if
SCIENCE FICTION
SEPTEMBER 1960 ● 35 CENTS

KANGAROO COURT

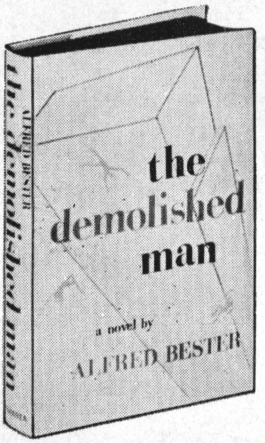
by Daniel F. Galouye

BESTER'S BEST!

Have you read his famed THE DEMOLISHED MAN? Lived in its vividly real telepathic society, detailed so ingeniously and dramatically that, finishing the book, you'll find it hard to believe that society doesn't exist — yet!

By special arrangement with the publisher of THE DEMOLISHED MAN, we can offer you this magnificent book for $1.00, 2/3 off the regular price, plus 25¢ for postage and handling.

⅓ OF LIST PRICE



CASE BOUND $1.00

Supplies are limited! Send your order in immediately!

(Use Coupon or Separate Sheet)

GALAXY PUBLISHING CORP.

Please rush me ☐ copies of THE DEMOLISHED MAN

421 Hudson St.
New York 14, N. Y.

THE DEMOLISHED MAN
The Original Edition — Complete!
Not A Low Cost Reprint — Yet Yours For Only $1.00!
Plus Postage 25¢

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ State_____

I Enclose_____

Secrets entrusted to a few

The Unpublished Facts of Life

THERE are some things that cannot be generally told—*things you ought to know.* Great truths are dangerous to some—but factors for *personal power* and *accomplishment* in the hands of those who understand them. Behind the tales of the miracles and mysteries of the ancients, lie centuries of their secret probing into nature's laws—their amazing discoveries of *the hidden processes of man's mind,* and *the mastery of life's problems.* Once shrouded in mystery to avoid their destruction by mass fear and ignorance, these facts remain a useful heritage for the thousands of men and women who privately use them in their homes today.

THIS FREE BOOK

The Rosicrucians (not a religious organization) an age-old brotherhood of learning, have preserved this secret wisdom in their archives for centuries. *They now invite you to share the practical helpfulness of their teachings.* Write today for a free copy of the book, "The Mastery of Life." Within its pages may lie a new life of opportunity for you. Address: Scribe T.J.W.

SEND THIS COUPON

Scribe T.J.W.
The ROSICRUCIANS (AMORC)
San Jose, California

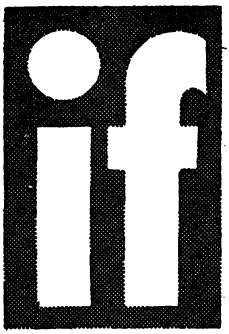
Please send me the *free* book, *The Mastery of Life,* which explains how I may learn to use my faculties and powers of mind.

Name_____

Address_____

City_____

The Rosicrucians (AMORC) SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA, U.S.A.



WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION

SEPTEMBER 1960

All Stories New and Complete

Editor: **H. L. GOLD**

Feature Editor: **FREDERIK POHL**

SHORT NOVEL

NOVELETTES

SHORT STORIES

FEATURE

COVER by John Pederson, Jr.: "Why If's Art Is So Accurate"

IF is published bi-monthly by Digest Productions Corporation. Vol. 10, No. 4. Main Office: 421 Hudson Street, New York 14, New York, 35¢ per copy. Subscriptions 12 issues $3.00 in the United States, Canada, Mexico, South and Central America and U. S. possessions, elsewhere $4.00. Second-class postage paid at New York, New York, and at additional mailing offices. All material submitted must be accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes. The publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited material. All stories printed in this magazine are fiction, and any similarity between characters and actual persons is coincidental. Printed in the U. S. A. by the Guinn Company, Inc., New York.

Next Issue (November) on Sale September 6th

Looking Ahead?

●

You must be, or you wouldn't be reading this magazine. Looking ahead, for instance, into the future of technology, sociology, ecology, space and time and terrestrials and extraterrestrials.

But what about looking ahead to:

- Saving money? (The longer your subscription to IF, the more free issues you get.)
- Saving steps? (A subscription brings IF right to your mailbox, irrespective of heat, cold, snow, rain, gloom of night—and mailed flat, to boot.)
- Saving time? (You get your copies at least a week before the newsstands receive theirs.)
- Saving your temper? (IF can and often does sell out; with a subscription there's no need to hunt from stand to stand.)

IN SHORT, IF YOU'RE REALLY LOOKING AHEAD, YOU'LL EITHER USE THE COUPON BELOW OR SEND IN YOUR ORDER ON ANY OLD SHEET OF PAPER.

COUPON

IF Science Fiction • 421 Hudson Street • New York 14, New York

Start my subscription to IF Science Fiction with the _____ issue. I enclose (check one):

6 issues....$1.75 **12 issues....$3.00**

Foreign Postage 6 Issues 50¢ Additional

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ **P. O. Zone**_____ **State**_____

Kangaroo Court

By DANIEL F. GALOUYE

Illustrated by WOOD

Blake's future was dark. He had murdered his friend—his life was forfeit—and now he had to break the news to the corpse!

I

TEMPLES pounding from the aftereffects of too many B-jolts, Greg Blake hauled himself groggily out of the bunk. He shook his head, trying to relieve the roaring fuzziness.

But he was unable to dispel the nauseating impression that the ship was under way, rather than sitting on its pad at Spaceport.

What a hell of a charge-over!

He cast about in his memory for details of the night before. But he could only remember up to the third or fourth pleasure spot. After that there was a stubborn blankness, broken only by an isolated recollection of "just one more binge-jolt for the orbit."

"Art," he mumbled, heading forward along the passageway.

There was no answer from his partner.

He rubber-legged it past the hatch, noticing it was securely dogged and accepting that as evidence that Thorman must be *somewhere* aboard.

More fully in control now, he was aware of the intrusive thoughts festering in his head, ridiculing his charge-over.

Boy, he sure tied one on! (That one evidently from a tracker in Operations Blockhouse.)

(Suggestion of subvocal laughter from the Administration Section.) *I would too if I had been in on their strike.*

Imagine—two prospectors staking out a whole swarm of kitarium!

Straighten up, Blake. How about a few more B-jolts? (That bit of derision from a ground crewman.)

The buzzsaw of impinging thoughts whined away on the communicative level of Greg's consciousness. In the distance was a seething backdrop of telepathic reflection and conversation. It rose like an effluvium from teeming Spaceport City. It was a grating whisper of many confusing voices that could never be shut out. It was a blazing spotlight, forever obliterating all the shadows of privacy.

In contrast to the fishbowl life and its mental pandemonium, he was convinced that the isolation of prospecting was Utopia.

At the base of the companionway his foot struck a small object and sent it skittering across the deck. He stooped to retrieve it. A hand blaster. He stood there fretting over its half exhausted chamber.

As he entered the control room he drew back.

The blaster slipped from his hand. In an instant his charge-over was gone.

Art Thorman lay there, dead, with his left shoulder and half of his head burned away.

AND I guess I told him off, Maud. He— (Abrupt astonishment.) *Dead? Who? Where?*

Killed? With a blaster? How?

Did you get that, Walker? Where'd it come from?

Over on Pad Eleven. That Blake fellow. It's sifting through spottily.

Blake?

The prospector. His partner got burned down.

You mean—fatally?

Sure. Ain't you reading?

Oh, Maud! It's horrible!

Not a—murder? (Almost hopefully.)

Must be. A guy can't burn half his own head off and then toss the blaster out where Blake found it.

Greg stood staring down at Thorman's body. The intrusive undercurrent of thought and paraspeech was like a far-away tide of anxious voices.

ART, dead. A victim of violence. It was almost incomprehensible!

He had heard of crime before. There was that incident across the cluster thirty years ago, when a man had taken his wife's life on a space yacht—despite the consequences he would have to (and did) face when he got within the telepathic range of others.

But this was something else. It was vividly personal and horribly close to home. And that only made it all seem all the more unreal.

He could sense the wave of shocked attention that was traversing Spaceport City. And, in its wake, a deluge of discordant, demanding voices descended upon him.

You killed him, Blake!

"No!" he protested, not realizing that he was vocalizing. "I couldn't have!"

It's your blaster, an anonymous accuser pointed out.

"But that doesn't mean—"

The hatch is dogged shut. You saw that yourself just a few minutes ago.

There's nobody else in the ship.

"Why would I kill Thorman? He was my friend!" His eyes remained on Art's body.

Most of the city had quieted down to listen.

You touched down here a week ago and filed claim on a sizable kitarium strike in Hound's Tooth Nebula, someone reminded. *That made you and Thorman rich. Now you're twice as rich.*

"But I'd have known I couldn't get away with a—crime!"

Nobody else could have done it, Blake, a new accuser blared out.

Greg shrank away before the ruthless speed of justice in an empathic society. Once, these things took inexorable time. But now suspicion, indictment, trial, verdict and execution could all be carried out in minutes.

"If I had killed him I'd remember it!"

You were in a charged-up stupor.

That's why we didn't have a chance to stop you.

Completely unpremeditated.

Or maybe at the last minute you did *intend to kill him.*

Whether he wanted to or not isn't the issue.

The fact is that he murdered his partner.

And he's got to pay.

LIKE thunder rumbling against distant hills, accusation and threat churned the psychic background. They were a counterpoint to the direct inquisition. The prosecution was rushing ahead with ruthless speed.

Dismayed, Greg turned to run. But the compelling force of a thousand imperious, soundless voices shackled him where he stood.

A life for a life.

The gun, Blake—pick it up.

The punishment must fit the crime.

There was an overpowering indignation in the expressions of communal conscience that overrode his own awareness and left him without will. He groped along the deck and found the blaster. Then he swung its barrel toward his temple.

THIS IS THE MONITOR OF THE CONSENSUS.

The silent words, magnified by a psycho-amplifier, exploded like a giant's bellow. They commanded stark silence.

IT IS YOUR PRIVILEGE TO EXECUTE GREGORY BLAKE NOW OR TO DEFER JUDGMENT. THE SOCIAL CONSCIENCE WILL ASSERT ITSELF IN THE END. HOWEVER, THERE ARE SEVERAL MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES, AS I SEE IT. SINCE HE HAS NO MEMORY OF THE CRIME, WE HAVE TO CONCEDE THE EVIDENCE IS WHAT ONCE WAS REFERRED TO AS CIRCUMSTANTIAL.

I'LL ADMIT GUILT IS OVERWHELMINGLY INDICATED. THE MURDER TAKES PLACE IN A SHIP WHOSE HATCH IS DOGGED ON THE INSIDE. THERE ARE ONLY TWO MEN ABOARD. THE WEAPON THAT KILLED THE VICTIM BELONGS TO THE SUSPECT.

What further proof do we—

Quiet! The Monitor is speaking!

STILL, I DON'T SEE WHERE JUSTICE IS SERVED IF BLAKE IS EXECUTED WITHOUT BEING CONVINCED OF HIS GUILT.

Thousands of determined voices rose in protest. But, in deference to the Monitor, the greater psychic background reflected only indecision.

THEREFORE I RECOMMEND OUR VERDICT BE HELD UNDER STUDY UNTIL WE ESTABLISH THE SUBJECT'S CULPABILITY BEYOND A DOUBT.

II

THE toneless voices stayed with Greg — admonishing, taunting, accusing, demanding to know whether his lack of knowledge of the crime was the result of a charged-up stupor or some unprecedented scheme to escape punishment.

Greg was a lean, serious

person with a straightforward face and a slightly receding hairline. That he could have murdered Art Thorman, his closest friend for more than a decade, was inconceivable to him.

The hell it is! challenged a nearby tormentor. *You did it and you probably know you did.*

Lay off, Marl. Give him a chance, like the Monitor says.

Greg waited until the cremator's apprentice arrived before he left the ship. By skip-jump relay through sympathetic minds, he had located the crematorium, out of telepathic range on the other side of the city, and had himself arranged for the final convention, knowing that Art had no relatives.

Passing through Spaceport Lounge on his way to the Monitor's office, he shrank before the heavy incrimination and denunciation that assaulted him from all sides. At the transit platform, he engaged an air car whose driver was an elderly man with a broad expanse of glistening scalp.

As soon as they were airborne, the latter offered, *I don't think you did it.*

"Thanks," Greg said without enthusiasm.

The driver, too, switched to vocalization: "Edna, she's my wife—" but Greg had already ascertained the relationship from the other's mind—"she says, 'You can bet he's guilty.' But you take little Algernon now. That's my boy. He's a good judge of character, even though he ain't got his complete telepathic faculty yet. He says—"

Greg?

Recognizing the identity behind the tentative contact, Greg tensed. *Yes, Virgil. What do you want?*

I want to help.

You never wanted to help before.

But you're in a jam! Maybe there's something I can do for you now.

Greg sensed the driver's discovery of the telepathic exchange between himself and Virgil Blake. And he felt the man politely turning his attention elsewhere.

I know I haven't been an ideal brother, Greg. But that might be as much the result of your own hot-headedness as of my possessiveness and domination.

Sure. You always wanted everything I had—from Estrella on down.

Let's forget her. She isn't even in the picture any longer.

No, Greg told himself. Virgil had gotten tired of her after he proved he could step in and take over.

That bit of resentful reflection didn't get by Virgil. *Maybe it was because you were always so damned independent that I acted that way.*

And Greg detected nothing

in his brother's conscious that indicated other than wounded pride as the basis of his past hostility.

BENEATH the car, the polished-chrome expanse of Spaceport City glittered in the brilliance of its system's twin suns. Down there were millions who, though at the moment preoccupied, were vigilantly anticipating the time when they might jump in on the kill—in the name of righteous vengeance.

That's why I want to help, Greg. I'm a psychiatrist.

I know. One of the top professionalists in the system. But they won't let you do anything to block justice.

Indeed we won't! came an obtrusive thought. *We'll see to that!*

You're damned right we will! echoed a chorus.

Greg ignored the pointed interruptions. *What's your proposition, Virgil?*

I don't think B-jolts can produce so severe an intoxication that a man will have no memory at all of what he does —especially if violent death is concerned.

So?

I suspect either subconscious repression or induced amnesia.

Induced amnesia?

Yes. And if that's the answer, it means somebody else is involved.

What do you suggest?

Psychoanalytic exploration. Seeing whether you're unconsciously holding anything back.

Again, Greg searched the other's mind for ulterior motive. Why should a brother, with whom he hadn't even had telepathic contact in fifteen years, suddenly be overflowing with solicitude?

Instantly, he detected Virgil's pang of aggrieved reaction.

It was a genuine emotion that carried heartfelt regret for the years he had neglected his younger brother. It was a discovery in the nakedness of Virgil's mind that made Greg feel warm and grateful.

I don't blame you for being suspicious, kid. Virgil magnanimously dismissed the misgiving. *When do we start?*

The other's thoughts were becoming weaker as the air car sped on toward Administration Plaza. Virgil was rapidly slipping out of normal telepathic range.

I'll get in skip-jump contact with you first thing in the morning. And, Virgil—if I'm repressing the memory of a horrible crime, I want that to come out too. I don't want you trying to hide it to save me.

I couldn't, kid. If I established anything like that, the first person to read me afterward would know it.

That's good. If I killed Art, intentionally or even acciden-

tally, I deserve everything that's coming to me. He was that kind of a guy.

The luxuriantly landscaped Administration Plaza achieved picturesque definition as it surged up to meet the descending car. Surrounded by towering, steel buildings, the park and its complex of official edifices were things of unadorned beauty, devoid of harsh inscription and directional signs.

In range of the various buildings' psychocasters, Greg began receiving subtle impressions of identity, volunteered items of information and instruction.

These are the offices of the Monitor of the Consensus, softly intoned a slender, graceful structure north of a sparkling pool, the whisper of recorded thought purring pleasantly into his receptive mind.

He concentrated on the building and its psycho-emissions and was rewarded, in due time, with the rest of the information he sought:

. . . office of the First Assistant Monitor is situated on the Twelfth Level. The Monitor himself will be found on the Sixteenth Level, South Wing.

Reading the destination from his passenger's reflections, the driver swerved his car abruptly and put it down on its air cushion in front of the main entrance.

GREG got out, watched the car slip away, then regarded the building before him.

Get on with it! someone prompted.

You're wasting our time too! another watcher reproached.

Let's find out if you're guilty!

Instantly, a myriad offensive, prodding voices were welling up in his conscious.

"All right!" he shouted. "I'm going!"

He started across the terrace, his concentration falling back to the scene of violent death in the ship and punishing himself for not being able to remember what had happened. Then, suddenly he felt as though he were betraying himself by admitting that, through some weird circumstance, he *might* have killed Thorman.

Of course he couldn't have done it! He was a fool to stay here and subject himself to indignity and unjust inquisition. The moment he found Art's body he should have blasted off to safety—before the Consensus had a chance to decree his execution!

A pandemonium of outrage exploded on the receptive level of his conscious as knowledge of what he had just thought was passed from mind to mind with meteoric speed.

He stiffened, waiting for

the grip of compulsion to seize him. But, even though the Consensus was swiftly crystallizing into a potent weapon of vindictiveness, he remained free.

He watched horrified, however, as the air car he had just left swerved sharply from its thousand-foot altitude, plunged to ground level and hurtled directly at him.

I can't stop it, Blake! came the desperate apology of the driver. *It's not me! It's the Consensus!*

Greg broke and lunged for the building. The car streaked for him, accelerating close to Mach One, and he hurled himself to the ground.

The cyclonic tailwash of the vehicle rolled him over and over like a dry leaf.

Gaining altitude, it screamed around in a tight turn and dived once more.

But its brakes came on abruptly and it shuddered to a halt only feet from where he lay. Then it drifted off, like a predatory beast suddenly finding its prey out of reach.

Now Greg was aware of the furious confusion of voices coming to grips in the psychic background.

That proves he's guilty!

Absolutely!

No, it doesn't!

He wanted to escape! You read that, didn't you?

Might have been just a normal fear reaction.

My foot!

But he still doesn't have any conscious memory of the crime.

Naturally. He's repressed it.

Then why would he feel an impulse to run?

Subconscious motivation.

Tubewash!

I say kill him—now!

No, wait. Remember what the Monitor—

Launch the Monitor! It's time we took matters in—

Greg picked himself up and, not knowing whether he'd even be allowed to reach the Monitor's office, pushed on into the building.

OUTSIDE the double doors, the suite's psychocaster gently emitted: *You are now in front of the office of Felco Irwan, Monitor of the Consensus.*

He went in and was immediately confronted by a tooslim blonde in tight-fitting secretarial garb who had unobstrusively read his approach.

This way, please, she beamed politely.

Seated behind the broad desk in his inner office, Felco Irwan was an imposing man with a double chin and florid jowls. His face was the type which, under less formal circumstances, might have managed some sort of a smile for the occasion.

Please be seated, Mr. Blake,

he instructed. *I'm glad to see you're still alive.*

"Why?"

Irwan respected the choice of oral communication. "Because it shows our people know how to temper instinctive justice with an insistence on doing what's right, even though this is our first experience with crime."

"I didn't run into much temperance a few minutes ago."

"You're still around, aren't you?" The Monitor did manage a smile this time.

Despite his sluggish appearance, he was spitting out his words with a rapidity that gave Greg little chance to probe ahead and see what he was going to say next.

In the telepathic background, there was a patient silence. Those interested watchers within range were merely listening to see what would develop next. But their anxiety was like a heavy mist.

"So I'm still alive and I'm here," Greg summed up dryly. "What now?"

Irwan leaned forward on the desk. "I received a number of skip-jump reports on your contact with Virgil Blake. Good man. Good psychiatrist. Glad to see you're going to let him work you over. As a matter of fact, proposing some form of psychotherapy was one of the two reasons I asked you up here."

"And the other reason?"

I'm Elar Ronsted.

And I'm Stafford Waverly.

"They are the other reason," the Monitor disclosed.

Greg identified the origin of the two contacts as being in another suite of offices across the Plaza.

I'm the Chief of Police, Ronsted expanded.

The other added importantly, *And I'm the Detective.*

Confused, Greg stared at the Monitor but asked of all three, *What is Police? What's the Detective?*

That stumped us for a while too, Ronsted confessed while Greg began to piece together a physical picture of the man from his elements of self-regard.

We always thought our offices were nonfunctional, the Detective explained, *until the Monitor told us we had a job to do.*

Greg wanted to know, "What's all this got to do with me?"

"Police," the Monitor offered, "used to be an armed force within a community. That was in pre-empathy days, when crime flourished in psychic privacy. It was their job to protect the community from the criminals."

And the Detective was the official who outsmarted the criminal, Waverly interjected. *After a crime was committed he found out how it was done, why and who did it.*

Greg sensed the prideful

expansion of the Detective's chest.

"This, Mr. Blake," said Monitor Irwan solemnly, "is an unusual crime. We might call it an anachronism. And it's my judgment that primitive methods of resolution are warranted. I therefore assigned Chief Ronsted and Detective Waverly to the case."

You may count on my—ah—department, sir. And Greg received the impression of a meaningless gesture—a stiff hand snapping up to Ronsted's forehead.

We'll get our man, Waverly vowed.

"The Chief and his Detective will contact you later, Blake," Irwan assured.

III

GREG managed a restful night. He had feared at first that the prying voices of the watchers, their ranks swelled by thousands with early evening hours of idleness, would drive him to distraction.

As it was, for more than an hour they immobilized him with demands for details of the killing. But his sincere introspection was futile. There remained only a chronological blank between the height of their celebration the night before and his awakening that morning.

Softening, the watchers eventually allowed him access to the ship's jolt bar. And they had no objection when he dialed a light soporific charge and took hold of the electrodes.

After that, sleep came quickly. With his mental activity dropping to a subconscious plane, he found complete release from the telepathic pressures that had harassed him all day.

Before leaving the next morning, he gave the interior of the ship a quick inspection, conscious of the snowballing presence of watchers eager to be tuned in while he revisited the scene of the murder.

He circled wide around the blaster, which still lay in the passageway, and went on into the forward compartment. Staring at Thorman's empty control chair, he realized for the first time what a severe loss Art's death represented. It would be a long while before he could restore equilibrium to his until-then orderly existence . . . even if they gave him the opportunity to try.

A few silent commentaries came through:

Hypocrite!

Whose leg are you trying to pull?

That won't get you any sympathy!

Assassin!

Murderer!

But, all in all, there was mostly a respectful silence.

Which doesn't mean we're

going to throw you any hearts and flowers, someone was quick to point out.

Greg opened the personal storage compartment under Thorman's chair. He found nothing of value except an orderly array of E-records.

Absently he withdrew one of the cylinders and glanced at the date on its tag. It was only a little over a week old. Thorman had evidently recorded his ego structure the day they touched down. He no doubt had wanted an accurate duplicate, as of that date, for reference and interrogation.

Bringing the cylinder over to the playback unit, he slipped it into the deposit slot and turned on the switch. Then he waited while the stored impressions, knowledge and personality traits transferred themselves to the circuits and retentive cells of the replay "brain."

"THIS is Arthur Cervan Thorman," the speaker hissed, "as of the Thirtieth Day, Seventh Month, Forty-three Hundred and Thirty-Six."

"Art, this is Greg."

Circuits in the unit evaluated the greeting, matching it against the associative references in the recording, and came back with: "This is a little unusual, isn't it—*you* playing back my personal recording?" There was no resentment, only curiosity in the question.

"Yes, I suppose it is."

"Anything wrong?"

When there was no answer: "Am I out there with you?"

"No, you're not."

"I thought it was customary to replay a recording only in the presence of the subject," Art reminded facetiously.

"You're—dead, Art."

There was an abrupt interruption in the background hum of the speaker. "What happened?"

"You were—murdered."

"Impossible! Those things don't happen."

"It's true."

"How?"

"A meteor blaster. In the control compartment here."

"Who did it?"

"They say I did."

Laughter. "Now I know you're joking." Then gravity. "You serious?"

"Dead serious, Art. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have come here with my troubles."

"No. That's all right. After all, this is just a recording. No subjective appreciation. If it seems otherwise, it's only because I took pains to make this an authentic duplicate. The murder—how did it happen?"

"I don't know. I found you here in the control compartment. We had been out on a bender."

"When was this?"

"Night before last. On the sixth, a week after we touched down. We went out on a B-jolt tear."

"Like we promised ourselves we would."

"And I blanked out before the night was half over. The next morning I was back in the ship. It was locked on the inside. No one else was aboard. You were dead."

"Tell me everything that's happened since then."

Greg went painstakingly into the details. When he finished, the speaker said, "You are in a hell of a mess."

"It's even worse than it seems. I—"

Gregory Blake. Open in the name of the moral code. It's a Police!

THE hatch swung back on a quite small and lean, but erect man whose appearance altogether contradicted the physical impression Greg had gotten from his telepathic contact with Chief Ronsted.

Every man's got a right to a personalized conception of himself, Ronsted asserted. Then he jerked a thumb over his shoulder. *This is Detective Waverly.*

The Detective's mouth was set in a grin which, Greg read from his mind, was characteristic. He was a lanky man with a thin nose that cleaved a pair of dense brows.

Where's the body? he asked anxiously. *I'd like to inspect . . . The crematorium! Already? Say, isn't that destroying evidence?*

The Chief assured him that normally it wouldn't be since, under the system of telepathic detection and communal prosecution, the content of anyone's memory was considered sufficient evidence. He wasn't quite sure, however, what special considerations applied in this case.

Waverly nodded densely and followed the Chief down the passageway and into the control compartment.

The Detective grinned more broadly, drew a thin cylinder of what appeared to be compressed limestone from his pocket, knelt and began sketching the outline of a sprawled human form on the deck.

You'll have to concentrate, Mr. Blake, he admonished, *if you expect me to get this silhouette down accurately.*

Sure you're doing it right? Chief Ronsted asked. Then, in an oral aside to Greg, "We spent half the night in the library, boning up on the lost art of detection. Like the Monitor said, this calls for an anachronistic approach."

Radiating an absorbed degree of intrigue, he produced from his pocket a circular magnifying glass, patently a museum piece. For want of a better object of study he trained it on a grease stain on the deck.

When Greg's prevocal reflection identified the spot for what it was, Ronsted returned the glass to his pocket with no little amount of embarrassment.

"My purpose here, Mr. Blake," he said stiffly, "is to ascertain whether the victim made any recent E-recordings and . . . On the thirtieth? Good! Where did you say . . . Oh, it's *already* on the playback unit!"

Waverly's chalk stick broke and he rose, his brows pinched together as he glowered at Greg. *That recording, sir, is material evidence. I hope you haven't biased any of its contents by misuse.*

When he read that Greg hadn't, he added an exclamation of relief:

Splendid!

THE psychic medium was dense now with the avid attention of thousands who had hastened to tune in on the unprecedented scene of applied criminology. Many of them, t o o, h a d evidently "boned up" on ancient methodology.

Look under Blake's fingernails, someone advised.

How about detaining everyone at Spaceport and grilling them one at a time?

Throw a tail on the suspect.

Don't you think you ought to call in the (unconcealed pretentiousness) *meat wagon?*

Let's have a stakeout.

Ask him where he was on the night of the sixth.

Ronsted stretched his small frame to its full height. *Quiet! If I don't have order I'll black out the entire area and nobody'll be able to read a thing!*

There was an obedient hush and Greg asked, "What do you want with Thorman's E-record?"

"It *might* show where there were strained relations between you and the victim."

"If there had been, you'd easily be able to read it from me."

"Let's go in for a bit of deductive reasoning, Mr. Blake. The basic premise is that you murdered Arthur Thorman. Which is something we'll have to prove. Assumption Number Two"—he held up a second finger—"is that you've found some way to, ah, beat the rap, as they used to say.

"That presupposes that you've discovered how to isolate a segment of your thought processes. If you are able to mentally throw a blanket over your memory of the murder experience, then it logically follows that you can hold back from telepathic scrutiny any recollection of trouble between you and Thorman that might have provided you with motivation."

Waverly, who had gone out into the passageway, returned with Greg's blaster. He held it gingerly between thumb

and forefinger. *The murder weapon!*

Fine! Ronsted commended. *Check it for fingerprints.*

The Detective squinted at the gun. *How do you "take" a fingerprint, Chief?*

Damned if I know.

VIRGIL BLAKE'S business suite was an elaborate facility in the personal services district.

Greg was admitted by a pert young thing with tufted red hair. She read his identity and blurted her reaction, *Blake himself! The killer! Gol-ly, a real nova!*

Then she composed herself. *I'm sorry, Mr. Blake. I didn't realize—*

Hussy! someone nearby observed.

She ignored the comment and indicated the inner door. *Dr. Blake is expecting you.*

Greg? Virgil's anxious query came through. *Come on in.*

Were it not for Virgil's distantly familiar personality pattern, Greg doubted whether he would have recognized his brother. He still had plenty of hair, but it was streaked with gray and there was a gray-mottled mustache that hadn't been there before.

Of course I've changed, kid. Fifteen years make a lot of difference.

Greg gripped the other's shoulders. "Good to see you again."

It's been a long time. Too long for brothers. After this mess is settled, we'll fix that.

"You mean *if* it's settled."

Virgil laughed and said against an inner background of sincerity, "You didn't do it. I'm confident of that. If you did, there were mitigating circumstances. You just aren't the type to commit violence."

Greg eased into the leather reclining chair. *What do we do now?*

We could rehash old times. But it's more important to get to work.

He adjusted the chair to a more comfortable position. *We're going to identify those mitigating circumstances. Then everybody won't be so anxious for an execution.*

Knock off the sentiment! came a sardonic thought.

Let's confine ourselves to the murder! someone else proposed.

Gol-ly, give them a chance. It's the first time they've seen each other in years.

Virgil repositioned one of a pair of two-inch metal spheres that sat on small pedestals on the desk. Then he snapped on a switch protruding from the surface of the globe.

The ever-present voices of the watchers were snuffed out. To Greg, it was as though he were back in the vast loneliness of Hound's Tooth Nebula without even Art Thor-

man within telepathic range.

"Why are you using the Blank-Out?"

"Psychojamming's standard procedure for this kind of work."

"What's it for?"

"Protection of the public. When we dig down into the subconscious we sometimes pull out things that don't make for very pleasant telepathic reception."

Greg shifted position in the chair, content with his sudden isolation from the imperious curiosity of the masses.

From its slot in the arm rest, Virgil pulled an electrode that trailed a heavy, insulated wire. "Ready?"

He touched the prong to Greg's forehead and unconsciousness came immediately.

VIRGIL was standing by the window, hands clasped rigidly behind his back, when Greg reopened his eyes.

"How did it go?"

The other exhibited a troublesome frown. "It's difficult. I can't say. I don't know whether I like it or not."

"What did you find out?"

"If you're actually repressing a distasteful experience, you're doing a good job of it."

"Why should I want to cover anything over?"

"Could be the promptings of a guilt complex."

"Then it looks like I did it."

"I won't say that. There are other aspects."

"Such as?"

Virgil went back to his desk. "You have a vague impression of a gun discharging. It's not clear whether you pressed the stud yourself, but it looks like you did." Perfunctorily, he snapped off the Blank-Out generator.

"Well, hell! That settles it." Greg rose. "I shot him."

Projected thoughts of the watchers returned instantly, descending like a gathering tempest.

Blake shot him?

He did it?

Is he guilty?

Wait a minute! Virgil's nearer subvocal emission overrode the rest. *You're getting in on the tail end of a speculative conversation. Wait and hear what develops. Then let the Consensus take its course.*

"No, Greg," he continued, switching to oral delivery. "You could have fired that blast at someone else—after *he* killed Thorman."

General psychic surprise from all directions.

"I also found something else in your subconscious—an impression of the hatch opening and closing after you and Thorman returned to the ship on the night of the sixth. It could have been a valid remembrance—or an hallucination. We'll have to have more sessions to find out. Will you come back tomorrow?"

"If I'm still around."

But Greg noticed that there was only confusion and uncertainty in the telepathic background. The Consensus was not yet taking definite direction.

Absently, he fingered one of the two Blank-Out generators. "Who's authorized to use these things?"

"The Monitor. Medical institutions where temporary suffering must be expected. Accident mop-up crews—so they can block in an injured person's pain. Psychoanalysts."

Greg stood there pensively.

No, I'm afraid not, Virgil offered in response to his brother's further reflection. *Nobody could have used a Blank-Out to cover up his actions during Thorman's murder. Not unless ever since the crime he has kept himself in the sanctuary of the generator's field so nobody could read his guilt.*

Greg hadn't realized Ronsted was one of the current watchers. He learned that when he heard the Chief emit:

Make a note of that, Waverly. Get a list of everyone who has been issued a Blank-Out.

Greg started purposefully for the door.

But Virgil called after him, "I'm worried, kid. If you're innocent, someone else is the murderer."

"So?" Greg didn't bother to probe ahead into the other's prevocal preparation.

"Then someone's counting on your prompt execution to square things with the Consensus. Right?"

"I suppose so."

"And, if he's still using a Blank-Out to conceal his thoughts, he could at this very moment be plotting your 'accidental' death—so the public will consider the whole case settled."

AS SOON as Greg left the office, the watchers closed in and immobilized him while he stood on a high-speed pediramp and zipped through the heart of the city. They picked his mind clean. Then, satisfied that they had all the details of the psychoanalytical session, they released him.

Having long since passed his destination he had to transfer and backtrack.

This just gets more confusing, said a discouraged watcher.

We ought to execute him.

But suppose he didn't do it?

He fired the blaster, didn't he?

Yes, but Dr. Blake said he might have fired it at the real murderer.

Meteor fragments! He's guilty!

Maybe not.

Thus, in effect, the Consensus had tied itself in a knot.

Still, Greg could draw no consolation from his tempo-

rary reprieve. For there was the ominous presence of an intractable, dedicated, opinionated segment whose brooding thoughts lurked in the psychic medium. They were *already* convinced of his guilt.

And the unfortunate fact was that there were many who would be willing to have the malcontents take justice in their own hands and relieve them of the responsibility. General sentiment ran something like this: What the hell! In ancient times, didn't the body politic invest its judicial interest in a representative jury of but twelve persons?

The pediramp slowed and he got off, joining the press of humanity in the teeming central district. He tried to conceal his thoughts. But, thanks to his well-known (by now) personality pattern, he drew a constant barrage of curious stares and subvocal taunts.

As best he could, he ignored them and halted before a lesser building whose psychocaster monotonously intoned, *Substation of the Department of Legal Transfer.*

He hesitated at the entrance, reassuring himself that he had been wrong all along about Virgil.

You're damned right you're wrong about Dr. Blake! a passerby echoed, testily confronting him.

Another drew up. *He's more than a brother. He's the best friend you've got!*

Three or four more persons crowded around him.

Damned if I'd do as much for you.

He has every right to wash his hands.

It isn't every man who'd get involved in the mess you are in!

Greg pressed past them and went on into the Substation.

I want to transfer all my interest in Hound's Tooth to my brother, he told the clerk, *in the event I'm not around to enjoy it.*

The man smiled warmly. *Now you're doing the right thing by Virgil.*

IV

BY LATE afternoon, Greg had made an interesting discovery concerning mass attention. It was when he was physically isolated that psychic pressure was greatest.

As long as he remained fully exposed, the city seemed to take it for granted that those nearby were keeping a close enough eye on him.

Throughout the afternoon, conjecture over his guilt had continued to figure prominently in all the mental emanations within range. The hostile, opinionated minority had gathered converts. But the overall Consensus was still far from taking definite shape.

Mentally weary from a full day of constant harassment, he stood at the edge of a lofty terrace and gripped the low handrail as he stared down into the chasm and watched the people below. Like microbes, they flowed along the pediramps and congested the streets.

One of the suns had already set, leaving the early evening air with a chill. The other, huge and vivid, eased itself between distant spires and bathed his grim features with its ocher light.

The first indication of danger was a subtle thought that raised itself above the jumbled background, *There he is —by the rail.*

Greg turned. Two men, leaving the terrace's pediramp transfer station, were advancing toward him.

Watch it! warned one. *He's reading us!*

An elderly couple and a much younger man, standing along the rail, turned and came forward.

Killer! Foul murderer!

We'll give him what's coming to him!

More than a dozen poured out of the building. As many more advanced from the opposite direction along the handrail. Still others followed the first pair off the pediramp.

We don't want to waste any time! someone exhorted. *We've got a sub-Consensus. Let's go!*

Their personality patterns sharply identified them as members of the opinionated minority. They fairly radiated unswerving dedication to his execution.

Greg sidled along the rail, letting the metal tubing slip through his moist hand. Abruptly, he turned and ran.

Get him!

Don't let him escape!

Everybody in the background—come on in!

Push!

Lock him in!

His plodding feet were instantly sucked down in an invisible mire. He stood rooted to the terrace's tile surface.

You killed Thorman!

You found a way to keep from being read!

Admit it!

Beyond his immediate captors, there was a tense, watchful silence throughout the psychic medium. Everyone within range had become avid watchers.

In the chasm below, there was no motion on the streets. The dense shadows of the buildings were mottled with the whiteness of unturned faces, all anxious to witness the summary execution.

I didn't do it! he insisted.

The hell you didn't!

Climb up on the railing!

Climb! Climb! Climb!

NOT knowing how he got there, Greg found himself precariously balanced on the

horizontal tubing. And the minority had pressed in much closer physically.

Jump!

Jump!

Jump!

He stood there trembling, feebly resisting the mass will.

Everybody in the background—together—push!

But his paralysis lessened almost imperceptibly.

I don't think it's right (from somewhere in the street blow).

I don't either.

Jump! Jump!

What kind of do-nothings are we? We going to let a handful decide for the Consensus?

We shouldn't, should we?

Of course not!

Shove off, Blake!

Leap!

No, Blake—don't do it!

Everybody get with us and help!

I'm not. I'm going to help Blake.

Me too. I'll do my part only when I know he murdered Thorman.

That's the way I feel. When I execute, it's going to be as part of the true Consensus.

Get down, Blake.

No! Jump!

Don't do it!

Let him alone!

The bond of minority control slipped away gradually and, eventually freed, Greg did a balancing act on his lofty perch. But he finally managed to reach down and secure a grip on the rail.

Themselves under the pressure of direct compulsion now, the self-appointed executioners opened their ranks and cleared a path for the intended victim.

Numbly, Greg slipped through.

THIS IS THE MONITOR. TO THE UNCOMMITTED WATCHERS, MY COMMENDATION FOR DISCRETION AND RESTRAINT IN BEHALF OF PRECISE JUSTICE.

TO THE IMPULSIVE MINORITY—YOU ARE TO BE CONGRATULATED FOR INITIATIVE IN THE INTEREST OF THE CONSENSUS, BUT CENSURED FOR RASHNESS AND IMMATURE JUDGMENT.

AS TEDIOUS AS THE WORKINGS OF JUSTICE MAY SEEM, WE MUST TAKE INSPIRATION FROM OUR OBLIGATION TO SERVE PROPRIETY AND FAIR PLAY.

UNABLE to shut out the horror of near death, Greg wandered about the city on the low-speed pediramps for hours. The second sun had long since set when finally he made his way back to Spaceport. He was still unable to order his disorganized thoughts.

In the ship, he cast himself on his bunk. Despite the per-

sistent curiosity of a handful of callous watchers he dropped swiftly into an exhausted sleep.

He hadn't slept long, though, when someone had him by the arm and was shaking him insistently.

Wake up, Blake.

Chief Ronsted hovered over the Bunk. *Couldn't contact you, so I figured you must be asleep. The hatch was open. I came on in.*

Greg struggled up. *What do you want?* He had no specific reaction to the inevitable fact that the watchers were even now tuning in to hear what would transpire.

The diminutive official perched on the edge of the opposite bunk and leaned forward, forearms resting casually on his knees. "Can you imagine what would happen if someone were to devise a way to permanently conceal part or all of his conscious thoughts?"

Greg shrugged. "He'd buy himself a lot of privacy."

"That's not what I mean," the Chief said, annoyed. "He could *wreck* civilization! There was a time when society monitored itself with cordons of armed wardens who apprehended criminals and protected the innocent."

"We do better than that now," Greg countered. "Crime doesn't even have a chance to take the first step."

"Exactly!" Ronsted agreed. "As a result, we haven't needed armed protectors for a couple of thousand years. Which means there's no provision at all for stopping a criminal who could work outside the 'open mind' framework."

"I see what you mean. If he could permanently shield part of his mind, he could plan and execute all the crimes he wanted to."

RONSTED nodded grimly. *You've got the picture.*

"But that could never happen," Greg said confidently. "Whenever your so-called culprit began conceiving of a way to hide his thought processes, his intentions would be read. He'd be committed to an institution for reorientation."

The Chief pensively pinched his chin. "Perhaps not."

He continued silently, *On a prospecting jaunt, you usually parked your ship on the edge of a congestion of nebular matter. Right?*

"Why ask me? I can see that you already got that information from Thorman's E-record."

"Then you both struck out in different directions and set up collapsible bases. Frequently you were isolated from each other for weeks on end, during which time you had to use radio communication. You were beyond telepathic range."

"That's right." Greg read what was coming next.

Ronsted pushed on, "During those periods of pure isolation you could have conceived of a way to wall off a section of your conscious mind, couldn't you?"

"I'd have to be a genius if I did."

"Nobody said you aren't."

"That's ridiculous! I—"

"For the sake of argument, let's say that while you were in Hound's Tooth you *did* discover a way to blank out part of your mind. That means you had several weeks to refine the method, to realize how much better off you'd be if you had Thorman's share of the strike too . . . and to plan his murder."

Greg reared erect. "I'd have killed him out there and said he died accidentally!"

"Maybe so." Ronsted headed for the door. "But perhaps while you were still there you didn't get any further, criminally, than making the intriguing discovery that there *was* a way to outwit society. It's possible that you didn't conceive of killing Thorman until *after* you touched down here."

The Chief's reasoning was full of holes. Greg told him as much as he disappeared down the passageway.

But, still, the prosecution had made another point. The jury had a new element to mull over.

Greg sensed Ronsted's pausing in the passageway near the control compartment.

I'd like to replay Thorman's E-record, the Chief emitted.

Don't mind me. It's only my ship.

V

AWAKENING long before sunrise-A, Greg was at once conscious of a restlessness in the city. It was too early for more than a relative handful of the population to be up and about. But those who were tuned in were desperate to get in contact with him.

The silent voices descended like an avalanche.

We've finally got you!

Now we know you're guilty!

As soon as we can muster the Consensus, that'll be it, Blake!

Greg was off the bunk instantly. "What in hell do you mean!"

You can't hide your guilt any longer.

We know all about it.

Ronsted got Thorman's recording to admit you two had a squabble.

Thorman says you even threatened to kill him.

"That's impossible!"

See for yourself.

The record's still there.

He hurried down the passageway to the control compartment. In the far corner, the "on" light of the playback

unit burned with a steady brilliance. Ronsted had left it on all night!

Sorry, the Chief's familiar thought pattern came through. *I guess I forgot.*

Apparently he was sticking with the case on an around-the-clock basis.

Indeed I am. It's all cleared up now, though—except for disposition by the Consensus. The Detective has finished his check of all Blank-Out holders. All the generators were accounted for. Those in use were turned off while their owners were questioned telepathically. There isn't anybody hiding his guilt in a Blank-Out field.

Leave Thorman's record alone! Greg warned. *It's the last one he made. I don't want any of the impressions blurred or distorted.*

"Anybody in here?" the playback speaker asked.

"It's Greg."

"Thought I heard someone. Have you been in here since Ronsted left?"

"I haven't been here since yesterday. Why?"

"Somebody has. I heard him moving around. Stayed about an hour."

Greg glanced out the compartment and down the passageway. He could see now that the main hatch was still open. Ronsted had found it that way the night before and had left it that way.

"Who was it?"

"I don't know. I called out but he wouldn't answer."

Greg finished fastening the clothes he had thrown on. "Never mind. I've got something more important. Did you tell Ronsted we had an argument?"

"I had to. He said if I didn't co-operate, he'd take the recording in for micro-analysis."

"What did you tell him?" Greg was already beginning to feel trapped.

"Exactly what happened. How you fairly flew out of orbit in Hound's Tooth when I radioed that I was going to come over to your outpost for a couple of days."

Greg was thoughtfully silent.

"I hope you understand," the record continued. "Ronsted would have gotten the information anyway in micro-analysis and—"

"What else did you tell him?"

A pause. "That you threatened to kill me."

Greg sensed the flurry of anxiety in the background as he turned off the playback unit. The steadily mounting number of watchers had greedily drunk in his conversation in the recording.

Don't you see? he demanded. *Thorman's E-record was tampered with! None of that stuff ever happened!*

The hell it didn't!

You're lying!

"How could I lie?" he pleaded. "You'd read the truth if I tried to deceive you!"

Like Ronsted said, you learned how to wall off part of your conscious.

It's all over, Blake.

All the evidence is in.

You're guilty.

I'M INCLINED TO AGREE, the Monitor's amplified thoughts broke in. *BUT IT'S EARLY IN THE MORNING. THERE ARE ONLY A FEW OF US WATCHING. IF WE TOOK ACTION NOW, IT WOULD NOT BE THE TRUE CONSENSUS.*

Don't you see what he did? someone emitted.

He figured out a way to shield a section of his mind!

OF COURSE. AND HE WAS STILL WORKING ON THE METHOD WHEN THORMAN GOT LONELY AND WANTED TO GO OVER AND SEE HIM. THAT'S WHEN BLAKE BLEW UP. HE HAD TO KEEP HIS PARTNER AWAY UNTIL HE PERFECTED HIS SYSTEM OF PERSONAL BLANK-OUT. OTHERWISE, IF THORMAN HAD GOTTEN IN TELEPATHIC RANGE HE WOULD HAVE READ WHAT BLAKE WAS UP TO.

"It's not true!" Greg insisted.

THAT'S FOR US TO DECIDE.

Greg, listen. This time it was his brother. *You've got to get over to my office before the Consensus builds up. I'll meet you there. There may still be a chance. Pick up all the E-records Thorman cut since the beginning of the Hound's Tooth trip.*

Greg started to pry behind the words and see what Virgil's plan was. But the Monitor broke in again:

LET HIM GO TO HIS BROTHER. IF HE REALLY BELIEVES HE'S INNOCENT, VIRGIL BLAKE MAY BE ABLE TO OPEN HIS MIND AND LET HIM SEE THE TRUTH BEFORE HIS EXECUTION.

Swiftly, Greg flipped the restorage switch on the playback unit and waited until all the impressions and personality features had been transferred back to Art's E-record. Then he snatched the cylinder out of the slot and thrust it in his pocket.

He lunged for Thorman's control seat, reaching for the door to the compartment beneath, where the other records were stored. But he pulled his hand back instinctively.

Something was wrong.

Eventually he saw what it was. The high-tension lead extending from the deck to the control column had been wrenched loose and had flopped back down against the seat, as though someone had

tripped over it and jarred it loose.

If he had touched any part of the chair or its storage compartment he would have been electrocuted.

What was it Virgil had said? "He—the real murderer—could at this very moment be plotting your 'accidental' death so the public will consider the whole case settled."

Knock off the intrigue!

We see what you're doing.

You want us to believe somebody else is involved.

Thorman's recording, Greg reminded himself, had picked up a new impression during the night—the sound of someone moving furtively about the compartment. Now he knew why.

You're not confusing us.

Not any more.

If you can wall off a section of your conscious, you could certainly use the privacy to plan a fake death-trap for yourself.

You want us to believe the Consensus is aiming at the wrong suspect.

It took only a minute to reconnect the cable. Then Greg scooped up a handful of Thorman's records and lunged from the compartment.

THE door to Virgil's suite was ajar, as though purposely left that way to save time. Reading ahead, Greg saw that his brother had already arrived.

He swept through the unattended outer office and found Virgil bustling about the inner room. He had just snapped on the E-record playback unit and was now adjusting one of the Blank-Out generators.

He glanced around and saw Greg. *Thorman's records. Did you—*

The generator warmed up to full output. Its sphere came alive with a soft, silvery glow, cutting off Virgil's emission.

Greg held up six cylinders. "These cover the past four months. I have the most recent one in my pocket."

"Good!" the other exclaimed. "Bring them over here and we'll get to work."

Greg stepped into the compact Blank-Out field, leaving behind him the gathering psychic storm. "What are you going to do?"

Virgil accepted the six cylinders. "If Thorman's last record was biased with false impressions, then it's possible that several before that one were modified too in order to build up a case against you."

"What if they were?"

"Then I'll want to examine them psychoanalytically. We might get an idea as to the identity of the conditioner."

He punched the "total erase" stud on the playback unit. A confusion of syllables stumbled over one another getting out of the speaker, as all the circuits and retentive

cells purged themselves of lingering reflections from the last record. The final few words rumbled off almost indiscernibly into a bass nothingness, ". . . use a rout-out . . . everything about it . . ."

Greg looked down at his hands. "Everybody's convinced I murdered Thorman. I don't have very much of a chance."

"I know that. But I think we can prove you're innocent."

"The Monitor," Greg went on, "believes I may have killed Art, then repressed the traumatic experience. I'd like another session in that chair to see if he's right."

"We'll just be wasting time! Even now the Consensus could be—"

"I'll take the chance. If we find out definitely that I'm not guilty, then I'll *know* where I stand."

Virgil ran a hand tentatively over his face, disheveling his meticulously groomed mustache. "All right, kid. We'll give it another try."

WHEN Greg regained consciousness, Virgil was staring down at him in an expression of confused disbelief.

"Well?" Greg prompted.

The other backed off and leaned numbly against the desk.

"I killed Thorman?" Greg guessed.

Virgil nodded.

"But how? What happened?"

"It wasn't pleasant. Both of you were practically out with B-jolts. It wasn't premeditated, though—if that helps any."

"I want to know everything."

"You both came in looping. You stumbled around the control compartment looking for the portable B-jolt bar for 'just one more charge.' You found the meteor blaster instead. You laughed and shouted, 'There goes one with a vein in it! Watch out! I'm going to blow it into the next cluster!' "

"And—?"

"You fired wildly."

"And hit Thorman."

Virgil stared at the floor. "It was late. Nobody was close enough to the ship to be reading you casually. You passed out a few seconds later and that was that."

Greg rose and paced between the chair and the desk. He remembered having told himself at one time that if he'd killed Thorman he would welcome execution. Yet, somehow, at this moment the idea of death didn't seem as unobjectionable as it had then.

"I killed him," he whispered.

"But it wasn't premeditated, kid. Maybe the Consensus—"

"The Consensus operates on the eye-for-an-eye principle."

He went back to the chair. "I repressed the memory of the murder?"

Again Virgil nodded. "It was pretty horrible. Art Thorman, your friend, with half his head blown off. Even as you slept in a B-jolt stupor, pangs of remorse and guilt were at work. It was a hell of a subconscious conflict. You wanted your punishment for killing Thorman. But your survival instinct was strong too. So you repressed the whole thing. Compunction won out in the long run, however, and even though you were hiding your guilt from yourself and everybody else, you were also trying to trip yourself up."

"The death-trap?"

"Yes, the death-trap. You set that yourself—when it appeared for a moment that you might have a chance of escaping justice."

Greg drew erect. "But what about the argument on Thorman's E-record? I'm sure nothing like that happened!"

"Evidently it did." Virgil went over and stared out the window at the city coming to life in the first rush of morning. "I didn't go too deeply into that."

"But why don't I remember it?"

VIRGIL turned and faced him. "I don't know what that was all about. But this much seems clear: When you were out in Hound's Tooth you had a run-in with Thorman over *something*. Or maybe you were simply suffering from space fatigue. Whatever it was, you threatened to kill him."

He spread his hands in further explanation. "Now, a *threat* to kill is closely related to the *action* of killing itself. It would be my guess that when you repressed the memory of killing your partner, you went a step further and also buried the recollection of having at one time threatened him."

Greg dropped back in the chair and sat with his elbows on his knees. He couldn't shake off the conviction that the watchers—millions of them now—were all lurking immediately beyond the Blank-Out field. When Virgil turned off the generator, justice would be swift and impersonal . . .

There was a sound at the door and the frazzle-haired secretary-assistant burst in. Her face lit up joyfully as she brought her hands together. "We're going to have an execution!"

Greg and Virgil exchanged pointed stares.

"The Consensus just finished jelling!" she went on. "Isn't it *wonderful?* It's going to be a full-dress affair on Administration Plaza. And we've just declared a Grand Holiday!"

She glanced at Greg. "Golly, Mr. Blake! Aren't you *thrilled?*" Then her eyes darted in Virgil's direction. "Can I have the day off, Dr. Blake? Can I get in on the excitment too?"

He muttered consent and she was gone.

Greg said, "I'm not going to sit still for this."

"I don't see anything else you can do."

"Maybe I can get out of the system." He stared at the pair of Blank-Out generators.

"You don't think you can—*escape?*"

Greg stepped closer and said, "Sorry." Then he rocked Virgil's head back with a blow that carried all his strength and weight.

He lifted his brother into the chair and touched the electrode to his head. The light somnicharge would keep him from being read for at least half an hour. To make doubly certain, he turned on the second Blank-Out generator after he had slipped the first under his tunic.

VI

THE glowing silver sphere made only a slight bulge beneath his clothes as he left the deserted building and stepped into the street. It was a desolate scene. The city, so close and towering, seemed remote, lonely. Moreover, the hidden generator not only jammed his own mental processes, but also walled off the thoughts of the populace, adding to his sense of utter isolation.

He rode a deserted pediramp for a mile before reaching an air car platform with a driver and vehicle that somehow hadn't joined the rush to Administration Plaza. Overhead, that exodus had taken the shape of a sky-darkening flight converging like the spokes of a wheel on the execution site.

The driver whirled around in surprise as Greg stepped up and touched him on the shoulder.

"Say!" the man exclaimed suspiciously. "How come I can't read—?"

Greg slipped his hand in his pocket and gripped Thorman's E-record. He thrust the cylinder's blunt end forward until the material of his tunic stretched taut under the pressure.

"I've got a meteor blaster," he warned. "I'm Blake."

"The—*killer!*"

Greg forced him into the car. "To Spaceport. And stay close to the surface."

The trip took only a moment.

Even as he lunged from the car and raced for his ship, Greg could imagine the frenzy of communicative thought that must be spilling out of the driver's mind.

He slammed and dogged the

hatch and pushed on to the control room. For a moment, while the drive circuits warmed up, he vaguely wondered how far he would have to go before he found one of the quarantined, nontelepathic worlds. That's what it would have to be. For, if he wound up in another free-reading society, they would only complete the kangaroo proceedings.

Impatiently, he leaned over and checked the fuel gauge.

"Damn!" he said.

Almost empty! There wasn't enough left to lift the ship out of the atmosphere!

Finally achieving operational voltage, the view screen flicked to life and relayed the picture of thousands of cars blotting out the sky as they streamed from the city to Spaceport.

Dismayed, he stumbled over to the gear locker and got another meteor blaster, thrusting it under his belt. As long as he had the Blank-Out to avert being forced to kill himself, he could hold them off—until the sphere's stored power was completely exhausted, at any rate.

He swept the ship's scanner in a full circle. The entire Spaceport landing area was packed with humanity—all waiting for the exciting moment when the killer would be routed from his sanctuary, somehow, and brought to justice.

IT WAS several hours later that Greg rediscovered Thorman's E-record in his pocket. By now, the angry horde had begun valving off the steam of its frustration by pelting the ship with whatever they could get their hands on.

Absently, he returned the cylinder to the compartment beneath Thorman's chair. It was then that he saw the other record lying on the deck, half hidden by the high-tension lead. He had doubtlessly knocked it out of the compartment when he had snatched up the handful of cylinders.

He retrieved it and glanced at the date on the tag—Twenty-third Day, Seventh Month. That was a week before Thorman had cut his final cylinder. Greg remembered the occasion now. They were wrapping things up at Hound's Tooth, getting ready to return home.

He fed the cylinder into the playback unit and waited until it was ready for interrogation.

"Art, this is Greg."

He had to indulge his partner's characteristic reaction to finding someone else questioning his own recording. But Greg cut it as short as he could.

"Something's come up concerning that argument we had at Hound's Tooth," he explained.

"Argument? What argument?"

"When you wanted to come

over to my outpost and I told you to stay the hell where you were."

There was a pause, then, "You're kidding, of course."

"The time when I threatened to kill you."

Thorman's record produced a laugh. "I don't remember anything like *that.*"

"Are you sure?" Greg backed off.

"Of course I'm sure!"

But there was a clear recollection of the argument on the recording Thorman had made a week later! This, Greg realized despite his confusion, could only mean the later recording *had* been tampered with!

And, by extension, it was certain now that someone else was involved in Thorman's murder. And that meant—what did it mean?

For one thing, maybe he *hadn't* set the death-trap for himself as an expression of his guilt complex!

Deep, disorderly realizations began to swim into focus. He went back to Thorman's control seat, staring dully at the cable which might have electrocuted him.

If he had unconsciously set the death-trap, he asked himself, why would he have baited *Thorman's* chair? It was unlikely that he would have had any reason to blunder, unknowingly, into that snare! His subconscious would certainly have been more practical. He would have rigged up something like his bunk, or his own chair.

THE communication screen in the Spaceport Administration Office flared to life, limning a picture of Greg Blake at the controls of the ship.

There he is now! thought the Spaceport manager in excitement.

He's on the air! added Chief Ronsted, who had been standing vigil in the room.

Come out of that ship, Blake! Monitor Irwan ordered, forgetting Virgil had recently relinquished the information that Gregory Blake's mind was being blocked off by a stolen Blank-Out generator.

The screen's audio amplifier hummed tentatively as Greg scanned the room and sighted Irwan.

"I want to talk with you and the Chief," he said.

"Come out of there, Blake!" the Monitor repeated.

Ronsted added, "Turn off the Blank-Out!"

"And get executed for something I didn't do?"

"We'll flush you out sooner or later," Irwan promised.

Ronsted's lean face formed an even leaner smile. "We've just sent to the Hall of Ancient Artifacts for a weapon that'll blow that ship to pieces."

Greg spread his hands importunately. "All I want is a

few minutes to talk with you and the Monitor."

"Well, come on out and talk," Irwan urged.

"I wouldn't make it past the hatch. You'll have to come here."

"In your ship?" Irwan asked in protest, fingering his double chin.

Of course we'll go there, Chief Ronsted beamed, with a tinge of amusement that didn't show on his face. *We'll let him think we're willing to go in and talk.*

What do you mean? the Monitor asked.

He can't read us now, not with that Blank-Out on. By going there we'll at least get him to open the hatch. Then we'll all rush him and grab the Blank-Out!

GREG waited tensely at the hatch. That some development was imminent was indicated in the sudden silence. For the first time in hours, no missiles were pelting the ship.

Eventually there was a hesitant rapping.

He drew the bolts and, in one swift motion, swung the hatch open and thrust the meteor blaster out in front of him. The weapon covered Chief Ronsted and the Monitor as their faces froze in expressions of frustrated surprise.

The scores who had pressed in close behind them, ready to spring, fell back at the sight of the blaster.

"I thought you'd try something like this," Greg disclosed. "You gave in too easy when I asked you over."

He waved them into the passageway, closed the hatch behind him and prodded them on into the control compartment.

"What do you expect to gain by this?" Ronsted demanded.

"Don't you see?" the Monitor said disgustedly. "He just wanted a couple of hostages."

"Wrong." Greg ordered them into the control chairs with a wave of the blaster.

Then he pointed to the playback unit. "I have one of Thorman's E-records in the slot. It was made a week before the one that supposedly incriminated me."

"You're wasting our time, Blake," the Monitor said impatiently. "If you hadn't been covered by this Blank-Out field over the past few hours, you'd know your brother was contacted by thousands of us. He wasn't able to hold back one iota of truth. We know he succeeded in digging up all the information from your subconscious—how you killed Thorman—how—"

"This record," Gregg went on implacably, "has no trace of the argument Thorman and I presumably had in Hound's Tooth. That means the more recent recording, showing the argument, was faked."

"You expect us to believe *that?*" Ronsted asked.

Irwan leaned forward. "If this record is as you say, then you made it that way."

"Let's don't get off on that jag again."

Ronsted tried to rise, glanced at the blaster and sat down again. "Then why is it that the records you brought to your brother's office this morning contain recollections of the same argument?"

Greg smiled bitterly. "I suspected they would—by now. He's had plenty of time to impress false knowledge on them, just as he did on the most recent cylinder."

"Blake, you're insane!" exclaimed the Chief.

"Virgil had no Blank-Out on when we contacted him on his way here a few minutes ago," Irwan argued. "If he had done anything like that, we'd have read it!"

"You were willing to believe *I* did something like that without anyone being able to read it!"

Ronsted rose. "That was different! You had weeks of total isolation in Hound's Tooth to figure a way to cheat the communal conscience!"

"YOU'LL find that Virgil, too, had all the time he wanted. You see, he was always envious of me when we were younger. He simply decided he wanted the fortune I made from that kitarium strike.

"In order to get it, he came over here on the night of the sixth, carrying a Blank-Out generator. He banged on the ship until either Thorman or I let him in. He used a portable somnibattery to put me in a receptive trance. He killed Thorman. Then, using psychotherapeutic procedure, he buried in my subconscious the memory of having let him in the ship. There was also a posthypnotic suggestion to bolt the hatch after he left, and to forget that act."

Chief Ronsted lunged up too, but held his distance in deference to the blaster. "That's ridiculous!"

Greg waved them back into their chairs. "Virgil Blake might have made it easier on himself. He *could* have planted a false memory of the murder in my conscious mind. But, if he'd done that, he would have had no chance to play on my sympathy, win back my confidence—and have me legally arrange for the fortune to become his after my death!

"That was the purpose of my first psychoanalytical session—so he could plant the compulsion in my mind to think kindly of him and sign over my wealth. During that session he also planted the subconscious suggestion that I was to leave the ship's hatch open that night."

"This," Monitor Irwan began, "is the most preposterous—"

But Greg plodded on, "After

the legal transfer was effected, he used another Blank-Out to return to the open ship and set the death-trap. At the same time, he employed oral hypnotic procedure to put a false impression of the Hound's Tooth argument on Thorman's E-record, just in case his trap didn't work. He deleted from the record all conscious recollection of that oral procedure. But he forgot to erase the impression of someone moving around in the control compartment.

"I should have known he was the one who rigged up Thorman's personal storage compartment with the high-tension charge! Wasn't it *his* idea for me to pick up Thorman's records and bring them to his office?"

"It was," the Chief admitted, "but that doesn't prove—"

"When I got to his office he finally had his opportunity to plant a false memory of the crime in my subconscious—or at least to pretend he had found it there. At the same time he had to produce an excuse for having asked me to bring Thorman's recordings."

Greg leaned forward, smiling tensely. "If I'd been alert at the time, I might have noticed something vital: Virgil had to clear some residual impressions out of his playback unit before he could use it again—presumably to inspect Thorman's recent records for clues to clear me.

"During that playback clear-out run, I caught a couple of fragments of speech: '. . . use a rout-out . . . everything about it . . .' If I'd been thinking clearly, I might have recognized that the words were Virgil's and I might have realized their significance."

"GREG, kid—stop it! You're just making it harder on yourself."

Greg turned toward the communication screen, which he realized had been on for some time. It showed the interior of the Spaceport Administration Office. Virgil was in the foreground.

"Don't you see," he asked, "that all this thrashing around you're doing is nothing more than the guilt complex-survival instinct conflict in your subconscious?"

"Virgil," Greg said patronizingly, "will you come over to the ship?"

"I don't see why I should. I'd only be endangering my own life."

Greg turned to Chief Ronsted and the Monitor. "I didn't think he would. He's laboring under a compulsion right now. Something's telling him not to do anything to betray himself."

Ronsted was on his feet again. "Blake, you aren't making any sense at all!"

"All right," Virgil said finally. "I'll come over, if you think it'll help any. But remember,

I've heard all your accusations. And I'm not in range of any Blank-Out. Everybody in Spaceport City has read those insinuations through me. They watched my reaction. They all know my unspoken denials were sincere and truthful. If I had tried to lie they would have set upon me by now."

Greg turned off the communicator. "He's going to come over," he told the two officials, "because he subconsciously fears that not to come might eventually cast some doubt on his innocence. He probably has another purpose too—to look for an opportunity to kill me in self-defense."

Chief Ronsted ran a hand distraughtly over his thin face. "I'm not going to sit here and—"

"Yes, you are," Greg said grimly.

GREG barely managed to get Virgil in the ship.

He jerked open the hatch, reached out and seized his brother's wrist, snatching him in just as several persons, flattened furtively againt the side of the ship, grabbed unsuccessfully for his own swiftly moving arm.

As he fired a warning shot to clear the entranceway, he ducked just in time to avoid his brother's lunging charge from behind. Then he slammed the hatch and dogged it.

Virgil picked himself up off the deck and said, "I just wanted to take the blaster away from you."

Greg smiled knowingly. "Of course you did—the blaster and the Blank-Out generator. Then the Consensus would take care of the rest."

He searched his brother's face. And what he sought was there, hidden deep in his eyes. In the range of the generator now, Virgil had undergone a subtle change. He didn't seem to be as aloof as before. And his stare was one of discernible preoccupation.

He gave Virgil a shove and sent him ahead to the control compartment. Respecting the blaster, Ronsted and Irwan hadn't left their chairs.

"I bring one Virgil Blake," Greg said affectedly, "forced here as a result of the obscure promptings of unconscious motivation. He's already had his try at blasting me—in self-defense, of course."

Virgil started to say something, but Greg motioned him silent with the blaster. "When my brother came in on the communication screen, I was saying—"

"But don't you see?" the Monitor pleaded. "He *couldn't* have done any of those things without betraying himself the minute anyone got in contact with him."

"That's what I tried to tell Greg," Virgil offered. But he was busy mopping perspiration from his face.

"A few minutes ago in the

Spaceport office," Greg said clearly, "he *was* telling the truth when he insisted there was no trace of guilt in his mind for anybody to read. But *now* he knows everything I said is true."

Virgil backed off, perspiring more freely.

"As I was saying," Greg continued, "the playback unit in his office gave out with these fragments of speech as it cleared its circuits: '. . . use a rout-out . . . everything about it . . .' Do you know what a rout-out is, Monitor?"

"Of course. It's an electronic instrument for destroying all the impressions on an E-record so the cylinder can be used again."

"Exactly. Virgil's *own* record was telling him to use a rout-out and destroy everything that had been deposited on that record, then *forget everything about it.* He was supposed to forget even the fact that he had made such a record. That order to forget was to apply *except when he found himself in the range of a Blank-Out,* as he is now. In other words, whenever it was evident that his thoughts *couldn't be read,* he was free to plot the death of Thorman, my incrimination and whatever would be necessary to take over my interest in the Hound's Tooth strike!"

Monitor Irwan's stout face was stiff with shock and amazement.

Chief Ronsted faced Virgil with calculating regard.

Virgil, his mouth hanging open, only stared at the blaster as he backed against the bulkhead.

But he tensed abruptly and charged, his arms outstretched to encompass Greg and hurl him to the deck. Greg, however, was prepared. He sidestepped and brought the handle of the weapon down against his brother's head.

IT STUNNED Virgil, but only momentarily. Then he sat on the deck and buried his face in his hands.

"I had a patient," he sobbed. "It was the day after Greg and Thorman got back from Hound's Tooth. The psychocasts were full of stories about their fabulous strike. My patient was unconscious. The Blank-Out was on. I thought then how I'd like to get Greg's wealth. And, in a moment, I saw how it could be done.

"I had to go through with it. If I had backed out then, my envious thoughts would have been read when I eventually turned the Blank-Out off and I would have been sent to an institution for disassociation and reorientation.

"I cut an E-record and put it on the playback. All the while my patient remained unconscious. Then I let the recording, with my intentions an integral part of it, carry on from there.

"The record used oral psychoanalytical procedure. In effect, I hypnotized myself, making myself forget *on a conscious plane* that I had even conceived of the thought of killing my brother. At the same time I ordered myself to plan toward that end on a conscious level only when I was in range of a Blank-Out generator. I was to drop all such mental activity into the subconscious whenever I got out of its range.

"It was a perfect setup. Since only the conscious mind can be telepathically read, my hands were always clean.

"The E-record also directed that, consciously, I should think and act kindly toward Greg. At times I carried out those instructions only too well —such as warning him an attempt might be made on his life when all the while I subconsciously *knew* that would happen. In other words, all the planning and a good deal of the execution was done without even the watchers or myself knowing about it.

"Even when I asked Greg to bring over Thorman's records, I honestly *thought* I was trying to help him. But when he got there I had already turned a Blank-Out on and was ready to carry on my scheme from there."

Greg handed the meteor blaster to Chief Ronsted.

The Monitor rose, shaking his head incredulously. "You stay here and keep that Blank-Out generator on," he said, thumping the bulge under Greg's tunic, "until I go out and let them read all that's happened."

Greg watched him and the Chief disappear down the passageway together.

Then he knelt beside Virgil, placed an arm around his shoulder and waited.

END

HOW DO YOUR IDEAS GROW?

When Vivian Kellems is hot copy, she is hot copy indeed—moving her manufacturing plant from New York, for instance, in protest against state taxes, and, in her fight to shoot down federal withholding taxes, making such demands that, had they been successful, would have had every employer compensated as a tax collector, thus ruining the withholding scheme.

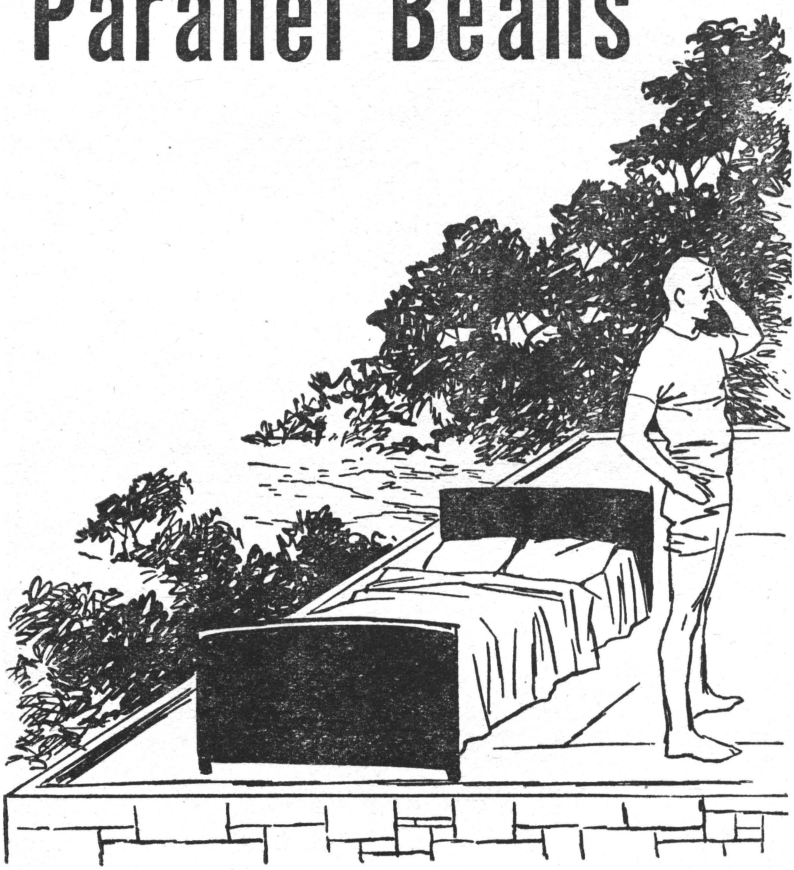
In the idea field, though, Vivian Kellems is topped perhaps only by the item on page 84. Remember the Burmese thumb trap? Strictly kid stuff, it's made of plaited straw in a cylinder shape that gets tighter the harder you try to yank your thumbs free. Miss Kellems saw a well-nigh perfect electrical connection in the gizmo; conduits and cables joined this way—not with straw, of course—were hooked for keeps. Her company turns out millions of dollars' worth of such equipment a year, all from the idea behind a toy.

Warning! Don't try to pass any phony zulceets — it can cost you everything you own!

By MARGARET ST. CLAIR

Illustrated by WOOD

Parallel Beans




Wood

THE fat announcer said threateningly, " 'n I want to warn you that the government is cracking down on zulceet forging. They won't permit our matter-transmitters to be mulcted by cheap zulceet forgers any longer. Sales via the zulceet slot play a vital role in our economic life. The new penalties for forging are strict, and will be strictly enforced." The bib around his pudgy neck shook indignantly. His piggy eyes glared.

George switched off the TV. The programs from the parallel time-stream stations were lousy anyway. He looked at his wife.

She was frowning anxiously. "*Do* you think they'll attach our house? It's a darling house. And we've made a lot of payments on it."

"I don't see how they could," George answered. His voice was calmer than he felt. "According to Herbert, they're in a time-stream parallel to ours, so I doubt they can really get at us, in the first place. Getting those beans across into our stream is about as much as they could do. And in the second place, a silver fifty-cent piece isn't a forged zulceet. It's legal U. S. tender. The whole thing's unfair. Fifty cents is more than those beans were worth."

"They weren't very good beans," Nina agreed. She sighed. "I know Herbert meant well," she said. "He thought we'd enjoy trying the beans we'd been hearing advertised on the parallel time-stream stations. But sometimes I wish he'd never repaired our TV set, or installed the zulceet slot on it, or put the fifty cents in the slot. It would have been better to have the regular repairman work on it. The 'Notice of Attachment of Domicile' they sent frightens me."

THERE was a thud of feet from the vacant lot outside. The back door opened and, as if the mention of his name had evoked him, Herbert came bounding in.

"Hi, sis," he said. "D'I smell caramel cake, hunh? You got caramel cake for supper tonight, hunh, sis?"

"Yes, dear," Nina answered, her face softening. "Would you like a piece?"

"Double zorch!" Herbert cried joyously. He leapt toward the kitchen, with Nina after him.

George glared at his back. When he wasn't with his brother-in-law, he wondered why he disliked the boy so. That Herbert had no manners could be laid to his age, and modern education was responsible for the fact that he sometimes spelled "cat" with a "Q." On the credit side, Herbert was a whizz with anything electronic (too much of a whizz—his repairs to the TV set had started all the trou-

ble), and he got straight A's in physics and math. But he was bumptious, officious, and opinionated. He told Nina what detergent to use, and advised George in the choice of razor blades. What really made George loathe him was that he was always after Nina's cakes.

Herbert came back from the kitchen with a glass of milk and a slab of cake. "Good cake," he said, swallowing. "Icing's grainy, though. You must've stirred it too much, sis."

"I expect I did," Nina agreed submissively. "Herbert, I'm worried. Do you think the people in the parallel time-stream will attach our house?"

"Sure," said Herbert. "Why not? They sent you the notice. They think you forged a zulceet."

"But—"

"It's a difficulty of communication," replied Herbert, licking a crumb of caramel icing from his face. "You ought to try to square things. Don't want them to take over the house."

"We can't give back the beans. We ate them."

"That's what you ought to explain."

There was a silence. George looked at his wife and his brother-in-law. Then he went in the kitchen and came back with a can of present, non-parallel-time beans. He got paper and a pencil from the desk.

"What'cha going to do?" Herbert asked interestedly.

"Put the beans in the zulceet slot, with a note. The beans are for compensation, and the note is to explain."

"Won't work," Herbert said, in a superior voice.

"Why not?" George demanded. He was growing angry.

"They don't understand English. They're not like us. They may not be human beings at all."

"English is what they speak!"

"Naw, they don't. Your mind just translates it ment'lly. I bet what they talk isn't any more like English than it is, unh, like Chinese."

"Nuts, the 'Notice of Attachment of Domicile' is in English!"

Herbert shrugged. "You'll be sorry," he said.

George was too annoyed to answer. He finished writing the note, fastened it around the can with a rubber band, and put the can in the merchandise bin at the end of the zulceet slot. He pressed the lever. The can disappeared.

THERE was a slight pause. Then four green cans, cans of parallel time-stream beans, dropped out of the merchandise bin.

"They've sent more," said Nina. She laughed hysterical-

ly. "More of those same old lousy beans!"

Herbert giggled. "I told you so," he said.

George managed to restrain himself from bashing the cans in Herbert's face. "If you know so blasted much—"

There was a whuffle from the zulceet slot and a document dropped out. It was ornamented with purple ribbons and big official-looking blue seals. George picked it up and broke the seals.

"Notice of Aggravated Offense," he read aloud. "Whenas the owners of videal set no. 37765" (the number was blurred) "have compounded their offense of zulceet forging by a repetition of said offense, they are informed that immediate attachment of spouse, female sex, has been adjudged against them. This judgment is without appeal. Videal Intercity Authority."

Nina's jaw had dropped down. "Spouse, female sex—George! Oh! That's *me!*"

"I thought something like this would happen," Herbert observed. He took a gulp of milk. "Nina had better stay away from near the TV set."

"But—I don't get it," George said. He had put his arm around Nina and was holding her close to him.

"They think your can of present-time beans was meant as another forged zulceet," Herbert explained. "So they're going to attach sis." He finished the milk and put the glass down on the table. "Don'tcha worry about it," he said kindly. "I'll fix it up."

He rummaged through the pockets of his plastic jacket, pulled out a tiny piece of paper and a pencil, and began to write.

"What are you writing?" George demanded. "You just said they don't understand English."

"Um-hum. But mathematics is a universal language. I'm explaining in mathematical terms about how I came to install the zulceet slot on the TV set. Once they realize we're in a different time-stream from theirs, they'll give up the idea of attaching sis or bothering the house."

He folded the paper to the size of a postage stamp, put it in the slot, and pressed the lever. George waited. But no more cans of parallel-time-stream beans appeared.

"That did it," Herbert said jubilantly. "Told yuh they'd understand math, didn't I? Guess I'm pretty big deal, hunh, sis, pretty big d—"

HE disappeared.

His disappearance was so sudden and so complete that George involuntarily looked up at the ceiling, expecting to find him being drawn up through it. Herbert wasn't there, of course, He wasn't anywhere.

Nina giggled hysterically.

The whites of her eyes were showing. "They've attached him," she said. "Whu-whu-whu-whu! They've attached Herbert, instead."

"Instead—?" George demanded blankly. He couldn't seem to focus on things.

"Attached him instead of me. Whu-whu-whu! Whu, whu, whu, whu!" She began to cry.

George put his arm around her. He was just getting her calm when there came another whuffle from the zulceet slot.

This time it was neither beans nor another legal-looking document. It was a piece of paper folded up small, and even before he unfolded it, George knew who it was from.

"They are all mixced up," it began without preamble. "I have been here a couple of days now—" George and Nina looked at each other; it hadn't been ten minutes yet— "and I am eggsplaining it to them. It is hard wurk. They are plenty dumm. A bunch squares. But do not wurry. I am alrighte. Herbt."

George looked up from the paper. "But why would they attach *him?*" he demanded.

"Because they think he's me," said Nina. "Don't you see what he says? They're all mixed up—he says so—and plenty dumb. Maybe they aren't really human beings at all—we don't really know that they are. Those beans tasted funny. Maybe they even thought that math paper Herbert put in the slot was a confession of zulceet forging. But anyhow, they think Herbert's me. They think he's your *wife!*"

She began to go whu-whu-whu once more. Once more George calmed her. Though they discussed the disappearance over and over again, they could find no better explanation than the one Nina had advanced. When it got dark Nina called her mother and told her Herbert was staying with them that night.

GEORGE couldn't get to sleep. He heard Nina sighing, and knew she couldn't either. At last she said, "George, I'm scared."

"Don't be, honey. There isn't anything more to worry about. The worst has already happened. And Herbert says he's all right."

"Yes, but—there was that first paper, the Notice of Attachment of Domicile."

"Well?"

"We didn't do it. You remember, it said if the vextix wasn't wrytled by Junel 40th, they'd attach the house. And we didn't wrytle it because we didn't know what it was. So they could still attach the house!"

"Go to sleep, honey. Herbert said he was explaining things. He'll get it fixed up."

"But—all right."

Her breathing quieted. The

sound was soothing, and George drifted off to sleep himself. He wakened some hours later, feeling very cold.

He pulled the blanket up, but the room was still too chilly. He'd have to shut the window.

He looked around to orient himself before getting out of bed. What he saw startled him into full wakefulness. There were stars overhead. Stars! Then the roof—

He put his hand on Nina's shoulder and shook her gently. "Honey . . . they've attached the house."

For a moment Nina was silent. He thought she must still be asleep. Then she answered, "It's because we didn't wrytle the vextix, I suppose. Did they take everything?"

"It's too dark to be sure. But I think so. Except the bed."

"It's probably illegal to attach the bed."

For a moment George thought she was going to begin whu-whu-ing again, but she didn't. She pulled a quilt around her shoulders and put her feet on the floor. "Let's go see just what they did attach," she said.

Their cautious inspection did not take long. Except for the concrete slab that formed the foundation of the house, and the bed in which they had been sleeping, everything was gone. Their domicile had been thoroughly attached.

Nina said, "I never realized before how limited the floor space in the house was. We can't take three steps without being at the edge of the foundation. Well. Do you suppose we'll have to keep up the payments even though the house is gone?"

"I imagine so. And it's going to be difficult, explaining to the bank what happened to their security."

Nina sniffled. "—No, I'm not going to cry. But I'm disappointed in Herbert. I thought he'd be able to clear things up with the parallel time-stream people better than this."

"Um. You'd better get back in bed, honey. You'll freeze, going around like this."

Nina obeyed. George sat down beside her dejectedly. "It'll be light soon," she said. "Maybe we can think of something to do when it's light. I wish we could make some coffee. Coffee would help a lot. —Oh! What was that?"

THERE had been a soft yet profound vibration in the air, like a deep harp string being plucked. The vibration was repeated. Abruptly the gray pre-dawn light around them was blotted out.

George swallowed. He said, "Honey, I think they've unattached the house."

It was true. Their dazed tour found everything back in place. Even the books Herbert

had given them for a wedding present—a two-volume set of log tables—were back in the bookcase.

They looked at each other. At last Nina drew a quavering sigh. "Let's go outside," she said. "I don't know what—but I'm afraid. Let's go outside."

"All right," said George.

In the chill gray light the exterior of the house was irreproachably normal. The lawn, the pelargoniums, the mail box, the sidewalk, were all in place. But on the vacant lot adjoining, the vacant lot Herbert had run across yesterday afternoon, there was a house whose exterior was also irreproachably normal. Its lawn, its pelargoniums, its mail box, its sidewalk, were also all in place.

Nina clutched at George's shoulder. In a high voice she said, "They've sent another our house. They've sent back two of our house."

"Maybe there's some mistake. Do you want to go over and look at the other one?"

"I don't need to go look. I know without looking. It's exactly like our house. It *is* our house. Everything's the same. There is even half a caramel cake on the cake dish out in the kitchen."

She began to cry gently. George stood embracing her helplessly while the sky grew light. At last he drew her back within their own house that wasn't on the formerly vacant lot.

They sat down in the living room. George's mind was busy with financial considerations. If he could contact the owner of the vacant lot—Beckstein, his name was—before he heard about the house on his lot—and if there wasn't trouble with the zoning laws—but of course George didn't have a building permit. Did you need a building permit for a house that was already built? Probably. And was the second their house too near the first one? Would Beckstein sue if he found out about the house before George could buy the lot? And what about the zoning laws?

He kept on petting Nina. At last he said, "I'm going to turn on the TV set."

"Just more trouble," she answered in a muffled voice.

"Um. Maybe we'll get some explanation of all this." He clicked the switch.

THERE was a soft whuffle from the zulceet slot. A document—the most official-looking, the most formidable to date—dropped out. There was scarcely an inch on its exterior that wasn't covered with blue wax seals.

George opened it. The heading was in very large Gothic lettering. "Notice of Restoration and Recompensation," it read.

"Whenas it has come to the

attention of the Videal Intercity Authority that the domicile of the owners of videal set no. 37765" (still blurred) "was wrongfully attached, and, whenas it has come to the attention of the Videal Intercity Authority that the spouse, female sex, of the owners of videal set No. 37765" (just as blurred as ever) "was wrongfully attached also, be it enacted by the puissance of the Videal Intercity Authority in council assembled that said domicile and said spouse, female sex, be immediately restored. And be it further enacted by the said puissance of said Videal Intercity Authority that Recompensation for said wrongful attachment be made synchronously, via the Imperial Duplisissix. Signed, Videal Intercity Authority in full council assembled." Underneath the signature there was a truly enormous blue wax seal.

George closed his eyes and then opened them. There was really nothing to be said.

The doorbell rang.

They both jumped. George went to answer it. Herbert was standing with a pleased grin on the porch.

"Hi, George," he said. "Hi, sis. Miss me a lot, hunh? I was gone a long time, but I finally got it fixed, didn't I? Do I ever know my stuff!"

He sounded jubilant, but George was struck by a curious echoing quality in his brother-in-law's words. He opened the door wide and looked out at the their house that stood on the erstwhile vacant lot.

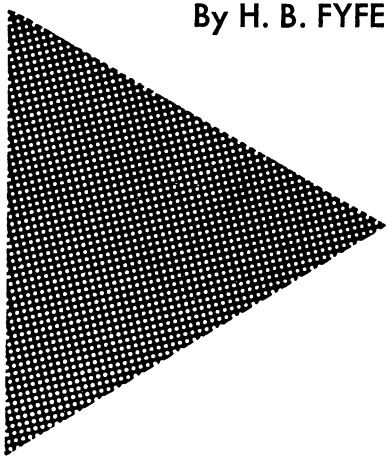
A Herbert was standing on the porch of the other their house too. For a wild moment George wondered if there was a George and a Nina inside that house also. But there was a slightly puzzled look on the second Herbert's face.

"Whyn't you answer?" The Herberts went on. It was light enough so George could see that their lips were moving in perfect unison. They weren't twins, any more than the houses were; the Herberts were the same Herbert, in the sense that the houses were the same house. Recompensation had been made via the Imperial Duplisissix; presumably the Videal Intercity Authority had thought that George would enjoy having two spouses, female sex; and George now had two brothers-in-law.

"Sis made any cakes lately?" the pair asked brightly. "She makes good cakes, if they had better icing. D'ju learn how to make better icing while I was gone, sis? How's for a nice piece cake?"

END

By H. B. FYFE



Finding his way out of this maze was only half the job.

The Wedge

WHEN the concealed gong sounded, the man sitting on the floor sighed. He continued, however, to slump loosely against the curving, pearly plastic of the wall, and took care not to glance toward the translucent ovals he knew to be observation panels.

He was a large man, but thin and bony-faced. His dirty gray coverall bore the name "Barnsley" upon grimy white tape over the heart. Except at the shoulders, it looked too big for him. His hair was dark brown, but the sandy ginger of his two-week beard seemed a better match for his blue eyes.

Finally, he satisfied the softly insistent gong by standing up and gazing in turn at each of the three doors spaced around the cylindrical chamber. He deliberately adopted an expression of simple-minded anticipation as he ambled over to the nearest one.

The door was round, about four feet in diameter, and set in a flattened part of the wall with its lower edge tangent with the floor. Rods about two inches thick projected a hand's breadth at four, eight, and twelve o'clock. The markings around them suggested that each could be rotated to three different positions. Barnsley squatted on his heels to study these.

Noting that all the rods were set at the position he had learned to think of as "one," he reached out to touch the door. It felt slightly warm, so he allowed his fingertips to slide over the upper handle. A tentative tug produced no movement of the door.

"That's it, though," he mumbled quietly. "Well, now to do our little act with the others!"

He moved to the second door, where all the rods were

set at "two." Here he fell to manipulating the rod handles, pausing now and then to shove hopefully against the door. Some twenty minutes later, he tried the same routine at the third door.

Eventually, he returned to his starting point and rotated the rods there at random for a few minutes. Having, apparently by accident, arranged them in a sequence of one-two-three, he contrived to lean against the door at the crucial instant. As it gave beneath his weight, he grabbed the two lower handles and pushed until the door rose to a horizontal position level with its hinged top. It settled there with a loud click.

BARNSLEY stooped to crawl through into an arched passage of the same pearly plastic. He straightened up and walked along for about twenty feet, flashing a white-toothed grin through his beard while muttering curses behind it. Presently, he arrived at a small, round bay, to be confronted by three more doors.

"Bet there's a dozen of you three-eyed clods peeping at me," he growled. "How'd you like me to poke a boot through the panel in front of you and kick you blubberballs in all directions? Do you have a page in your data books for that?"

He forced himself to *feel* sufficiently dull-witted to waste ten minutes opening one of the doors. The walls of the succeeding passage were greenish, and the tunnel curved gently downward to the left. Besides being somewhat warmer, the air exuded a faint blend of heated machine oil and something like ripe fish. The next time Barnsley came to a set of doors, he found also a black plastic cube about two feet high. He squatted on his heels to examine it.

I'd better look inside or they'll be disappointed, he told himself.

From the corner of his eye, he watched the movement of shadows behind the translucent panels in the walls. He could picture the observers there: blubbery bipeds with three-jointed arms and legs ending in clusters of stubby but flexible tentacles. Their broad, spine-crested heads would be thrust forward and each would have two of his three protruding eyes directed at Barnsley's slightest move. They had probably been staring at him in relays every second since picking up his scout ship in the neighboring star system.

That is, Barnsley thought, it must have been the next system whose fourth planet he had been photo-mapping for the Terran Colonial Service. He hoped he had not been wrong about that.

Doesn't matter, he consoled himself, *as long as the Service can trace me. These slobs certainly aren't friendly.*

He reconsidered the scanty evidence of previous contact in this volume of space, light-years from Terra's nearest colony. Two exploratory ships had disappeared. There had been a garbled, fragmentary message picked up by the recorders of the colony's satellite beacon, which some experts interpreted as a hasty warning. As far as he knew, Barnsley was the only Terran to reach this planet alive.

To judge from his peculiar imprisonment, his captors had recovered from their initial dismay at encountering another intelligent race—at least to the extent of desiring a specimen for study. In Barnsley's opinion, that put him more or less ahead of the game.

"They're gonna learn a lot!" he muttered, grinning vindictively.

He finished worrying the cover off the black box. Inside was a plastic sphere of water and several varieties of food his captors probably considered edible. The latter ranged from a leafy stalk bearing a number of small pods to a crumbling mass resembling moldy cheese. Barnsley hesitated.

"I haven't had the guts to try this one yet," he reminded himself, picking out what looked like a cluster of long, white roots.

The roots squirmed feebly in his grasp. Barnsley returned them to the box instantly.

Having selected, instead, a fruit that could have been a purple cucumber, he put it with the water container into a pocket of his coverall and closed the box.

Maybe they won't remember that I took the same thing once before, he thought. *Oh, hell, of course they will! But why be too consistent?*

He opened one of the doors and walked along a bluish passage that twisted to the left, chewing on the purple fruit as he went. It was tougher than it looked and nearly tasteless. At the next junction, he unscrewed the cap of the water sphere, drained it slowly, and flipped the empty container at one of the oval panels. A dim shadow blurred out of sight, as if someone had stepped hastily backward.

"Why not?" growled Barnsley. "It's time they were shaken up a little!"

PRETENDING to have seen something where the container had struck the wall, he ran over and began to feel along the edge of the panel. When his fingertips encountered only the slightest of seams, he doubled his fists and pounded. He thought he could detect a faint scurrying

on the other side of the wall.

Barnsley laughed aloud. He raised one foot almost waist-high and drove the heel of his boot through the translucent observation panel. Seizing the splintered edges of the hole, he tugged and heaved until he had torn out enough of the thin wall to step through to the other side. He found himself entering a room not much larger than the passage behind him.

To his left, there was a flicker of blue from a crack in the wall. The crack widened momentarily, emitting a gabble of mushy voices. The blue cloth was twitched away by a cluster of stubby tentacles, whereupon the crack closed to an almost imperceptible line. Barnsley fingered his beard to hide a grin and turned the other way.

He stumbled into a number of low stools surmounted by spongy, spherical cushions. One of these he tore off for a pillow before going on. At the end of the little room, he sought for another crack, kicked the panel a bit to loosen it, and succeeded in sliding back a section of wall. The passage revealed was about the size of those he had been forced to explore during the past two weeks, but it had an unfinished, behind-the-scenes crudeness in appearance. Barnsley pottered along for about fifteen minutes, during which time the walls resounded with distant running and he encountered several obviously improvised barriers.

He kicked his way through one, squeezed through an opening that had not been closed quite in time, restrained a wicked impulse to cross some wiring that must have been electrical, and at last allowed himself to be diverted into a passage leading back to his original cell. He amused himself by trying to picture the disruption he had caused to the honeycomb of passageways.

"There!" he grinned to himself. "That should keep them from bothering me for a few hours. Maybe one or two of them will get in trouble over it—I hope!"

He arranged his stolen cushion where the wall met the floor and lay down.

A thought struck him. He sat up to examine the cushion suspiciously. It appeared to be an equivalent to foam rubber. He prodded and twisted until convinced that no wires or other unexpected objects were concealed inside. Not till then did he resume his relaxed position.

Presently one of his hands located and pinched a tiny switch buried in the lobe of his left ear. Barnsley concentrated upon keeping his features blank as a rushing sound seemed to grow in his ear. He yawned casually, moving one hand from behind

his head to cover his mouth.

Having practiced many times before a mirror, he did not think that any possible watcher would have noticed how his thumb slipped briefly inside his mouth to give one eyetooth a slight twist.

A strong humming inundated his hearing. It continued for perhaps two minutes, paused, and began again. Barnsley waited through two repetitions before he "yawned" again and sleepily rolled over to hide his face in his folded arms.

"Did you get it all?" he murmured.

"Clear as a bell," replied a tiny voice in his left ear. "Was that your whole day's recording?"

"I guess so," said Barnsley. "To tell the truth, I lose track a bit after two weeks without a watch. Who's this? Sanchez?"

"That's right. You seem to come in on my watch pretty nearly every twenty-four hours. Okay, I'll tape a slowed-down version of your blast for the boys in the back room. You're doing fine."

"NOT for much longer," Barnsley told him. "When do I get out of here?"

"Any day," Sanchez reassured him. "It was some job to learn an alien language with just your recordings and some of your educated guesses to go on. We've had a regular mob sweating on it night and day."

"How is it coming?"

"It turns out they're nothing to worry about. The fleet is close enough now to pick up their surface broadcasting. Believe me, your stupid act has them thoroughly confused. They hold debates over whether you could possibly be intelligent enough to belong in a spaceship."

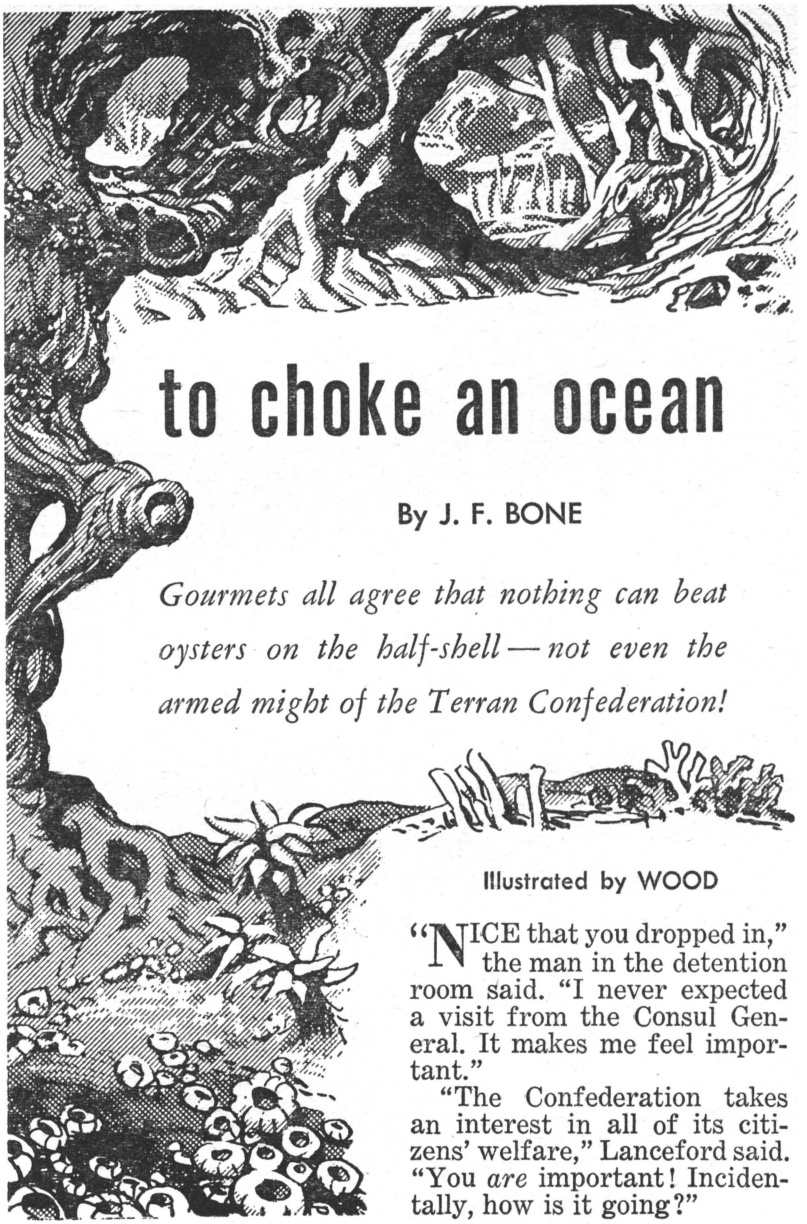
"Meanwhile, I'm slowly starving," said Barnsley.

"Just hang on for a couple of days. Now that we know where they are, they're in for a shock. One of these mornings, they're going to hear voices from all over their skies, demanding to know what kind of savages they are to have kidnapped you—and in their own language!"

Barnsley grinned into his improvised pillow as Sanchez signed off. Things would really work out after all. He was set for an immensely lucrative position; whether as ambassador, trade consultant, or colonial governor depended upon how well the experts bluffed the blubber-heads. Well, it seemed only his due for the risks he had taken.

"Omigosh!" he grunted, sitting up as he pictured the horde of Terran Colonial experts descending upon the planet. "I'll be the only one here that hasn't learned to speak the language!"

END



to choke an ocean

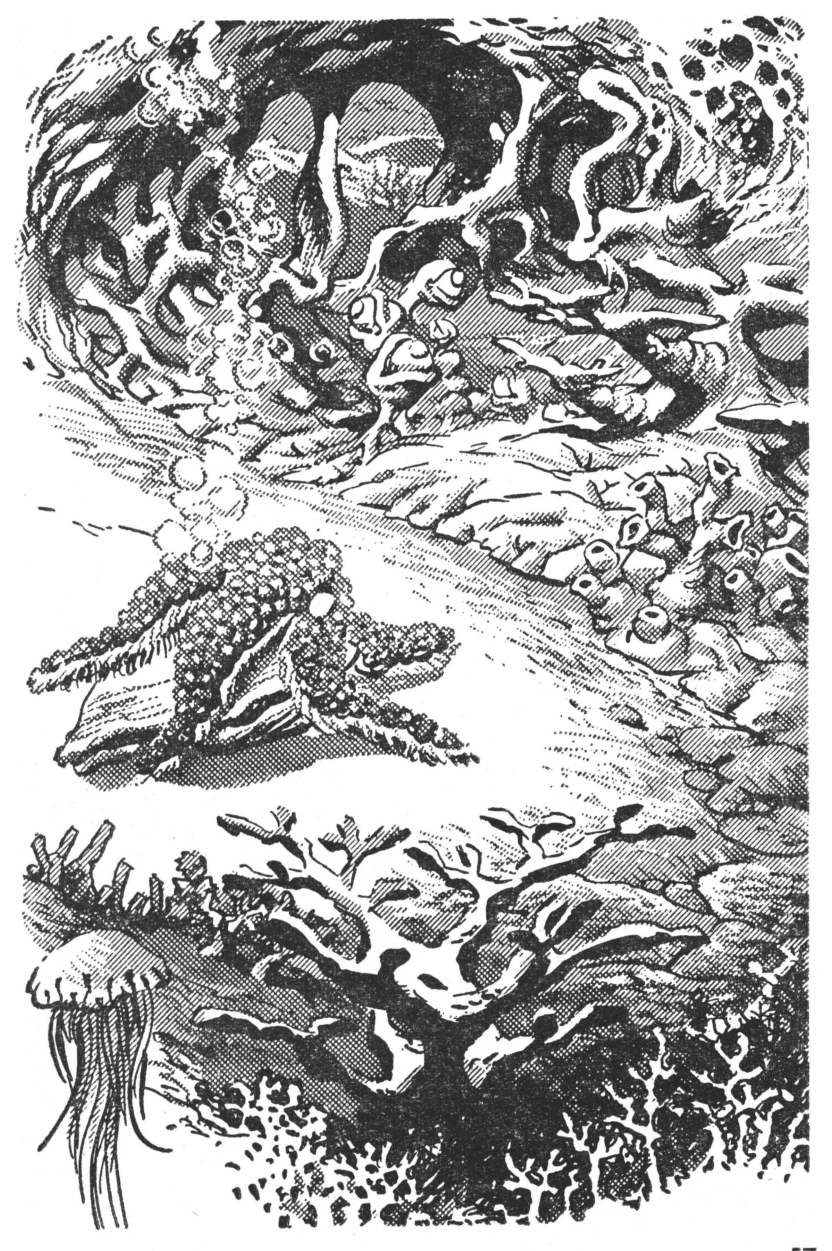
By J. F. BONE

Gourmets all agree that nothing can beat oysters on the half-shell — not even the armed might of the Terran Confederation!

Illustrated by WOOD

"NICE that you dropped in," the man in the detention room said. "I never expected a visit from the Consul General. It makes me feel important."

"The Confederation takes an interest in all of its citizens' welfare," Lanceford said. "You *are* important! Incidentally, how is it going?"



"Not too bad. They treat me all right. But these natives sure are tough on visitors. I've never been checked so thoroughly in all my life—and now this thirty day quarantine! Why, you'd think I was carrying the plague instead of a sample case!"

The chubby little commercial traveller probably had a right to complain, Lanceford thought. After all, a Niobian quarantine station isn't the pleasantest sort of environment. It's not meant to be comfortable, physical discomfort being as good a way as any to discourage casual visitors. The ones who have fortitude enough to stand the entry regulations can get in, but tourists seldom visit Niobe. However, the planet's expanding economy offered a fertile field for salesmen, and men of that stripe would endure far worse hardships than a port of entry in pursuit of the Almighty Credit.

Now this fellow, George Perkins, was a typical salesman. And despite his soft exterior there was a good hard core inside.

Lanceford looked him over and decided that he would last. "You came here of your own free will, didn't you?" he asked.

"If you call a company directive free will," Perkins answered. "I wouldn't come here for a vacation, if that's what you mean. But the commercial opportunities can't be ignored."

"I suppose not, but you can hardly blame the Niobians for being suspicious of strangers. Perhaps there's no harm in you. But they have a right to be sure; they've been burned before." Lanceford uncoiled his lean gray length from the chair and walked over to the broad armorglas window. He stared out at the gloomy view of Niobe's rainswept polar landscape. "You know," he continued, "you might call this Customs Service a natural consequence of uninvestigated visitors." He brooded over the grayness outside. A polar view was depressing—scrubby vegetation, dank grassland, the eternal Niobian rain. He felt sorry for Perkins. Thirty days in this place would be sheer torture.

"It must have been quite some disturbance to result in this." Perkins waved his hand at the barren room. "Sounds like you know something about it."

"I do. In a way you might say that I was responsible for it."

"Would you mind telling me?"

"I WOULDN'T mind at all." Lanceford looked at his watch. "If I have the time, that is. I'm due to be picked up in an hour, but Niobians have some quaint conceptions of time. So if you want to take

a chance that I won't finish—"

"Go ahead."

"To start with, take a look at that insigne over the door. The whole story's right there."

Perkins eyed the emblem of the Niobian Customs Service. It was a five-pointed star surrounding a circle, superimposed over the typically Terran motto: "Eternal Vigilance is the Price of Safety." He nodded.

"How come the Terran style?" he asked.

"That's part of the story. Actually that insigne's a whole chapter of Niobe's history. But you have to know what it stands for." Lanceford sighed reminiscently. "It began during the banquet that celebrated the signing of the Agreement which made Niobe a member of the Confederation. I was the Director of the BEE's Niobe Division at that time. As a matter of fact, I'd just taken the job over from Alvord Sims. The Old Man had been ordered back to Terra, to take over a job in the Administration, and I was the next man in line.

"The banquet was a flop, of course. Like most mixed gatherings involving different races, it was a compromise affair. Nobody was satisfied. It dragged along in a spirit of suffering resignation — the Niobians quietly enduring the tasteless quality of the food, while the Confederation representatives, wearing unobtrusive nose plugs, suffered politely through the watered-down aroma and taste of the Niobian delicacies. All things being considered, it was moving along more smoothly than it had any right to, and if some moron on the kitchen staff hadn't used tobasco sauce instead of catsup, we'd probably have signed the Agreement and gone on happily ever after.

"But it didn't work out that way.

"Of course it wasn't entirely the kitchen's fault. There had to be some damn fool at the banquet who'd place the bomb where it would do some good. And of course I had to be it." Lanceford grinned. "About the only thing I have to say in my defense is that I didn't know it was loaded!"

Perkins looked at him expectantly as Lanceford paused. "Well, don't stop there," he said. "You've got me interested."

Lanceford smiled good-naturedly and went on.

WE HELD the banquet in the central plaza of Base Alpha. It was the only roofed area on the planet large enough to hold the crowd of high brass that had assembled for the occasion. We don't do things that way now, but fifty years ago we had a lot to learn. In those days, the admission of a humanoid planet into the Confederation was quite an

event. The VIP's thought that the native population should be aware of it.

I was sitting between Kron Avar and one of the high brass from the Bureau of Interstellar Trade, a fellow named Hartmann. I had no business being in that rarefied air, since Kron was one of the two First Councilors and Hartmann ranked me by a couple of thousand files on the promotion list. But I happened to be a friend of Kron's, so protocol got stretched a bit in the name of friendship. He and I had been through a lot together when I was a junior explorer with the BEE some ten years before. We'd kept contact with each other ever since. We had both come up the ladder quite a ways, but a Planetary Director, by rights, belonged farther down the table. So there I was, the recipient of one of the places of honor and a lot of dirty looks.

Hartmann didn't think much of being bumped one seat away from the top. He wasn't used to associating with mere directors, and besides, I kept him from talking with Kron about trade relations. Kron was busy rehashing the old days when we were opening Niobe to viscayaculture. Trade didn't interest him very much, and Hartmann interested him less. Niobians are never too cordial to strangers, and he had never seen the BIT man before this meeting.

Anyway, the talk got around to the time he introduced me to vorkum, a native dish that acts as a systemic insect repellant—and tastes like one! And right then I got the bright idea that nearly wrecked Niobe.

As I said, there was both Niobian and Confederation food at the banquet, so I figured that it was a good time as any to get revenge for what my dog-headed friend did to my stomach a good decade before.

So I introduced him to Terran cooking.

Niobians assimilate it all right, but their sense of taste isn't the same as ours. Our best dishes are just mush to their palates, which are conditioned to sauces that would make the most confirmed spice lover on Earth run screaming for the water tap. They have a sense of the delicate, too, but it needs to be stimulated with something like liquid fire before they can appreciate it. For instance, Kron liked Earth peaches, but he spiced them with horseradish and red pepper.

I must admit that he was a good sport. He took the hors d'oeuvres in stride, swallowing such tasteless things as caviar, Roquefort and anchovy paste without so much as a grimace. Of course, I was taking an unfair advantage of Kron's natural courtesy, but it didn't bother me too much. He had rubbed that vorkum episode in

for years. It was nice to watch him squirm.

WHEN I pressed him to try an oyster cocktail, I figured things had gone far enough.

He took it, of course, even though anyone who knew Niobians could see that he didn't want any part of it. There was a pleading look in his eye that I couldn't ignore. After all, Kron was a friend. I was actually about to stop him when he pulled an oyster from its red bath and popped it into his mouth. There was a 'you'll be sorry' look on his face. I gestured to a waiter to remove the cocktail as he bit into the oyster, figuring, somewhat belatedly, that I had gone too far.

The grateful look I got from him was sufficient reward. But then it happened. Kron stopped looking grateful and literally snatched the cocktail back from the startled waiter!

He looked at me with an expression of disgust. "The first decent food thus far," he said, "and you attempt to send it away!"

"Huh?" I exclaimed stupidly. "I didn't want to make you miserable."

"Miserable! Hah! This dish is wonderful! What in the name of my First Ancestor is it?" His pleased grin was enough like a snarl to make Hartmann cringe in his chair. Since Kron and I were both speaking Niobian rather than Confed, he didn't understand what was happening. I suppose he thought that Kron was about to rip my throat out. It was a natural error, of course. You've seen a dog smile, and wondered what was going on behind the teeth? Well, Kron looked something like that. A Niobian with his dog-headed humanoid body is impressive under any conditions. When he smiles he can be downright frightening.

I winked at Hartmann. "Don't worry, sir," I said. "Everything's all right."

"It certainly is," Kron said in Confed. "This dish is delicious. Incidentally, friend Lanceford, what is it? It tastes something like our Komal, but with a subtle difference of flavor that is indescribable!"

"It's called an oyster cocktail, Kron," I said.

"This is a product of your world we would enjoy!" Kron said. "Although the sauce is somewhat mild, the flavor of the meat is exquisite!" He closed his eyes, savoring the taste. "It would be somewhat better with vanka," he said musingly. "Or perhaps with Kala berries."

I shuddered. I had tried those sauces once. Once was enough! I could still feel the fire.

"I wonder if you could ship them to us," Kron continued.

Hartmann's ears pricked up at the word "ship." It looked like an opening gambit for a

fast sales talk on behalf of interstellar trade, a subject dear to his heart.

But I was puzzled. I couldn't figure it out until I tried one of the oysters—after which I knew! Some fool had dished them up in straight tobasco sauce! It took some time before I could talk, what with trying to wash the fire out of my mouth, and during the conversational hiatus Hartmann picked up the ball where I dropped it. So I sat by and listened, my burned mouth being in no condition for use.

"I'M AFRAID that we couldn't ship them," Hartmann said. "At least not on a commercial basis. Interstellar freight costs are prohibitive where food is concerned."

Kron nodded sadly. He passed the oysters to Tovan Harl, his fellow First Councilor. Harl went through the same reaction pattern Kron had shown.

"However," Hartmann continued, "we could send you a few dozen. Perhaps you could start a small oyster farm."

"Is this a plant?" Kron asked curiously.

"No, it's a marine animal with a hard outer shell."

"Just like our Komal. We could try planting some of them in our oceans. If they grow, we will be very obliged to you Terrans for giving us a new taste sensation."

"Since my tribe is a seafaring one," Harl interjected, "they can be raised under my supervision until we find the exact methods to propagate them in our seas."

Hartmann must have been happy to get off the hook. It was a small request, one that was easy to fulfill. It was a good thing that the Niobians didn't realize what concessions they could wring from the BIT. The Confederation had sunk billions into Niobe and was prepared to sink many more if necessary. They would go to almost any lengths to keep the natives happy. If that meant star-freighter loads of oysters, then it would be star-freighter loads of oysters. The Confederation needed the gerontin that grew on Niobe.

The commercial worlds needed the anti-aging drug more and more as the exploration of space continued—not to mention the popular demand. Niobe was an ideal herbarium for growing the swampland plant from which the complex of alkaloids was extracted.

So Hartmann made a note of it, and the subject was dropped.

I didn't think anything more about it. Kron was happy, Harl was happy, and Hartmann was feeling pleased with himself. There was no reason to keep the oyster question alive.

But it didn't die there. By some sort of telepathy the Niobians scattered along the long

tables found out what had been getting talked about at the upper end.

By this time I was on the ball again. When the orders went in I slipped a note to the cooks to use tabasco or vanaka on the Niobian orders. It was fortunate that there was an ample supply of oysters available, because the banquet dissolved shortly thereafter into an outright oyster feed. The Niobians dropped all pretense. They wanted oysters—with vanaka, with tabasco or with Kala berries. The more effete Earth preparations didn't rouse the slightest enthusiasm, but the bivalve found its place in the hearts and stomachs of the natives. The oysters ultimately ran out, but one thing was certain. There was a definite bond of affection between our two utterly dissimilar species.

The era of good feeling persisted for several hours. There was no more quiet undertone of polite suffering among our guests. They were enjoying themselves. The Agreement was signed with hardly an exception being taken to its clauses and wording.

Niobe became a full member of the Confederation, with sovereign planetary rights, and the viscaya concentrate began flowing aboard the ships waiting at the polar bases.

A day later I got orders to start winding up the BEE's installations on Niobe. The consular service would take over after I had finished . . .

LANCEFORD looked at his watch. "Well, we're going to have time. It looks like they'll be late. Want to hear the rest of it?"

"Naturally," Perkins said. "I certainly wouldn't want you to stop here."

"Well," Lanceford continued, "the next four years weren't much."

WE SPENT most of the time closing down the outpost and regional installations, but it took longer than I expected what with the difficulty in getting shipping space to move anything but viscaya concentrate off the planet. Of course, like any of the Confederation bureaus, the BEE died hard. With one thing and another, there were still a lot of our old people left. We still had the three main bases on the continental land masses in operating condition, plus a few regional experiment stations on Alpha Continent and the Marine Biology Labs on Varnel Island. I'd just closed the last regional stations on Beta and Gamma when Heinz Bergdorf paid me an official call.

Heinz was the senior biologist on Varnel. He was a good looking lad of Teutonic ancestry, one of those big blond kids who fool you. He didn't look like a scientist, but his skull held more knowledge of Ni-

obe's oceans than was good for a man. He would have to unlearn a lot of it before he took his next job, or so I thought at the time.

Anyway, Heinz came into my office looking like someone had stolen his favorite fishnet. The expression of Olympian gloom on his beak-nosed face would have done credit to Zeus. It didn't take any great amount of brains to see that Heinz was worried. It stuck out all over him. He draped himself limply in the chair beside my desk.

"We've got troubles, Chief," he announced.

I grinned at him. I knew perfectly well why he was here. Something had come up that was too big for him to handle. That was Heinz's only fault, a belief in the omnipotence of higher authority. If he couldn't handle it, it was a certainty that I could—even though I knew nothing of either his specialty or his problems. However, I liked the man. I did my best to give him the fatherly advice he occasionally needed, although he would have been better off half the time if he hadn't taken it.

"Well, what's the trouble now?" I asked. "From the look on your face it must be unpleasant. Or maybe you're just suffering from indigestion."

"It's not indigestion, Chief."

"Well, don't keep me in suspense. Tell me so I can worry too."

I didn't like the way he looked. Of course, I'd been expecting trouble for the past year. Things had been going far too smoothly.

"Oysters!" Bergdorf said laconically.

"Oysters?"

I looked at him incredulously. Bergdorf sat straight up in his chair and faced me. There was no humor in his eyes. "For God's sake! You frightened me for a moment. You're joking, I hope."

"Far from it," Bergdorf replied. "I said oysters and I mean oysters. It's no joke! Just who was the unutterable idiot who planted them here?"

IT TOOK a minute before I remembered. "Hartmann," I said. "Of the BIT. He ordered them delivered at the request of Kron Avar and Tovan Harl. I suppose Harl planted them. I never paid very much attention to it."

"You should have. It would have been better if they had imported Bengal tigers! How long ago did this infernal insanity happen?"

"Right after the Agreement was signed, I guess. I'm sure it was no earlier than that, because Niobians met up with oysters for the first time at that affair." I still didn't get it, but there was no doubt that Heinz was serious. I tried to remember something about oysters, but other than the fact that they were good to eat

and produced pearls I could think of nothing. Yet Bergdorf looked like the end of the world was at hand. There was something here that didn't add up. "Well, get on with it," I said. "As far as marine biology is concerned I'm as innocent as a Lyranian virgin. Tell me—what's wrong with the oysters?"

"Nothing! That's the trouble. They're nice healthy specimens of terrestrial *Ostrea lurida.* We found a floating limb with about a dozen spat clinging to it."

"Spat?"

"Immature oysters."

"Oh. Is that bad?"

"Sure it's bad. I suppose I'd better explain," Bergdorf said. "On Earth an oyster wouldn't be anything to worry about, even though it produces somewhere between sixteen and sixty million fertile eggs every year. On Earth this tremendous fertility is necessary for survival, but here on Niobe where there are no natural enemies to speak of, it's absolutely deadly!

"Just take these dozen spat we found. Year after next, they'd be breeding size, and would produce about three hundred million larvae. If everything went right, some three years later those three hundred million would produce *nine thousand trillion* baby oysters! Can you image how much territory nine thousand trillion oysters would cover?"

I STOPPED listening right then, and started looking at the map of Niobe pinned on the wall. "Good Lord! They'd cover the whole eastern seaboard of Alpha from pole to pole."

Bergdorf said smugly, "Actually, you're a bit over on your guess. Considering the short free swimming stage of the larvae, the slow eastern seaboard currents, poor bottom conditions and overcrowding, I doubt if they would cover more than a thousand miles of coastline by the fourth year. Most of them would die from environmental pressures.

"But that isn't the real trouble. Niobe's oceans aren't like Earth's. They're shallow. It's a rare spot that's over forty fathoms deep. As a result, oysters can grow almost anywhere. And that's what'll happen if they aren't stopped. Inside of two decades they'll destroy this world!"

"You're being an alarmist," I said.

"Not so much as you might think. I don't suppose that the oysters will invade dry land and chase the natives from one rain puddle to another, but they'll grow without check, build oyster reefs that'll menace navigation, change the chemical composition of Niobe's oceans, pollute the water with organic debris of their rotting bodies, and so change the ecological environment of this world that only the hardi-

est and most adaptable life forms will be able to survive this!"

"But they'll be self-limiting," I protested.

"Sure. But by the time they limit themselves, they will eliminate about everything else."

"If you're right, then, there's only one thing to do. We'll have to let the natives know what the score is and start taking steps to get rid of them."

"Oh, I'm right. I don't think you'll find anyone who'll disagree with me. We kicked this around at the Lab for quite a spell before I came up here with it."

"Then you've undoubtedly thought of some way to get rid of them."

"Of course. That was one of the first things we did. The answer's obvious."

"Not to me."

"Sure. Starfish. They'll swamp up the extra oysters in jig time."

"But won't the starfish get too numerous?"

"No. They die off pretty fast without a source of food supply. From what we can find out about Niobe's oceans, there is virtually no acceptable food for starfish other than oysters and some microscopic animal life that wouldn't sustain an adult."

"Okay, I believe you. But you still leave me cold. I can't remember anything about a starfish that would help him break an oyster shell."

BERGDORF grinned. "I see you need a course in marine biology. Here's a thumbnail sketch. First, let's take the oyster. He has a big muscle called an adductor that closes his shell. For a while he can exert a terrific pull, but a steady tension of about nine hundred grams tires him out after an hour or so. Then the muscle relaxes and the shell gapes open. Now the starfish can exert about thirteen hundred grams of tension with his sucker-like tube feet, and since he has so many of them he doesn't have to use them all at one time. So, by shifting feet as they get tired, he can exert this pull indefinitely.

"The starfish climbs up on the oyster shell, attaches a few dozen tube feet to the outside of each valve and starts to pull. After a while the oyster gets tired, the shell opens up, and the starfish pushes its stomach out through its mouth opening, wraps the stomach around the soft parts of the oyster and digests it right in the shell!"

I shuddered.

"Gruesome, isn't it?" Bergdorf asked happily. "But it's nothing to worry about. Starfish have been eating oysters on the half shell for millions of years. In fact I'll bet that a starfish eats more oysters in its lifetime than does the most confirmed oyster-addict."

"It's not the fact that they eat them," I said feebly. "It's the way they do it. It makes me ill!"

"Why should it? After all a starfish and a human being have a lot in common. Like them, you have eaten oysters on the half shell, and they're usually alive when you gulp them down. I can't see where our digestive juices are any easier on the oyster than those of a starfish."

"Remind me never to eat another raw oyster," I said. "On second thought you won't have to. You've ruined my appetite for them forever."

Bergdorf chuckled.

"Well, now that you've disposed of one of my eating habits," I said bitterly, "let's get back to the problem. I presume that you'll have to find where the oysters are before you start in working them over with starfish."

"You've hit the reason why I'm here. That's the big problem. I want to find their source."

"DON'T you know?"

"I can make a pretty good guess. You see, we picked this limb out of the Equatorial current. As you know, Varnel Island is situated right at the western termination of the current. We don't get much littoral stuff unless it comes from the Islands or West Beta. And as far as I can figure the islands are the best bet. These spat probably came from the Piralones, that island group in the middle of the current about halfway across."

I nodded. "It would be a good bet. They're uninhabited. If Harl wanted an isolated spot to conduct oyster planting experiments, I couldn't think of a better location. Nobody in his right mind would visit that place willingly. The islands support the damnedest assortment of siths you ever saw."

"If that's where it is," Bergdorf said, "we can thank heaven for the natives' suspicious nature. That location may help us save this world!"

I laughed at him. "Don't be so grim, Heinz—or so godlike. We're not going to save any worlds."

"Someone has to save them."

"We don't qualify. What we'll do is chase this business down. We'll find out where the oysters come from, get an idea of how bad things are and then let the Niobians know about it. If anyone is going to save this planet it won't be a bunch of Confederation exploration specialists."

Bergdorf sighed. "You're right, of course."

I slapped him on the shoulder. "Cheer up, Heinz." I turned to my appointment calendar and checked it over. There was nothing on it that couldn't wait a few days. "Tell you what," I continued. "I need a vacation from this place. We'll

take my atomic job and go oyster hunting. It ought to be fun."

Bergdorf's grin was like a sunrise on Kardon.

I BROUGHT the 'copter down slowly through the overcast, feeling my way cautiously down to the ground that radar told me was somewhere below. We were hardly a hundred and fifty meters up before it became visible through the drenching tropic rain. Unless you've seen it you can't imagine what rain is really like until you've been in the Niobian tropics. It literally swamps everything, including visibility.

It was the Piralones all right.

The last time I'd seen them was when I led the rescue party that pulled Wilson Chung and his passengers out of the Baril Ocean, but they were still the same, tiny deserted spots of land surrounded by coral reefs. We were over the biggest one of the group, a rounded hummock barely a kilometer in diameter, surrounded by a barrier reef of coral. Between the reef and the island a shallow lagoon lay in sullen grayness, its surface broken into innumerable tiny wavelets by the continual splash of rain. The land itself was a solid mass of olive-green vegetation that ended abruptly at a narrow beach.

"Well, we're here," I said. "Grim looking place, isn't it?"

"Whoever spoke of the beauties of tropical islands didn't have Niobe in mind," Bergdorf agreed. "This place looks like something left behind by a cow."

I couldn't help the chuckle. The simile was too close for comfort. I tilted the rotors and we went down to hover about ten meters off the beach. Bergdorf pointed down the beach. I headed the 'copter in that direction as Bergdorf looked out of the bubble, intently scanning the waters of the lagoon. Finally he looked up with an expression of understanding on his lean face.

"No wonder I missed them!" he murmured with awe. "There are so many that there's no floor of the lagoon to spot them against. They cover the entire bottom! You might as well set her down here; it's as good a place as any."

I throttled back and landed the whirlybird on the beach. "You had your quota of vorkum?" I asked as Bergdorf reached for the door handle.

The biologist made a wry face. "Naturally. You think I'd be fool enough to go outside without it?"

"I wouldn't know. All I'm sure of is that if you're going to get out here, you'd better be loaded." I followed after him as he opened the door and jumped down to the ground.

A small horde of siths in-

stantly left the cover of the jungle and buzzed out to investigate. A few years ago, that would have been the signal for ray beams at fan aperture, but both Bergdorf and I ignored them, trusting in the protection of the vorkum. The beasties made a tactical pass at Heinz, thought the better of it and came wheeling over in my direction. I could almost see the disappointed look in their eyes as they caught my aura, put on the brakes and returned disappointed to their shelter under the broadleaves. Whatever vorkum did, it certainly convinced insects that we were inedible and antisocial.

One or two ventured back and buzzed hopefully around our heads before giving up in disgust.

"It beats me what they live on," Bergdorf said, gesturing at the iridescent flash of the last bloodsucker as it disappeared beneath the broadleaves.

"As long as it isn't us, I don't give a damn," I said. "Maybe they live on decaying vegetable matter until something live and bloody comes along. Anyway, they seem to get along."

Bergdorf walked the few steps to the water's edge. "I won't even have to go swimming," he said as he walked into the water a few steps, bent and came up with what looked like a handful of rocks.

"OYSTERS?" I asked, turning one over in my hand.

"Yep. Nice little *O. lurida.* About three years old, I'd guess, and just ripe for breeding. You know, I've never seen them growing so close to the shore. They must be stacked on top of each other out there a ways. There's probably millions of them in this lagoon alone!"

"Well, we've found where they're coming from. Now all that's left is to figure out what to do about it."

"We'd still better check Beta. They might possibly have reached there."

"Not unless someone's planted them," I said. "You're forgetting the ocean currents."

"No. I was thinking of planted areas."

"Well, think again. You may know your biology, but I know Niobians. They're too suspicious to bring untried things too close to where they live. They've been that way as long as I can remember them, and I don't think that anything—even something as delightful as an oyster—would make them change overnight."

"I hope you're right."

"Oh, we'll check Beta, all right," I said. "But you can send a couple of your boys to do it. There's no sense in our wasting time with it."

I heard the noise behind us before Bergdorf did. We turned in time to see four Niobians

emerge from the jungle and glide purposefully toward us. The tribal tattoos on their chests identified them as members of Tovan Harl's commune. I nudged Heinz and murmured, "We've got company."

The natives approached to within a few paces. They stood politely to leeward while one of their number approached. "I'm sorry," he said without the normal introduction, "but this is leased land. You will have to leave at once. And you will please return the oysters to the lagoon. It is not permitted to remove them."

"Oh, all right," I said. "We're through here anyway. We'll visit the other islands and then be off."

"The other islands are also leased property. When you leave I will radio the other guards, and you will not be permitted to land."

"This is not according to your customs," I protested.

"I realize that, Mr. Lanceford," the native said. "But I have given oath to keep all trespassers out."

I nodded. It wasn't usual. I wondered what Harl had in mind—possibly a planetary monopoly. If that was his plan, he was due for a surprise.

"That's very commendable," Bergdorf said, "but these oysters are going with me. They are needed as evidence."

"I'm sorry, sir," the native said. "The oysters stay here."

"Don't be a fool, Heinz," I interjected. "They're in the right. The oysters are their property. If you try to take them you'll be in trouble up to your ears."

"But I need those oysters, Arthur! Probably the only adult oyster tissue on Niobe is on these islands. I need a sample of it."

"Well, it's your neck." I turned to the native. "Don't be too hard on him," I said. "He's quite an important man."

The Niobian nodded and grinned. "Don't worry, sir. He won't feel a thing. But I really wish to apologize for our rudeness. If conditions were different—"

He paused and turned toward Bergdorf who was climbing into the 'copter with the oysters still in his hand.

I WASN'T surprised that he didn't make it. In fact, I'd have been more surprised if he had. Heinz crumpled to the ground beside the ship. One of the natives came forward, took the oysters from his limp hand and threw them back into the lagoon.

"All right," I said to the spokesman. "You fellows clobbered him, so now you can get him into the ship."

"That is only fair," the native said. "We do not want to cause you any extra inconvenience." He gestured to his companions. Between them they got Bergdorf's limp body into

the ship and strapped into one of the seats. They got out, I got in, and in a minute the two of us got out of there, going straight up through to overcast to get a celestial bearing for home.

I kept looking at Bergdorf's limp body and grinning.

It was nearly an hour later before Bergdorf woke up. "What hit me?" he asked fuzzily.

"Subsonics," I said. "They should have scared you to death."

"I fainted?"

"Sure you did. You couldn't help it. They hit like a ton of brick."

"They certainly do," he said ruefully.

"They can kill," I said. "I've seen them do it. The Niobians generate them naturally, and they can focus them fairly well. Probably this quality was one of their forms of defense against predators in their early days. It's a survival trait; and when there are enough natives present to augment the impulses they can be downright nasty."

Bergdorf nodded. "I know," he said. He stopped talking and looked out over the sun-drenched top of the overcast. "It looks like Tovan Harl wants to keep this oyster farm a private matter. In a way he's doing us a favor, but I'd still feel happier if I had one or two of those oysters."

"Why do you need them?"

"Well, I figured on getting a couple of the Navy's organic detectors and setting them for oyster protoplasm. You know how sensitive those gadgets are. There might be a small but significant change in oyster protoplasm since it has arrived here."

"Well, you don't need to worry," I said. "I put one of your pets in my pocket before the natives showed up, so you've got what you need." I pulled the oyster out and handed it to him. It didn't look any the worse for its recent rough treatment.

Bergdorf grinned. "I knew I could trust you, Chief. You're sneaky!"

I laughed at him.

WE ARRIVED back at Alpha without trouble. I shooed Bergdorf back to Varnel with the one oyster and a promise that I'd back him up in any requisitions he cared to make. After that I checked up on the BEE business I had neglected for the past couple of days and, finally, late that night took one of the Base's floaters and drove slowly down the trail to Kron's village.

While Earth-style civilization had done much to improve transport and communication on Niobe, it hadn't—and still hasn't for that matter—produced a highway that can stand up to the climate. Roads simply disappear in the bottomless mud. So whatever

vehicular transport exists on Niobe is in the form of floaters, whose big sausage-shaped tires give enough flotation to stay on top of the ooze, and sufficient traction to move through the morass that is Niobe's surface. They're clumsy, slow and hard to steer. But they get you there—which is something you can't say about other vehicles.

Kron's village had changed somewhat since I first visited it. The industrial section was new. The serried ranks of low dural buildings gleamed metallically in the glare of the floater's lights, glistening with the sheets of water that ran from their roofs and sides. The power-broadcast station that stood in the center of the village hadn't been there either. But other than that everything was pretty much the same as it always had been, an open space in the jungle filled with stone-walled, thatch-roofed houses squatting gloomily in the endless rain.

The industry, such as it was, was concentrated solely upon the production of viscaya concentrate. It had made little difference in the Niobian way of life, which was exactly as the natives wanted it.

It was odd, I reflected, how little change had taken place in Niobian society despite better than two decades of exposure to Confederation technology. Actually, the Confederation could leave tomorrow, and would hardly be missed. There would be no cultural vacuum. The strangers would simply be gone. Possibly some of our artifacts would be used. The atomic power-broadcast station would possibly stay, and so would the high-powered radio. Perhaps some of the gadgetry the natives had acquired from us would be used until it was worn out, but the pattern of the old ways would stay pretty much as it had always been. For Niobian culture was primarily philosophical rather than technological, and it preferred to remain that way.

I parked my floater beside the house that had sheltered Kron as long as I had known him. I entered without announcing myself.

As an old friend I had this privilege, although I seldom used it. But if I had come formally there would have been an endless rigmarole of social convention that would have had to be satisfied before we could get down to business. I didn't want to waste the time.

KRON was seated behind a surprisingly modern desk, reading a book by the light of a Confederation glowtube. I looked at its title—*The Analects of Confucius*—and blinked. I'd heard of it. It and Machiavelli's *Prince* are classics on governmental personality and philosophy, but I had never read it. Yet here, hun-

dreds of light years from the home world, this naked alien was reading and obviously enjoying that ancient work. It made me feel oddly ashamed of myself.

He looked up at me, nodded a greeting and laid the book down with a faint expression of regret on his doglike face. I found a chair and sat down silently. I wondered how he found time to read. My job with the BEE kept me busy every day of the 279-day year. And his, which was more important and exacting than mine, gave him time to read philosophy! I sighed. It was something I could never understand.

I waited for him to speak. As host, it was his duty to open the wall of silence which separated us.

"Greetings, friend Lanceford," Kron said. "My eyes are happy with the pleasure of beholding you." He spoke in the ancient Niobian formula of hospitality. But he made it sound as though he really meant it.

"It's a double joy to behold the face of my friend and to hear his voice," I replied in the same language. Then I switched to Confed for the business I had in mind. Their polite forms are far too clumsy and uncomfortable for business use; it takes half a day to get an idea across. "It seems as though I'm always coming to you with trouble," I began.

"What now?" Kron asked. "Every time I see you, I hope that we can relax and enjoy our friendship, but every time you are burdened. Are you Earthmen forever filled with troubles or does my world provoke them?" He smiled at me.

"A little of both, I suppose," I said.

Kron hummed—the Niobian equivalent of laughter. "I've been observing you Earthmen for the past twenty years, and I have yet to see one of you completely relaxed. You take yourselves much too seriously. After all, my friend, life is short at best. We should enjoy some of it. Now tell me your troubles, and perhaps there is no cause to worry."

"You're wrong, Kron. There is plenty of cause to worry. This can affect the well-being of everything on this world."

Kron's face sharpened into lines of interest. "Continue, friend Lanceford."

"It's those oysters the BIT sent you a few years ago. They're getting out of hand."

Kron hummed. "I was afraid that it—"

"—was something serious!" I finished. "That's what I told Heinz Bergdorf when he came to me with this story. Now sober down and listen! This *is* serious!"

"IT SOUNDS pretty grim," Kron said after I had finished. "But how is it that your people didn't foresee the dan-

ger? Something as viciously reproductive as the oyster should be common knowledge."

"Not on our world. You see, the study of sea life is a specialized science on Earth. It is one of the faults of our technological civilization that almost everyone must specialize from the time he enters secondary school. Unless one specializes in marine biology, one generally knows little or nothing about it."

"Odd. Very odd. But then, you Earthmen always were a peculiar race. Now, if I heard you right, I believe that you said there is an animal on your world which preys upon these oysters. A starfish?"

"Yes."

"Won't this animal be as destructive as the oyster?"

"Bergdorf doesn't think so, and I trust his judgment."

"Won't this animal also kill our Komal? They are like these oysters of yours in a way."

"But they burrow, and the starfish doesn't. They'll be safe enough."

Kron sighed. "I knew that association with you people would prove to be a mixed blessing." He shrugged his shoulders and turned his chair to his desk. A Niobian face appeared on the screen. "Call a Council meeting and let me know when it is ready," Kron ordered.

"Yes, Councilor," the face replied.

"Well, that's that. Now we can relax until the Council manages to get together."

"How long will that take?"

"I haven't the least idea," Kron said. "Several days—several weeks. It all depends upon how soon we can get enough Council members together to conduct business."

I said unhappily, "I'd like to have your outlook but we're fighting against time!"

"You Earthmen pick the most impossible opponents. You should learn to work with time rather than against it." He pulled at one ear reflectively. "You know, it is strange that your race could produce ethical philosophers like this one." He tapped the *Analects* with a webbed forefinger. "Such contrast of thought on a single world is almost incredible!"

"You haven't seen the half of it!" I chuckled. "But I'm inclined to agree with you. Earth is an incredible world."

FORTUNATELY there was a battle cruiser in the Polar spaceport on a goodwill mission. We had no trouble about getting the detectors Bergdorf needed, plus a crew to run them. The Navy is cooperative about such things, and every officer knows the importance of the BEE on a planetary operation. We could have had the entire cruiser if we had wanted it.

A week later the four Marine Lab ships, each equipped

with a detector, started a search of Niobe's oceans. Their atomic powerplants could drive them along at a respectable speed. Bergdorf and I expected a preliminary report within a month.

We weren't disappointed.

The results were shocking, but not unexpected. Preliminary search revealed no oysters in the other two major oceans, but the Baril Ocean was badly infested. There were groups and islands of immature oysters along the entire course of the Equatorial current and the tropical coast of Alpha. Practically every island group in the central part of the ocean showed traces of the bivalves. It was amazing how far they had spread. Even the northern shallows had a number of thriving young colonies.

Bergdorf was right. Another year and we'd have been swamped. As it was it was nothing to laugh about.

The news reached Kron just before the Council meeting, which, like most of Niobe's off-season politics, had been delayed time after time. Since a Council meeting requires an attendance of ninety per cent of the Council, it had been nearly impossible to schedule an assembly where a quorum could be present. But our news broadcasts over the BEE radio reached every corner of the planet, and the note of urgency in them finally produced results.

The Niobians held the emergency session at Base Alpha, where our radio could carry the proceedings to the entire planet. Whatever else they may be, Niobian government sessions are open to the public. Since the advent of radio, practically the entire public listens in.

Like the natives, I listened too. I wasn't surprised when Kron appeared in my office, his eyes red and swollen from lack of sleep, but with a big grin on his face that exposed his sharp sectorial teeth. "Well, that's over, friend Lanceford. Now send us your starfish."

"That's easier said than done," I replied gloomily. "I've contacted the Confederation. They won't ship twenty pounds of starfish—let alone the twenty thousand tons Bergdorf says we'll need!"

"Why not? Are they crazy? Or do they want to destroy us?"

"Neither. This is just a sample of bureaucracy at work. You see, the starfish is classed as a pest on Earth. Confederation regulations forbid the exportation of pests to member planets."

"But we need them!"

"I REALIZE that, but the fact hasn't penetrated to the highest brass." I laughed humorlessly. "The big boys simply can't see it. By the time we marshal enough evidence to convince them, it will be too

late. Knowing how Administration operates, I'd say that it'd take at least a year for them to become convinced. And another two months for them to act."

"But we simply can't wait that long! Your man Bergdorf has convinced me. We're in deadly danger!"

"You're going to have to wait," I said grimly. "Unless you can find some way to jar them out of their rut."

Kron looked thoughtful. "I think that can be done, friend Lanceford. As I recall, your bureaus are timid things. Furthermore, we have something they want pretty bad. I think we can apply pressure."

"But won't your people object? Doesn't that deny your basic philosophy of non-interference with others?"

Kron grinned ferociously. "Not at all. Like others of your race, you have never understood the real significance of our social philosophy. What it actually boils down to is simply this—we respect the customs and desires of others but require in turn that they respect ours."

"You mean that you will use force against the rest of the Confederation? But you can't do that! You wouldn't stand a chance against the Navy."

"We will first try a method we have used with our own tribes who get out of line. I don't think anything more will be necessary." Kron's voice was flat. "It goes against the grain to do this, but we are left no choice." He turned and left the room without a farewell, which was a measure of his agitation.

I sat there behind my desk wondering what the Niobians could do. Like my ex-boss Alvord Sims, I had a healthy respect for them. It just could be that they could do plenty.

They could.

ORGANIZATION! Man, you've never seen anything like what the Niobians tossed at our startled heads! We always thought the Planetary Council was a loose and ineffective sort of thing, but what happened within the next twenty hours had to be seen to be believed. I saw it. But it was days before I believed it.

Within a day the natives had whipped up an organization, agreed on a plan of action and put it into effect. By noon of the next day Niobe was a closed planet. A message was sent to the Confederation informing them that Niobe was withdrawing until the emergency was over. An embargo was placed on all movement of shipping.

And everything stopped.

No factories operated. The big starfreighters stood idle and empty at the polar bases. Not one ounce of gerontin or its concentrate precursor left Niobe. Smiling groups of Ni-

obians, using subsonics to enforce their demands, paralyzed everything the Confederation had operated on the planet. No one was hurt. The natives were still polite and friendly. But Confederation business came to an abrupt halt, and stayed halted.

It was utterly amazing! I had never heard of a planet-wide boycott before. But Niobe was entirely within her rights. The Confederation had to accept it.

And, of course, the Confederation capitulated. If the Niobians were fools enough to want pests as a condition of resuming viscaya shipments—well, it was their affair. The Confederation needed viscaya. It was willing to do almost anything to assure its continued supply.

With the full power of the Confederation turned to giving Niobe what she wanted, it wasn't long before the oysters were under control. We established a systematic seeding procedure for the starfish that kept arriving by the freighter load. In a few months Bergdorf reported that an ecological balance had been achieved.

"BUT didn't the starfish create another pest problem?" Perkins asked.

"Not at all," Lanceford said. "I told you that the Niobians had an odd sense of taste. Starfish proved to be quite acceptable to the Niobian palate. They merely added another item to Niobe's food supply."

Perkins shuddered delicately. "I wouldn't eat one of those things in a million years."

"You're going to have to eat vorkum if you expect to survive on this world. Compared to vorkum, a starfish is sheer pleasure! But that wasn't the end of it," Lanceford added with a smile. "You see, shortly after things had simmered down to normal Kron dropped into my office.

"'I think, friend Lanceford,' he said, 'that we are going to have to create a permanent organization to keep unwanted visitors out. This little affair has been a needed lesson. I have been reading about your planetary organization, and I think a thing like your Customs Service is vitally needed on our world to prevent future undesirable biological importations.'

"'I agree,' I replied. 'Anything that would prevent a repetition of this business would be advisable.'

"So that was how the Customs Service started. The insigne you will recognize as a starfish opening an oyster. Unfortunately the Niobians are quite literal minded. When they say any biological importation will be quarantined and examined, they mean Confederation citizens too!

"And that, of course, was the entering wedge. You'll find things quite homelike once you

get out of here. The natives have developed an organization that's a virtual copy of our Administrative Branch. Customs, as you know, is a triumph of the bureaucratic system, and naturally the idea spread. Once the natives got used to a permanent government organization that was available at all times, it was only a question of time before the haphazard tribal organization became replaced by a planetary union. You could almost say that it was an inevitable consequence."

Lanceford grinned. "The Niobians didn't realize that the importation of foreign Customs was almost as bad as the importation of foreign animals!" He chuckled at the unconscious pun. **END**

Words *and* Music

By ARTHUR PORGES

"YEAH, it's a talent, all right," Lane said gloomily. He emptied his fourth drink, and looked about in envious fascination. "But it's not like fortune-telling. I can't make a living out of it. I've never even been inside a plush joint like this one before. No money in music nowadays; people don't learn instruments —they just listen to hi-fi from the can."

"You couldn't get in here with a million." Carson was complacent. "This room's strictly for celebrities. Money or not, you gotta be known.

No one else heard the music, but it was a lovely overture.

The only trouble was — the curtain was about to go up!

Congressmen fly down from Washington; movie and TV stars drop by for drinks, and to be seen. The place is always crawling with V.I.P.'s"

The little man was wistful. "Yeah, the classiest crowd I've ever seen. Even the music's special: 'Pomp and Circumstance' from every other table."

"Fine, I see you're getting tuned up. Let's have that demonstration now, okay? I can't promise a thing, but I got friends here in New York. We might get you a good spot on TV. Eight, ten weeks on a high-priced quiz show could do a lot for your bank account."

"It's all right with me," Lane said, brightening a little. "Where should I start?"

"Try that gal over there, huh?"

"You gotta remember," Lane reminded him, "it's not definite like words. Just atmosphere, mostly. The person's character and general background. An idea what's on their mind—even a peek into the future now and then."

"That so?" Carson was impressed. "Sounds like quite a deal to me."

"Lemme explain first what it's like, so there won't be any misunderstandings. For instance, there was a guy I went to school with. His folks were set on making him a doctor. He was agreeable, but I didn't hear any medical music from him—nothing like it. Used to hear other kinds, especially one set of themes. I didn't know my stuff then, so it took me quite a while to identify the music. Know what? It was that suite, 'The Planets,' by Holst."

Carson leaned forward, eyebrows raised. " 'The Planets'? Greek to me; I'm a Welk fan myself. What's the point?"

LANE raised an admonitory finger and laid it along his big nose. "That kid wound up at Mt. Wilson, a first class astronomer. He found out something new about the planet Mercury. Forget what it was. If I'd known then what a talent I had, I could've predicted the whole thing."

"Say," Carson exclaimed in admiration, "that's pretty neat! You hear a piece about planets—hear it inside your head, right?—and the guy turns out to be an astronomer."

"Yeah, but I can't make a dime. All these years a music teacher, starving in three-four time," he added sourly.

"We'll change that pretty damn quick. You got a talent there. Go ahead, see what you can do with the woman. But I give you fair warning—I know her."

"This is on the level," Lane said, blearily resentful.

"I'm only kidding."

"Okay, then. Here goes."

He stared at the woman.

She twisted her creamy bare shoulders uneasily, and stopped smiling at her sleek companion.

"Well, what do you hear?" Carson demanded impatiently.

"Mendelssohn. Easy one: 'Wedding March.' Kinda jazzed up, though."

"Ha! Anything else?"

"Clicking sounds, and a whir."

"That's not music." There was naked suspicion in Carson's voice.

"It's never all music. Plain sounds, too. Remember, noise and melody are just vibrations. It's just a matter of how they're organized."

Carson reflected. "Clicking and whirring. What the devil —say-y-y!"

"Right, ain't I?" Lane demanded, morosely triumphant. "It always makes sense if you think it through."

"It does at that. Damn good sense! If I didn't know for a fact that she just hit New York—you sure you haven't met her before?"

"I told you this was straight! I don't know the dame from your grandmother. It's a talent, that's all."

"Don't get mad. It hasn't sunk in yet. See, that's Rita Howard, the movie star. Married seven times, some legal."

"Mendelssohn," Lane said with satisfaction. "What about the whirr, clackety-clack?"

"Simple, if you know Rita. She's nuts about roulette. Practically haunts Vegas. Never has a dime. Say, try her some more; she oughta be good for a whole concert."

With a shrug, the little man fixed his gaze again. He began to hum a scrap of melody. His voice was harsh but deadly accurate. "Tough one," he muttered. "Not a war-horse like Mendelssohn. But it'll come. Dum de dum dah. Aha! Tricky. Roussel: 'The Spider's Banquet.' "

"That's a song? Helluva title, if you ask me."

"Orchestral piece. Fits, doesn't it? Seven husbands, you said."

"I get it—she's like a spider! Rita's sucked plenty of men dry, all right. And the latest victim's pouring drinks into her right now. Well, at least no spider has her curves! You're all right, Lane—a genius!"

"I got a talent. But it don't buy any groceries."

"It will. That's a promise, Boy! This could be a big thing. Let's give it another whirl. Take that big, red-faced bird over there. What do you get from him?"

"LEMME listen . . . Sounds like a dog growling, that possible? Must be; it's coming through plain. A big dog. A mean one. Music, too. Another toughie. You sure pick 'em. Liszt? No, Berlioz. Not a

major work. Overture, I think. Wait, it's coming. Dum dah dee-dah. Know it well. Got it! 'Judges of the Secret Court.' Sure, that's a composition; don't look so surprised. Welk don't play this one."

Carson studied him in awe. "Well, I'm damned. A bull's eye. That guy's Senator Crawford, a big shot on the Judiciary Committee. They call him a watch dog; some say more of a mad dog. You're batting a thousand."

"He was easy," Lane said, without conceit. He picked up the empty glass and set it down again. His host took the hint, beckoning to a waiter.

"TWO more Martinis, very dry."

Lane was peering after the waiter. "He's mad at us and the world," the little man muttered. "Hate music blasting out of him like a ninety-piece orchestra. 'Vile Race of Courtiers' from 'Rigoletto.' "

"Hell with him," Carson grunted. "See that fellow over there, the little plump one with buck teeth, grinning like a happy shark?"

"Yeah. I'll work him for you." He gazed steadily at the man, who looked back at Lane, grinned wider and nodded.

"Doesn't know you," Carson sneered, "but that S.O.B. would shine up to Judas if he thought it might pay off some time! Since you're here, he assumes you're somebody important. What're you getting?"

"A cinch, this one. It's played to death. 'La Gazza Ladra.' "

"What in hell's that? Why can't they have the English names?"

" 'Gazza Ladra.' Thieving magpie. Overture by Rossini."

"Thieving mag—good boy!" Carson chuckled delightedly. "Talk about a crook! Pearson had the Honorable J. Calvert Bangs tagged months ago. Oh, brother—and him howling smear and libel all over Washington!"

The little man sucked at his drink. He hiccoughed. "Told you it works."

"One more, huh?" Carson said. "This is fun. Wednesday I'll get Jim Stein to meet us here. You got a great gimmick, man, and Stein's the one to do things with it."

"The TV producer?"

"That's him. Movies, too. Look, get the guy leaving! The chunky character in the dark suit. There, he's stopped by the door."

"Okay." Lane peered vacantly at the tense, stony-faced man. "Ha. Should know this one. I'm a little tight, and that slows me up. Rimsky-Korsakov... or Rachmaninov? Some Russian, that's for sure. Romantic School. Classical theme, too, weaving in and out. Whaddya know about that? Queer combination: classical and romantic. Mo-

zart? No, Haydn. Can't get 'em. Noises, too. Whistles. I hear whistles."

"Whistles?" Carson said. "What kind of character is this? A wolf?"

"Not that kind. Shrill, *thin* whistles, like something moving high and fast. Real high up; sounds like fifty, sixty thousand feet . . . Music again. Can't place 'em when I'm tight. He's gone, anyway. Who was he?"

"Damned if I know—just thought he looked interesting. Some executive, I bet; one of those hard faces. See if you can place that music."

"It'll come, but not now. After I sober up. Think of 'em easy tomorrow. Know the stuff well. Glazounov, maybe?"

"If you can't, you can't. I'll get a line on the man. Maybe by Wednesday you—"

"Sure, I never miss, only I'm tight. Spent twenty years studying music. Should have my own ensemble. Better—shoulda learned to be a butcher! Ever hear of a butcher going broke?"

"You've made your point. Well, be here Wednesday at three. Stein and I might come up with a proposition." They left.

ON Wednesday they shared a table with Stein.

Stein was a small, almost dwarfish man, redeemed from ugliness only by eyes which were liquid brown and compassionate. He drank milk. "My stomach's giving me hell," he moaned.

"Too bad," Lane said politely, watching him with furtive awe. Stein's income was reputed to exceed half a million yearly.

"Isn't it? Took me thirty years to afford decent food, and now I can't eat it." He gulped morosely. "It's the strain. First World War II; then Korea; next Suez. Never any let-up. A man worries about his grandchildren. And no policy you can count on. We fight in Europe—we defend the U. S. only. Arm—stop arming. Make bigger bombs—junk ' em all. The whole world's crazy! Now Russia's screaming at England and France again. Kick out the American missile bases, or we might have to attack. They say thirty or forty Russian rockets could destroy England and we'd have a rough time hitting back from here." He glared at his glass. "And for a little splash milk, two dollars, the robbers!"

"Don't cry, Jimmy. You can afford it," Carson grinned. "And quit worrying. Not even the Commies would wipe out France and kill Brigitte Bardot!" He winked at Lane. "Well, I identified our mystery man from the other day. If you spotted the music, let's see how close they fit."

"You bet I got the music!

And I was close, too, tight or not. Funny thing, both pieces were about islands. Ain't that something?"

"Islands? I don't see that. You must be off base this time, Lane."

"Like hell! I never miss. Rachmaninov: 'The Isle of the Dead.' That's the Russian one. Remember, I mentioned Rachmaninov. Not so easy, but I'm sure now. The classic was no push-over, either. Haydn: 'The Uninhabited Island.' Gloomy, almost threatening readings. But those whistles high up don't mean a thing to me."

Carson's face was suddenly gray and flaccid. "No," he said half to himself. "They can't be that crazy. It's just more bluff!"

Stein looked at him in momentary wonder, and Lane thrust out his chin.

"Ain't I right?" he demanded belligerently. " 'Isle of the Dead.' 'The Uninhabited Island.' And forty whistling things high up. It's gotta fit in somewhere. I'm never wrong on this stuff. Who was the guy, anyhow?"

"The Russian Ambassador to England," Carson said. "The one they just recalled." They looked at each other in horror while Stein, hardly listening, his thoughts on the worrisome headlines, quietly sipped his milk.

END

THE IDEA THAT GREW AND GREW

Back in 1910, Elmer A. Sperry, a doctor of engineering, decided to put a puzzling toy to work. The gyroscope had been invented centuries before by the Chinese, had fascinated many—scientists included—by its refusal to be anything but perpendicular, and its casual disregard of the magnetic north pole. Sperry started the Sperry Gyroscope Company with one employee and a dinky low-rental office, and one job—a gyro-compass for the U.S.S. *Delaware*. When that proved successful, ships everywhere ordered these compasses that disregarded the buffeting of storms.

Half a century of stabilizing everything from ships to spaceships has been anything but stabilizing for the Sperry outfit. It now has over 100,000 employees in nearly 100 plants throughout the world, has passed the billion-dollar-a-year mark, and shows no signs of slowing down.

What once was an item for Christmas stockings is an integral part of this missile, rocket and satellite age, perfectly obvious *after* Sperry put it to work, not before. Is there anything else as profitably lying around in nursery or rumpus room? Wouldn't surprise us a bit!

Worlds of if

Book Reviews by Frederik Pohl

WHOEVER "Sarban" may be, the novel *The Sound of His Horn* (Ballantine) is a valued addition to recent science fiction, once you get to it.

This takes some bit of doing. The book has an introduction by Kingsley Amis (rather surgical in tone) and then Sarban has chosen to "frame" the story itself. (" 'Look here!' He straightened up abruptly and turned round. 'You're not tired, are you? Mind if I tell you something? Let me fill your glass, then sit down and I'll tell you a tale.' ")

The effect is that one has made two false starts before beginning the story itself. And as the story takes some space to get where it is going, it seems possible that a number of readers will wander off to the refrigerator and never quite get back.

This would be a major loss. Once Sarban begins to get down to particulars, he reveals a talent for horror that is all the more penetrating because it is couched in a literate and attractive style. It is Sarban's purpose to explore what the world would have been like if the Nazis had won World War II. His draft of the consequences is convincing and frightening. Inevitably the war was renamed, becoming "The War of German Rights." The victors have Nazified every spot on the globe; there is no longer an external enemy. Internal resistance is not ended, but it has come to take such shapes as conspiring to change the emphasis of a National-Socialist slogan. Civil rights do not exist. In fact even the identity of non-Nazi groups has been so far suppressed that one character is unable to guess whether a group of slaves are Czechs, Russians or Chinese. He isn't even interested. "They seem to me very much just lumps of undifferentiated Under-Race."

There are many such glances at the outside world, but they are only glances. The main course of Sarban's story concerns itself with the life of the great hunting preserve of the Reich Master Forester. Here the quarry is human—sometimes "lumps," sometimes criminals. Here are men like stags and girls like game birds, hunted by a scrupulous sporting code, making what lives they can out of what

little humanity is allowed them.

The Sound of His Horn, a slim book to begin with, spends more than a quarter of its pages on introduction, prologue and epilogue. What is left is not much over novelette length, and so there is not the space for a detailed study in full dress. It hints and evokes, instead of stating. It may sometimes leave one unsatisfied; but it will hardly leave anyone unmoved.

IN A remarkably irritating new book, *Stadium Beyond the Stars* (Winston), Milton Lesser proposes to tell us about a group of young athletes en route from Earth to "Ophiuchus" to take part in Interstellar Olympics. That's what he proposes. What he accomplishes is something else again. The athletic-competition theme drops from sight almost at once, flickers briefly a time or two and then is seen no more. Instead Lesser gives us a stale hash of menacing aliens.

Stadium Beyond the Stars moves its thin, pale plot along only with the help of fantastic amounts of snooping, skulking, eavesdropping and shadowing. Everybody is always following everybody else around in the shadows, and what they learn from this your reviewer cannot tell, for a careful study shows that if every character in the book had slept through its action, the end position of all parties would have been just about the same.

The story is classified as "young adult" reading—that is to say, it is ostensibly aimed at the later teens and actually is read mostly by twelve-year-olds. If a science fiction writer has any responsibility at all to keep his facts straight, it would seem that the responsibility is gravest of all in stories aimed at the young.

To this ideal Lesser comes nowhere near. There aren't very many factual statements in *Stadium Beyond the Stars,* only doubletalk; but even the doubletalk is in its implications absurdly wrong. It would be easy to draw up a list of a dozen instances of this, but as it would also be repetitious let one suffice.

One of Lesser's characters is a space captain who sights a derelict; he wishes to match course and board it. The derelict is comparatively motionless and the space captain's command is traveling at "barely sublight speed," so Lesser rightly supposes that some time will be necessary for deceleration. How is this done? Lesser says *first* the space captain circles back to the derelict, *then* goes through the long deceleration.

Not only does Lesser tamper with awfully elementary science, he hardly troubles to remember his own inventions.

It is not ignorance that is demonstrated here. It is contempt. Contempt for his medium. Contempt for his readers. Contempt for his own story.

What is even more incredible is the necessary assumption that someone read this before allowing it to get into print. Does Winston have an editor? If so, does the editor edit?

WELL, MAYBE he does. It is satisfying to be able to report that another Winston writer (and another writer who is sometimes less than sensible with his "science") has done a fine, competent job in a second Winston juvenile.

The author is Robert Silverberg; the book is *Lost Race of Mars*. The book is fun. Listed as for the "8 to 12" group, it will most likely be read by the first-graders and read *to* the pre-schoolers. They will like it very much. Possibly they will sometimes have a little trouble with its vocabulary. They should; that's how kids learn.

In *Lost Race of Mars* Silverberg invents a likable family who, for persuasive reasons, travel to a well-thought-out and well-described Martian settlement. They are pioneers and, as it turns out, discoverers. What they discover is the "Lost Race" of the title.

This is all very simple, of course. The plot is not simple because Robert Silverberg is too feckless to invent a complicated one; it is simple because he has the wisdom to realize complications would be out of place. All in all, Silverberg does this book so well that he makes it look easy; pray heaven it is—for him—because then we can hope that he will do many more.

ANOTHER WINSTON juvenile, now reissued by Signet, is Arthur C. Clarke's *Islands in the Sky*. A youngster enters a quiz contest and wins the great prize, which is a trip to a space satellite. Through accident, helped by youthful guile, he stretches the trip to include half a dozen, all described with Clarke's splendidly matter-of-fact detail.

It is an entertaining book even for adult readers, once they reconcile themselves to a teen-age level of plot and character; but it does seem deceitful of Signet to publish it without a single hint anywhere that it was designed for a juvenile audience.

IN ALGIS BUDRYS'S *The Unexpected Dimension* (Ballantine), the unexpected common feature of its seven stories is remorse. His heroes have variously founded societies, invented world-shaking machines, served false ideals of justice, etc. Whatever they

did, they did it before the story opens, and they're sorry for it now.

The stories themselves are fine. Budrys walks a crooked mile to get from beginning to end of a story, but the detours are not without point and never without power.

Philip Jose Farmer's *Strange Relations* (Ballantine) is a collection of five short pieces arranged in the form of a family album: the stories are *Mother, Daughter, Father, Son* and *My Sister's Brother.* (The last two have had their titles forcibly wrenched into conformity with the pattern.)

Farmer is an important writer, who repays study. He is, it is true, an acquired taste, but that is only another way of saying that he is his own writer instead of being a copy of someone else. In his work are several highly individual qualities—one, an explicit curiosity about reproduction and elimination; two, an astute knack for inventing alien biology; three, an obsessive concern for the subconscious wounds which express themselves in the human sum called "personality."

Nearly all of Farmer's aliens are meticulously and brightly drawn. Nearly all of his humans have pockets of rot in their brains which seep through, polluting their actions. No matter what great struggles his characters may engage in in the physical world, their real battle is always with the wild black storms that scourge their minds.

Very much like Farmer in his inventive care, C. S. Lewis is utterly unlike him in orientation. Avon has just reissued Lewis's *Out of the Silent Planet,* which demonstrates that science fiction can be used to bring us closer to God. Surprisingly, it also demonstrates that a theological tract can be a fine, entertaining novel.

AVON'S NEWEST Double Novel combines George O. Smith and A. E. van Vogt, both doing what they do best.

Smith's *Lost in Space* is a first-contact story with a generous overlayer of interstellar navigation theory. It is not a major work, but it is not in any way a dull one.

Van Vogt is . . . van Vogt. The name of the story is *Earth's Last Fortress.* The plot concerns a great struggle in some future age, involving the totality of human history on one side or another. It contains all of van Vogt's usual deadpan overstatement. When a character is surprised, it is by "the deadliest shock that had ever stabbed into a human brain." When a character is confused, "His brain was an opaque mass flecked with the moving lights of thoughts, heavy with

the gathering pall of his suspicion, knowing finally only one certainty."

Certainly van Vogt creates an urgency in almost everything he writes; it may be that these crushingly insensitive phrases are necessary to create that urgency. It may be, indeed, that the only proper verdict on van Vogt is an Irishism: If van Vogt were a better writer, he would be a worse one.

IN THE seven stories in *Out of Bounds* (Pyramid), Judith Merril demonstrates a reliable French saying: The more it changes, the more it's the same thing. Her stories are different as different can be in plot structure, theme and character. Yet they are very much the same in effect, and the reason is the overpowering subjectivity of her writing. What she has to sell is not adventure or speculation. It is emotion . . . a fine thing in measured doses, but maybe too saturating for a collection.

Which also pretty much applies to *A Medicine for Melancholy,* Ray Bradbury's short story collection now reissued by Bantam. The stories are short and varied—pastiches, vignettes, O. Henrys, gleanings of autobiography—but every one of them is capable of delivering a jolt to the glands. It is useless to try to evaluate Bradbury as a science fiction writer. What he knows of science you could put in your eye, and what he cares about it is less. A story like *Dark They Were,* and *Golden-Eyed*—Earthmen, by virtue of settling on Mars, turn into Martians—makes no sense at all, but it generates a mood well and movingly. But *twenty-two* of these in a row?

Miss Merril has another book for us this month. This one is a novel, again published by Pyramid, most unpromisingly entitled *The Tomorrow People.*

What the title seems to suggest is a sort of lackluster cuteness, quaint and folksy. The suggestion is a libel. The book is a real piece of work. The themes the author weaves into the structure are important and fresh; her characters are drawn in depth. All in all, it is the biggest, probably the best, piece of work we have seen from her since *Shadow on the Hearth.*

The locale wanders across the face of the Earth and out into space. The themes are space travel, politics and biology—both non-human and all too human. It is quite a can of worms the author has opened here, but she is equal to it. The elements are laid in place with skill (barring an occasional lapse like "helicopter" for a vehicle in which to travel about the face of the Moon) and all the radiating

threads draw neatly together at the end; she has not merely given her story a conclusion, she has provided it with a climax. You will find the book worth reading.

You may also find, however, that you wish you had a road map now and again. Here too the author salts the stew with a heavy dose of character introspection and emotion; she will not—*will not*—tell you what is happening in her story; she will only tell you what her characters think about it all. The characters talk endlessly—not only aloud. After every line of dialogue is another line, in italics, to let you know what they *mean.* (Special attention is invited to page 20. This page has no italics, and it seems to be the only one of its kind in the book.) Finally, the author has adopted a "teaser" style of narration in which nearly all the relevant information about what is going on is concealed from the reader.

All this makes thorny going, but there are roses.

CHARLES ERIC MAINE'S *Fire Past the Future* (and what does that mean?) involves a nuclear device at work on a remote Pacific atoll. The device is not a bomb. It is a time machine. The whole island is interdicted for security reasons and Maine thus creates a closed universe in which to set his story. The story itself is a whodunit.

In another Ballantine novel, Chad Oliver continues to put his anthropology degree to excellent use. The story is *Unearthly Neighbors,* a detailed examination into first contact between Earth and the long-armed, toolless, tribal inhabitants of Sirius IX. Other science fiction writers have invented more "alien" aliens than these for us to make contact with. Few, though, have been as able as Oliver to convince us that this is the way first contact is going to be.

In a twin bill, Robert Moore Williams gives us *World of the Masterminds,* a novel, and *To the End of Time,* a short story collection (Ace). Williams is always a competent writer and sometimes a moving one, but in these he has sacrificed everything to speed and action. When the Earthmen and the aliens have finished bopping each other over the head, the battlefield is left a clutter of begged questions and abandoned premises.

A properly ordered Hallowe'en will have a gathering of congenial persons (for example, science fiction writers), a supply of suitable refreshment (for example, cider spiked with applejack) to make them merry, and suitable entertainment (for example, ghost stories) to make them creep. As a purveyor of this sort of

entertainment, Basil Davenport has no equal. Here, in the abridged version of *Tales to Be Told in the Dark* (Ballantine), eleven of his most successful opera are reproduced, with hints from the master on how to congeal an audience. Davenport means the stories to be told aloud, but you will find them almost as much fun to read.

From Ace another double volume: Andre Norton on one side, Richard Wilson on the other. The Wilson is *And Then the Town Took Off;* it has all of his virtues—grace, smoothness and ease—and all of his faults, the worst of which is a reluctance to dig beneath the surface. *And Then the Town Took Off* is about—well, about a town that takes off. It disappears; aliens have burrowed beneath it and floated it away into the sky. There is then a struggle to get it back with battles between nations (it drifts toward Russia) and among the parts of the administration of our own. It is all witty and bright and disappointing only because you can't help feeling the man can do more.

Much the same can be said about the other occupant of this book, Andre Norton. Her story is *The Sioux Spaceman* and the title again tells you about all you need to know. She does not falter in her word-handling or her understanding of her characters; and if you accept in the beginning that this book is going to operate safely in conventional areas, then you will enjoy both ends of the volume.

SOME BOOKS are meant for the ages; some age more rapidly than bakery bread. A book which should be read immediately, before it grows stale, is the collection of essays on nuclear weapons and their effects, edited by John M. Fowler and published by Basic Books under the title of *Fallout.*

The title is misleading. Actually of twelve chapters only a few are concerned with the rain of fission products that is seeping into our bones. The others have more urgent dangers to discuss.

It is true, say the authors, that fallout is killing some thousands of persons, mostly children. "Military preparedness inevitably costs lives: there are some 1,400 deaths each year in our armed forces from peacetime accidents." However much we may dislike the probability that one additional child in each average community will contract leukemia from the fission products over the next few years, Ralph Lapp's chapter, sketching the probable face of nuclear war, makes it clear that the real thing to fear from The Bomb is The Bomb itself.

Let us suppose war comes. First there would be the heat, igniting every inflammable object over some 5,000 square miles. Then the firestorm (in cities at least), killing the unburned survivors by asphyxiation, sucking all the oxygen out of the air. Then the blast, extending in some degree as far as a hundred miles from the burst. Then the fallout. This is the pattern of one bomb. It needs to be multiplied by scores or hundreds.

John Fowler takes up the story with a chapter on the prospects of national survival after a nuclear war. He posits a hypothetical 1,400-megaton attack (probably smallish, as against what might be delivered) that was imagined to have taken place on October 17th, 1958. To fill out the picture of the if-world results, weather records were consulted, tracing the wind-driven pattern of fallout, estimating what aid might have come from rain or storm to help control the resulting fires.

The answer is not encouraging. Fowler quotes from Congressional testimony of John N. Wolfe on this point: "It is most likely, in my opinion, that these fires would go unquenched until checked by the winter snows, spreading over hundreds of thousands of square miles . . . With the coming of spring thaws, especially in the mountains, meltwater from the mountain glaciers and snowfields would erode the denuded slopes, flood the valleys, in time rendering them uninhabitable and unexploitable for decades or longer . . . I visualize those persons unsheltered in heavy fallout areas after three months to be dead, dying, sick or helpless; those sheltered, if they can psychologically withstand confinement for that period, will emerge to a strange landscape. The sun will shine through a dust-laden atmosphere; the landscape in mid-January would be snow-covered or blackened by fire; at higher latitudes blizzards and sub-zero temperature would add death and discomfort; both food and shelter would be inadequate and production incapacitated."

There is very little comfort to be found in this book for those who, like Edward Teller, suggest "conventions" to limit the use of nuclear weapons, or for those who minimize the effect of nuclear war on the total history of a nation. It would be only an episode, they say; it would not destroy a country. Would it? "If a nuclear war could not destroy civilization and the economy in the warring countries, then perhaps we do not understand what is meant by civilization and national economy," says Fowler.

The list of contributors is distinguished and expert; and there is an introduction by Adlai Stevenson, reminding us (with manfully concealed self-righteousness) that the same administration which in 1956 sternly rebuked him for proposing an end to bomb tests in 1958 put his suggestion into practice. The hopeful implication is that some of the frightening faces the world's governments are making at each other are only for effect; reason may ultimately prevail, as it has in the suspension of testing. It is good to have this hopeful implication. It is about the only one to be found in the book.

NEW AMERICAN LIBRARY, which has given list room to both the "Steady-State" hypothesis of permanent creation (Fred Hoyle) and to its "Big Bang" theory adversaries (George Gamow), now offers equal time to a proponent of the Middle Way.

In *The Oscillating Universe,* Ernst J. Opik accepts the hypothesis of creation of the galaxies from the explosion of a "primordial atom." (This is the "Big Bang" hypothesis.) But, he says, this was not a unique event. The universe does not have a beginning and an end; like Hoyle, he believes it goes on forever. That exploding "atom" which produced the expanding universe, says Opik, was itself formed from the contraction of a universe before ours—which itself had been born in a "Big Bang"—had then expanded to the limits gravitation would allow—and had then collapsed, thus generating another "atom."

Further, he says this is the fate of our own universe and all the universes yet to come. "Some 25,000 million years from now the Day of Reckoning will come. The whole universe—all galaxies with their suns shining or extinct, their planets dead or still carrying life on their surface—will precipitate itself into a narrow space, almost a point. Everything will perish in a fiery chaos well before the point of greatest compression is reached. All bodies and all atoms of the world will dissolve into the nuclear fluid of the primeval atom—which in this case is not truly primeval—and a new expanding world will surge from it, like Phoenix out of the ashes, rejuvenated and full of creative vigor."

Like Gamow and Hoyle, Opik has coated his cosmogony with a layer of popularized astrophysics, very well done and very informative. New American Library has much to be proud of in presenting three such articulate and persuasive scientists. It's too bad that at least two of them must necessarily be wrong. **END**

Star Performer

By ROBERT J. SHEA

Illustrated by DICK FRANCIS

GAVIR gingerly fitted the round opening in the bottom of the silvery globe over the top of his hairless blue skull. He pulled the globe down until he felt tiny filaments touching his scalp. The tips of the wires were cold.

The moderator then said, "*Dreaming Through the Universe* tonight brings you the first native Martian to appear on the dreamwaves—Gavir of the Desert Men. With him is his guardian, Dr. Malcomb Rice, the noted anthropologist."

Then the moderator ques-

Blue Boy's rating was high and his fans were loyal to the death—anyone's death!

tioned Malcomb, while Gavir nervously awaited the moment when his thoughts would be transmitted to millions of Earthmen. Malcomb told how he had been struck by Gavir's intelligence and missionary-taught ability to speak Earth's language, and had decided to bring Gavir to Earth.

The moderator turned to Gavir. "Are you anxious to get back to Mars?"

No! Gavir thought. Back behind the Preserve Barrier that killed you instantly if you stepped too close to it? Back to the constant fear of being seized by MDC guards for a labor pool, to wind up in the MDC mines?

Mars was where Gavir's father had been pinned, bayonets through his hands and feet, to the wall of a shack just the other side of the Barrier, to die slowly, out of Gavir's reach. Father James told Gavir that the head of MDC himself had ordered the killing, because Gavir's father had tried to organize resistance to the Corporation. Mars was where the magic powers of the Earthmen and the helplessness of the Martian tribes would always protect the head of MDC from Gavir's vengeance.

Back to that world of hopeless fear and hatred? *I never want to go back to Mars! I want to stay here!*

But that wasn't what he was supposed to think. Quickly he said, "I will be happy to return to my people."

A movement caught his eye. The producer, reclining on a divan in a far corner of the small studio, was making some kind of signal by beating his fist against his forehead.

"Well, enough of that!" the moderator said briskly. "How about singing one of your tribal songs for us?"

Gavir said, "I will sing the *Song of Going to Hunt.*" He heaved himself up from the divan, and, feet planted wide apart, threw back his head and began to howl.

He was considered a poor singer in his tribe, and he was not surprised that Malcomb and the moderator winced. But Malcomb had told him that it wouldn't matter. The dreamees receiving the dreamcast would hear the song as it *should* sound, as Gavir heard it in his mind. Everything that Gavir saw and heard and felt in his mind, the dreamees could see and hear and feel . . .

IT WAS cold, bitter cold, on the plain. The hunter stood at the edge of the camp as the shriveled Martian sun struck the tops of the Shakam hills. The hunter hefted the long, balanced narvoon, the throwing knife, in his hand. He had faith in the knife, and in his skill with it.

The hunter filled his lungs, the cold air reaching deep into

his chest. He shouted out his throat-bursting hunting cry. He began to run across the plain.

Crouching behind crumbling red rocks, racing over flat expanses of orange sand, the hunter sought traces of the seegee, the great slow desert beast whose body provided his tribe with all the essentials of existence. At last he saw tracks. He mounted a dune. Out on the plain before him a great brown seegee lumbered patiently, unaware of its danger.

The hunter was about to strike out after it, when a dark form leaped at him.

The hunter saw it out of the corner of his eye at the last moment. His startled sidestep saved him from the neck-breaking snap of the great jaws.

The drock's long body was armored with black scales. Curving fangs protruded from its upper jaw. Its hand-like forepaws ended in hooked claws, to grasp and tear its prey. It was larger, stronger, faster than the hunter. The thin Martian air carried weirdly high-pitched cries which proclaimed its craving to sink its fangs into the hunter's body. The drock's huge hind legs coiled back on their triple joints, and it sprang.

The hunter thrust the gleaming knife out before him, so that the dark body would land on its gleaming blade. The drock twisted in mid-air and landed to one side of the hunter.

Now, before it could gather itself for another spring, there was time for one cast of the blade. It had to be done at once. It had to be perfect. If it failed, the knife would be lost and the drock would have its kill. The hunter grasped the weapon by the blade, drew his arm back, and snapped it forward.

The blade struck deep into the throat of the drock.

The drock screamed eerily and jumped clumsily. The hunter threw himself at the great, dark body and retrieved the knife. He struck with it again and again into the gray twitching belly. Colorless blood ran out over the hard, tightly-stretched skin.

The drock fell, gave a last convulsion, and lay still. The hunter plunged the blade into the red sand to clean it. He threw back his head and bellowed his hunting cry. There was great glory in killing the drock, for it showed that the Desert Man and not the drock, was lord of the red waste...

GAVIR sat down on the divan, exhausted, his song finished. He didn't hear the moderator winding up the dreamcast. Then the producer of the program was upon him.

He began shouting even be-

fore Gavir removed his headset. "What kind of a fool are you? Before you started that song, you dreamed things about the Martian Development Corporation that were libelous! I got the whole thing —the Barrier, the guards, the labor pools and mines, the father crucified. It was awful! MDC is one of our biggest sponsors."

Malcomb said, "You can't expect an untrained young Martian to control his very thoughts. And may I point out that your tone is hostile?"

At this a sudden change came over the producer. The standard Earth expression—invincible benignity—took control of his face. "I apologize for having spoken sharply, but dreamcasting is a nerve-wracking business. If it weren't for Ethical Conditioning, I don't know how I'd control my aggressive impulses. The Suppression of Aggression is the Foundation of Civilization, eh?"

Malcomb smiled. "Ethical Conditioning Keeps Society from Fissioning." He shook hands with the producer.

"Come around tomorrow at 1300 and collect your fee," said the producer. "Good night, gentlemen."

As they left the Global Dreamcasting System building, Gavir said to Malcomb, "Can we go to a bookstore tonight?"

"Tomorrow. I'm taking you to your hotel and then I'm going back to my apartment. We both need sleep. And don't forget, you've been warned not to go prowling around the city by yourself . . ."

As soon as Gavir was sure that Malcomb was out of the hotel and well on his way home, he left his room and went out into the city.

In a pitifully few days he would be back in the Preserve, back with the fear of MDC, with hunger and the hopeless desire to find and kill the man who had ordered his father's death.

Now he had an opportunity to learn more about the universe of the Earthmen. Despite Malcomb's orders, he was going to find a seller of books.

During a reading class at the mission school, Father James had said, "In books there is power. All that you call magic in our Earth civilization is explained in books." Gavir wanted to learn. It was his only hope to find an alternative to the short, fear-ridden, impoverished life he foresaw for himself.

A river of force carried him, along with thousands of Earthmen—godlike beings in their perfect health and their impregnable benignity—through the streets of the city. Platforms of force raised and lowered him through the city's multiple levels . . .

And, as has always happen-

ed to outlanders in cities, he became lost.

HE WAS in a quarter where furtive red and violet lights danced in the shadows of hunched buildings. A half-dozen Earthmen approached him, stopped and stared. Gavir stared back.

The Earthmen wore black garments and furs and metal ornaments. The biggest of them wore a black suit, a long black cape, and a broad-brimmed black hat. He carried a coiled whip in one hand. The Earthmen turned to one another.

"A Martian."

"Let's give pain and death to the Martian! It will be a new experience—one to savor."

"Take pain, Martian!"

The Earthman with the black hat raised his arm, and the long heavy lash fell on Gavir. He felt a savage sting in the arm he had thrown up to protect his eyes.

Gavir leaped at the Earthmen. He clubbed the man with the whip across the face. As the others rushed in, Gavir flailed about him with long arms and heavy fists.

He began to enjoy it. It was rare that a Martian had an opportunity to knock Earthmen down. The mood of the *Song of Going to Hunt* came over him. He sprang free of his attackers and drew his glittering narvoon.

The man with the whip yelled. They looked at his knife, and then all at once turned and ran. Gavir drew back his arm and threw the knife with a practiced catapult-snap of shoulder, elbow, and wrist. To his surprise, the blade clattered to the street far short of his retreating enemies. Then he remembered: you couldn't throw far in the gravity of Earth.

The Earthmen disappeared into a lift-force field. Gavir decided not to pursue them. He walked forward and picked up his narvoon, and saw that the street on which it lay was solid black pavement, not a force-field. He must be in the lowest level of the city. He didn't know his way around; he might meet more enemies. He forgot about the books he'd wanted, and began to search for his hotel.

WHEN he got back to his room, he went immediately to bed. He slept late.

Malcomb woke him at 1100. Gavir told Malcomb about the strangely-dressed men who had tried to kill him.

"I told you not to wander around alone."

"But you did not tell me that Earthmen might try to kill me. You have told me that Earthmen are good and peace-loving, that there have been no acts of violence on Earth for many decades. You have told me that only the MDC

men are exceptions, because they are living off Earth, and this somehow makes them different."

"Well, those people you ran into are another exception."

"Why?"

"You know about the Regeneration and Rejuvenation treatment we have here on Earth. A variation of it was given you to acclimate you to Earth's gravity and atmosphere. Well, since the R&R treatment was developed, we Earthmen have a life-expectancy of about one hundred fifty years. Those people who attacked you were Century-Plus. They are over a hundred years old, but as healthy, physically, as ever."

"What is wrong with them?"

"They seem to have outgrown their Ethical Conditioning. They live wildly. Violently. It's a problem without precedent, and we don't know what to do with them. The fact is, Senile Delinquency is our number one problem."

"Why not punish them?" said Gavir.

"They're too powerful. They are often people who've pursued successful careers and acquired a good deal of property and position. And there are getting to be more of them all the time. But come on. You and I have to go over to Global Dreamcasting and collect our fee."

THE impeccably affable producer of *Dreaming Through the Universe* gave Malcomb a check and then asked them to follow him.

"Mr. Davery wants to see you. Mr. *Hoppy* Davery, executive vice-president in charge of production. Scion of one of Earth's oldest communications media families!"

They went with the producer to the upper reaches of the Global Dreamcasting building. There they were ushered into a huge office.

They found Mr. Hoppy Davery lounging on a divan the size of a space-port. He was youthful in appearance, as were all Earthmen, but a soft plumpness and a receding hairline made him look slightly older than average.

He pointed a rigid finger at Malcomb and Gavir. "I want you two to hear a condensed recording of statements taken from calls we received last night."

Gavir stiffened. They *had* gotten into trouble because of his thoughts about MDC.

A voice boomed out of the ceiling.

"That Martian boy has power. That song was a fist in the jaw. More!"

A woman's voice followed:

"If you let that boy go back to Mars I'll never dream a Global program again."

More voices:

"Enormous!"

"Potent!"

"That hunting song drove me mad. I *like* being mad!"

"Keep him on Earth."

Hoppy Davery pressed a button in the control panel on his divan, and the voices fell silent.

"Those callers that admitted their age were all Century-Plus. The boy appeals to the Century-Plus mentality. I want to try him again. This time on a really big dream-show, not just an educational 'cast. Got a spot on next week's Farfel Flisket Show. If he gets the right response, we talk about a contract. Okay?"

Malcomb said, "His visa expires—"

"We'll take care of his visa."

Gavir trembled with joy. Hoppy Davery pressed another button and a secretary entered with papers. She was followed by another woman.

The second woman was dark-haired and slender. She wore leather boots and tight brown breeches. She was bare from the waist up and her breasts were young and full. A jewelled clip fastened a scarlet cape at her neck. Her lips were a disconcertingly vivid red, apparently an artificial color. She kissed Hoppy Davery on the forehead, leaving red blotches on his pink dome. He wiped his forehead and looked at his hand.

"Do you have to wear that barbaric face-paint?" Hoppy turned sad eyes on Gavir and Malcomb. "Gentlemen, my mother, Sylvie Davery."

A Senile Delinquent! thought Gavir. She looked like Davery's younger sister. Malcomb stared at her apprehensively, and Gavir wondered if she were somehow going to attack them.

She looked at Gavir. "Mmm. What a body, what gorgeous blue skin. How tall are you, Blue Boy?"

"He's approximately seven feet tall, Sylvie," said Hoppy, "and what do you want here, anyway?"

"Just came up to see Blue Boy. One of the crowd dreamed him last night. Positively manic about him. I found out he'd be with you."

"See?" said Hoppy to Gavir. "The Century-Plus mentality. You've got something they go for. Undoubtedly because you're—forgive me—such a complete barbarian. That's what they're all trying to be."

"Spare me another lecture on Senile Delinquency, Our Number One Problem." She walked to the door and Gavir watched her all the way. She turned with a swirl of scarlet and a dramatic display of healthy young flesh. "See you again, Blue Boy."

After Sylvie left, Hoppy Davery said, "That might be a good professional name—Blue Boy. Gavir doesn't *mean* anything. Now what kind of

a song could you do for the Farfel Flisket show?"

Gavir thought. "Perhaps you would like the *Song of Creation.*"

"It's part of a fertility rite," Malcomb explained.

"Great! Give the Senile Delinquents another workout. It's not quite ethical, but its good for us. But for heaven's sake, Blue Boy, keep your mind off MDC!"

THE following week, Gavir sang the *Song of Creation* on the Farfel Flisket show, and transmitted the images which it brought up in his mind to his audience. A jubilant Hoppy Davery called him at his hotel next morning.

"Best response I've ever seen! The Century-Plussers have been rioting and throwing mass orgies every since you sang. But they take time out to call us up and beg for more. I've got a sponsor and a two-year contract lined up for you."

The sponsor was pacing back and forth in Hoppy Davery's office when Malcomb and Gavir arrived. Hoppy introduced him proudly. "Mr. Jarvis Spurling, president of the Martian Development Corporation."

Gavir's hand leaped at the narvoon under his doublet.

Then he stopped himself. He turned the gesture into the proffer of a handshake. "How do you do?" he said quietly. In his mind he congratulated himself. He had learned emotional control from the Earthmen. Here was the man who had ordered his father crucified! Yet he had managed to hide his instant desire to strike, to kill, to carry out the oath of the blood feud then and there.

Jarvis Spurling ignored Gavir's hand and stared coldly at him. There was not a trace of the usual Earthman's kindliness in his square, battered face. "I'm told you got talent. Okay, but a Bluie is a Bluie. I'll pay you because a Bluie on Dreamvision is good publicity for MDC products. But one slip like on your first 'cast and you go back to the Preserve."

"Mr. Spurling!" said Malcomb. "Your tone is hostile!"

"Damn right. That Ethical Conditioning slop doesn't work on me. I've lived too long on the frontier. And I know Bluies."

"I WILL sign the contract," said Gavir.

As he drew his signature pictograph on the contract, Sylvie Davery sauntered in. She held a white tube between her painted lips. The end of the tube was glowing and giving off clouds of smoke. Hoppy Davery coughed and Sylvie winked at Gavir. Gavir straightened up, and she took a long look at his seven feet.

"All finished, Blue Boy?

Come on, let's go have a drink at Lucifer Grotto."

Caution told Gavir to refuse. But before he could speak Spurling snapped, "Disgusting! An Earth woman and a Bluie! If you were on Mars, lady, we'd deport you so fast your tail would burn. And God help the Bluie!"

Sylvie blew a cloud of smoke at Spurling. "You're not on Mars, Jack. You're back in civilization where we do what we damned well please."

Spurling laughed. "I've heard about you Century-Plussers. You're all sick."

"You can't claim any monopoly on mental health. Not with that concentration camp you run on Mars. Coming, Gavir?"

Gavir grinned at Spurling. "The contract, I believe, does not cover my private life."

Hoppy Davery said, "Sylvie, I don't think this is wise."

Sylvie uttered a short, sharp obscenity, linked arms with Gavir, and strolled out.

"You screwball Senile Delinquent," Spurling yelled after Sylvie, "you oughtta be locked up!"

LUCIFER Grotto was in that same quarter in which Gavir had been attacked. Sylvie told him it was *the* hangout for wealthier New York Century-Plussers. Gavir told her about the attack, and she laughed. "It won't happen again. You're a hero to the Senile Delinquents now. By the way, the big fellow with the broad-brimmed hat, he's one of the most prominent Senile Delinquents of our day. He's president of the biggest privately-owned space line, but he likes to call himself the Hat Rat. You must be one of the few people who ever got away from him alive."

"He seemed happy to get away from me," said Gavir.

An arrangement of force-planes and 3V projections made the front of Lucifer Grotto appear to be a curtain of flames. Gavir hung back, but Sylvie inserted a tiny gold pitchfork into a small aperture in the glowing, rippling surface. The flames swept aside, revealing a doorway. A bearded man in black tights escorted them through a luridly-lit bar to a private room. When they were alone, Sylvie dropped her cape to the floor, sat on the edge of a huge, pink divan, and smiled at Gavir.

Gavir contemplated her. That she was over a hundred years old was a little frightening. But the skin of her face and her bare upper body was a warm color, and tautly filled. She had lashed out at Spurling, and he liked her for that. But in one way she was like Spurling. She didn't fit into the bland, non-violent world of Malcomb and Hoppy.

He shook his head. He said, "Sylvie, why—well, why are

you the way you are? Why—and how—have you broken away from Ethical Conditioning?"

Sylvie frowned. She spoke a few words into the air, ordering drinks. She said, "I didn't do it deliberately. When I reached the age of about a hundred it stopped working for me. I suddenly wanted to do what *I* wanted to do. And then I found out that I didn't *know* what I wanted to do. It was Ethical Conditioning or nothing, so I picked nothing. And here I am, chasing nothing."

"How do you chase nothing?"

She set fire to a white tube. "This, for instance. They used to do it before they found out it caused cancer. Now there's no more cancer, but even if there were, I'd still smoke. That's the attitude I have. You try things. You live in the past, if you're inclined, adopt the costumes and manners of some more colorful time. You try ridiculous things, disgusting things, vicious things. You know they're all nothing, but you have to do something, so you go on doing nothing, elaborately and violently."

A tray of drinks rose through the floor. Sylvie frowned as she noticed a folded paper tucked between the glasses. She picked it up and read it, chuckled, and read it again, aloud.

"Sir: I beg you to forgive the presumption of my recent attack on you. Since then you have captured my imagination. I now hold you to be the noblest savage of them all. Henceforward please consider me, Your obedient servant, Hat Rat."

"You've impressed him," said Sylvie. "But you impress me even more. Come here."

She held out slim arms to him. He had no wish to refuse her. She was not like a Martian woman, but he found the differences exciting and attractive. He went to her, and he forgot entirely that she was over a hundred years old.

IN THE months that followed, Gavir's fame spread over Earth. By spring, the rating computers credited him with an audience of eight hundred million—ninety-five percent of whom were Century-Plussers. Davery doubled Gavir's salary.

Gavir toured the world with Sylvie, mobbed everywhere by worshipful Century-Plussers. Male Century-Plussers by the millions adopted blue doublets and blue kilts in honor of their hero.

Blue-dyed hair was now *de rigeur* among the ladies of Lucifer Grotto. The Hat Rat himself, who often appeared at a respectful distance in crowds around Gavir, now wore a wide-brimmed hat of brightest blue.

Then there came the dream-

cast on which Gavir sang the *Song of Complaint.*

It was an ancient song, a Desert Man's outcry against injustice, enemies, false friends and callous leaders. It was a protest against sufferings that could neither be borne nor prevented. At the climax of the song Gavir pictured a tribal chief who refused to make fair division of the spoils of a hunt with his warriors. Gradually he allowed this image to turn into a picture of Hoppy Davery withholding bundles of money from a starving Gavir. Then he ended the song.

Hoppy sent for him next morning.

"Why did you do that?" he said. "Listen to this."

A recorded voice boomed: "This is Hat Rat. Pay the Blue Boy what he deserves, or I will give you death. It will be a personal thing between you and me. I will besprinkle you with corrosive acids; I will burn out your eyes; I will—"

Hoppy cut the voice off. Gavir saw that he was sweating. "There were *dozens* like that. If you want more money, I'll *give* you more money. Say something nice about me on your next dreamcast, for heaven's sake!"

Gavir spread his big blue hands. "I am sorry. I don't want more money. I cannot always control the pictures I make. These images come into my mind even though they have nothing to do with me."

Hoppy shook his head. "That's because you haven't had Ethical Conditioning. We don't have this trouble with our other performers. You just must remember that dreamvision is the most potent communications medium ever devised. Be *careful.*"

"I will," said Gavir.

ON HIS next dreamcast Gavir sang the *Song of the Blood Feud.* He pictured a Desert Man whose father had been killed by a drock.

The Desert Man ran over the red sand, and he found the drock. He did not throw his knife. That would not have satisfied his hatred. He fell upon the drock and stabbed and stabbed.

The Desert Man howled his hunting-cry over the body of his enemy, and spat into its face.

And the fanged face of the drock turned into the square, battered face of Jarvis Spurling. Gavir held the image in his mind for a long moment.

When the dreamcast was over, a studio page ran up to Gavir. "Mr. Spurling wants to see you at once, at his office."

"Let him come and find me," said Gavir. "Let us go, Sylvie."

They went to Lucifer Grotto, where Gavir's wealthiest admirers among the Senile Delinquents were giving a

party for him in the Pandemonium Room. The only prominent person missing, as Sylvie remarked after surveying the crowd, was the Hat Rat. They wondered about it, but no one knew where he was.

Sheets of flame illuminated the wild features and strange garments of over a hundred Century-Plus ladies and gentlemen. Gouts of flame leaped from the walls to light antique-style cigarettes. Drinks were refilled from nozzles of molded fire.

An hour passed from the time of Gavir's arrival.

Then Jarvis Spurling joined the party. There was a heavy frontier sonic pistol strapped at his waist. A protesting Malcomb was behind him.

Jarvis Spurling's square face was dark with anger. "You deliberately put my face on that animal! You want to make the public hate me. I pay your salary and keep you here on Earth, and this is what I get for it. All right. A Bluie is a Bluie, and I'll treat you like a Bluie should be treated." He unsnapped his holster and drew the square, heavy pistol out and pointed it at Gavir.

Gavir stood up. His right hand plucked at his doublet.

"You're itching to go for that throwing knife," said Spurling. "Go on! Take it out and get ready to throw it. I'll give you that much chance. Let's make a game out of this. We'll make like we're back on Mars, Bluie, and you're out hunting a drock. And you find one, only this drock has a gun. How about that, Bluie?"

Gavir took out the narvoon, grasped the blade, and drew his arm back.

"Gavir!"

It was the Hat Rat. He stood between pillars of flame in the doorway of the Pandemonium Room of Lucifer Grotto, and there was a peculiar contrivance of dark brown wood and black metal tubing cradled in his arm. "This ancient shotgun I dedicate to your blood feud. I shall hunt down your enemy, Gavir!"

Spurling turned. The Hat Rat saw him.

"The enemy!" the Hat Rat shouted.

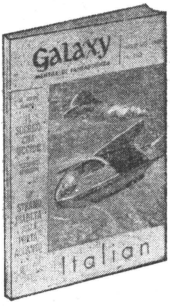
The shotgun exploded.

Spurling's body was thrown back against Gavir. Gavir saw a huge ragged red caved-in place in Spurling's chest. Spurling's body sagged to the floor and lay there face up, eyes open. The Senile Delinquents of Lucifer Grotto leaned forward to grin at the tattered body.

Still holding the narvoon, Gavir stood over his dead enemy. He threw back his head and howled out the hunting cry of the Desert Men. Then he looked down and spat in Jarvis Spurling's dead face.

END

Galaxy...AROUND THE WORLD



With your literally thousands of letters you have proven that *Galaxy* is the most widely read science-fiction magazine on *Earth* (see above for evidence of our foreign editions). Subscribing to *Galaxy* is similar to a profit-sharing arrangement; for the more you invest, the greater your dividends. And this, as you've seen, and will go on seeing, is truly voting stock. (No need to cut up this attractive copy. Your order on any sheet of paper will convey the same vote and privileges.)

GALAXY Publishing Corp., 421 Hudson Street, New York 14, N. Y.

Enter my subscription for the New Giant 196-page Galaxy (U. S. Edition only) for:

(50¢ additional per 6 issues foreign postage)

6 Issues @ $2.50 ☐ 12 Issues @ $4.50 ☐ 24 Issues @ $8.50 ☐

Name_____ City_____

Address_____ Zone_____ State_____


YOU MISSED ME!

THE SIX FINGERS OF TIME

Time is money.

Time heals all wounds.

Given time,

anything is possible.

And now he had all the

time in the world!

By R. A. LAFFERTY

Illustrated by GAUGHAN

HE BEGAN by breaking things that morning. He broke the glass of water on his night stand. He knocked it crazily against the opposite wall and shattered it. Yet it shattered slowly. This would have surprised him if he had been fully awake, for he had only reached out sleepily for it.

Nor had he wakened regularly to his alarm; he had wakened to a weird, slow, low booming, yet the clock said six, time for the alarm. And the low boom, when it came again, seemed to come from the clock.

He reached out and touched it gently, but it floated off the stand at his touch and bounced around slowly on the floor. And when he picked it up again it had stopped, nor would shaking start it.

He checked the electric clock in the kitchen. This also said six o'clock, but the sweep hand did not move. In his living room the radio clock said six, but the second hand seemed stationary.

"But the lights in both rooms work," said Vincent. "How are the clocks stopped? Are they on a separate circuit?"

He went back to his bedroom and got his wristwatch. It also said six; and its sweep hand did not sweep.

"Now this could get silly. What is it that would stop both mechanical and electrical clocks?"

He went to the window and looked out at the clock on the Mutual Insurance Building. It said six o'clock, and the second hand did not move.

"Well, it is possible that the confusion is not limited to myself. I once heard the fanciful theory that a cold shower will clear the mind. For me it never has, but I will try it. I can always use cleanliness for an excuse."

The shower didn't work. Yes, it did: the water came now, but not like water; like very slow syrup that hung in the air. He reached up to touch it there hanging down and stretching. And it shattered like glass when he touched it and drifted in fantastic slow globs across the room. But it had the feel of water, wet and pleasantly cool. And in a quarter of a minute or so it was down over his shoulders and back, and he luxuriated in it. He let it soak his head and it cleared his wits at once.

"There is not a thing wrong with me. I am fine. It is not my fault that the water is slow this morning and other things awry."

He reached for the towel and it tore to pieces in his hands like porous wet paper.

NOW he became very careful in the way he handled things. Slowly, tenderly, and deftly he took them so that they would not break. He shaved himself without mishap in spite of the slow water in the lavatory also.

Then he dressed himself with the greatest caution and cunning, breaking nothing except his shoe laces, a thing that is likely to happen at any time.

"If there is nothing the matter with me, then I will check and see if there is anything seriously wrong with the world. The dawn was fairly along when I looked out, as it should have been. Approximately twenty minutes have passed; it is a clear morning; the sun should now have hit the top several stories of the Insurance Building."

But it had not. It was a clear morning, but the dawn had not brightened at all in the twenty minutes. And that

big clock still said six. It had not changed.

Yet it had changed, and he knew it with a queer feeling. He pictured it as it had been before. The hour and the minute hand had not moved noticeably. But the second hand had moved. It had moved a third of the dial.

So he pulled up a chair to the window and watched it. He realized that, though he could not see it move, yet it did make progress. He watched it for perhaps five minutes. It moved through a space of perhaps five seconds.

"Well, that is not my problem. It is that of the clock maker, either a terrestrial or a celestial one."

But he left his rooms without a good breakfast, and he left them very early. How did he know that it was early since there was something wrong with the time? Well, it was early at least according to the sun and according to the clocks, neither of which institutions seemed to be working properly.

He left without a good breakfast because the coffee would not make and the bacon would not fry. And in plain point of fact the fire would not heat. The gas flame came from the pilot light like a slowly spreading stream or an unfolding flower. Then it burned far too steadily. The skillet remained cold when placed over it; nor would water even heat. It had taken at least five minutes to get the water out of the faucet in the first place.

He ate a few pieces of leftover bread and some scraps of meat.

In the street there was no motion, no real motion. A truck, first seeming at rest, moved very slowly. There was no gear in which it could move so slowly. And there was a taxi which crept along, but Charles Vincent had to look at it carefully for some time to be sure that it was in motion. Then he received a shock. He realized by the early morning light that the driver of it was dead. Dead with his eyes wide open!

Slowly as it was going, and by whatever means it was moving, it should really be stopped. He walked over to it, opened the door, and pulled on the brake. Then he looked into the eyes of the dead man. Was he really dead? It was hard to be sure. He felt warm. But, even as Vincent looked, the eyes of the dead man had begun to close. And close they did and open again in a matter of about twenty seconds.

THIS was weird. The slowly closing and opening eyes sent a chill through Vincent. And the dead man had begun to lean forward in his seat. Vincent put a hand in the middle of the man's chest to hold him upright, but he

found the forward pressure as relentless as it was slow. He was unable to keep the dead man up.

So he let him go, watching curiously; and in a few seconds the driver's face was against the wheel. But it was almost as if it had no intention of stopping there. It pressed into the wheel with dogged force. He would surely break his face. Vincent took several holds on the dead man and counteracted the pressure somewhat. Yet the face was being damaged, and if things were normal, blood would have flowed.

The man had been dead so long however, that (though he was still warm) his blood must have congealed, for it was fully two minutes before it began to ooze.

"Whatever I have done, I have done enough damage," said Vincent. "And, in whatever nightmare I am in, I am likely to do further harm if I meddle more. I had better leave it alone."

He walked on down the morning street. Yet whatever vehicles he saw were moving with an incredible slowness, as though driven by some fantastic gear reduction. And there were people here and there frozen solid. It was a chilly morning, but it was not that cold. They were immobile in positions of motion, as though they were playing the children's game of Statues.

"How is it," said Charles Vincent, "that this young girl (who I believe works across the street from us) should have died standing up and in full stride? But, no. She is not dead. Or, if so, she died with a very alert expression. And—oh, my God, she's doing it too!"

For he realized that the eyes of the girl were closing, and in the space of no more than a quarter of a second they had completed their cycle and were open again. Also, and this was even stranger, she had moved, moved forward in full stride. He would have timed her if he could, but how could he when all the clocks were crazy? Yet she must have been taking about two steps a minute.

He went into the cafeteria. The early morning crowd that he had often watched through the windows was there. The girl who made flapjacks in the window had just flipped one and it hung in the air. Then it floated over as if caught by a slight breeze, and sank slowly down as if settling in water.

The breakfasters, like the people in the street, were all dead in this new way, moving with almost imperceptible motion. And all had apparently died in the act of drinking coffee, eating eggs, or munching toast. And if there were only time enough, there was even a chance that they would

get the drinking, eating, and munching done with, for there was the shadow of movement in them all.

The cashier had the register drawer open and money in her hand, and the hand of the customer was outstretched for it. In time, somewhere in the new leisurely time, the hands would come together and the change be given. And so it happened. It may have been a minute and a half, or two minutes, or two and a half. It is always hard to judge time, and now it had become all but impossible.

"I am still hungry," said Charles Vincent, "but it would be foolhardy to wait for service here. Should I help myself? They will not mind if they are dead. And if they are not dead, in any case it seems that I am invisible to them."

HE WOLFED several rolls. He opened a bottle of milk and held it upside down over his glass while he ate another roll. Liquids had all become perversely slow.

But he felt better for his erratic breakfast. He would have paid for it, but how?

He left the cafeteria and walked about the town as it seemed still to be quite early, though one could depend on neither sun nor clock for the time any more. The traffic lights were unchanging. He sat for a long time in a little park and watched the town and the big clock in the Commerce Building tower; but like all the clocks it was either stopped or the hand would creep too slowly to be seen.

It must have been just about an hour till the traffic lights changed, but change they did at last. By picking a point on the building across the street and watching what moved past it, he found that the traffic did indeed move. In a minute or so, the entire length of a car would pass the given point.

He had, he recalled, been very far behind in his work and it had been worrying him. He decided to go to the office, early as it was or seemed to be.

He let himself in. Nobody else was there. He resolved not to look at the clock and to be very careful of the way he handled all objects because of his new propensity for breaking things. This considered, all seemed normal there. He had said the day before that he could hardly catch up on his work if he put in two days solid. He now resolved at least to work steadily until something happened, whatever it was.

For hour after hour he worked on his tabulations and reports. Nobody else had arrived. Could something be wrong? Certainly something was wrong. But this was not a holiday. That was not it.

Just how long can a stubborn and mystified man plug

away at his task? It was hour after hour after hour. He did not become hungry nor particularly tired. And he did get through a lot of work.

"It must be half done. However it has happened, I have caught up on at least a day's work. I will keep on."

He must have continued silently for another eight or ten hours.

He was caught up completely on his back work.

"Well, to some extent I can work into the future. I can head up and carry over. I can put in everything but the figures of the field reports."

And he did so.

"It will be hard to bury me in work again. I could almost coast for a day. I don't even know what day it is, but I must have worked twenty hours straight through and nobody has arrived. Perhaps nobody ever will arrive. If they are moving with the speed of the people in the nightmare outside, it is no wonder they have not arrived."

He put his head down on his arms on the desk. The last thing he saw before he closed his eyes was the misshapen left thumb that he had always tried to conceal a little by the way he handled his hands.

"At least I know that I am still myself. I'd know myself anywhere by that."

Then he went to sleep at his desk.

JENNY came in with a quick click-click-click of high heels, and he wakened to the noise.

"What are you doing dozing at your desk, Mr. Vincent? Have you been here all night?"

"I don't know, Jenny. Honestly I don't."

"I was only teasing. Sometimes when I get here a little early I take a catnap myself."

The clock said six minutes till eight and the second hand was sweeping normally. Time had returned to the world. Or to him. But had all that early morning of his been a dream? Then it had been a very efficient dream. He had accomplished work that he could hardly have done in two days. And it was the same day that it was supposed to be.

He went to the water fountain. The water now behaved normally. He went to the window. The traffic was behaving as it should. Though sometimes slow and sometimes snarled, yet it was in the pace of the regular world.

The other workers arrived. They were not balls of fire, but neither was it necessary to observe them for several minutes to be sure they weren't dead.

"It did have its advantages," Charles Vincent said. "I would be afraid to live with it permanently, but it would be handy to go into for a few minutes a day and accomplish the business of hours. I may

be a case for the doctor. But just how would I go about telling a doctor what was bothering me?"

Now it had surely been less than two hours from his first rising till the time that he wakened to the noise of Jenny from his second sleep. And how long that second sleep had been, or in which time enclave, he had no idea. But how account for it all? He had spent a long while in his own rooms, much longer than ordinary in his confusion. He had walked the city mile after mile in his puzzlement. And he had sat in the little park for hours and studied the situation. And he had worked at his own desk for an outlandish long time.

Well, he would go to the doctor. A man is obliged to refrain from making a fool of himself to the world at large, but to his own lawyer, his priest, or his doctor he will sometimes have to come as a fool. By their callings they are restrained from scoffing openly.

Dr. Mason was not particularly a friend. Charles Vincent realized with some unease that he did not have any particular friends, only acquaintances and associates. It was as though he were of a species slightly apart from his fellows. He wished now a little that he had a particular friend.

But Dr. Mason was an acquaintance of some years, had the reputation of being a good doctor, and besides Vincent had now arrived at his office and been shown in. He would either have to—well, that was as good a beginning as any.

"Doctor, I am in a predicament. I will either have to invent some symptoms to account for my visit here, or make an excuse and bolt, or tell you what is bothering me, even though you will think I am a new sort of idiot."

"Vincent, every day people invent symptoms to cover their visits here, and I know that they have lost their nerve about the real reason for coming. And every day people do make excuses and bolt. But experience tells me that I will get a larger fee if you tackle the third alternative. And, Vincent, there is no new sort of idiot."

VINCENT said, "It may not sound so silly if I tell it quickly. I awoke this morning to some very puzzling incidents. It seemed that time itself had stopped, or that the whole world had gone into super-slow motion. The water would neither flow nor boil, and fire would not heat food. The clocks, which I first believed had stopped, crept along at perhaps a minute an hour. The people I met in the streets appeared dead, frozen in lifelike attitudes. And it was only by watching them for a very long time that I

perceived that they did indeed have motion. One car I saw creeping slower than the most backward snail, and a dead man at the wheel of it. I went to it, opened the door, and put on the brake. I realized after a time that the man was not dead. But he bent forward and broke his face on the steering wheel. It must have taken a full minute for his head to travel no more than ten inches, yet I was unable to prevent his hitting the wheel. I then did other bizarre things in a world that had died on its feet. I walked many miles through the city, and then I sat for hours in the park. I went to the office and let myself in. I accomplished work that must have taken me twenty hours. I then took a nap at my desk. When I awoke on the arrival of the others, it was six minutes to eight in the morning of the same day, today. Not two hours had passed from my rising, and time was back to normal. But the things that happened in that time that could never be compressed into two hours."

"One question first, Vincent. Did you actually accomplish the work of many hours?"

"I did. It was done, and done in that time. It did not become undone on the return of time to normal."

"A second question. Had you been worried about your work, about being behind?"

"Yes. Emphatically."

"Then here is one explanation. You retired last night. But very shortly afterward you arose in a state of somnambulism. There are facets of sleepwalking which we do not at all understand. The time-out-of-focus interludes were parts of a walking dream of yours. You dressed and went to your office and worked all night. It is possible to do routine tasks in a somnambulistic state rapidly and even feverishly, with an intense concentration — to perform prodigies. You may have fallen into a normal sleep there when you had finished, or you may have been awakened directly from your somnambulistic trance on the arrival of your co-workers. There, that is a plausible and workable explanation. In the case of an apparently bizarre happening, it is always well to have a rational explanation to fall back on. They will usually satisfy a patient and put his mind at rest. But often they do not satisfy me."

"Your explanation very nearly satisfies me, Dr. Mason, and it does put my mind considerably at rest. I am sure that in a short while I will be able to accept it completely. But why does it not satisfy you?"

"One reason is a man I treated early this morning. He had his face smashed, and he had seen—or almost seen—a ghost: a ghost of incredible

swiftness that was more sensed than seen. The ghost opened the door of his car while it was going at full speed, jerked on the brake, and caused him to crack his head. This man was dazed and had a slight concussion. I have convinced him that he did not see any ghost at all, that he must have dozed at the wheel and run into something. As I say, I am harder to convince than my patients. But it may have been coincidence."

"I hope so. But you also seem to have another reservation."

"After quite a few years in practice, I seldom see or hear anything new. Twice before I have been told a happening or a dream on the line of what you experienced."

"Did you convince your patients that it was only a dream?"

"I did. Both of them. That is, I convinced them the first few times it happened to them."

"Were they satisfied?"

"At first. Later, not entirely. But they both died within a year of their first coming to me."

"Nothing violent, I hope."

"Both had the gentlest deaths. That of senility extreme."

"Oh. Well, I'm too young for that."

"I would like you to come back in a month or so."

"I will, if the delusion or the dream returns. Or if I do not feel well."

After this Charles Vincent began to forget about the incident. He only recalled it with humor sometimes when again he was behind in his work.

"Well, if it gets bad enough I may do another sleepwalking act and catch up. But if there is another aspect of time and I could enter it at will, it might often be handy."

CHARLES VINCENT never saw his face at all. It is very dark in some of those clubs and the Coq Bleu is like the inside of a tomb. He went to the clubs only about once a month, sometimes after a show when he did not want to go home to bed, sometimes when he was just plain restless.

Citizens of the more fortunate states may not know of the mysteries of the clubs. In Vincent's the only bars are beer bars, and only in the clubs can a person get a drink, and only members are admitted. It is true that even such a small club as the Coq Bleu had thirty thousand members, and at a dollar a year that is a nice sideline. The little numbered membership cards cost a penny each for the printing, and the member wrote in his own name. But he had to have a card—or a dollar for a card —to gain admittance.

But there could be no entertainments in the clubs. There

was nothing there but the little bar room in the near darkness.

The man was there, and then he was not, and then he was there again. And always where he sat it was too dark to see his face.

"I wonder," he said to Vincent (or to the bar at large, though there were no other customers and the bartender was asleep), "I wonder if you have ever read Zurbarin on the Relationship of Extradigitalism to Genius?"

"I have never heard of the work nor of the man," said Vincent. "I doubt if either exists."

"I am Zurbarin," said the man.

Vincent hid his misshapen left thumb. Yet it could not have been noticed in that light, and he must have been crazy to believe there was any connection between it and the man's remark. It was not truly a double thumb. He was not an extradigital, nor was he a genius.

"I refuse to become interested in you," said Vincent. "I am on the verge of leaving. I dislike waking the bartender, but I did want another drink."

"Sooner done than said,"

"What is?"

"Your glass is full."

"It is? So it is. Is it a trick?"

"Trick is the name for anything either too frivolous or too mystifying for us to comprehend. But on one long early morning of a month ago, you also could have done the trick, and nearly as well."

"Could I have? How would you know about my long early morning—assuming there to have been such?"

"I watched you for a while. Few others have the equipment to watch you with when you're in the aspect."

SO THEY were silent for some time, and Vincent watched the clock and was ready to go.

"I wonder," said the man in the dark, "if you have read Schimmelpenninck on the Sexagintal and the Duodecimal in the Chaldee Mysteries?"

"I have not and I doubt if anyone else has. I would guess that you are also Schimmelpenninck and that you have just made up the name on the spur of the moment."

"I am Schimm, it is true, but I made up the name on the spur of a moment many years ago."

"I am a little bored with you," said Vincent, "but I would appreciate it if you'd do your glass-filling trick once more."

"I have just done so. And you are not bored; you are frightened."

"Of what?" asked Vincent, whose glass was in fact full again.

"Of reentering a dread that

you are not sure was a dream. But there are advantages to being both invisible and inaudible."

"Can you be invisible?"

"Was I not when I went behind the bar just now and fixed you a drink?"

"How?"

"A man in full stride goes at the rate of about five miles an hour. Multiply that by sixty, which is the number of time. When I leave my stool and go behind the bar, I go and return at the rate of three hundred miles an hour. So I am invisible to you, particularly if I move while you blink."

"One thing does not match. You might have got around there and back, but you could not have poured."

"Shall I say that mastery over liquids is not given to beginners? But for us there are many ways to outwit the slowness of matter."

"I believe that you are a hoaxer. Do you know Dr. Mason?"

"I know that you went to see him. I know of his futile attempts to penetrate a certain mystery. But I have not talked to him of you."

"I still believe that you are a phony. Could you put me back into the state of my dream of a month ago?"

"It was not a dream. But I could put you again into that state."

"Prove it."

"Watch the clock. Do you believe that I can point my finger at it and stop it for you? It is already stopped for me."

"No, I don't believe it. Yes, I guess I have to, since I see that you have just done it. But it may be another trick. I don't know where the clock is plugged in."

"Neither do I. Come to the door. Look at every clock you can see. Are they not all stopped?"

"Yes. Maybe the power has gone off all over town."

"You know it has not. There are still lighted windows in those buildings, though it is quite late."

"Why are you playing with me? I am neither on the inside nor the outside. Either tell me the secret or say that you will not tell me."

"The secret isn't a simple one. It can only be arrived at after all philosophy and learning have been assimilated."

"One man cannot arrive at that in one lifetime."

"Not in an ordinary lifetime. But the secret of the secret (if I may put it that way) is that one must use part of it as a tool in learning. You could not learn all in one lifetime, but by being permitted the first step—to be able to read, say, sixty books in the time it took you to read one, to pause for a minute in thought and use up only one

second, to get a day's work accomplished in eight minutes and so have time for other things—by such ways one may make a beginning. I will warn you, though. Even for the most intelligent, it is a race."

"A race? What race?"

"It is a race between success, which is life, and failure, which is death."

"Let's skip the melodrama. How do I get into the state and out of it?"

"Oh, that is simple, so easy that it seems like a gadget. Here are two diagrams I will draw. Note them carefully. This first, envision it in your mind and you are in the state. Now this second one, envision, and you are out of it."

"That easy?"

"That deceptively easy. The trick is to learn why it works—if you want to succeed, meaning to live."

So Charles Vincent left him and went home, walking the mile in a little less than fifteen normal seconds. But he still had not seen the face of the man.

THERE are advantages intellectual, monetary, and amorous in being able to enter the accelerated state at will. It is a fox game. One must be careful not to be caught at it, nor to break or harm that which is in the normal state.

Vincent could always find eight or ten minutes unobserved to accomplish the day's work. And a fifteen-minute coffee break could turn into a fifteen-hour romp around the town.

There was this boyish pleasure in becoming a ghost: to appear and stand motionless in front of an onrushing train and to cause the scream of the whistle, and to be in no danger, being able to move five or ten times as fast as the train; to enter and to sit suddenly in the middle of a select group and see them stare, and then disappear from the middle of them; to interfere in sports and games, entering a prize ring and tripping, hampering, or slugging the unliked fighter; to blue-shot down the hockey ice, skating at fifteen hundred miles an hour and scoring dozens of goals at either end while the people only know that something odd is happening.

There was pleasure in being able to shatter windows by chanting little songs, for the voice (when in the state) will be to the world at sixty times its regular pitch, though normal to oneself. And for this reason also he was inaudible to others.

There was fun in petty thieving and tricks. He would take a wallet from a man's pocket and be two blocks away when the victim turned at the feel. He would come back and stuff it into the man's mouth as he bleated to a policeman.

He would come into the

home of a lady writing a letter, snatch up the paper and write three lines and vanish before the scream got out of her throat.

He would take food off forks, put baby turtles and live fish into bowls of soup between spoonfuls of the eater.

He would lash the hands of handshakers tightly together with stout cord. He unzippered persons of both sexes when they were at their most pompous. He changed cards from one player's hand to another's. He removed golf balls from tees during the backswing and left notes written large "YOU MISSED ME" pinned to the ground with the tee.

Or he shaved mustaches and heads. Returning repeatedly to one woman he disliked, he gradually clipped her bald and finally gilded her pate.

With tellers counting their money, he interfered outrageously and enriched himself. He snipped cigarettes in two with a scissors and blew out matches, so that one frustrated man broke down and cried at his inability to get a light.

He removed the weapons from the holsters of policemen and put cap pistols and water guns in their places. He unclipped the leashes of dogs and substituted little toy dogs rolling on wheels.

He put frogs in water glasses and left lighted firecrackers on bridge tables.

He reset wrist watches on wrists, and played pranks in men's rooms.

"I was always a boy at heart," said Charles Vincent.

ALSO during those first few days of the controlled new state, he established himself materially, acquiring wealth by devious ways, and opening bank accounts in various cities under various names, against a time of possible need.

Nor did he ever feel any shame for the tricks he played on unaccelerated humanity. For the people, when he was in the state, were as statues to him, hardly living, barely moving, unseeing, unhearing. And it is no shame to show disrespect to such comical statues.

And also, and again because he was a boy at heart, he had fun with the girls.

"I am one mass of black and blue marks," said Jenny one day. "My lips are sore and my front teeth feel loosened. I don't know what in the world is the matter with me."

Yet he had not meant to bruise or harm her. He was rather fond of her and he resolved to be much more careful. Yet it was fun, when he was in the state and invisible to her because of his speed, to kiss her here and there in out-of-the-way places. She made

a nice statue and it was good sport. And there were others.

"You look older," said one of his co-workers one day. "Are you taking care of yourself? Are you worried?"

"I am not," said Vincent. "I never felt better or happier in my life."

But now there was time for so many things—time, in fact, for everything. There was no reason why he could not master anything in the world, when he could take off for fifteen minutes and gain fifteen hours. Vincent was a rapid but careful reader. He could now read from a hundred and twenty to two hundred books in an evening and night; and he slept in the accelerated state and could get a full night's sleep in eight minutes.

He first acquired a knowledge of languages. A quite extensive reading knowledge of a language can be acquired in three hundred hours world time, or three hundred minutes (five hours) accelerated time. And if one takes the tongues in order, from the most familiar to the most remote, there is no real difficulty. He acquired fifty for a starter, and could always add any other any evening that he found he had a need for it. And at the same time he began to assemble and consolidate knowledge. Of literature, properly speaking, there are no more than ten thousand books that are really worth reading and falling in love with. These were gone through with high pleasure, and two or three thousand of them were important enough to be reserved for future rereading.

History, however, is very uneven; and it is necessary to read texts and sources that for form are not worth reading. And the same with philosophy. Mathematics and science, pure or physical, could not, of course, be covered with the same speed. Yet, with time available, all could be mastered. There is no concept ever expressed by any human mind that cannot be comprehended by any other normal human mind, if time is available and it is taken in the proper order and context and with the proper preparatory work.

And often, and now more often, Vincent felt that he was touching the fingers of the secret; and always, when he came near it, it had a little bit the smell of the pit.

For he had pegged out all the main points of the history of man; or rather most of the tenable, or at least possible, theories of the history of man. It was hard to hold the main line of it, that double road of rationality and revelation that should lead always to a fuller and fuller development (not the fetish of progress, that toy word used only by toy people), to an unfolding and growth and perfectibility.

But the main line was often obscure and all but obliterated, and traced through fog and miasma. He had accepted the Fall of Man and the Redemption as the cardinal points of history. But he understood now that neither happened only once, that both were of constant occurrence; that there was a hand reaching up from that old pit with its shadow over man. And he had come to picture that hand in his dreams (for his dreams were especially vivid when in the state) as a six-digited monster reaching out. He began to realize that the thing he was caught in was dangerous and deadly.

Very dangerous.

Very deadly.

One of the weird books that he often returned to and which continually puzzled him was the Relationship of Extradigitalism to Genius, written by the man whose face he had never seen, in one of his manifestations.

It promised more than it delivered, and it intimated more than it said. Its theory was tedious and tenuous, bolstered with undigested mountains of doubtful data. It left him unconvinced that persons of genius (even if it could be agreed who or what they were) had often the oddity of extra fingers and toes, or the vestiges of them. And it puzzled him what possible difference it could make.

YET there were hints here of a Corsican who commonly kept a hand hidden, or an earlier and more bizarre commander who wore always a mailed glove, of another man with a glove between the two; hints that the multiplex-adept, Leonardo himself, who sometimes drew the hands of men and often those of monsters with six fingers, may himself have had the touch. There was a comment of Caesar, not conclusive, to the same effect. It is known that Alexander had a minor peculiarity; it is not known what it was; this man made it seem that this was it. And it was averred of Gregory and Augustine, of Benedict and Albert and Acquinas. Yet a man with a deformity could not enter the priesthood; if they had it, it must have been in vestigial form.

There were cases for Charles Magnut and Mahmud, for Saladin the Horseman and for Akhnaton the King; for Homer (a Seleuciad-Greek statuette shows him with six fingers strumming an unidentified instrument while reciting); for Pythagoras, for Buonarroti, Santi, Theotokopolous, van Rijn, Robusti.

Zurbarin catalogued eight thousand names. He maintained that they were geniuses. And that they were extradigitals.

Charles Vincent grinned and looked down at his misshapen or double thumb.

"At least I am in good though monotonous company. But what in the name of triple time is he driving at?"

And it was not long afterward that Vincent was examining cuneiform tablets in the State Museum. These were a broken and not continuous series on the theory of numbers, tolerably legible to the now encyclopedic Charles Vincent. And the series read in part:

"On the divergence of the basis itself and the confusion caused—for it is five, or it is six, or ten or twelve, or sixty or a hundred, or three hundred and sixty or the double hundred, the thousand. The reason, not clearly understood by the people, is that Six and the Dozen are first, and Sixty is a compromise in condescending to the people. For the five, the ten are late, and are no older than the people themselves. It is said, and credited, that people began to count by fives and tens from the number of fingers on their hands. But before the people the—by the reason that they had—counted by sixes and twelves. But Sixty is the number of time, divisible by both, for both must live together in time, though not on the same plane of time—" Much of the rest was scattered. And it was while trying to set the hundreds of unordered clay tablets in proper sequence that Charles Vincent created the legend of the ghost in the museum.

For he spent his multi-hundred-hour nights there studying and classifying. Naturally he could not work without light, and naturally he could be seen when he sat still at his studies. But as the slow-moving guards attemped to close in on him, he would move to avoid them, and his speed made him invisible to them. They were a nuisance and had to be discouraged. He belabored them soundly and they became less eager to try to capture him.

His only fear was that they would some time try to shoot him to see if he were ghost or human. He could avoid a seen shot, which would come at no more than two and a half times his own greatest speed. But an unperceived shot could penetrate dangerously, even fatally, before he twisted away from it.

He had fathered legends of other ghosts, that of the Central Library, that of University Library, that of the John Charles Underwood Jr. Technical Library. This plurality of ghosts tended to cancel out each other and bring believers into ridicule. Even those who had seen him as a ghost did not admit that they believed in the ghosts.

HE WENT back to Dr. Mason for his monthly checkup.

"You look terrible," said the Doctor. "Whatever it is, you have changed. If you can afford it, you should take a long rest."

"I have the means," said Charles Vincent, "and that is just what I will do. I'll take a rest for a year or two."

He had begun to begrudge the time that he must spend at the world's pace. From now on he was regarded as a recluse. He was silent and unsociable, for he found it a nuisance to come back to the common state to engage in conversation, and in his special state voices were too slow-pitched to intrude into his consciousnes.

Except that of the man whose face he had never seen.

"You are making very tardy progress," said the man. Once more they were in a dark club. "Those who do not show more progress we cannot use. After all, you are only a vestigial. It is probable that you have very little of the ancient race in you. Fortunately those who do not show progress destroy themselves. You had not imagined that there were only two phases of time, had you?"

"Lately I have come to suspect that there are many more," said Charles Vincent.

"And you understand that only one step cannot succeed?"

"I understand that the life I have been living is in direct violation of all that we know of the laws of mass, momentum, and acceleration, as well as those of conservation of energy, the potential of the human person, the moral compensation, the golden mean, and the capacity of human organs. I know that I cannot multiply energy and experience sixty times without a compensating increase of food intake, and yet I do it. I know that I cannot live on eight minutes' sleep in twenty-four hours, but I do that also. I know that I cannot reasonably crowd four thousand years of experience into one lifetime, yet unreasonably I do not see what will prevent it. But you say I will destroy myself."

"Those who take only the first step destroy themselves."

"And how does one take the second step?"

"At the proper moment you will be given the choice."

"I have the most uncanny feeling that I will refuse the choice."

"From present indications, you will refuse it. You are fastidious."

"You have a smell about you, Old Man without a face. I know now what it is. It is the smell of the pit."

"Are you so slow to learn that?"

"It is the mud from the pit, the same from which the clay tablets were formed, from the old land between the rivers. I've dreamed of the six-fingered hand reaching up from the pit and overshadowing us all. And I have read:

'The people first counted by fives and tens from the number of fingers on their hands. But before the people the—for the reason that they had—counted by sixes and twelves.' But time has left blanks in those tablets."

"Yes, time in one of its manifestations has deftly and with a purpose left those blanks."

"I cannot discover the name of the thing that goes in one of those blanks. Can you?"

"I am part of the name that goes into one of those blanks."

"And you are the man without a face. But why is it that you overshadow and control people? And to what purpose?"

"It will be long before you know those answers."

"When the choice comes to me, it will bear very careful weighing."

AFTER that a chill descended on the life of Charles Vincent, for all that he still possessed his exceptional powers. And he seldom now indulged in pranks.

Except for Jennifer Parkey.

It was unusual that he should be drawn to her. He knew her only slightly in the common world and she was at least fifteen years his senior. But now she appealed to him for her youthful qualities, and all his pranks with her were gentle ones.

For one thing this spinster did not frighten, nor did she begin locking her doors, never having bothered about such things before. He would come behind her and stroke her hair, and she would speak out calmly with that sort of quickening in her voice: "Who are you? Why won't you let me see you? You are a friend, aren't you? Are you a man, or are you something else? If you can caress me, why can't you talk to me? Please let me see you. I promise that I won't hurt you."

It was as though she could not imagine that anything strange would hurt her. Or again when he hugged her or kissed her on the nape, she would call: "You must be a little boy, or very like a little boy, whoever you are. You are good not to break my things when you move about. Come here and let me hold you."

It is only very good people who have no fear at all of the unknown.

When Vincent met Jennifer in the regular world, as he more often now found occasion to do, she looked at him appraisingly, as though she guessed some sort of connection.

She said one day: "I know it is an impolite thing to say, but you do not look well at all. Have you been to a doctor?"

"Several times. But I think it is my doctor who should go to a doctor. He was always given to peculiar remarks, but

now he is becoming a little unsettled."

"If I were your doctor, I believe I would also become a little unsettled. But you should find out what is wrong. You look terrible."

He did not look terrible. He had lost his hair, it is true, but many men lose their hair by thirty, though not perhaps as suddenly as he had. He thought of attributing it to the air resistance. After all, when he was in the state he did stride at some three hundred miles an hour. And enough of that is likely to blow the hair right off your head. And might that not also be the reason for his worsened complexion and the tireder look that appeared in his eyes? But he knew that this was nonsense. He felt no more air pressure when in his accelerated state than when in the normal one.

He had received his summons. He chose not to answer it. He did not want to be presented with the choice; he had no wish to be one with those of the pit. But he had no intention of giving up the great advantage which he now held over nature.

"I will have it both ways," he said. "I am already a contradiction and an impossibility. The proverb was only the early statement of the law of moral compensation: 'You can't take more out of a basket than it holds.' But for a long time I have been in violation of the laws and balances. 'There is no road without a turning,' 'Those who dance will have to pay the fiddler,' 'Everything that goes up comes down.' But are proverbs really universal laws? Certainly. A sound proverb has the force of universal law; it is but another statement of it. But I have contradicted the universal laws. It remains to be seen whether I have contradicted them with impunity. 'Every action has its reaction.' If I refuse to deal with them, I will provoke a strong reaction. The man without a face said that it was always a race between full knowing and destruction. Very well, I will race them for it."

THEY began to persecute him then. He knew that they were in a state as accelerated from his as his was from the normal. To them he was the almost motionless statue, hardly to be told from a dead man. To him they were by their speed both invisible and inaudible. They hurt him and haunted him. But still he would not answer the summons.

When the meeting took place, it was they who had to come to him, and they materialized there in his room, men without faces.

"The choice," said one. "You force us to be so clumsy as to have to voice it."

"I will have no part of you.

You all smell of the pit, of that old mud of the cuneiforms of the land between the rivers, of the people who were before the people."

"It has endured a long time, and we consider it as enduring forever. But the Garden which was in the neighborhood—do you know how long the Garden lasted?"

"I don't know."

"That all happened in a single day, and before nightfall they were outside. You want to throw in with something more permanent, don't you."

"No. I don't believe I do."

"What have you to lose?"

"Only my hope of eternity."

"But you don't believe in that. No man has ever really believed in eternity."

"No man has ever either entirely believed or disbelieved in it," said Charles Vincent.

"At least it cannot be proved," said one of the faceless men. "Nothing is proved until it is over with. And in this case, if it is ever over with, then it is disproved. And all that time would one not be tempted to wonder, 'What if, after all, it ends in the next minute?'"

"I imagine that if we survive the flesh we will receive some sort of surety," said Vincent.

"But you are not sure either of such surviving or receiving. Now *we* have a very close approximation of eternity. When time is multiplied by itself, and that repeated again and again, does that not approximate eternity?"

"I don't believe it does. But I will not be of you. One of you has said that I am too fastidious. So now will you say that you'll destroy me?"

"No. We will only let you be destroyed. By yourself, you cannot win the race with destruction."

After that Charles Vincent somehow felt more mature. He knew he was not really meant to be a six-fingered thing of the pit. He knew that in some way he would have to pay for every minute and hour that he had gained. But what he had gained he would use to the fullest. And whatever could be accomplished by sheer acquisition of human knowledge, he would try to accomplish.

And he now startled Dr. Mason by the medical knowledge he had picked up, the while the doctor amused him by the concern he showed for Vincent. For he felt fine. He was perhaps not as active as he had been, but that was only because he had become dubious of aimless activity. He was still the ghost of the libraries and museums, but was puzzled that the published reports intimated that an old ghost had replaced a young one.

HE NOW paid his mystic visits to Jennifer Parkey less often. For he was always

dismayed to hear her exclaim to him in his ghostly form: "Your touch is so changed. You poor thing! Is there anything at all I can do to help you?"

He decided that somehow she was too immature to understand him, though he was still fond of her. He transferred his affections to Mrs. Milly Maltby, a widow at least thiry years his senior. Yet here it was a sort of girlishness in her that appealed to him. She was a woman of sharp wit and real affection, and she also accepted his visitations without fear, following a little initial panic.

They played games, writing games, for they communicated by writing. She would scribble a line, then hold the paper up in the air whence he would cause it to vanish into his sphere. He would return it in half a minute, or half a second by her time, with his retort. He had the advantage of her in time with greatly more opportunity to think up responses, but she had the advantage over him in natural wit and was hard to top.

They also played checkers, and he often had to retire apart and read a chapter of a book on the art between moves, and even so she often beat him; for native talent is likely to be a match for accumulated lore and codified procedure.

But to Milly also he was unfaithful in his fashion, being now interested (he no longer became enamored or entranced) in a Mrs. Roberts, a great-grandmother who was his elder by at least fifty years. He had read all the data extant on the attraction of the old for the young, but he still could not explain his successive attachments. He decided that these three examples were enough to establish a universal law: that a woman is simply not afraid of a ghost, though he touches her and is invisible, and writes her notes without hands. It is possible that amorous spirits have known this for a long time, but Charles Vincent had made the discovery himself independently.

When enough knowledge is accumulated on any subject, the pattern will sometimes emerge suddenly, like a form in a picture revealed where before it was not seen. And when enough knowledge is accumulated on all subjects, is there not a chance that a pattern governing all subjects will emerge?

Charles Vincent was caught up in one last enthusiasm. On a long vigil, as he consulted source after source and sorted them in his mind, it seemed that the pattern was coming out clearly and simply, for all its amazing complexity of detail.

"I know everything that they know in the pit, and I

know a secret that they do not know. I have not lost the race —I have won it. I can defeat them at the point where they believe themselves invulnerable. If controlled hereafter, we need at least not be controlled by them. It is all falling together now. I have found the final truth, and it is they who have lost the race. I hold the key. I will now be able to enjoy the advantage without paying the ultimate price of defeat and destruction, or of collaboration with them.

"Now I have only to implement my knowledge, to publish the fact, and one shadow at least will be lifted from mankind. I will do it at once. Well, nearly at once. It is almost dawn in the normal world. I will sit here a very little while and rest. Then I will go out and begin to make contact with the proper persons for the disposition of this thing. But first I will sit here a little while and rest."

And he died quietly in his chair as he sat there.

DR. MASON made an entry in his private journal: "Charles Vincent, a completely authenticated case of premature aging, one of the most clear-cut in all gerontology. This man was known to me for years, and I here aver that as of one year ago he was of normal appearance and physical state, and that his chronology is also correct, I having also known his father. I examined the subject during the period of his illness, and there is no question at all of his identity, which has also been established for the record by fingerprinting and other means. I aver that Charles Vincent at the age of thirty is dead of old age, having the appearance and organic condition of a man of ninety."

Then the doctor began to make another note: "As in two other cases of my own observation, the illness was accompanied by a certain delusion and series of dreams, so nearly identical in the three men as to be almost unbelievable. And for the record, and no doubt to the prejudice of my own reputation, I will set down the report of them here."

But when Dr. Mason had written that, he thought about it for a while.

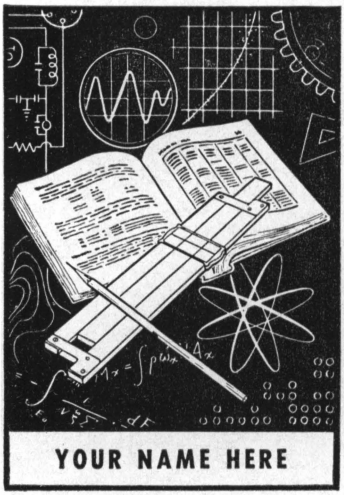
"No, I will do no such thing," he said, and he struck out the last lines he had written. "It is best to let sleeping dragons lie."

And somewhere the faceless men with the smell of the pit on them smiled to themselves in quiet irony.

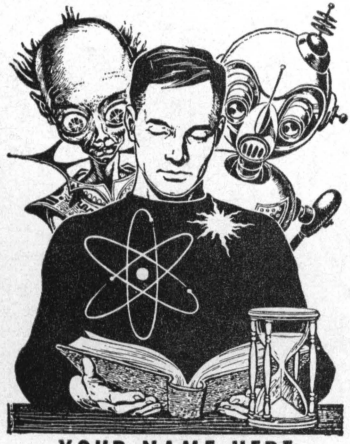
END

The BEMs in your neighborhood

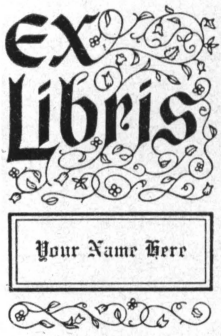
won't run off with your books if you put inside the front cover of each book... a gummed bookplate with your name printed on it!



No. GF-614 by Emsh



No. GF-612 by Emsh



No. GM-12 by Cullen Rapp

No. GX-57 by Lynd Ward

FINAGLE SAYS—

The umpteenth corollary of Finagle's General Law of Dynamic Negatives says:

"No books are ever lost by loaning except ones you particularly want to keep."

100 for $4; 200, $6; 300, $8
with owner's name imprinted
All Postpaid. Add state sales tax, if any.

ACTUAL SIZE, all designs, 3x4 inches

The designs shown above are the only ones we offer!

Order from IF MAGAZINE 421 Hudson Street, New York 14, N.Y.

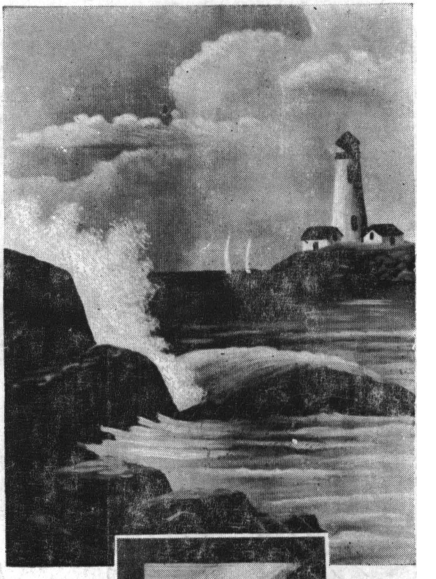
AT LAST!

You can paint an original picture like this, using real artists' oil paints... the

Vis-A-Lens

Trade Mark

(overlay) way



JUST AS A TEACHER by your side, this entirely new and original method shows you in actual size and color how and what to do. You compare your progress, step-by-step, with the easy-to-follow VIS-A-LENS, and before you realize it, you are actually painting.

A choice of subjects available—get yours now—

Price includes Vis-A-Lens, 12x16 inch Art Board, 6 tubes Oil Paint, Oil, Turpentine, 2 Brushes, 16 page Instruction Book.

only 4.95

VIS-A-LENS is sold by Aldens, Montgomery Ward, Sears, Roebuck & Co. and leading department stores, coast to coast. If your local stores do not have it, ask them to order an assortment. Address inquiries to:

Vis-a-lens, Inc., 530 E. Bainbridge St., Elizabethtown, Penna.