

WORLDS OF

AUGUST 1967 • 60¢



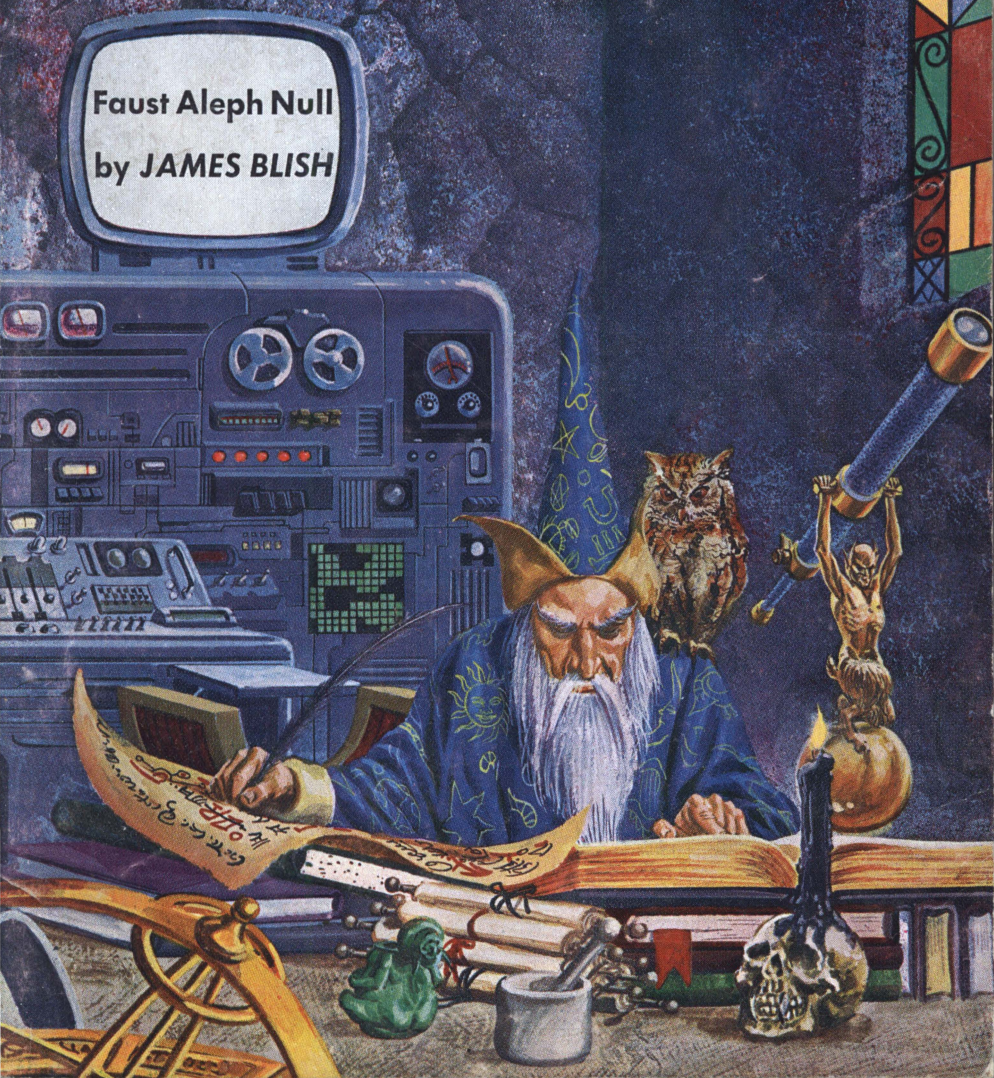
SCIENCE FICTION

combined with

WORLDS OF TOMORROW

The Age of Science Versus Sorcery! A Terrifying New Novel

Faust Aleph Null
by JAMES BLISH



volume 1 NUMBER 1

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WORLDS OF

AUGUST, 1967
Vol. 17, No. 8
ISSUE 117



SCIENCE FICTION

**ALL NEW
STORIES**

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NOVELETTES

CLEAR AS MUD **32**

by Keith Laumer

THE WINGED HELMET **57**

by Fred Saberhagen

SERIALS

FAUST ALEPH-NUL **6**

by James Blish

THE FELLE **127**

by Philip José Farmer

SHORT STORIES

THE TROUBLE WITH VEGANS **25**

by Roger Deeley

PAINT 'EM GREEN **101**

by Burt K. Filer

FEATURES

EDITORIAL **4**

by Frederik Pohl

FAN INTO PRO **52**

by Lin Carter

WHEN WOMEN RULE **111**

by Sam Moskowitz

HUE AND CRY **160**

Cover by MORROW from FAUST ALEPH-NUL

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NO MORE TOMORROWS

With this issue we've combined *Worlds of Tomorrow* with *If* — and, as you've noticed, raised the price of *If* to 60c.

We don't suppose there's much need to explain the rise in price, because we've all got pretty used to the fact that everything eternally costs more. (But you can avoid this particular price rise by subscribing now at the old rates — see ad elsewhere in this issue.) As long as the price had to go up anyway, we've taken this opportunity of bringing into *If* some of the most popular features from *Worlds of Tomorrow* — Philip Jose Farmer's *Riverworld* stories, Sam Moskowitz's articles and so on. We think *If* — which, as you know, already holds the Hugo as the world's leading science-fiction magazine — will be even better for the change

But *Worlds of Tomorrow*, alas, is with us no more.

The funny thing about *Worlds of Tomorrow* is that it seemed to have every chance of surviving. Magazine publishing has become a chancy sort of business in the past decade or so, and the mortality tables for new publications are alarming. If you look at the circulation statements for even the titans of the field — *Saturday Evening Post*, *Life*, you name it — you can see the change. Where once a big slick magazine expected to sell half its copies on the newsstands and half by subscription, now 90% or

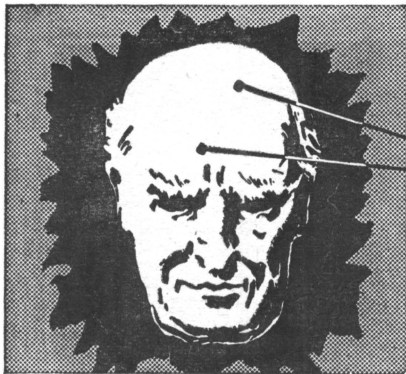
more go by subscription. This isn't because subscription sales are more profitable; quite the reverse. In fact, the figures are rather astonishing: a big slick magazine whose single-copy price amounts to, say, \$10 in a year will happily sell you a subscription for half that — and will pay \$8 or \$9 in list rental and mailing cost to get you to send in that five-dollar check! The freight is paid by advertising, of course.

For nearly every magazine, though, the newsstand sales — the copies are bought by people like ourselves, browsing over the stacks in the corner drug store and buying what looks like it would be interesting to read — are harder and harder to come by.

Worlds of Tomorrow, in its early issues, had a great deal of publicity, a friendly response from readers and a good sale — where it got on the stands at all. But that was the catch. Even after four years, it simply was not getting out in some of the best parts of the country.

Lacking the advertising subsidy that permits a big slick to lose money on every copy it sells and still come up smiling, the effort to stay afloat with a limited distribution was too precarious to maintain. So — now we have *If*, enhanced with some of the best features of *Worlds of Tomorrow*, and *Galaxy*; and we'll just concentrate on continuing to make them better and better!

— THE EDITOR



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FAUST

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by JAMES BLISH

Illustrated by Morrow

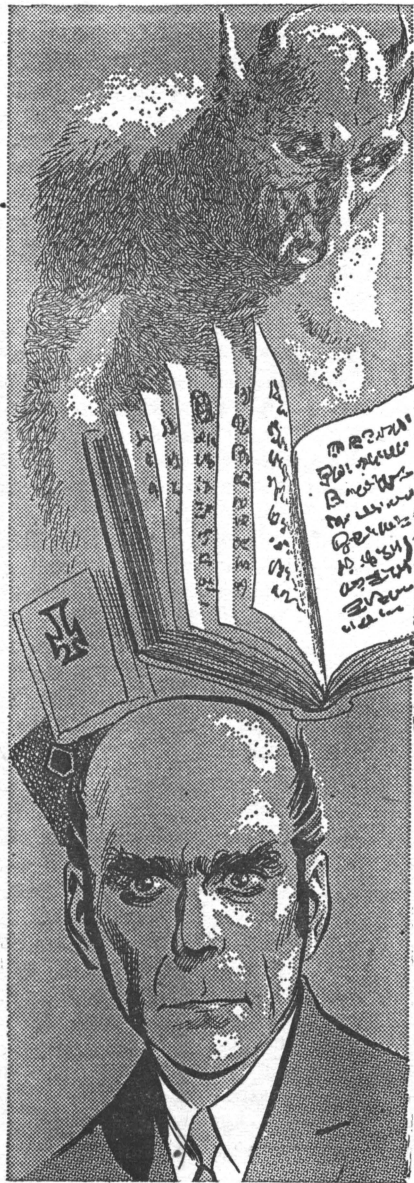
*There's no such thing as sorcery.
But what was it, then, that turned
tears to gold and destroyed lives?*

I

The magician said, "No, I can't help you to persuade a woman. Should you want her raped, I can arrange that. If you want to rape her yourself, I can arrange that too, with more difficulty — possibly more than you'd have to exert on

your own hook. But I can't supply you with any philtres or formulae. My specialty is crimes of violence. Chiefly, murder."

Baines shot a sidelong glance at his special assistant, Jack Ginsberg, who as usual wore no expression whatsoever and had not a crease out of true. It was nice to be able to



trust someone. Baines said: "You're very frank."

“No trade secrets? Arcane lore, and so on?”

weren't, well, computers could break them in a hurry."

Most of these generalities were familiar stuff to Baines, as Ware doubtless knew. Baines suspected the magician of offering them in order to allow time for himself to be studied by the client. This suspicion crystallized promptly as a swinging door to the left of Ware's huge desk opened silently, and a short-skirted blonde girl in a pageboy coiffure came in with a letter on a small silver tray.

"Excuse me," Ware said, taking the tray. "We wouldn't have been interrupted if this weren't important." The envelope crackled expensively in his hands as he opened it.

Baines watched the girl go out — a moving object, to be sure, but except that she reminded him vaguely of someone else, nothing at all extraordinary — and then went openly about inspecting Ware. As usual, he started with the man's chosen surroundings.

The magician's office, brilliant in the afternoon sunlight, might have been the book-lined study of any doctor or lawyer, except that the room and the furniture were outsize. That said very little about Ware, for the house was a rented cliffside palazzo. There were bigger ones available in Positano had Ware been interested in still higher ceilings and worse acoustics. Though most of the books looked old, the office was no mustier than, say the library of Merton College, and it contained far fewer positively ancient instruments. The only

trace in it which might have been attributable to magic was a faint smell of mixed incenses which the Tyrrhenian air coming in through the opened windows could not entirely dispell; but it was so slight that the nose soon tired of trying to detect it. Besides, it was hardly diagnostic by itself. Small Italian churches, for instance, also smelled like that. So did the drawing rooms of Egyptian police chiefs.

Ware himself was remarkable, but with only a single exception, only in the sense that all men are unique to the eye of the born captain. A small, spare man he was, dressed in natural Irish tweeds, a French-cuffed shirt linked with what looked like ordinary steel, a narrow gray silk four-in-hand tie with a single very small sapphire chessman — a rook — tacked to it. His leanness seemed to be held together with cables. Baines was sure that he was physically strong, despite a marked pallor, and that his belt size had not changed since he had been in high school.

His present apparent age was deceptive. His face was seamed, and his bushy gray eyebrows now only slightly suggested that he had once been red-haired. His hair proper could not, for — herein lay his one marked oddity — he was tonsured, like a monk, blue veins crawling across his bare white scalp as across the papery back of his hands. An innocent bystander might have taken him to be in his late sixties. Baines knew him to be exactly his own age, which was forty-eight. Black magic, not surprising-

ly, was obviously a wearing profession; cerebrotonic types like Ware, as Baines had often observed of the scientists who worked for Consolidated Warfare Service (div. A. O. LeFebre et Cie.), ordinarily look about forty-five from a real age of thirty until their hair turns white, if a heart attack doesn't knock them off in the interim.

The parchment crackled, and Jack Ginsberg unobtrusively touched his dispatch case, setting going again a tape recorder back in Rome. Baines thought Ware saw this, but chose to take no notice. The magician said:

"Of course, it's also faster if my clients are equally frank with me."

"I should think you'd know all about me by now," Baines said. He felt an inner admiration. The ability to pick up an interrupted conversation exactly where it had been left off is rare in a man. Women do it easily, but seldom to any purpose.

"Oh, Dun and Bradstreet," Ware said, "newspaper morgues, and of course the grapevine — I have all that, naturally. But I'll still need to ask some questions."

"Why not read my mind?"

"Because it's more work than it's worth. I mean your excellent mind no disrespect, Mr. Baines. But one thing you must understand is that magic is hard work. I don't use it out of laziness, I am not a lazy man, but by the same token I do take the easier ways of getting what I want if easier ways are available."

"You've lost me."

"An example, then. All magic — I repeat, *all* magic, with no exceptions whatsoever → depends upon

the control of demons. By demons I mean specifically fallen angels; no lesser class can do a thing for you. Now, I know one such whose Earthly form includes a long tongue. You may find the notion comic."

"Not exactly."

"Let that pass for now. In any event, this is also a great prince and president, whose apparition would cost me three days of work and two weeks of subsequent exhaustion. Shall I call him up to lick stamps for me?"

"I see the point," Baines said. "All right, ask your questions."

"Thank you. Who sent you to me?"

“A medium in Bel Air — Los Angeles. She attempted to blackmail me, so nearly successfully that I concluded that she did have some real talent and would know somebody who had more. I threatened her life, and she broke.”

Ware was taking notes. "I see. And she sent you to the Rosicrucians?"

"She tried, but I already knew that dodge. She sent me to Monte Albano."

"Ah. That surprises me, a little. I wouldn't have thought that you'd have any need of treasure-finders."

"I do and I don't," Baines said.

"I'll explain that too, but a little later, if you don't mind. Primarily I wanted someone in your specialty — murder — and of course the white monks were of no use there. I didn't even broach the subject with them. Frankly, I only wanted to test your reputation, of which

I'd had hints; I too can use newspaper morgues. Their horror when I mentioned you was enough to convince me that I ought to talk to you, at least."

"Sensible. Then you don't really believe in magic yet — only in ESP or some such nonsense."

"I'm not," Baines said guardedly, "a religious man."

"Precisely put. Hence, you want a demonstration. Did you bring with you the mirror I mentioned on the phone to your assistant?"

Silently, — Jack took from his inside jacket pocket a waxed-paper envelope, from which he in turn removed a lady's hand-mirror sealed in glassine. He handed it to Baines, who broke the seal.

"Good. Look in it."

Out of the corners of Baines' eyes, two slow thick tears of dark venous blood were crawling down beside his nose. He lowered the mirror and stared at Ware.

"Hypnotism," he said, quite steadily. "I had hoped for better."

"Wipe them off," Ware said, unruffled.

Baines pulled out his immaculate monogrammed handkerchief. On the white-on-white fabric, the red stains turned slowly into butter-yellow gold.

"I suggest you take those to a government metallurgist tomorrow," Ware said. "I could hardly have hypnotized him. Now perhaps we might get down to business."

"I thought you said —"

"— that even the simplest trick requires a demon. So I did, and I meant it. He is sitting at your back

now, Mr. Baines, and he will be there until day after tomorrow at this hour. Remember that: day after tomorrow. It will cost me dearly to have turned this little piece of silliness, but I'm used to having to do such things for a skeptical client — and it will be included in my bill. Now, if you please, Mr. Baines, what *do* you want?"

Baines handed the handkerchief to Jack, who folded it carefully and put it back in its waxed-paper wrapper. "I," Baines said, "of course want someone killed. Tracelessly."

"Of course; but who?"

"I'll tell you that in a minute. First of all, do you exercise any scruples?"

"Quite a few," Ware said. "For instance, I don't kill my friends, not for any client. And possibly I might balk at certain strangers. However, in general, I do have strangers sent for, on a regular scale of charges."

"Then we had better explore the possibilities," Baines said. "I've got an ex-wife who's a gross inconvenience to me. Do you balk at that?"

"Has she any children — by you or anybody else?"

"No, none at all."

"In that case, there's no problem. For that kind of job, my standard fee is fifteen thousand dollars, flat."

Despite himself, Baines stared in astonishment. "Is that all?" he said at last.

"That's all. I suspect that I'm almost as wealthy as you are, Mr.

Baines. After all, I can find treasure as handily as the white monks can — indeed, a good deal better. I use these alimony cases to keep my name before the public. Financially they're a loss to me."

"What kinds of fees are you interested in?"

"I begin to exert myself slightly at about five million."

If this man was a charlatan, he was a grandiose one. Baines said, "Let's stick to the alimony case for the moment. Or rather, suppose I don't care about the alimony, as in fact I don't. Instead, I might not only want her dead, but I might want her to die badly. To suffer."

"I don't charge extra for that."

"Why not?"

"Mr. Baines," Ware said patiently, "I remind you, please, that I myself am not a killer. I merely summon and direct the agent. I think it very likely — in fact, it is beyond doubt — that any patient I have sent for dies in an access of horror and agony beyond your power to imagine, or even mine. But you did specify that you wanted your murder done 'tracelessly,' which obviously means that I must have no unusual marks left on the patient. I prefer it that way myself. How then could I prove suffering if you asked for it, in a way inarguable enough to charge you extra for it?"

"Or, look at the other side of the shield, Mr. Baines. Every now and then, an unusual divorce client asks that the ex-consort be carried away painlessly, even sweetly, out of some residue of sentiment. I *could* collect an extra fee for that, on a con-

tingent basis, that is, if the body turns out to show no overt marks of disease or violence. But my agents are demons. Sweetness is not a trait they can be compelled to exhibit; so I never accept that kind of condition from a client, either. Death is what you pay for, and death is what you get. The circumstances are up to the agent, and I don't offer my clients anything that I know I can't deliver."

"All right, I'm answered," Baines said. "Forget Dolores — actually she's only a minor nuisance, and only one of several, for that matter. Now let's talk about the other end of the spectrum. Suppose instead that I should ask you to . . . send for . . . a great political figure. Say, the governor of California. Or, if he's a friend of yours, pick a similar figure who isn't."

Ware nodded. "He'll do well enough. But you'll recall that I asked you about children. Had you really turned out to have been an alimony case, I should next have asked you about surviving relatives. My fees rise in direct proportion to the numbers and kinds of people a given death is likely to affect. This is partly what you call scruples, and partly a species of self-defense. Now in the case of a reigning governor, I would charge you one dollar for every vote he got when he was last elected. Plus expenses, of course."

Baines whistled in admiration. "You're the first man I've ever met who's worked out a system to make scruples pay. And I can see why you don't care about alimony."

cases. Some day, Mr. Ware — ”

“Doctor Ware, please. I am a Doctor of Theology.”

“Sorry. I only meant to say that some day I’ll ask you why you want so much money; you asthenics seldom can think of any good use for it. In the meantime, however, you’re hired. Is it all payable in advance?”

“The expenses are payable in advance; the fee is C.O.D. As you’ll realize once you stop to think about it, Mr. Baines — ”

“Dr. Baines. I am an LL.D.”

“Apologies in exchange. I want you to realize, after these courtesies, that I have never, never been bilked.”

Baines thought about what was supposed to be at his back until day after tomorrow. Pending the test of the golden tears on the handkerchief, he was willing to believe that he should not try to cheat Ware. Actually, he had never planned to.

“Good,” he said, getting up. “By the same token, we don’t need a contract. I agree to your terms.”

“But what for?”

“Oh,” Baines said, “we can use the Governor of California for a starter. Jack here will iron out any remaining details with you; I have to get back to Rome by tonight.”

“You did say, ‘For a starter?’ ”

Baines nodded shortly. Ware, also rising, said: “Very well. I shall ask no questions. But in fairness, Mr. Baines, I should warn you that on your next commission of this kind, I shall ask you what you want.”

“By that time,” Baines said, holding his excitement tightly bottled,

“we’ll have to exchange such confidences. Oh, Dr. Ware; will the, uh, demon on my back go away by itself when the time’s up, or must I see you again to get it taken off?”

“It isn’t on your back,” Ware said. “And it will go away by itself. Marlowe to the contrary, misery does not love company.”

Baring his teeth, Baines said, “We’ll see about that.”

II

For a moment, Jack Ginsberg felt the same soon-to-be-brief strangeness of the man who does not really know what is going on and hence thinks he might be about to be fired. It was as though something had swallowed him by mistake, and — quite without malice — was about to throw him up again.

While he waited for the monster’s nausea to settle out, Jack went through his rituals, stroking his cheeks for stubble, resettling his creases, running through last week’s accounts, and thinking above all, as he usually did most of all in such interims, of what the new girl might look like squatting in her stockings. Nothing special, probably. The reality was almost always hedged around with fleshly inconveniences and piddling little preferences which could flense away at will from the clean vision.

When the chief had left and Ware had come back to his desk, however, Jack was ready for business and thoroughly on top of it. He prided himself upon an absolute self-control.

“Questions?” Ware said.



"A few, Doctor Ware. You mentioned expenses. What expenses?"

"Chiefly travel," Ware said. "I have to see the patient, personally. In the case Doctor Baines posed, that involves a trip to California, which is a vast inconvenience to me, and goes on the bill. It includes air-fare, hotels, meals, other put-of-pocket expenses which I'll itemize when the mission is over. Then there's the question of getting to see the governor. I have colleagues in California, but there's a certain amount of influences I'll have to buy, even with the help of Consolidated Warfare — munitions and magic are circles which don't intersect very effectively. On the whole, I think a draft for ten thousand would be none too large."

All that for magic. Disgusting. But the chief believed in it, at least provisionally. It made Jack feel very queasy.

"That sounds very satisfactory," he said, but he made no move toward the corporate checkbook; he was not about to issue any Valentines to strangers yet, not until there was more love touring about the landscape than he had felt in his crew-cut antennae. "We're naturally a little bit wondering, sir, why all this expense is necessary. We understand that you'd rather not ride a demon when you can fly a jet with less effort —"

"I'm not sure you do," Ware said, "but stop simpering about it and ask me about the money."

"Argh . . . Well, sir, then, just why do you live outside the United States? We know you're still a citizen. And after all, we have freedom

of religion in the States still. Why does the chief have to pay to ship you back home for one job?"

"Because I'm not a common gunman," Ware said. "Because I don't care to pay income taxes, or even report my income to anybody. There are two reasons. For the benefit of your ever-attentive dispatch-case there — since you're a deaf ear if I ever saw one — if I lived in the United States and advertised myself as a magician, I would be charged with fraud. And if I successfully defended myself — proved I was what I said I was — I'd wind up in a gas chamber; if I failed to defend myself, I'd be just one more charlatan. In Europe, I can say I'm a magician and be left alone if I can satisfy my clients; *caveat emptor*. Otherwise, I'd have to be constantly killing off petty politicians and accountants, which isn't worth the work and sooner or later runs into the law of diminishing returns. Now you can turn that thing off."

Aha; there was something wrong with this joker. He was preying upon superstition. As a Reformed Orthodox Agnostic, Jack Ginsberg knew all the ins and outs of that, specially the double-entry sides. He said smoothly:

"I quite understand. But don't you perhaps have almost as much trouble with the Church, here in Italy, as you would with the government back home?"

"No, not under a liberal Pontificate. The modern Church discourages what it calls superstition among its adherents. I haven't encountered

a prelate in decades who believes in the *literal* existence of demons — though of course some of the Orders know better."

"To be sure," Jack said, springing his trap exultantly. "So I think, sir, that you may be overcharging us — and haven't been quite candid with us. If you do indeed control all these great princes and presidents, you could as easily bring the chief a woman as you could bring him a treasure or a murder."

"So I could," the magician said, a little wearily. "I see you've done a little reading. But I explained to Doctor Baines, and I explain again to you, that I specialize only in crimes of violence. Now, Mr. Ginsberg, I think you were about to write me an expense check."

"So I was." But still he hesitated. At last Ware said with delicate politeness:

"Is there some other doubt I could resolve for you, Mr. Ginsberg? I am, after all, a Doctor of Theology. Or perhaps you have a private commission you wish to broach to me?"

"No," Jack said. "No, not exactly."

"I see no reason why you should be shy. It's clear that you like my lamia. And in fact, she's quite free of the nuisances of human women which annoy you —"

"Damn you. I *thought* you read minds! You lied about that too."

"I don't read minds, and I never lie," Ware said. "But I'm adept at reading faces and somatotypes. It saves me a lot of trouble and a lot of unnecessary magic. Do

you want the creature or don't you? I could have her sent to you invisibly if you like."

"No."

"Not invisibly. I'm sorry for you. Well then, my godless and lustless friend, speak up for yourself. What *would* you like? Your business is long since done. Spit it out. What is it?"

For a breathless instant, Jack almost said what it was, but the God in which he no longer believed was at his back. He ~~made~~ out the check and handed it ~~over~~. The girl (no, not a girl), came in and took it away.

"Good-bye," Theron Ware said. Jack had missed the boat ~~again~~.

III

Father F. X. Domenico Bruno Garelli read the letter ~~again~~, hopefully. Father Uccello affected an Augustinian style, after his ~~name~~-saint, full of rare words and out-right neologisms imbedded in medieval syntax. As a stylist Fr. Domenico much preferred Roger Bacon, but that eminent anti-magician, not being a Father of the Church, tempted few imitators — and it was possible that Fr. Domenico had misread him. But no. Involved though the Latin of the letter was, the sense, this time, was all too plain.

Fr. Domenico sighed. The practice of ceremonial magic, at least of the white kind which was the monastery's sole concern, seemed to be becoming increasingly unrewarding. Part of the difficulty, of course, lay in the fact that the

chiefest traditional use (for profit) of white magic was the finding of buried treasure; and after centuries of unremitting practice by centuries of sorcerers black and white, plus the irruption into the field of such modern devices as the mine-detector, there was very little buried treasure left to find. Of late, the troves revealed by those under the governments of OCH and BETHOR — with the former of whom in particular lay the bestowal of "a purse springing with gold" — had increasingly turned out to be underseas, or in places like Fort Knox or a Swiss bank, making the recovery enterprises so colossal and mischancy as to remove all possibility of profit for client and monastery alike.

On the whole, black magicians had an easier time of it — at least in this life; one must never forget, Fr. Domenico reminded himself hastily, that they were also damned eternally. It was as mysterious as it had always been that such infernal spirits as Lucifuge Rofocale should be willing to lend so much power to a mortal whose soul Hell would almost inevitably have won anyhow, considering the character of the average sorcerer, and considering how easily such pacts could be voided at the last instant; and that God would allow such demonic malice to be vented through the sorcerer upon the innocent. But that was simply another version of the Problem of Evil, for which the Church had long had the answer (or the dual answer) of free will and original sin.

It had to be recalled, too, that

even the practice of white or Transcendental magic was officially a mortal sin, for the modern Church held that all trafficking with spirits — including the unfallen, since such dealings inevitably assumed the angels to be demiurges and other Kabbalistic semi-deities — was an abomination, regardless of intent. Once upon a time, it had been recognized that (barring the undertaking of an actual pact) only a man of the highest piety, of the highest purpose, and in the highest state of ritual and spiritual purification could hope to summon and control a demon, let alone an angel; but there had been too many lapses of intent, and then of act. In both practicality and compassion the Church had declared all Theurgy to be anathema, reserving unto itself only one negative aspect of magic — exorcism — and that only under the strictest of canonical limitations.

Monte Albano had a special dispensation, to be sure — partly since the monks had at one time been so spectacularly successful in nourishing the coffers of St. Peter's; partly because the knowledge to be won through the Transcendental rituals might sometimes be said to have nourished the soul of the Rock; and, in small part, because under the rarest of circumstances white magic had been known to prolong the life of the body. But these fountains (to shift the image) were now showing every sign of running dry. Hence the dispensation might be withdrawn at any time — thus closing out the last sanctuary of white magic.

That would leave the field to the black magicians. There were no black sanctuaries, except for the Parisian Brothers of the Left-Hand Way, who were romantics of the school of Eliphas Levi and were more to be pitied for folly than condemned for evil. But of solitary black sorcerers there was still a disconcerting number — though even one would be far too many.

Which brought Fr. Domenico directly back to the problem of the letter.

He sighed, turned away from his lectrum and padded off — the brothers of Monte Albano were discalced — toward the office of the Director, letter in hand. Father Umberto was in (of course he was always *physically* in, like all the rest of them, since the Mount could not be left, once entered, except by the laity and they only by muleback), and Fr. Domenico got to the point directly.

"I've had another impassioned screed from our witch-smeller," he said. "I am beginning to consider, reluctantly, that the matter is at least as serious as he's been saying all along."

"You mean the matter of Theron Ware, I presume."

"Yes, of course. That American gun-maker we saw went directly from the Mount to Ware, as seemed all too likely even at the time. Father Uccello says that there's now every sign of another series of sendings being prepared in Positano."

"I wish you could avoid these alliterations. They make it difficult to discover what you're talking about. I often feel that a lapse

into alliteration or other grammatical trick is a sure sign that the speaker isn't himself quite sure of what he means to say and is trying to blind me to the fact. Never mind. As for the demonolater Ware, we are in no position to interfere with him, whatever he's preparing."

"The style is Father Uccello's. Anyhow, he insists that we *must* interfere. He has been practicing divination — so you can see how seriously *he* takes this, the old purist of Ware and Baines presages some — and he says that his principal, whom he takes great pains *not* to identify, told him that the meeting thing truly monstrous for the world at large. According to his information, all Hell has been waiting for this meeting since the two of them were born."

"I suppose he's sure his principal wasn't in a fact a demon and didn't slip a lie past him, or at least one of their usual brags? As you've just indirectly pointed out, Father Uccello is way out of practice."

Father Domenico spread his hands. "Of course I can't answer that. Though if you wish, Father, I'll try to summon Whatever it was myself, and put the problem to It. But you know how good the chances are that I'll get the wrong one — and how hard it is to ask the right question. The great Governors seem to have no time sense as we understand the term. And as for demons, well, even when compelled they often really don't seem to know what's going on outside their own jurisdictions."

"Quite so," said the Director, who had not himself practiced in many years. He had been greatly talented once, but the loss of gifted experimenters to administrative posts was the curse of all research organizations. "I think it best that you don't jeopardize your own usefulness, and your own soul of course, in calling up some spirit you can't name. Father Uccello in turn ought to know that there's nothing we can do about Ware. Or does he have some proposal?"

"He wants us," Fr. Domenico said in a slightly shaky voice, "to impose an observer on Ware. To send one directly to Positano, someone who'll stick to Ware until we know what the deed is going to be. We're just barely empowered to do this — whereas of course Father Uccello can't. The question is, do we want to?"

"Hmm, hmm," the Director said. "Obviously not. That would bankrupt us — oh, not financially, of course, though it would be difficult enough. But we couldn't afford to send a novice. Or indeed anyone less than the best we have. And after the good Lord only knows how many months in that infernal atmosphere"

The sentence trailed off, as the Director's sentences often did, but Father Domenico no longer had any difficulty in completing them. Obviously the Mount could not afford to have even one of its best operators incapacitated — the word, in fact, was "contaminated" — by prolonged contact with the person and effects of Theron Ware. Similar-

ly, Father Domenico was reasonably certain that the Director would in fact send somebody to Positano. Otherwise he would not have mounted the obvious objections, but simply dismissed the proposal. For all their usual amusement with Father Uccello, both men knew that there were occasions when one had to take him with the utmost seriousness and that this was one of them.

"Nevertheless the matter will need to be explored," the Director resumed after a moment, fingering his beads. "I had better give Ware the usual formal notification. We're not obligated to follow up on it, but"

"Quite," Fr. Domenico said. He put the letter into his scrip and arose. "I'll hear from you, then, when a reply's been received from Ware. I'm glad you agree that the matter is serious."

After another exchange of formalities, he left, head bowed. He also knew well enough whom the Director would send, without any intervention of false modesty to cloud the issue; and he was well aware that he was terrified.

He went directly to his conjuring room, a cluttered tower chamber which no one else could use — for magic is intensely sensitive to the personality of the operator — and still faintly redolent of a scent a little like oil of lavender, a trace of his last use of the room. *Mansit odor, posses scire duisse deam*, he thought, not for the first time; but he had no intention of summoning any Presence now. Instead, he crossed to the chased casket which

contained his 1606 copy — the second edition, but not much corrupted — of the *Enchiridion* of Leo III, that odd collection of prayers and other devices “effectual against all the perils to which every sort and condition of men may be made subject on land, on water, from open and secret enemies, from the bitter bites of wild and rabid beasts, from poisons, from fire, from tempests.” For greatest effectiveness he was instructed to carry the book on his person, but he had seldom judged himself to be in sufficient peril to risk so rare and valuable an object. In any event he did always read at least one page daily, chiefly the *In principio*, a version of the first chapter of the gospel according to St. John.

Now he took the book out and opened it to the Seven Mysterious Orisons, the only section of the work — without prejudice to the efficacy of the rest of it — which probably had indeed proceeded from the hand of the Pope of Charlemagne. Kneeling to face the east. Fr. Domenico, without looking at the page, began the prayer appropriate for Thursday, at the utterance of which, perhaps by no coincidence, it is said that “the demons flee away.”

IV

Considerable business awaited Baines in Rome, all the more pressing because Jack Ginsberg was still out of town. Baines made no special effort to hunt down Jack’s report on what the government metallurgist had said about the golden



tears amid the mass of other papers. For the time being, at least, Baines regarded the report as personal correspondence, and he had a standing rule never even to open personal letters during office hours, whether he was actually in an office or, as now, working out of a hotel room.

Nevertheless, the report came to the surface the second day that he was back to work; and since he also made it a rule never to lose time to the distractions of an unsatisfied curiosity if an easy remedy was to hand, he read it. The tears on the handkerchief were indeed 24-karat gold; worth about eleven cents, taken together, on the current market, but to Baines representing an enormous investment (or, looked at another way, a potential investment in enormity.)

He put it aside with satisfaction and promptly forgot about it. Or very nearly. Investments in enormity were his stock in trade, though of late, he thought again with cold anger, they had been paying less and less — hence his interest in Ware, which the other directors of Consolidated Warfare Service would have considered simple insanity. But after all, if the business was no longer satisfying, it was only natural to seek analogous satisfactions somewhere else. An insane man, in Baines' view, would be one who tried to substitute some pleasure — women, philanthropy, art collecting, golf — which offered no cognate satisfaction at all. Baines was ardent about his trade, which was destruction. Golf could no more have sub-

limated that passion than it could have diluted that of a painter or a lecher.

The current fact, which had to be faced and dealt with, was that nuclear weapons had almost totally spoiled the munitions business. Oh, there was still a thriving trade to be drummed up selling small arms to a few small new nations — small arms being defined arbitrarily as anything up to the size of a submarine. Hydrogen fusion and the ballistic missile made the really major achievements of the art, the lubrication of the twenty-year cycle of world wars, entirely too obliterative and self-defeating. These days, Baines kind of diplomacy consisted chiefly in the fanning of brush-fires and civil wars. Even this was a delicate business. The nationalism game was increasingly an exceedingly confused affair, in which one could never be quite sure whether some emergent African state, with a population about the size of Maplewood, N.J., would not turn out to be of absorbing interest to one or more of the nuclear powers. (Some day, of course, they would all be nuclear powers, and then the art would become as formalized and minor as flower-arranging.)

The very delicacy of this kind of operation had its satisfactions, in a way, and Baines was good at it. In addition, Consolidated Warfare Service had several thousand man-years of accumulated experience at this sort of thing upon which he could call. One of the CW's chiefest specialists was in Rome with him

now: Dr. Adolph Hess, famous as the designer of that peculiar all-purpose vehicle called the Hessicopter, but of interest in the present negotiations instead as the inventor of something nobody was supposed to have heard of: the land torpedo, a rapidly burrowing device which might show up, commendably anonymous, under any installation within two hundred miles of its launching tunnel, geology permitting. Baines had guessed that it might be especially attractive to at least one of the combatants in the Yemeni insurrection. He had proven to be so right that he was now trying hard not to have to dicker with all four of them. This was all the more difficult because, although the two putative Yemeni factions accounted for very little, Nasser was nearly as shrewd as Baines was, and Faisal inarguably a good deal shrewder.

Nevertheless, Baines was not essentially a miniaturist, and he was well aware of it. He had recognized the transformation impending in the trade early on, in fact with the publication in 1950 by the U.S. Government Printing Office of a volume titled *The Effects of Atomic Weapons*, and as soon as possible had engaged the services of a private firm called the Mamaroneck Research Institute. This was essentially a brainstorming organization, started by an alumnus of the RAND Corporation, which specialized in imagining possible political and military confrontations and their possible outcomes, some of

them so outre as to require the subcontracting of free-lance science-fiction writers. From the files of CWS and other sources, Baines fed Mamaroneck materials for its computers, some of which material would have considerably shaken the governments who thought they were sitting on it. In return, Mamaroneck fed Baines long, neatly lettered and Xeroxed reports bearing such titles as "Short- and Long-Term Probabilities Consequent to an Israeli Blockade of the Faeroe Islands."

Baines winnowed out the most obviously absurd of these, but with a care which was the very opposite of conservatism, for some of the strangest proposals could turn out upon second look to be not absurd at all. Those which offered the best combination of surface absurdity with hidden plausibility, he set out to translate into real situations. Hence there was really nothing illogical or even out of character in his interest in Theron Ware, for Baines, too, practiced what was literally an occult art in which the man on the street didn't believe.

The buzzer sounded twice; Ginsberg was back. Baines returned the signal and the door swung open.

"Rogan's dead," Jack said without preamble.

"That was fast. I thought it was going to take Ware a week after he got back from the States."

"It's been a week," Jack reminded him.

"Hmm? So it has. Waiting around for these Ayrabs to get off the dime is hard on the time sense. Well, well. Details?"

"Only what's come over the Reuters ticker, so far. Started as pneumonia, ended as cor pulmonale — heart failure from too much coughing. It appears that he had a small mitral murmur for years. Only the family knew about, and his physicians assured them that it wasn't dangerous if he didn't try to run a four-minute mile or something like that. Now the guessing is that the last campaign put a strain on it, and the pneumonia did the rest."

"Very clean," Baines said.

He thought about the matter for a while. He had borne the late governor of California no ill will. He had never met the man, nor had any business conflicts with him and in fact had rather admired his brand of medium-right-wing politics, which had been of the articulate but inoffensive sort expectable of an ex-account executive for a San Francisco advertising agency specializing in the touting of cold breakfast cereals. Indeed, Baines recalled suddenly from the file biography, Rogan had been a fraternity brother of his.

Nevertheless he was pleased. Ware had done the job — Baines was not in the smallest doubt that Ware should have the credit — with great nicety. After one more such trial run, simply to rule out all possibility of coincidence, he should be ready to tackle something larger; possibly, the biggest job of them all.

Baines wondered how it had been done. Was it possible that a demon could appear to a victim in the form of a pneumococcus? If so, what about the problem of reproduction? Well, there had been the appearances

all over medieval Europe of fragments of the True Cross, in numbers quantitatively sufficient to stock a large lumberyard. Contemporary clerical apologists had called that Miraculous Multiplication, which had always seemed to Baines to be a classic example of rationalizing away the obvious; but since magic was real, maybe Miraculous Multiplication was, too.

These, however, were merely details of technique, in which he made a practice of taking no interest. That kind of thing was for hirelings. Still, it wouldn't hurt to have somebody in the organization who did know something about the technicalities. It was often dangerous to depend solely on outside experts.

"Make out a check for Ware," he told Jack. "From my personal account. Call it a consultation fee — medical, preferably. When you send it to him, set up a date for another visit — let's see — as soon as I get back from Riyadh. I'll take up all this other business with you in about half an hour. Send Hess in, but wait outside."

Jack nodded and left. A moment later, Hess entered silently. He was a tall, bony man with a slight pod, bushy eyebrows, a bald spot in the back, pepper-and-salt hair and a narrow jaw which made his face look nearly triangular.

"Any interest in sorcery, Adolph? Personal, I mean?"

"Sorcery? I know something about it. For all the nonsense in-

volved, it was highly important in the history of science, particularly the alchemical side, and the astrological."

"I'm not interested in either of those. I'm talking of black magic.

"Then, no, I don't know much about it," Hess said.

"Well, you're about to learn. We're going to visit an authentic sorcerer in about two weeks. I want you to study his methods."

"Are you pulling my leg?" Hess said. "No, you never do that. Are we going into the business of exposing charlatans, then? I'm not sure I'm the best man for that, Baines. A professional stage magician — a Houdini type — would be more apt to catch a faker than I."

"No, that's not the issue at all. I'm going to ask this man to do some work for me, in his own line, and I need a close observer to see what he does — not to see through it, but to form an accurate impression of the procedures, in case something should go sour with the relationship later on."

"But — well, if you say so, Baines. It does seem rather a waste of time."

"Not to me," Baines said. "While you're waiting to talk to the Saudis with me, read up on the subject. By the end of a year, I want you to know as much about the subject as an expert. The man himself told me that that's possible even for me, so it shouldn't tax you any."

"It's not likely to tax my brains much," Hess said drily, "but it may be a considerable tax on by patience. However, you're the boss."

"Right. Get on it."

Hess nodded distantly to Jack as he went out. The two men did not like each other much, in part, Baines sometimes thought, because in some ways they were much alike. When the door had closed behind the scientist, Jack produced from his pocket the waxed-paper envelope which had contained, and obviously still contained, the handkerchief bearing the two transmuted tears.

"I don't need that," Baines said. "I've got your report. Throw that thing away; I don't want anybody asking what it means."

"I will," Jack said. "But first, you'll remember that Ware said that the demon would leave you after two days."

"Sure. Why?"

"Look at this."

Jack took out the handkerchief and spread it on Baines' blotter.

On the Irish linen, where the golden tears had been, were now two dull, inarguable smears of lead.

V

By some untraceable miscalculation, Baines' party arrived in Riyadh precisely at the beginning of Ramadan, during which the Arabs fasted all day and were consequently in too short a temper to do business with, which was followed, after nine solid days, by a three-day feast during which they were too stuporous to do business with. Once negotiations were properly opened, however, they took no more than the two weeks Baines anticipated.

Since the Moslem calendar is lunar, Ramadan is a moveable festival,

which this year fell close to Christmas. Baines half suspected that Theron Ware would refuse to see him in so inauspicious a season for servants of Satan, but Ware made no objection, remarking only (by post), "December 25th is a celebration of great antiquity."

Hess, who had been reading dutifully, interpreted Ware to mean that Christ had not actually been born on that date — "though in this universe of discourse I can't see what difference that makes," he said. "If the word 'superstition' has any of its old meaning left at all by now, it means that the sign has come to replace the thing. Or in other words, that facts come to mean what we say they mean."

"Call it an observer effect," Baines suggested, not entirely joking. He was not disposed to argue the point with either of them. Ware would see him, that's what counted.

But if the season was no apparent inconvenience to Ware, it was a considerable one to Fr. Domenico, who at first flatly refused to celebrate it in the very maw of Hell. He was pressed at length and from both sides by the Director and Fr. Ucello.

Mustering all his humility, obedience and resignation — his courage seemed to have evaporated — he trudged forth from the monastery, dispensed for sandals and mounted a mule, the *Enchiridion* of Leo III swinging from his neck under his cassock in a new leather bag, and a selection of his thaumaturgic tools, newly exorcised, asperged, fumigated and wrapped in silken cloths, in

a satchel balanced carefully on the mule's neck. It was a hushed leave-taking — all the more so in its lack of any formalities or even witnesses, for only the Director knew why he was going, and he had been restrained with difficulty from bruiting it about that Fr. Domenico had been expelled, to make a cover-story.

The practical effect of both delays was that Fr. Domenico and Baines' party arrived at Ware's palazzo on the same day, in the midst of the only snowstorm Positano had seen in seven years. As a spiritual courtesy — for protocol was all-important in such matters, otherwise neither monk nor sorcerer would have dared to confront the other — Fr. Domenico was received first, briefly but punctiliously; but as a client, Baines (and his crew, in descending order) got the best quarters.

As was customary in southern Italy at this time, three masked kings came to the gate of the palazzo to bring and ask presents for the children and the Child; but there were no children there, and the mummers were turned away, baffled and resentful (for the rich American, who was said to be writing a book about the frescoes of Pompeii, had previously shown himself open-handed), but addly grateful too; it was a cold night, and the lights in the palazzo were of a grim and distant color.

Then the gates closed. The principals had gathered and were in their places; and the stage was set.

TO BE CONTINUED

The Trouble With Vegans

by ROGER DEELEY

*Vegans? All the galaxy knows
they're lovable rogues — very
lovable, and indubitable rogues!*

To start with, Vegans are altogether the wrong shape. We had built the Autofrisk on lines that would enable it to fit every one of the numerous life-forms of the Galaxy. We thought. The trouble with Vegans is that they're constructed back to front, inside out, upside down, take away the number you first thought of, with everything possibly wrong that could possibly be wrong. Imagine the most unlikely and improbable shape you can, and that's a Vegan. The first time an Autofrisk was ever tried on one had turned out to be acutely embarrassing to the commander of the Vegan merchant-cruiser, and as a result Terran-Vegan relations for some time were extremely strained — not to mention a certain vitally important part of the commander's anatomy. And although many had since tried to perfect one, there was no machine of any size, shape or

specification which could cater to the Vegans' almost liquid flowing contours.

Which might not have mattered. Except that they were compulsive smugglers.

They did it when it wasn't even particularly useful, let alone necessary. It was something in their past history which accounted for this; they had built their vast empire of trade and commerce through good old-fashioned crooked methods, and the habit had now become long inherent. At first most members of the Galactic Federation had turned a blind eye. Vegans were friendly, charming, the most likeable of all the races of the Galaxy, you just couldn't even remotely reprimand them. But then some contraband goods slipped skillfully into the major spaceport of Wlaxtac had resulted in every single inhabitant of that system breaking out in a rash of

green spots. Luckily that was not serious, but the point was that it could have been. One of the biggest single dangers in the galaxy was that some bacteria considered minor and unimportant in one system should possibly prove dangerous or even deadly in another. Hence the demand by the Praesidium for tighter customs regulations on every planet. Hence the Autofrisk here in Newyorkport.

And then dammit the Vegans didn't fit. They could hide any number of things in kangaroo-like pouches scattered haphazardly about their persons, and short of starting a diplomatic incident we could not trace them. They were quite willing, even eager, to be searched — that added to the fun of the game for them — but it was a waste of time and effort. And temper. Since the Sterilobacteria Room in every spaceport got rid of the danger of infection from goods actually carried on the person, this state of affairs was accepted with rueful equanimity by most customs officers. The loss of revenue from the goods on a Vegan's person you might as well accept. A Vegan ship was another matter altogether.

So here I was, on a bright May morning which was far too good for a situation like this, standing in the control room as the Vegan merchantman was talked down.

Perhaps I should explain that I am the Chief Customs Officer of the Newyorkport Spacecenter. At least, I was. The reason I'm not to this day is entirely the fault of that particular merchantman, and of her

captain, Llant'Gornu Gra-Oud, a man whose sheer animal cunning would have made Machiavelli creep off in shame to go check up on his textbooks. Customs officers throughout the galaxy manage to maintain a pretty good average rate of about eighty to eighty-five per cent success in preventing Vegan smuggling, so it needn't necessarily have been too shameful for me if Commander Llant'Gornu had merely outwitted me. What cost me my pride as well as my job was the way he did it. And the results.

As soon as the ship had docked and been radiation-checked I moved to make an immediate inspection. I had no reason to suspect anything out of the usual, allowing for the fact that Vegans seldom do anything that isn't out of the usual, but I was determined to make a good impression on Lt. Malo Allallu, a young Martian who had just passed out of college and was starting on a career in Customs and Excise. Perhaps if I had had someone more experienced with me the ghastly debacle that followed need not have happened, but I can hardly blame Allallu. If I myself didn't fathom the incredible depths of Llant'Gornu's criminally cunning mind, I can hardly complain at Allallu if he didn't either.

I entered the airlock. Since the Vegan atmosphere was the same as ours, all the doors of the ship were fully open, and the crew were standing idly around in small groups enjoying the taste of fresh air after so many months of the canned stuff

spaceside. They grinned and waved as I came in, if a foot-long elongation of one of their tongues and the elevation of four tentacles in a complicated ancestral pattern can be called a grin and a wave. That's what it added up to, anyway. You can't help liking Vegans, whatever their faults, they're such a cheerful bunch. Cheerful, happy, and courageous. And crooks, through and through. I strode on to the commander's cabin, with Allallu close behind me.

Llant'Gornu rose as I came in and advanced towards me. "My friend," he boomed with easy informality, "I and my fathers greet you and yours." It was a conventional form of greeting on his home planet, the third in the Vegan system, as far as I knew. Luckily he spoke fluent Terran. Most Vegans did, since their own language was the most complicated in the Galaxy, full of clicks, gurgles and retching sounds that come over rather like a mixture of Tovringian Southern, Ancient Terran Zulu, and Li Husat. And though, despite their double tongue, then can pronounce Terran Universal, they're all totally unable to master Galactica.

"I and mine thank your fathers," I replied.

He laughed boisterously. "It always sounds wrong somehow coming from Terrans," he commented. "Can I offer you a drink? I have some exquisite vintage Vungtakha Blue in the hold."

"Not at the moment, thanks," I said. "Er, have you anything to declare?"

That must be one of the most

stupid things I ever said. Llant'Gornu did the Vegan equivalent of a shrug and a crooked smile. "Who, me?" he said.

Vegans will never lie outright. That's part of the reason why they're so astonishingly popular considering everything. They will never say a thing is so if it is not so. However, with the slightest hesitation they will talk around the point, change the subject, twist your words, or, if pushed right into a corner, take refuge in a bland silence. But they will never lie.

"Yes, Commander, you. Are you carrying any contraband?"

"I rather think that depends on your definition of contraband."

"I define contraband as something which should be declared before entering a port."

"Why?"

"Why? Because there might be revenue to pay on it."

"Why?"

"My dear commander, you know as well as I do what contraband is. Must we go on beating about the bush like this? Are you carrying any?"

"You'll have to be more clear. Do you mean am I personally carrying any, or is the ship carrying any, or what?"

"Either of those possibilities." I was growing a trifle harrassed.

"Which one?"

"Are you?"

"Am I what?"

"Carrying any contraband?"

He raised his arms, all of them. "I'm not actually carrying anything," he informed me cheerfully.

I rose to my feet. This time I was going to nail them. I knew damn well I was a relatively good customs officer, and I just couldn't let the commander get away with it without a fight.

"Lt. Allallu!"

"Sir?"

"I want every available customs officer on the base to assemble here immediately. I'm going to search this ship from stem to stern, then back again, then back again if need be, and we're going to find whatever contraband they're carrying, every last ounce of it."

"Every man?" said Allallu in some surprise.

"Yes!" I bellowed. "Every single one that isn't sick, dead or on leave must be here on the double. On the treble if they have to. I expect them here on this ship's Flag Deck within fifteen minutes. Jump to it!"

He jumped. In actual fact he got them there in ten. He's a good man, Allallu. One day he might even make a Chief Officer — providing he doesn't act like me, that is.

As soon as the men were assembled — there were twenty-two of them, if I remember rightly — I told them what I had told Allallu. The whole ship was to be combed thoroughly, and any other ships that might land and want Customs clearance in the meantime would just damn well have to wait. Llant'Gornu watched all this with evident amusement. This had developed into a battle of wills as well as wits between him and me, and we both

knew it. And I was determined he was not going to win.

And he was determined he was.

And he was a Vegan, remember.

The first thing I did was order all the exits watched. I'd heard of a case on Betelgeuse where a rather green Customs officer had ordered a minute search of a Vegan cruiser as I was doing now, but had forgotten in his enthusiasm to watch the doors. As a result, while his men were laboriously working their way through the ship, the Vegans were casually wandering right out of the main exits in broad daylight carrying bundles of contraband under their arms. This was not going to happen with me.

I gave Allallu his orders, then remained on the flag deck as the search was carried out. They started on the bridge, all the men together, and combed it so thoroughly that a flea could not have escaped. No fleas. No contraband. The flight deck the same. And the crew quarters. And the engine room. And so on and so forth. Right down to the drive tubes. All clean as a whistle. It took them three hours to find this out. I was sweating.

"You see?" remarked Llant'Gornu casually from a doorway. "They didn't find anything."

"No," I agreed. "They didn't." I felt like grinding my teeth until they came out in the form of a fine white powder. "Allallu, are you sure there's nothing here?"

"Certain, sir. These cruisers aren't that large, and we've examined every nut and bolt. Perhaps there is no contraband?"

"On a Vegan merchantman? You must be joking!"

Commander Llant'Gornu looked solicitous. "You need a drink," he said. "Here."

"Thanks." I did need a drink. It was cool and delicious.

And blue. I choked.

"You found nothing?" I said to Allallu.

"No, sir."

"Then what about this? A consignment of Vungtakha Blue, which the commander was even foolish enough to mention personally. Where is that?"

He looked blank. "I'm afraid I don't"

"Where was the crew while your search was going on?"

"Going about their duties, sir. At least, I assumed so."

"Never assume anything with Vegans. Rule One of the Customs official. I suppose they were carrying various things?"

"I didn't see, but"

I sighed. It was Betelgeuse all over again. Thank God I'd put men on the doors. "Lieutenant," I said, "while you've been searching, the crew have been merrily going around rearranging everything. You've been passing contraband every time you passed a member of the crew." He looked suitably dumbfounded, as well he might. "We will now search again, even more thoroughly. And this time the crew — that includes you, Commander, if you would — will stay in their quarters. And I'll head the search."

So we did it again. This time it took us five and a half hours. It was

now nearly nine hours since I had first come aboard. In that time two merchant cruisers had landed from Lunaport, both perfectly routine local flights, plus one stellar from Sirius. All of these would have been dealt with quickly and easily if I hadn't commandeered every available Customs officer in the port. Already their captains were filing perfectly justified complaints. All I had to show for all this was a few dozen crates of the Vungtakha Blue. To me this was downright suspicious. As the lieutenant had said, these ships weren't all that large, I *had* searched everywhere and there was no more contraband aboard. But that wine was pretty small pickings for a Vegan ship. The few times that a search such as this was ordered on a Vegan ship normally turned up a veritable Aladdin's cave of dutiable goodies. However, I was forced to admit defeat.

Commander Llant'Gornu, as I had expected, was courtesy itself when I allowed him and his crew to disembark, having apologized for keeping them cooped up for so long. He paid the duty on the Vungtakha without a murmur, and offered me one of his own personal bottles as a gift. You just can't help liking Vegans.

I hurriedly inspected and passed the Sirian, allowing someone else to deal with the two lunar flights, and got back to the control room an hour or so later. The first thing I did was leaf through the messages which had come in while I was occupied. They all seemed relatively

uninteresting — except one. As I read it the skin of my back slowly crawled up and started biting the back of my neck:

To: Chief Officer, Customs, Newyorkport. W. Hemis. TERRA/Lok. From: Ditto. Bordash. Serraniol. MALLANASH/Alpha Centauri. URGENT URGENT. MERCHANTMAN "STAR OF HOPE" RECENTLY DEPARTED IS HEAVILY INFECTED BACCILLUS WLAXTACCUS. COMMANDER WAS ORDERED NOT TO PROCEED. HIS REPLY: (QUOTE) "GO MATE WITH VENUSIAN HEDGEHOG" (UNQUOTE). THIS SHIP MUST NOT REPEAT NOT BE ALLOWED TO LAND. ANYTHING WHICH COMES INTO CONTACT COULD CORRECTION WOULD CORRECTION WILL DEFINITELY SPREAD THE INFECTION.

"Why wasn't I shown this?" I roared at the communications officer.

"You'd said you didn't wish to be disturbed, sir," he answered, surprised. "If any ship of that name had attempted a landing I would have informed you, naturally."

I suddenly felt rather ill. I sat down. This message had arrived just ten minutes after I had left the control room earlier, and even then my opposite number on Alpha Centauri had left it just that little too late. Probably too worried about his newly forming rash of green spots. Baccillus Wlaxtaccus spreads too fast for comfort. I looked at the

bottle of wine handed me by Llant'Gornu with a weary smile. Go mate with a Venusian hedgehog.

"Is there anything wrong, sir?" asked the communications officer.

"Oh no," I said. "Nothing at all. Does anyone here know any Vegan at all, by any chance?"

They all shook their heads. "I thought no one could speak Vegan," said Allallu.

"No one can carry on a conversation," I replied. "But some people do know a little, names of ships for instance. Tell me, Lieutenant, will you read to me the name of Commander Llant'Gornu's ship. You can make it out from here. It's written in Galactical characters as well as Vegan."

Still puzzled, Allallu picked up the binoculars and stared across the spaceport. "*Takka'Aq Dorg*," he said after a moment.

"Right. Now, Lt. Allallu, am I or am I not the Chief Customs Officer here at Newyorkport?"

He frowned. "You are, sir."

"And did I or did I not, on my authority alone, order every single man here to search that Vegan ship, *Takka'Aq Dorg*, with me?"

"You did, sir."

"And were there or were there not three ships out there fuming because no one dealt with them for hours?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what contraband did we find to show for this, for having held up a whole spaceport for nine hours?"

"A dozen crates of wine, sir."

"A dozen crates of wine. Lieuten-

ant, do you know what the translation of *Takka'Aq Dorg* is?"

"No, sir."

"It's Vegan for *Star of Hope*. That is the merchantman in the signal. They didn't put the Vegan name when they sent the message at Centauri, my communications man doesn't know Vegan, he can't be expected to, and I had said no messages unless vital," Allallu was beginning to realize the truth. "That ship, Lieutenant, not just the crew, or the contraband, or the legal cargo, but the whole ship, is infected with little green spots! No wonder we couldn't find any contraband." I was nearly shouting now. "The

whole damn thing is contraband! Llant'Gornu smuggled in a space-ship!"

Which was why the whole population of Terra, with the exception of one civil servant in Buenos Aires who appeared immune, went down with a rash of green spots. Which was why I lost my job. Which is why I'm now Chief Officer on the Vegan merchantman *Takka'Aq Dorg*, or *Star of Hope* if you wish, under the command of Commodore Llant'Gornu Gra-Oud. Well, I mean, somehow you just can't harbor grudges against Vegans.

END

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The planet was as attractive as an open sewer — naturally Retief got the job of attempting to clean it up!

I

The voice of Consul General Magnan, Terran envoy to Slunch, crackled sharply through Vice-consul Retief's earphones as he steered the slab-sided mud-car up the slope through the dense smog issuing from the innumerable bubbling mud-pockets in the rocky ground.

"Retief, this whole idea is insane! We're likely to bog down or be blown up; we'll have to turn back!"

"It's just a few hundred yards now," Retief replied.

"Look here! As chief of mission, I'm responsible for the safety of all Terran personnel on Slunch, which means, specifically, you and me. It's not that I'm timid, you understand, but — Look out!" he shouted suddenly, as Retief cut hard at the wheel to avoid the uprearing form of a twenty-foot tangleworm. Magnan chopped with his machete as the blind creature swung its capacious jaws toward him. Brown



juices spattered as the severed, foot-ball head tumbled into the car, still biting the air.

He kicked it away and wiped a mud-stained sleeve across his face, peering ahead through the smoky air.

"There it is now." Retief pointed. Through the murky atmosphere, a dull glow swam into visibility. Half a minute later the mud-car came to a halt at the brink of a vast sinkhole, from which choking, sulphurous fumes rose in ochre billows, reflecting the fitful play of light from below.

Retief swung over the side of the car, went forward to the precipitous edge. Magnan advanced cautiously behind him.

"You see those openings down there?" Retief pointed through the swirling vapors. "I think we can work our way down along the ledge on this side, then —"

"Great heavens, Retief!" Magnan broke in. "You seriously propose that we explore this — this subterranean furnace — on foot?" His voice rose to the breaking point.

"We'll be all right inside our thermal suits," the junior diplomat said. "If we can discover which vents are the ones —"

"Mark!" Magnan raised a hand. A new, deeper, rumble was rising to drown the fretful murmurings from underfoot.

"Is that — could that be high tide coming?" he gasped.

Retief shook his head. "Not due for six hours yet. You're not by any chance expecting a ship today?"

"A ship? No, I wasn't — but yes

— it could be . . ." Far above, a faint bluish light flickered through the clouds, descending. "It is!" Magnan turned toward the car. "Come along, Retief! We'll have to go back at once!"

Ten minutes later, the car emerged from the fumes of the lava field onto an expanse of waving, foot-high stems which leaned to snatch at the car's oversized wheels with tiny claws. Retief shifted to low gear, to the accompaniment of ripping sounds as the strands of tough grab-grass parted. Beyond the town, the newly arrived vessel stood, a silvery dart against the black clouds rolling slowly upward from the tar pits in the distance.

"Retief, that's a Corps vessel!" Magnan said excitedly. "Heavens! You don't suppose Sector has decided to cut the tour of duty on Slunch to three months, and sent our relief along a year and a half ahead of schedule?"

"It's more likely they're shipping us a new ping-pong table to soften the blow of the news the tour's being extended to five years."

"Even ping-pong equipment would be a shade nearer the mark than the six gross of roller skates the Recreational Service sent out," Magnan sniffed.

"They're running out the VIP pennant," Retief called.

Magnan shaded his eyes. "Drat it! No doubt it's a party of junketing legislators, out to be wined and dined out of our consular luxury allowance."

Five minutes later, the car pulled

up in the lee of the gleaming vessel with the ornate crest of the *Corps Diplomatique Terrestrienne* blazoned on its prow. Already, a few questing runners of creeper vine had found the ship and were making their way rapidly up the landing vanes and twining over the access lock. As the Magnan descended, machete in hand, to clear the entry, the ship's exit lock swung open and extruded a landing ramp. Half a dozen Terrans, resplendent in pearl-gray pre-tiffin sub-informal coveralls and lime green seersucker dick-eyes emerged, drawing deep, healing lungfuls of air and immediately coughing violently.

"No time to waste, gentlemen," Magnan called, his voice muffled by his breathing mask. "Everybody out and into the car!"

A stout man with the look of a senior attache shied violently as Magnan confronted him. Those behind recoiled toward the lock.

"Good Lord! Dacoits!" The fat man raised his hands, backing away. "Don't strike, sir! We're merely harmless bureaucrats!"

"Eh?" Magnan stared at the newcomers. "Look here, I don't wish to alarm you, but unless you come along at once, you're all going to be in serious danger. The air . . ."

"Ransom!" the fat man cried. "I have a doting auntie, sir, who'll pay handsomely! The old minnie has more money than she knows what to do with."

"What's going on here!" A tall, broad-shouldered man had appeared at the lock, staring down at the tableau with a stern look.

"Look out, sir!" a small, wispy staffer chirped. "He has a dreadful-looking sword!"

"I'll handle this!" The big man pushed forward, stared down at Magnan. "Now then, what was it you wanted, fellow?"

"Why, ah," the consul general temporized, backing a step. "I just came out to welcome you to Slunch, sir, and to offer you transportation back to the consulate —"

"You're from the consulate?" the big man boomed.

"Of course."

"I'll have a word to say to the consul about sending a sweeper to welcome an arriving trade mission," the fat attache said, pushing forward. "I knew the moment I laid eyes on him."

Magnan gobbled. "A full-scale trade mission? But I've only been here three months! There hasn't been time —"

"Ha!" the big man cut him off. "I'm beginning to understand. You're a member of the diplomatic staff, are you?" He looked Magnan up and down, taking in the hip boots, the gauntlets, the battered poncho, the black smudges of soot under his eyes.

"Of course. And —"

"Yes, you'd be that fellow Whats-hisname. They told me about you back at Sector. Well, there are a number of matters I intend to set you straight on at the outset." The big man's steely eye transfixed the astounded Magnan. "I'm putting you on notice that I have no sympathy with undisciplined upstarts!"

"I . . . I think your excellency

has the wrong upstart," Magnan stammered. "That's Retief over there, in the old horse blanket. I'm Magnan, the principal officer."

"Wha . . . ?"

"It's not really a horse blanket," Magnan amended hastily. "Actually it's an urze-beast blanket. It's for the mud, you understand; and the rain, and the soot, and the nit-mites —"

"Well, anyone could have made the mistake," the fat staff member said. "This chap certainly *looks* ferocious enough."

"That's enough!" The new arrival thrust out his lower lip. "I'm Rainsinger. Just pass along what I said to the proper party."

He smoothed his features with an effort. "Mr. Magnan, you'll be delighted to know I've brought along a number of items for you."

"How grand!" Magnan beamed. "Gourmet foods for the consulate larder, I suppose? A nice selection of wines, of course — and possibly —" he winked playfully — "a library of racy sense-tapes?"

Rainsinger blinked. "Nothing so frivolous," he said flatly. "Actually, it's an automatic tombstone factory, complete, adequate to serve a community of one hundred thousand souls." He rubbed his hands together briskly. "After we've gotten the natives started on proper interment, we can expand into the casket and embalming end. The possibilities are staggering." His eye fell on the mud car. "What's *that*?"

"You gentlemen will have to excuse the limousine," Magnan said.

"Freddy didn't have time to dust it up after the little shower we had this morning. Mind your trousers, now."

"This is a Mark IX diplomatic issue limousine?" The fat man gaped at the conveyance. "Why, it's made of baling wire and clapboards!"

"The mud crabs ate the other body," Magnan explained. "They found the plastic highly palatable. I saved the cigar lighters, though."

"By golly, speaking of eating, I could do with a bite of lunch," the fat man said to no one in particular.

Rainsinger gave Magnan a hard stare. "Well, under the circumstances, I suppose a case could be made for a Report of Survey. By the way, how is the *berp-nut* crop?" He looked around the mud-coated port. "How many bottoms will you require for the first shipment?"

"Ah . . . none, to be precise," Magnan said faintly. "There isn't any shipment."

"No *berp-nuts*?" Rainsinger's left eyebrow went up as the right came down in a ferocious scowl. "As I understand your instructions, Magnan, your sole mission here is to flog up a little enthusiasm among the Slunchans for Terry goods. Since *berp-nuts* are the sole Slunchan source of foreign exchange, I fail to see how we can succeed without them!"

"Unfortunately, the mud seems to have a corrosive effect on most everything we manufacture," Magnan said. "Like shoes, for example." He eyed Rainsinger's feet. The visitor followed his gaze.

"My shoes!" he yelped. "Magnan, you idiot, get me out of this mud at once!"

Coughing, the newcomers sloshed across to the vehicle, mounted the rude ladder, stared with dismay at the mud-coated benches.

"Hold tight," Magnan called with an attempt at gaiety. "We'll have to hurry to get you in out of the weather. Don't be alarmed. We should get through with no more than a few mud burns, and maybe the odd firebug bite."

At the wheel, he gunned the car in a wide circle, inadvertently sending a sheet of mud sluicing over the polished stern of the vessel and the crisp whites of the crewmen peering from the lock. There were shrill cries as the passengers went reeling to form an untidy heap at the rear of the car. Of the visitors, only Inspector Rainsinger remained on his feet, gripping the upright that supported the sheet-metal awning.

"You'll soon catch on," Magnan called over his shoulder. "Gracious, you already look like old veterans, and you've only been here ten minutes!"

II

Magnan steered the car across the soft, black half-inch mud of the plaza, pulled up before an entry where a paunchy, splay-footed little humanoid with a flattened skull and a loose, liver-colored hide leaned on a combination broom-rake, humming to himself.

"Drive on, Mr. Magnan," Rainsinger barked. "We can tour the

slum areas later, after my staff and I have had an opportunity to freshen up a bit."

"But — but this is the consulate," Magnan explained with a glassy smile.

Rainsinger stared with a darkening expression at the scorched, chipped and discolored facade, banked with drifted muck from which tufts of greenery sprouted.

"This is the new building, completed only ninety standard days ago at a cost of one hundred thousand credits of Corps funds?"

"Ah, that's right, sir," Magnan climbed down from his seat.

Rainsinger looked down at the sea of oleaginous black mud in which the car rested hub-deep. "I'm supposed to walk through that?" he demanded.

"Relief could carry you," Magnan proposed brightly.

Rainsinger shot him a sharp look. "If there's any carrying to be done, I'll do it." He stepped down, followed by his staff, squelched through the ankle-deep mud that coated the ornamental tile steps. As they passed, Magnan beckoned to the native sweeper.

"See here, Freddy, let's see a little more spit and polish," he whispered. "Don't just knock those mud-puppy nests down; sweep the extra mud into neat little piles or something. We don't want our visitors to imagine we've grown slovenly, you know. And you'd better dig out the entrance to the snack bar and squirt a little more deodorant around; the stench-fungus is getting the upper hand again."

"Mud smooth nice my up messing are fellows these, Magnan Mister, hey!" the local protested in his scratchy voice.

"It's all right, Freddy," Magnan soothed. "Ah... headquarters from shots big, they're," he added in an undertone.

Inside, Rainsinger stared about incredulously at the runners of vine poking in through shattered windows, the dried and caked mud through which footpaths led to the grand staircase, itself well nigh buried under a luxuriant growth of coiling green weed. He started as a sharp-nosed rat scurried into view, scuttled away into the shelter of a pile of brush heaped carelessly beside the balustrade.

"Shall we have a look at the chancery wing?" he inquired in ominous tones.

"Say, where do we eat lunch?" the portly attache looked around curiously.

"Maybe we'd better not go up just yet..." Magnan broke off as a cascade of brown water came surging down from the landing above, bearing with it a flotsam of papers, twigs, vigorously swimming small animals and other odds and ends. The stream struck the floor, sluiced its way across to the exit and poured out into the street, eliciting a loud cry from Freddy.

"Conception esthetic whole my up loused they've!" his voice was hoarse with indignation. "On going what's?"

"Unplugged drains those got I, Magnan Mister Oh!" a cheery Slunthan voice called from above.

"Hmmm. Unfortunate timing,"

Magnan said. "But at least it scoured a path for us." He led the way up the stairs and along a corridor, the walls of which were obscured by a ragged growth of vines, through which discolored wallpaper was visible. He ducked under a festoon of creepers undulating in a doorway, waved the team members into his spacious office. Rainsinger stopped dead as his eye fell on the mud-clotted weeds layering the floor, the slab of rough ironwood spanning two up-ended oil drums serving as a desk, the clustered stems crowding the glassless windows.

There was a moment of profound silence. Then:

"Gentlemen!" The trade mission chief's voice had something of the quality of a volcano preparing to erupt. "During my career I've encountered slackness, inefficiency and disorder at many a station. A little dust on the filing cabinets, a few dope-stick burns in the upholstery, gum wrappers in the john — even some minor discrepancies in the voucher files — all these are normal concomitants of life at a remote post. But this!" His voice rose. "This model town, built with CDT funds as a gift to the Slunthan people less than six months ago — a perfect example of civic design produced by the most skillful Deep Think teams on the departmental payroll! Look at it! A blighted area! A pest hole! And the consulate general itself! Two inches of mud in the main lounge! Broken drains flooding the halls! Rats, mice and vermin swarming in every nook and cranny! Weeds

sprouting in the corridors! Broken glass! Vanished furnishings! Vandalism! Dereliction of duty! Destruction of Corps property! And withal — no berp-nuts!”

With an effort he pulled his voice back into the lower registers and directed a chilling gaze at Magnan.

“Sir, as of this moment you may consider yourself suspended, relieved of duty and under close house arrest! Under emergency powers vested in me under Article Nine, Section Four, Title Two of Corps Regulations, I’m taking personal command!”

“But — but, sir!” Magnan protested. “I haven’t yet had time to settle in, as it were. The mud crabs ate the furniture; and the conditions here — the mud tides and the cinder storms, and the shortage of local labor and . . . and”

“Say, I was wondering — how about a sandwich,” the fat attache put in.

“No excuses!” Rainsinger bellowed. “We built the town to point these benighted natives the way to higher living standards and an increased consumption of Terry-manufactured goods! A fine example you’ve set, sir! But I’ll do what I can in the eleventh hour to retrieve the situation!”

He whirled on his staff.

“Blockchip, you’ll take a detail and attend to the broken plumbing. Horace —” he addressed the stout attache — “you’ll see to shoveling out the mud from the ground floor. Poindexter will seal off the upper floors and fumigate. As for you, Mr. Magnan — I’m suspending

your arrest long enough for you to round up an adequate labor force to unload the cargo I brought in.” He looked at his old-fashioned strap watch.

“I’ll expect to see this building spotless by sundown, in time for a reception to be held this evening at eight o’clock sharp. Full formal attire, including clean fingernails! I’ll show these natives how civilized Terrans live — and inspire the wish to emulate us!”

“Ah — there might be a little trouble about the local labor,” Magnan spoke up. “The Slunchans have rigid taboos against working on weekdays.”

“This is Sunday!”

“How true, sir. Unfortunately, they don’t work on Sundays, either.”

“Offer them double wages!”

“They don’t use money.”

“Then offer them what they want!”

“All they want is for us to go away.”

“Mr. Magnan.” Rainsinger cut him off with an ominous tone. “I suggest you discontinue your obstructionism at once, or the word ‘insubordination’ will be cropping up in my report, along with a number of other terms non-conducive to rapid advancement in the service!” He broke off to grab up a bound volume of Corps regulations from the improvised desk and hurl it at an inquisitive vine rat which poked its snout above the window sill.

“Oh, I wouldn’t do that, sir,” Magnan blurted. “In about five hours —”

"Save your advice!" Rainsinger roared. "I'm in charge here now! You may make yourself useful by ringing up the Slunchan Foreign Minister and making me an appointment. I'll show you how to handle these locals! In an hour I'll have him begging for Terran imports!"

"Ah, about lunch," the stout attache began.

"I'll have him here in a jiffy," Magnan said. He stepped to the door. "Oh, Freddy," he called. A moment later a Slunchan appeared in the doorway.

"It is what; boss, yeah?" the local looked around the office. "Mat floor a for sneakweed the using, effect snazzy a that's, say!" he exclaimed.

"Mr. Rainsinger, may I present —" Magnan started.

"Here, isn't this the fellow who was raking mud at the front door as we came in?" Rainsinger demanded.

"Yes, indeed. Of course Freddy is just filling in for the regular man. As I was saying, may I present Sir Frederik Gumbubu, K.G.E., L. deC., N.G.S., Slunchan Minister of Foreign Affairs."

"A Foreign Minister? A part-time janitor?" Rainsinger took the proffered hand gingerly.

"Know you, do to ministering foreign my got I've," the Slunchan said defensively. "Janitor time full a be to me expect couldn't you, all after, well." He rolled a ball of dried mud between his fingers, lined up on a framed photo of the sector undersecretary and scored a bull's-eye.

"Mr. Magnan, I stand astounded at your ingenuity," Rainsinger said

in a voice like broken crockery. "Not content with failing in your mission while violating every regulation in the book, you invent a unique offense by demeaning an official of a friendly foreign power to the performance of menial tasks in your own Consulate!"

"But, sir! Freddy's one of the few locals with a taste for Pepsi. And the only way he can get it," he added behind his hand, "is to work here. I pay him off with a case a week."

"Get somebody else!"

"Job my me lose to trying you are — hey?" Freddy broke in.

"I can't!" Magnan wailed. "Scout's honor, sir — they won't work!"

"Union labor the with beef a for looking you're maybe," Freddy said. "Action fast you promise can I, member sole and president the be to happen I as and!"

Look here, ah, Sir Frederik." Rainsinger faced the foreign minister. "I'm sure we can work out a mutually agreeable arrangement. You round up and send along about a hundred good workers, and I'll see to it that Slunch is given full Most Favored Nation status in the new Trade Agreement I'm about to propose."

"It do can't, nope," the Slunchan said shortly.

"Now, don't be hasty, Mr. Minister," Rainsinger persisted. "I'm prepared to promise you prompt shipment of any items you care to name. What about a nice line of genuine machine-loomed antimacassars, inscribed with patriotic and inspirational mottos? I can make you an

attractive price on lots of a hundred thousand."

Sir Frederik shook his flat head sadly. "Items luxury afford can't we, bringing nuts-berps prices the at — nix!"

Rainsinger took the minister's elbow in a fatherly grip. "Now, Freddy"

"It's no use, sir," Magnan interposed glumly. "Lord knows I've tried. But they're incurably content. They already have everything they want."

"That's enough of your defeatism," Rainsinger snapped. "You'd best be on your way, and take Mr. Retief with you. I'll pitch in myself, as soon as I've given a few more instructions. We have a great deal of ground to cover if we're to be ready to receive our guests in four and a half hours!"

III

"Well, Magnan," Rainsinger complacently surveyed the chattering conversational groups of Slunchans and Terrans dotted across the gleaming ballroom floor, newly ornamented along one wall by a tasteful display of engraved headstones and funerary urns. "I must say we've acquitted ourselves creditably. And I've taken measures to insure conditions don't deteriorate again." He lifted a glass from a passing tray borne by a Slunchan who limped heavily.

"Hmmm. Chap seems to have a cast on his foot," the Inspector remarked. "Couldn't you have secured able-bodied personnel to staff the

catering function, Magnan?"

"He's not actually injured, sir," Magnan said. "He just happened to step in some, er, material."

"Say, isn't that a lump of powdered tombstone adhering to his foot?" Rainsinger demanded suspiciously. "I hope you haven't handled my cargo carelessly!"

"Say, when are the sandwiches coming?" the stout attache inquired testily.

"Ah, here comes the premier," Magnan cut in as a loose-hided local approached, rotating a hula-hoop with his torso. "Hi, there, your Excellency. May I present Mr. Rainsinger, our new, er, ah. Sir, Mr. Blabhug, the leader of the Slunchan people in their fight against, ah, whatever it is they're fighting against."

Rainsinger nodded curtly, eyeing the muddy tracks across the floor left by the chief executive. "See here, Blabhug," he said in a non-nonsense tone. "I'd like to request that you have your people step up the street-cleaning program. Those pavements are a gift of the Terrestrial taxpayer."

"Too, was it gesture nice a and," Blabhug acknowledged cheerfully. "Them see to get never we bad too."

"Yes. My point exactly. Now, Mr. Prime Minister; I've been here for only five hours, but I've already gotten a firm grasp of the situation and I see what the source of our problem is. Once we've cleared up the more active vermin —"

"Vermin what?"

"That little monster, for one!" Rainsinger nodded sharply toward an

inquisitive rodentoid nose poking around the nearest door.

"Kidding be must you," Balbghug said. "Rats-vine the for wasn't it if —"

"As soon as we've complete dusting with fast-acting pesticides, we'll see no more of the creatures," Rainsinger bored on. "Meanwhile, a few zillion tons of weed killer will control these man-eating vines you've been tolerating so complacently."

"About talking you're what know don't you," Blabghug protested.

"I know how to conduct a clean-up campaign!" Rainsinger came back hotly. "This state of affairs is an insult to the Slunchan people and a reflection on the Terran Consulate! I've already set wheels in motion —"

He broke off as a low rumble tinkled the newly polished glass of the chandelier. A deep-throated *bar-room!* sounded, like a distant cannonade, followed by a vast, glutinous *smooosh!*

Magnan glanced at his watch. "Right on time," he said.

The Slunchan premier cocked his head thoughtfully. "Usual than fluid more little a sounds that," he commented. "High early an for ready get better we'd."

"**W**hat the devil's he saying, Magnan?" Rainsinger muttered in an aside. "I can't make out one word in three."

"High mud in a few minutes," Magnan translated, as a second shock rocked the ballroom. A heavy splattering sounded, as of moist material raining against the building.

"Up button to time, oh-oh," Blabghug warned. He stepped to the nearest window and slammed shut a set of improvised shutters.

"What's this, Mr. Retief?" Rainsinger inquired. "Some sort of religious observation? Tribal taboo sort of thing?"

"No, it's just to keep the worst of the soot and mud out of the building during the eruption."

"What's this about an eruption?"

"It's a sort of mud geyser. Shoots a few million tons of glop into the air every twenty-seven hours."

Rainsinger blinked. "A million tons of glop?"

A third, even more vigorous tremor caused the ballroom to sway drunkenly. Rainsinger braced his feet, thrust out his chin, glared at Magnan, who was staring anxiously toward the door.

"Glop or no glop, this is an official diplomatic function, gentlemen! We'll carry on, and ignore the disturbance!"

"Frankly, I don't like the sound of that mud, sir." Magnan turned to the window, peered through a crack in the shutter.

"No doubt the consulate has weathered such conditions before," Rainsinger said uncertainly. "No reason why"

His voice was drowned by an ominously rising bubbling sound swelling outside. At the window, Magnan emitted a sharp yelp, leaped back as something struck the side of the building with an impact like a tidal wave. Jets of ink-black mud squirted into the room like fire hoses



through every cranny around the shutters. One stream caught Rainsinger full in the flowered weskit, almost knocked him down.

"One bad a is this!" Blabghug called over the hissing and splattering. "Look a have and roof the for head better we'd think I!"

"He's right, sir!" Magnan raised his voice. "This way!" He led the excited party along a hall, up a stair splattered with steaming mud from a shattered window on the landing. Emerging on the roof, Rainsinger ducked as a head-sized cinder slammed down beside him, bounded high and disappeared over the side. A rain of mud splattered down around them. The air was thick with tarry soot. Coughing, Rainsinger hastily donned the breathing mask offered by Magnan.

"This must be the worst disaster ever recorded here," he shouted over the groaning and squishing of the mud welling along the street below them.

"No, actually, by the sound of it, it's a rather mild one, as eruptions go," Retief leaned close to shout. "But the mud seems to be running wild."

"There look!" Blabghug shouted, pointing. "Seven-sixty in back made mark mud-high record the over it's!"

"There's something wrong," Retief called over the still-rising roar of the flowing mud. "The tide's not acting normally. Too fluid — and too much of it."

"Why on Slunch, with an entire planet to choose from, was the town situated in a disaster area?" Rainsinger frowned ferociously as sounds

of massive gurglings and sloshings sounded from below.

"It appears this was one of those rush jobs," Magnan called. "The entire city was erected in four days, which happened to be during a seasonal lull in the underground cookery."

"See here, Magnan, why didn't you report the situation?"

"I did. As I recall, my dispatch ran to three hundred and four pages!"

"A three hundred page dispatch? And nothing was done?"

"We received a consignment of twelve brooms, six dust-pans and a gross of mops. They must have been overstocked on mops back at Sector."

"And that's *all*?" Rainsinger's voice almost cracked.

"I think that's about as far as Headquarters could go without admitting a mistake had been made."

Across the street, the swelling, bubbling surface of the mud flow was rising past the first row of windows. Shutters creaked and burst inward. Refugees were crowding onto roofs all along the streets now. Retief stepped to the edge of the roof, looked down at the heaving bosom of the sea of mud, dotted with small, sodden forms, floating inertly. A great mass of dead creeper vine came sweeping along on the flood. A tongue of mud sluicing in from a side street struck a wall, sent a great gout thundering upward to descend on the crowded consulate roof. Diplomats and locals alike yelped and slapped at the hot, corrosive muck.

"Look there!" Magnan pointed to the feebly struggling body of a large vine rat, which gave a final twitch and expired.

"Trouble in we're, oh-oh!" Premier Blabghug exclaimed, as other Slunchans gathered about, talking rapidly.

"Why all the excitement about a dead animal?" Rainsinger barked.

"It's a vine-rat," Magnan blurted. "What could have killed it?"

"I imagine the vigorous application of pest-killer I ordered had something to do with it," the inspector snapped. "I suggest we defer grieving over the beggar until after we've taken steps to extricate ourselves from this situation!"

"You . . . you ordered *what*?" Magnan quavered.

"Ten tons of rodenticide, from your own consulate stores," Rainsinger said firmly. "I don't wonder you're astonished at the speed with which I went into action —"

"You . . . you didn't!"

"Indeed I did, sir! Now stop goggling at a purely routine display of efficiency, and let's determine what we're to do about this mud."

"But —" Magnan wailed. "If you killed off the vine-rats — that means the creeper-vine was allowed to grow all afternoon, uncontrolled —"

"Uncontrolled?"

"By the rats," Magnan groaned. "So the vines got the upper hand over the grab-grass — and it's the grass, of course, which suppresses the tangleworms —"

"Tangleworms?"

"And the young worms eat the egg-nit grubs," Magnan yelped. "The

egg-nits being the only thing that keeps the firebugs under control — though of course the vine rats need them for protein in the diet; while their droppings nourish the sneak weed which provides a haven for the nit-mites which prey on the mud-crabs —"

"Here, what's all this nonsense!" Rainsinger roared over the roar of the rising mud-flood. "You'd chatter on about the local wildlife, with disaster lapping at our ankles?"

"That's what I've been trying to tell you!" Magnan's voice broke. "With the ecological cycle broken, there's nothing to control the mud! That's why it's rising! And in another hour it will be up over roof level and that —" he shuddered — "will be a very sticky ending for all of us!"

IV

"Why, I don't believe it," Rainsinger said hoarsely, as he stared over the roof's edge at the steadily rising mud, its surface hazed with sulphurous fumes. "You mean to tell me that these worms were all that kept the mud in check?"

"That's an oversimplification — but yes." Magnan dabbed at the mud on his chin. "I'm afraid you've upset the balance of nature."

"All right, men!" Rainsinger turned to face his staff, huddled in the most protected corner of the roof. "It seems we've painted ourselves into a bit of a corner, ha-ha." He paused to square his shoulders and clear his throat. "However, there's no point in crying over spilled mud.

Now, who has a suggestion for a dynamic course of action from this point onward? Horace, Poindexter?"

"I suggest we write out our wills and place them in mud and heat-proof jackets," a lean accountant type proposed in a reedy voice.

"Now, men! No defeatism! Surely there's some simple way to elude our apparent fate! Mr. Premier." He faced the Slunchan contingent, muttering together at a short distance from the Terrans. "What do your people have in mind?"

"Opinion of difference a there's," Blabhug said. "Mud the into you pitching for out holding are extremists the but. Limb from limb you tear to want fellows the of few a."

"It's hopeless!" a trembling Terran blurted, staring down at the heaving surface of the tarry mud. "We'll all be drowned, scalded and eaten alive by acid!"

"Magnan!" Rainsinger whirled on the former chief of mission. "You chaps must have had some sort of plan of action for such an eventuality!"

"Nothing." Magnan shook his head. "*We* never interfered with Nature's Plan." His eyes strayed across the steaming bog now washing about the fourth story windows of the model town. On high ground half a mile distant, the slim form of the vacated Corps Vessel stood. Beyond it rose the rugged peaks from which the mud-flow issued.

"Retief *did* have some sort of mad notion of diverting the gusher at its source," he said, "but of course that's hopeless — especially now. I dare-say it's all under mud."

"Retief!" Rainsinger hurried across to where the younger man was prying a board from a ventilator housing. "What's this about a scheme to dam off the mud?"

Retief pointed to a rickety construction of boards, afloat in the mud below.

"It's the body off the car. It won't make the best boat in the world, I'm afraid, but as soon as it gets within reach I'll give it a try."

"You'll sink," Magnan predicted, standing at the fifth floor window through which Retief had climbed to secure the makeshift skiff. "You can't possibly row that contrivance with a board across half a mile of mud!"

"Maybe not," Retief said. He dropped down into the boat. "But if it sinks, I won't have to row it."

"Maybe the mud won't come this high," someone offered. "Maybe if we just wait here —"

"If we don't go now, it will be too late," Rainsinger cut off the discussion.

"We?" Magnan said.

"Certainly." Rainsinger threw a leg over the sill, lowered himself down beside Retief. "It will take two men to row this thing. Cast off, Mr. Retief, whenever you're ready."

V

For ten minutes the two men paddled in silence. Looking back, Retief saw the consulate tower rising from the bubbling mud, almost obscured by the wafting vapors. In a bundle at his feet were the two

thermal suits and a number of small packets previously prepared but unused.

"Better get your suit on, Mr. Rainsinger," he said.

"I give them another half hour," Rainsinger called, his voice muffled by his breathing mask. "How much farther?"

"Ten minutes," Retief said, "until we ground on the hill. Then five minutes walk." He paddled as Rainsinger pulled on the bulky thermal suit.

Beside him, a loose board creaked; mud slopped over the low gunwale. A sudden bulging of the mud almost swamped the boat; a bursting gas bubble threw a stinging spray across both men.

"When we get there — what?"

"We hope it's not already flooded out."

Five minutes later, just as Retief had pulled on his heat-suit, the overloaded boat emitted a sudden massive creaking and disintegrated.

"Jump!" Retief called; he grabbed the bundles and went over the side, landing in knee-deep muck, turned to lend a hand to Rainsinger, who floundered after him. They fought their way up-slope, emerged on a rocky shore at which the surging mud lapped like a sea of chocolate pudding.

"It's pretty deep," Retief said. "Let's hope it's not into the main bore yet."

Rainsinger followed Retief up the steep slope. Ahead, a ruddy glare lightened the murky scene. They reached the edge of the great circular vent from which smoke and

cinders boiled furiously, whirling glowing embers high in the air. Rainsinger stared down into the white-hot pit.

"Ye gods, man," he shouted over the din. "That's an active volcano! What in the world do you plan to do here?"

"Climb down inside and pull the plug," Retief said.

"I forbid it!" Rainsinger yelled. "It's suicide!"

"If I don't, the consulate will go under with all hands — to say nothing of a few thousand Slunchans."

"That's no reason to throw your life away! We'll head for higher ground and try to work our way around to the ship. We might be able to summon help —"

"Not a chance," Retief said. He started forward. Rainsinger stepped in his way, a bulky figure in the mud-coated heat-suit. They faced each other, two big men, toe to toe.

"That's an order!" Rainsinger grated.

"Better stand aside, Mr. Rainsinger," Retief said.

"I've warned you," Rainsinger said, and drove a short, sledgehammer right to Retief's mid-section. Retief grunted and took a step back.

"You throw a good right, Mr. Rainsinger," he said through his teeth. "How are you at catching?" — and he slammed a straight left that spun the other around, sent him to his knees. Retief started past him, and Rainsinger dived, tackled him from the side. Retief twisted, drove a knee to Rainsinger's chin. He went down on his face.

"Sorry," Retief said. He went forward, picked his spot and lowered his feet over the edge. Behind him, Rainsinger called out. Retief looked back. The trade mission chief struggled to his feet, stood swaying back and forth.

"You'll probably need a little help down there," he said blurrily as he started forward. "Wait for me . . ."

Roped together, the two men worked their way from one precarious foothold to the next, descending toward the smoky surface bubbling beneath them. A hundred feet below the crater's rim, Retief gripped Rainsinger's arm, pointed through the swirling clouds of soot.

"The level's risen about a hundred feet," he said. "If it reaches that series of vents along the north side before we can block them, the volume of the flow will double, and fill the valley in no time. We have to reach them and plug them before the mud covers them."

"What good will that do?" Rainsinger's voice came thinly through Retief's earset. "It will just keep rising until it goes all the way over the top!"

"That brings us to part two," Retief said. "You see that dark patch there, on the south wall, a little higher up? That's an old vent, silted up a long time ago. If we can blast it clear in time, the flow will go down the other side, away from the town."

Rainsinger studied the aspect below.

"We'll never make it," he said grimly. "Let's get started."

Another ten minutes' climb brought Retief and Rainsinger to the set of side-channels leading to the valley and the town. Working rapidly, Retief placed the charges of smashite so as to collapse the four six-foot-wide openings.

"All set," he called. "We'll take shelter from the blast in the other cave."

"It will be close," Rainsinger said. "The mud's risen ten feet in the last five minutes. Another ten feet and we're out of luck!"

"Come on!" Retief followed a ledge that led halfway around the seventy-foot throat of the volcano, then used a series of cracks and knobs to cover the remaining distance. The boiling muck was a bare six inches from his feet when he reached the dark conduit. Twenty feet inside its mouth, their progress was halted by an obstructing mass of hardened mud and volcanic ash.

"We'll fire our other charges first," Retief said. "As soon as they blow, we'll set another one here and head for the surface."

"I don't like the looks of this, Retief! All this rock is full of fractures!"

"I'm not too fond of it myself," Retief said. "Better turn off your earset. Here goes!"

He pressed the button on the detonator in his hand. White light winked; the crash that followed was deafening even over the shrieking of the volcano. Rock fragments rained down past the cave opening, sending geysers of steaming lava fountaining high. There was a deeper rumble, and the floor shook under them. A

giant slab of stone dropped into view, lodged across the throat of the volcano. Others slammed down, packing themselves into place with impacts like mountains falling. Trapped smoke and dust recoiled, thickening into opacity.

"That does it!" Rainsinger shouted. "We've blocked the main passage! We can't get out!"

"It looks that way—" Retief started. His voice was cut off by a thunderous boom as the cave's roof fell in.

"Retief!" Rainsinger's voice was a hoarse croak in the relative silence after the last rattle of falling rock had died away. "Are you still alive?"

"For the moment," Retief reassured his companion.

"Well—if there was any doubt about whether we'd get out, this finishes it," Rainsinger said grimly.

"Let's take a look," Retief suggested. Using handlamps, they scanned their surroundings. The original cave was now a rubble-choked pocket, blocked at one end by the lava plug, at the other by multi-ton fragments of fallen rock, through which small trickles of mud were already finding their way.

"The only remaining question is whether we broil in hot mud, drown in lava or die of asphyxiation," Rainsinger said grimly.

"It would be interesting to know whether our blast did any good," Retief said. "Will the lava go over the top, or will the dam hold?"

"Let's tell ourselves it wasn't all in vain," Rainsinger grunted. "Don't

misinterpret my remarks," he added. "I'm not complaining. I have only myself to blame. I started the whole thing with my misplaced zeal." He laughed hollowly. "And I was going to make a name for myself by putting Slunch on the map, business-wise."

"Let's just blame it on local conditions and let it go at that," Retief suggested. He looked at the gauge on his wrist. "The temperature in here is ninety-one and a half degrees Centigrade. It looks as if drowning is out."

"Look, the mud's hardening as it comes through the barrier," Rainsinger said. "The trickle's choking off." He looked thoughtful. "By now the level outside our door is up to the blockage. If the lava that squeezes through that hardens as fast as this did"

A tremor went through the cave's floor. "Oh-oh!" Rainsinger rocked on his feet. "Looks like this is it, Retief"

"Set your suit air on maximum pressure!" Retief said quickly. "Then lie down and wrap your arms around your knees and hold on!" His voice was drowned in an end-of-the-universe boom as the side of the mountain blew out.

VI

Retief's first impression, as he came back to consciousness, was of a gentle rocking motion, which ended rudely as something hard gouged him in the back. He rolled over and got to his feet. He

was standing in shallow mud at the shore of a placid expanse of brown, already stiffening into hardness. A few yards distant, a lumpy man-sized object stirred feebly. He went to it, assisted Rainsinger to his feet.

"Quite a view, eh?" He indicated the cone rising from the mists wreathing the expanse of mud. The entire wall of the volcano was gone, and from the vast rent a glistening river of gumbo poured.

"We're alive," Rainsinger said groggily. "Remarkable! And it looks as though we succeeded in diverting the mud." He pulled off his suit helmet, revealing a face puffed and bruised. "My apologies to you, Mr. Retief — for a number of things."

"And mine to you, Mr. Rainsinger, for an equal number of things. And I suggest we get these suits off before we harden into statues."

The two men stripped off the suits, thickly coated with rapidly hardening mud.

"Well, we may as well be getting back, I suppose," the trade mission chief said glumly. "I'll transmit my resignation to Sector, then gather up my chaps and be on my way."

They tramped along the lake shore in silence for half an hour. Rounding the curve of the mountain, the valley came into view. Where the town had been, a pattern of building tops reared up above a glossy expanse of eggplant brown.

"I came here to make commercial history," Rainsinger muttered. "Instead I destroyed a city, including enough Corps property to keep me in debt for six lifetimes . . ."

"I wonder what's going on down

there?" Retief said, pointing. On the level mud surrounding the buried buildings of the town, small figures darted and swooped.

"They look like giant water-bugs," Rainsinger said wonderingly. "What do you suppose it means?"

"Let's go down and see," Retief said.

"It's remarkable!" Magnan rubbed his hands together and beamed at the lively group of Slunchans disporting themselves on the mirror-flat surface of the hardened mud flow that occupied the former town plaza, brightly illuminated by the light from the surrounding windows. "It was Blabghug who discovered the crates stored in the consulate attic. He opened them, imagining they might contain something to eat — and discovered roller skates!"

"Rainsinger Mr., Hey!" One of the gracefully cavorting locals came whizzing across the newly formed rink, executed a flashy one-toe reverse spin and braked to a halt before the trade mission chief. "Foot-wheels these of shipment a get we can soon how?"

"They've had to set up a rotation system," Magnan said. "Every Slunchan who sees them simply goes mad for them!"

"With start to, sets thousand hundred a about take we'll," Blabghug cried. "More take we'll, ready rinks more get we as soon as!"

"I . . . I don't understand," Rainsinger said. "The mud — what's happened to it? It feels like top-quality asphalt, worth fifty credits a ton!"

Magnan nodded happily. "Just after the mud began to recede, Freddy was doing a little foraging—for salvage, of course—and accidentally got into the powdered tombstones. When the mud contacted the plastic, it started hardening up. It must have had some sort of catalytic action, because the whole plaza froze over."

"So that's why the volcano plugged up so quickly," Rainsinger said in wondering tones. "And it's still hardening, just as fast as it's exposed to the air and the, er, catalyst!"

"You've brought off a real coup, sir!" Magnan caroled. "The Slunchans have never had anything but squishy mud underfoot before. Now that they see the possibilities, we'll be able to sell them on all the court games: tennis, volleyball, badminton—then on to the whole gamut of wheeled vehicles! I can see it now: Round-the-planet motorcycle races! The Grand Prix to end all Grand Prixes!"

"Grands Prix," Rainsinger corrected absently. "But not only that, Magnan, my boy! This new material—I'll wager we can corner the paving market for the entire Galactic Arm! And it's virtually free!"

"Ah, am I to understand then, sir, that your report won't place as much emphasis on certain apparent custodial deficiencies as your earlier remarks might have indicated?" Magnan inquired smoothly.

Rainsinger cleared his throat. "My first impressions were a bit wide of the mark," he said. "I was just wondering if you'd find it necessary in your report of my visit to detail the *precise* circumstances surrounding the discovery—or should I say invention?—of this new product."

"No point in burdening Sector with excess detail," Magnan said crisply.

"Now, about transport," Rainsinger mused aloud. "I'd estimate I could place ten million tons at once on Schweinhund's World—and another ten or twenty million tons on Flamme"

"I think it would be wise to place immediate orders for pogo sticks, croquet sets and bicycles," Magnan thought aloud. "We'll want to work through the small items before bringing on the heavy equipment"

The two strolled away, deep in conversation.

"Say, all this excitement has given me an appetite," the fat attaches said. "I believe I'll go get myself a sandwich. Possibly two sandwiches." As he hurried off, Sir Frederik Gumbubu scooted up to Retief, executing a speed-braking stop.

"Terry, us join and pair a grab!" he shouted.

"Good idea," Retief said, and swung off across the plaza, arm in arm with the foreign minister.

END



FAN INTO PRO

by LIN CARTER

*Our Man in Fandom offers
a post-graduate course:
After fandom, what next?*

WE WERE talking about the "purpose" of Fandom last issue. I made the point that, while Fandom doesn't really *have* a purpose (outside of providing you with a lot of fun), it does seem to *serve* a purpose.

Fans grow up reading and collecting science fiction, and, for some reason, they very often turn to editing or writing or illustrating or publishing science fiction. Fandom acts, then, as a sort of recruiting office for the professional ranks of tomorrow.

I don't know why this is; nobody knows. But it sure works out that way, and in this particular, the science-fiction school of literature is completely different from any other form of popular literature I've ever heard of. Ghu knows, *mystery* read-

ers don't become inspired with the unholy itch to devote their lives to writing mysteries, nor do readers of Westerns or of anything else. But science fiction gets into your blood somehow, works down deep and keeps at it until more often than not you get out that old typewriter and start making like Keith Laumer.

Want to see some proof?

Would you believe . . . Ray Bradbury?

If you were to comb the reader columns of old *Astonishing's* from the '30's, you'd be astonished at the now-famous names signed to so many of the letters. Would you believe, for example, that Ray Bradbury was once naught but a lowly fan? Well, it's true . . . on July 2, 1939 (yep, *twenty-seven* years ago!),

a host of out-of-towners hove into New York for Nycon I, the First World Science Fiction Convention. Among them was the mighty Forrest J Ackerman, come all the way from sunny Cal . . . and in Ackerman's entourage there was a young fellow named Bradbury, doubtless awestruck to find himself mingling with and meeting such illustrious writers as Harl Vincent and John Victor Peterson and Frederick C. Painton, and other giants of comparable calibre. Others, like Ray, went through a fan-phase: *James Blish* was a fan long before he wrote all those "Okie" stories and became one of the brightest talents ever to enter the field.

Speaking of bright talents, *Cyril Kornbluth* and *Frederik Pohl* are two more "graduates" of Fandom: they both go back to New York's golden age and the jolly old days of the Futurians and the Science Fiction League. Then there's *Lester del Rey*, once a famous fan under his full name, *Lester Alvarez del Rey*. And *Damon Knight*, once a big name in Fandom, founder of the N.F.F.F. or National Fantasy Fan Federation way back in 1941, and more recently the founding father of the Science Fiction Writers of America. *Arthur C. Clarke* is another old-time fan; he was big in British fan circles as far back as 1937 or '38.

Popular fantasy artist *Hannes Bok*, who died a few years ago, became a professional illustrator after a fannish apprenticeship in Ray Bradbury's fanzine, *Futura Fantasia*. Lots of pros were once fan-

zine publishers: *Algis Budrys*, who reviews books for *Galaxy* and writes serials for *If*, used to edit a fanzine called *Slantasy*. Then there's *Robert Silverberg* — he used to run a magazine with the clever name of *Space-ship*. And *Harlan Ellison*, who dropped his very successful fanzine *Dimensions* right smack in the middle of things, to turn pro.

As I said last issue, sometimes the science-fiction form of "inbreeding" produces some paradoxical connections. Like ex-fan *Donald A. Wollheim*, when editor of *Stirring Science Stories*, publishing ex-fan *Cyril Kornbluth* in issues that first grabbed the attention of then-fan *Philip K. Dick*, who decided then and there to someday be a writer. Or ex-fan *William Lawrence Hamling*, who came into sf publishing via ex-fan *Raymond A. Palmer*, later founding Regency Books and having among his editors at various times such ex-fans as *Harlan Ellison*, *Larry Shaw*, and *Algis Budrys*.

Science fiction makes strange . . . er, what should I say . . . "ed"-fellows?

The Newer Writers

But not everybody came into the profession in the good old days. The process is continually happening: new writers are rising from the fan world right this minute. Sometimes, fans turn pro one right after another, like a row of dominoes being pushed over. For example, there's a big fanclub here in New York called "The Fanoclasts" who meet in the apartment of a member. The first host of

the Fanoclasts was *Richard A. Lupoff*, then a fan, editor of the Hugo-winning fanzine *Xero*, now professional editor at Canaveral Press, author of *Edgar Rice Burroughs: Master of Adventure*, whose first novel (yet unnamed) has just been purchased by ex-Fanoclast *Larry T. Shaw*, editor of Lancer Books.

Second Fanoclast host was Your Man in Fandom, *Lin Carter*. Since those happy days (if I may sneak it in without modesty), I've sold ten books and had (as of this moment) nineteen magazine appearances. Then host-ship switched briefly to *David G. Van Arnam*, now writing books for Pyramid and Belmont. Finally, the job settled on *Ted White*, who writes novels for Lancer and other publishers. (A hint to would-be sf writers: there's no secret to it, just move to New York and throw open your apartment to the Fanoclasts!)

Another way to break into professional sf circles might be to send a manuscript to Ace Books. Editor-in-Chief Don Wollheim and his co-editor, an ex-fan named *Terry Carr* who has had five books published that I can think of, seem very hospitable to new ex-fan writers. Among Ace's authors are *Marion Zimmer Bradley*, who used to publish fanzines and is still a member of FAPA (Fantasy Amateur Press Association), and old-time fan and friend of Hannes Bok, *Emil Petaja* . . . not to mention British fan *Kenneth Bulmer*, Australian fan *John Baxter* and a whole slew of American fans such as *Tom Purdom* and *Lee Hoffman*. Which reminds me that Ace covers

are often painted by ex-fans such as *Jack Gaughan* or *Gray Morrow* . . .

Some Fan Artists

Oh, Fandom takes care of its own, all right! Since fans love the stuff, they can often spot burgeoning science-fiction talents in the bud, so to speak. The glorious sword & sorcery fanzine, *Amra*, for example (the title comes from one of the names used by Robert E. Howard's swashbuckling hero, Conan of Cimmeria, during his pirate days). *Amra* was the first magazine to discover and publish the fantasy art of *Roy G. Krenkel*, not to mention Hugo-winner *Frank Frazetta* and *Gray Morrow*, too. *Amra* won a Hugo itself, which was richly deserved.

Lots of artists got their start in the fan world, as Hannes Bok and these other fellows did. There's *John Giunta*, whose work adorned the late, lamented *Weird Tales* . . . and *Ronald Clyne*, who went from fanzine covers to Arkham House book jackets to doing covers for big best-sellers like *Not as a Stranger* . . . and *Neil Austin*, who did illustrations for *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* . . . and *Jon Arfstrom*; and another *Amra*-graduate, *Jim Cawthorne*, now doing paperback jackets for British publishers.

They Come From All Over

Yep, fans have been turning pro for a long time, and it's still happening. A couple of fans like *Melvin Korshak* and *Ted Dikty* will get together and start a publishing house like Shasta Press. A fan like *Chester*

S. Geier will sell a batch of stories to ex-fans like **Ray Palmer** of *Amazing Stories*, and end up editing *Fate Magazine*. Fans like **Chad Oliver** will turn out respectable science fiction for a while, then veer off and turn professional anthropologist. Some will stop publishing in fanzines after hitting the heights—I, of course, name no names!—others, like **Robert Bloch** will write almost as much fan stuff as they sell to professional markets. Some, like **Wilson Tucker**, will go straight from long careers in science-fiction Fandom to write hard-boiled mysteries. Others, like **Ron Goulart**, will publish *collections* of hard-boiled mysteries! Sometimes a couple of fans will start doing comic-strip stuff . . . like **Jerry Siegel** and **Joe Schuster**, who created “*Superman*.” Then again, a fan like **Sam Moskowitz** will build a career—not in writing science fiction, although Sam has written some—but in writing books about science-fiction writers . . .

It's a funny world, Fandom. You can break into professional science fiction writing right here in New York, as **Richard Wilson** did. Or you can live in New York for years, then move to Australia, and turn pro: this happened to **Ron Smith**, who once won a Hugo for his great fanzine *Inside*—he moved to Australia as an American expatriate and started co-authoring those Library Service stories. Or you can simply live in Australia and let it happen, as did Ron's co-author, **John Baxter!**

Sometimes a fan will write just a book or two in the science fiction

field, then drop out of sight. This happened to **Milton Lesser** and **Stan Mullen** and **Frank Robinson** and **E. Everett Evans**. (Not all ex-fans stick with the field and become as prominent as **Blish**, **Knight**, **Pohl**, **Kornbluth** or **Bradbury**). Sometimes we find out where they went, some times they simply vanish into limbo. Take **Joe Kennedy**, for example.

The Strange Case of Joe Kennedy

Kennedy was a violently active fan in Dover, New Jersey. He appeared during the early 1940's and became the center of a fantastic flurry of fanac. He was more of a humorist than a Sercon fan (*serious constructive fan*—remember your lessons in the Fan Slanguage?). He published a host of good fanzines, like *Vampire*, which came along too early to win a Hugo, but would have, and a “fan comic-book” about a caped hero called the *Blue Bem*, and I don't know what all.

Joe helped found SAPS (Spectator Amateur Press Society) and was a big gun in the prozine letter columns . . . these were the good old days, when science-fiction magazines *had* letter columns, and entertaining things they were, largely given over to parody and wacky humor, always the first thing in the magazine you turned to, after plunking down your 15c (*those were the days! A sf mag that cost 15c—fantastic!*).

You got to know the more popular letter-writers, they were virtually celebrities. Some of the sharper wits of the day have already been discussed here, like **Chad Oliver** and

Milt Lesser, popular "letterhacks" of that remote era.

Well, Kennedy made a name for himself with the humor, and his fan publishing career was crowned with all sorts of accolades and his name topped many a fannish popularity poll. If ever there was a gifted someday writer, born to break into professional science fiction, it was jolly old Joe Kennedy of Dover, New Jersey . . . the Blue Bem, himself!

So — what happened? Did he become a big-gun sf pro? Did he vanish into limbo? Neither: he became quite famous for his writing . . . but not in science fiction. Nope — he became a well-known POET!

In 1964, under his full name (or initials, rather), as X. J. Kennedy, he started teaching at Tufts and Wel-

lesley . . . publishing poems in *Poetry* and *Paris Review* and *Shenandoah* and other lit'ry journals . . . and finally ended up by authoring a hard-cover collection of his verse, called *Nude Descending a Staircase*, for which he won a major poetry prize! X. J. Kennedy is probably the only ex-science-fiction-fan who became at all prominent in the fine arts (at least he's the only one I know of) — and certainly the most famous poet ever to rise from the fan ranks.

It just goes to show how important it is to be a fan. Or, anyway, how science-fiction fanning can lead to Big Things, later on. Tell *that* to the next snob who sneers at you for reading "that crazy Buck Rogers stuff!"

END

Next Month in IF

A BOWL BIGGER THAN EARTH

by Philip José Farmer

BRIDE NINETY-ONE

by Robert Silverberg

INVADER

by Harl Vincent

And continuing —

FAUST ALEPH-NUL

by James Blish

New combined with *Worlds of Tomorrow* —
don't miss the coming issue of *If!*

The Winged Helmet

by FRED SABERHAGEN

Illustrated by WOOD

*The planet possessed a strange
time fault. Through it, a host
of Berserkers were attacking!*

I

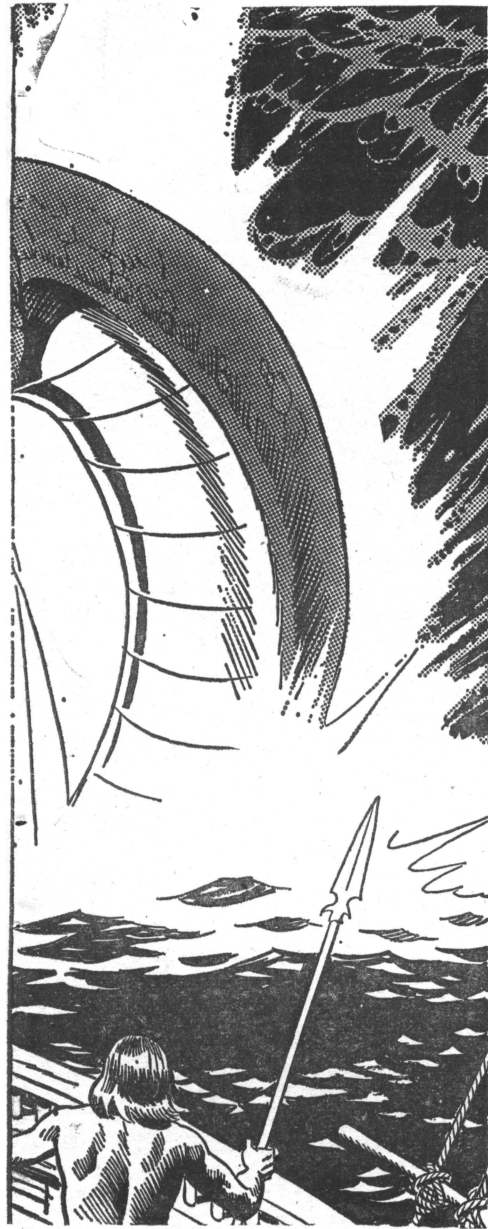
Arms upraised, gray beard and black robes whipping in the wind, Nomis stood on a tabletop of black rock twenty feet square, a hundred feet above the smashing surf.

White seabirds coasted downwind

toward him, then wheeled away, emitting sharp little cries like those of small souls in pain. Around Nomis on three sides there towered other splintered crags and fingers of this coastline of black basaltic rock; before him spread the immense vibration of the sea.

Feet braced apart, he stood cen-





tered in an intricate diagram chalked on the flat rock. Around him he had spread the paraphernalia of his craft — things dead and dried, things old and carven, things that most men would think better destroyed and forgotten. In his thin penetrating voice he was singing into the wind:

Gather, storm-clouds, day and night
Gather, lightning, and chew the ship
Gather, waves, and swallow the ship
Chew and swallow and drink it down!
The long-ship wherein my enemy rides.

There was much more to the song, and it repeated itself over and over. Nomis's thin arms quivered, tired from holding splinters from wrecked ships over his head, while the wind blew his thin gray beard up into his eyes.

Today he could not escape the feeling that his labor was in vain. Today he had been granted none of the tokens of success that sometimes came — heated dreams, dark trances shot with moments of strange vision, startling stretchings of the mind.

Not often in his life had Nomis managed to call down evil on his enemies' heads, not nearly so often, he knew, as those who stood in awe of him believed. Twice before in his life had Nomis tried to raise a storm. Once he had seemingly been successful, but even on that occasion the suspicion had persisted in his own mind that the storm would have come anyway, that the order and control of such a force was beyond him or any man.

But doubtful as he was of the re-

sult, he persisted now in the effort that had kept him almost sleepless on this rock for the past three days. Such was his fear and hatred for the man he knew must now be crossing the sea toward him, coming to rule this country called Queensland.

Nomis's grim eyes, turned hopelessly far out to sea, were mocked by the passage there of a thin squall-line. Of a ship-killing tempest there was no sign at all.

The cliffs of Queensland were still a day's rowing out of sight, dead ahead. In the same direction, but closer, some mildly bad weather was brewing. Harl frowned across the sea's gray face at the line of squalls, while his hands rested with idle sureness on the long-ship's steering oar.

The thirty rowers, freemen and warriors all, could turn their heads and see the bad weather as easily as Harl could see it. And they were all experienced enough to reach the same conclusion, that just slowing down a bit would probably let the squalls blow past before the ship got near them and make things a bit more comfortable for all on board. So now by unspoken agreement they were all easing up on the oars.

From ahead a cool, light breeze sprang up, to flutter the pennons on the sailless masts and ripple the awning fringes on the tent of royal purple which stood amidships. Inside that tent, alone for the moment with his thoughts, was the young man Harl called king and lord. Harl's frown faded, at the thought that young Ay was probably now

making plans for the fighting that was sure to come. The tribes who cared nothing for the new god or the old Empire were certain to test the will and courage of Queensland's new ruler, not that there were grounds for doubting either.

Harl smiled at the thought that his young lord in the tent might not be planning war at all, but a campaign to tame the Princess Alex. It was her hand in marriage that was to bring him his kingdom and his army. If she was like some other high-born girls that Harl had met, her conquest might be as difficult as that of any barbarian chief; and of course even more to a sturdy warrior's taste.

Harl's expression, having become about as jovial as his facial scars would allow, faded once more into glumness. It occurred to him that his king might be practicing reading. Ay had long been an admirer of books and was actually bringing two of them with him on this voyage. Or he might even be praying to his gentle new slave-god; for young and healthy though he was, Ay now and then took the business of worship seriously.

Though half his mind was busy with these thoughts, Harl of course remained alert as always. Now a faint splashing in the water nearby caused him to turn his head to port-side — and in a moment all the thoughts in his head were frozen, together with his warrior's blood.

Rearing right beside the ship, rising across the horizon and the distant afternoon clouds, came

a dragon-face out of legend, a head out of nightmare.

It rode on a shining neck that a man might just be able to circle with both arms. Sea-demons alone might know what the body in the sea below was like! The eyes were clouded sun, the size of silver platters; the scales of head and neck were gray and heavy. The mouth smiled, like a coffin with the lid open just a crack and fenced inside with daggers.

Long as a cable, the thick neck came reeling right in over the gunwale. The men's first cries were sounds such as warriors should not make, but in the next instant all of them were grabbing bravely enough for their weapons. Big Torla, strongest of the crew, leaped to stand on his rower's bench and was the first to hack with a sword at that tremendous swaying neck.

Torla's mighty blows fell useless on scales that gleamed like thick wet iron. The dragon did not even turn to him. Its head swayed to a stop facing the door of the purple tent, and from the slit of its terrible mouth it blew a challenge whose like Harl had not heard in a lifetime of war.

With all the clamor of the men, Ay had needed no such summons to make ready. The tent flaps were ripped open from inside before the dragon-bellow had ceased, and the young king came forth armed with shield and helm, sword ready in his hand.

Harl felt a tremendous pride to see that the young man did not flinch from the sight that met him. And

with the pride Harl's own right arm came back to life, drawing from his belt the short-shafted, iron-bladed axe, gripping it for a throw.

The axe clanged harmlessly from the clouded silver of one eye. The enormous head, its full shock of mouth suddenly open, lunged forward for the king. Ay met it bravely, aiming a thrust straight into the darkness of the throat.

But the king's long sword meant no more than a woman's spin. The doorlike jaw slammed shut, crushing Ay instantly. The head on its long neck swept away, for a moment displaying the horror of broken limbs dangling outside the teeth. And then, with one more sullen splash beside the ship, the evil miracle was gone. Everywhere the sunlit sea rolled on unchanged, hiding its secrets all below.

The remaining hours of daylight passed with scarcely a word spoken aboard the long-ship. In full battle-readiness she prowled on and on, in watery circles. But there was nothing for her to fight. The edge of the squall-line came and went, the men taking measures to meet it mechanically, not really aware of its passage. And then at the end of the day the sea was calm again.

Squinting into the setting sun, Harl rasped out a one-word order: "Rest."

Long ago he had retrieved his blunted axe and replaced it in his belt. Now the evidence to be seen on deck was only this: Ay's winged helmet, fallen from his head, and a few small spots of the last of his blood.

Derron Odegard, recently promoted three grades to major, was sitting in as a junior aide on an emergency staff meeting called by the new Time Operations Commander. At the moment Derron was listening with professional interest as a colonel from the Historical Research Section held forth.

"... as we more or less expected, the berserkers have chosen to focus this latest attack upon one individual. Naturally they've chosen one whose removal from history will have disastrous consequences for us.

"Their target is King Ay of Queensland. Until recently most historians even doubted this man's reality, but with some direct observation of the past, his historicity and his importance have both been fully confirmed."

The colonel-historian turned to an electric map, which he attacked with a teacher's gestures.

"We see here the middle stages in the shrinkage and disorganization of the Continental Empire, leading to its ultimate collapse. It's very largely due to Ay's activity and influence that Queensland here remains in a state of at least semi-civilization, providing something solid for our planet's later civilization to base itself on."

The new Time Operations Commander — his predecessor was reported on his way to the moon, or at least the surface — raised a hand. "I admit I'm not too clear on this. Ay was a bit of a barbarian himself, wasn't he?"

"Well, he certainly began as such. But when he found himself with a land of his own he settled down and defended it very well. He knew the raiders' methods, and many of the raiders knew him and preferred to attack someone else."

The next officer to appear at the head of the table was a major from Probability Analysis. "We don't know how Ay was killed," he began in a nervous voice. "But we do know where. His lifeline is newly broken *here*, while he's voyaging to Queensland for the first time." The major displayed a videotape made from a sentry screen. "As you can see, the other lifelines aboard ship remain unbroken. Probably the enemy expects historical damage to be intensified if Ay's crew is thought to have done away with him. It seems to me all too likely that such an expectation is correct."

The major paused for a quick sip of water. "Frankly the situation looks extremely grave. In nineteen or twenty days' present-time, the historical shockwave should reach us, with the most — the most serious effects. I'm told that our chances of finding the enemy keyhole within nineteen days' present-time are not good."

The faces round the table had tightened. Only the new Time Ops Commander managed to remain relatively relaxed. "I'm afraid you're right about the difficulty in finding this keyhole, major. Of course every effort is being made to find it. Trouble is the enemy's getting smart about hiding his tracks. This time he attacked with only one machine in-

stead of six. And immediately after killing one important man that one machine seems to have gone into hiding. It'll be still on the scene somewhere, waiting to mess up whatever we do to set things right, but meanwhile it's being careful not to stir up any changes we could use to track it."

The talk soon moved into a highly technical level. Here of course the scientific people dominated, but they were far from agreeing among themselves on what could and should be done. When they began to exchange personalities along with formulae, Time Ops called a half hour's recess.

With this much time unexpectedly on his hands, Derron called the nurses' quarters at the nearby hospital complex. Lisa was bunking there now and starting to train for some kind of a nursing job. He was pleased to find her home and available; within a few minutes they were walking together in the park where they had met.

He had come with a topic of conversation prepared, but Lisa these days had a favorite subject of her own.

"Matt's just healing so quickly that all the doctors are amazed!"

"Good. I'll have to come round and see him one of these days."

"They say it must be because he comes from so far in the past; they talk about the effect on one individual of coming up through twenty thousand years' evolutionary gradient, about the organizational energies in his body and brain becom-

ing infolded and intensified. I can't follow most of it. They talk about the realm where the material and the non-material meet — "

"Yes."

" — and Matt probably understands what they're saying as well as I do, now. He's up and around most of the time. They allow him a good deal of freedom. He's quite good about staying out of rooms he's warned not to enter, not touching dangerous things, and so forth."

"Yes."

"Oh, and did I tell you they've suspended healing in his face? Until they're sure he can make a fully informed decision on what he wants his new face to look like."

"Yes, I heard something about that. Lisa, how long are you going on living in the hospital? Are you really set on this nursing thing?"

"Oh." Her face fell slightly. "Sometimes I don't think I was cut out to be a nurse, but I have no immediate plans to move. They still work a little on my memory every day, and it's handy to live there."

"Any success with the treatments?" Derron knew that the doctors now accepted that Lisa had been caught in the path of the berserker missile while it was still a probability-wave. For a while they had considered the possibility that she was an emissary or deserter from the world of the future, made amnesic by descent through time.

But on the sentry-screens no such reversed lifeline could be found. No device or message had ever come to the modern age from the future. Either the inhabitants of the un-

knowable time-to-come had good reason to refrain from communication, or the future Sirgol was uninhabited by man. Or this present-time of the berserker war might be completely blocked off by paradox loops. It was some comfort at least that no berserker machines came attacking from the direction of tomorrow.

"The treatments don't help much." Lisa said. The memory of her personal life before the missile was still almost completely blank. She went back to taking about what Matt had done today.

Not listening, Derron closed his eyes for a moment, savoring the sensation of life he had when he was with her. There was the touch of her hand in his, the feel of soil under his feet, the warmth of the pseudosunshine on his face. And at any instant it might all be gone — a missile-wave could come down through the miles of rock, or the unraveling of King Ay's severed cord might propagate faster than expected up through the weave of history.

He opened his eyes and saw the muraled walls surrounding the buried park and the improbably alive and singing birds. The place was thronged, as usual, with strolling couples and solitaires; in places the tough grass showed signs of wear, and the gardeners had had to defend it with string fences. All in all, a poor imitation of the real world; but with Lisa it became for him a place of joy.

Derron pointed. "Right there's the

tree where I first came to your rescue. Or you came to mine, rather."

"I rescued you? From what horrible fate?"

"From dying of loneliness in the midst of forty million people. Lisa, I'm trying to tell you I want you to move out of that hospital dormitory."

"If I do, where will I live?"

"I'm asking you to live with me, of course. You're not a little lost girl any more, you're studying to be a nurse, you're a functioning adult, and I can ask. There are some unused apartments around, and if I take a companion I'll rate a fairly nice one. Especially with this promotion they've given me."

She squeezed his hand, but that was all. She was thoughtfully silent, her eyes on the ground a few paces ahead of them.

"Lisa? What do you say?"

"Just *exactly* what are you offering me, Derron?"

"Look, yesterday when you were telling me about your new girl friends' problems you seemed to have a very firm grasp of what this male-female business is all about."

"You want me to live with you temporarily, is that it?"

"Lisa, nothing in our world can be permanent. At the staff meeting just now — well, I'm not supposed to talk about that. But things don't look good. I want to share with you whatever good things may be left for us."

Still silent, she let him lead her on stepping-stones across the park's little stream.

"Lisa, do you want a marriage

ceremony? I should have put that first, I suppose, and asked you formally to marry me. The thing is not many people are going to raise their eyebrows if we don't have a ceremony, and by not having one we'll avoid some delay and red tape. Would you think we were doing wrong if we didn't have an official wedding?"

"I . . . suppose not. What bothers me is the way you talk about everything being temporary. I suppose feelings are included."

"When everything else is temporary, yes! I don't necessarily like it. But how can anyone in our world say what they'll be feeling or doing or thinking a month or a year from now? In a year we'll most likely all . . ." He let it trail off.

She had been searching, and now at last she found the words she wanted. "Derron, at the hospital I've absorbed the attitude that people's lives can be made less temporary, now or any time. That people should go on trying to build, to accomplish things, even though they may not have long to live."

Such thoughts had been his at one time. A year, a year and a half ago. A lifetime ago. With someone else. The girl's face that he could not and did not want to erase from his memory came back again.

Lisa went on: "Look at Matt, for instance. Remember how badly hurt he was — ?"

"I'm sorry," Derron interrupted. Looking at the time, finding a valid excuse for getting away. "I've got to run, I'm almost late at the staff meeting."

The scientists, by some combination of calculation and debate, had reached a consensus.

"It comes down to this," their spokesman explained as the meeting resumed. "If we're to have any chance of healing the break in Ay's lifeline we must first immobilize the affected part — like putting a splint on a broken bone."

"And how does one splint a lifeline?" demanded Time Ops.

The scientist gestured wearily. "Commander, the only thing I can suggest is for you to somehow put someone else temporarily in Ay's place, to ride his ship on to Queensland and there play his part for a few days at least. The man could be given a communicator and sent day-to-day instructions. If the berserkers stood still for it, he might play out the rest of Ay's life in its essentials."

"How do we tell just what the essentials are?" someone broke in.

"We make guesses and keep watching our screens." The scientists' spokesman grinned faintly. "Gentlemen, I don't know if a substitution scheme can be made to work over any length of time, nothing like it has ever been tried. But it should at least buy us a few more days of present-time in which to think of something else."

Time Ops thoughtfully rubbed his stubbled face. "Well, substitution is the only idea we've got to work with at this point. But Ay is about twelve hundred years back. That means dropping a Modern to take his place is out, right?"

"Afraid so, sir. Mental devolution sets in at about four hundred years."

Time Ope thought aloud in his tired monotonous voice. "Does anyone suppose we could get away with using a slave-unit on this kind of job? No, I thought not. Then what's left? We somehow enlist one of Ay's contemporaries, who's both willing and able to do the job."

Someone suggested: "Appearance isn't too much of a problem. Ay isn't known in Queensland, except by reputation, when he first arrives there."

Another offered: "We ought to be able to snatch his crew up to present-time and work on them a few days, get them to accept a substitute. Use pacifying drugs and hypnotic methods."

"Good thinking, gentlemen," said Time Ops. "Now let's try to solve the first problem. Who is our substitute going to be?"

Surely, thought Derron, someone besides me must see where one possible answer lies. He didn't want to be the first to suggest it — because of Lisa. But precious present-time was flowing away, and no one else saw it.

Derron cleared his throat, startling men who had forgotten his presence. "Correct me if I'm wrong, gentlemen. But don't we have one man available who could be sent down to Ay's century without losing his wits, because he comes from the even deeper past himself?"

There was nothing for Harl to do but take the ship on to Queensland. When he got there he would

have to stand before King Gorboduc and the princess, look them in the face and tell them what had happened to Ay.

The other warriors would be spared that burden at least. Now, hours after the monster's attack, they were still obeying Harl without question. The sun was going down, but Harl meant to keep them rowing right through the night, to hold off the mad demonstration of grief that was sure to come if he let the men fall idle now. They rowed now like blind men, sick men, walking dead men, not knowing or caring where the ship was steered, their faces blank with rage and shock turned inward.

Frequently the oars fell out of stroke, clattered together or splashed awkwardly along the surface of the sea. No one noticed. Torla groaned a death song as he pulled — woe to the next man who faced Torla in a fight.

Inside the purple tent, atop Ay's treasure chest (another problem for Harl, that chest, a problem that would grow as rage and grief wore away) the winged helmet rested in a place of honor. It was now all that was left . . .

Ten years ago Ay had been a real prince, with a real king for a father. About ten years ago Ay's beard had first begun to sprout, and Harl had first begun to serve as the young prince's good right hand. And at about that time, also, the sickness of envy and the fighting for power had started in earnest among Ay's uncles and brothers and cousins. So now Ay's father and most of his

house were dead, their kingdom lost and divided among strangers.

Ay's inheritance had shrunk to the deck of a fighting ship, not that Harl minded that for himself. Harl had not even complained about books and reading. Nor even about prayers to a man-god, a slave-god who had preached love and mercy and had gotten his bones split with wedges for his trouble.

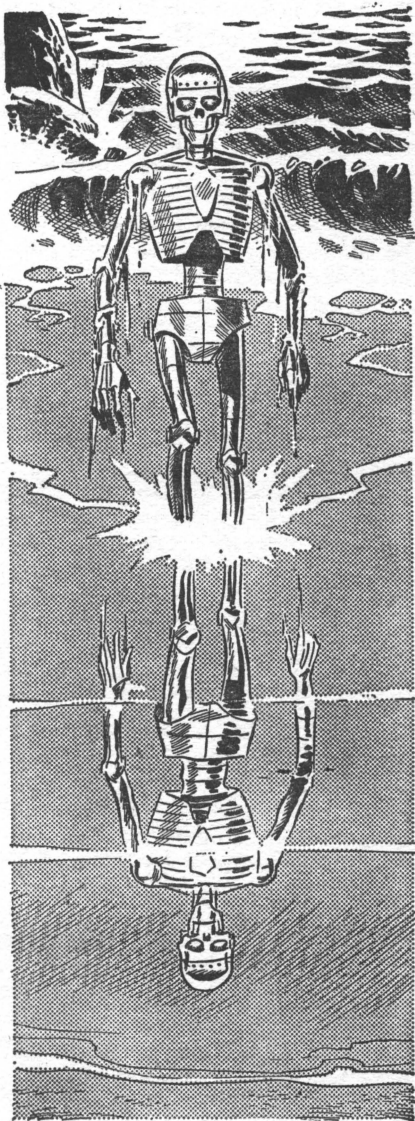
Over the ship, or beneath it, there passed a sudden lurching change. It was a tilting, swaying motion, over in an instant, so that Harl wondered if the dragon had come back, rising from the deep to scrape his bulk beneath their hull.

The men all dropped their oars and once more drew their weapons. But there was no dragon to be seen, nor much of anything else. With a speed that hinted at the supernatural a mist had closed in round the ship. The red lingering light of sunset had blurred into a white glow diffusing through the mist. Even the waves were different, Harl noticed now. The air was warmer, the very smell of the sea had changed.

The men looked at one another in the strange light. They fingered swords and muttered about wizardry.

"Row slowly ahead!" ordered Harl, thinking it best to keep the men busy, though his sense of direction had for once been totally confused.

He went forward to be lookout, and before the rowers had taken fifty strokes he threw up a hand to halt them. Water gurgled



round the backing oars. Only an easy spear-cast from the bow, a gentle sandy beach had materialized out of the grayness.

When the men became aware of this, their murmuring grew louder. They knew full well that a few minutes ago they had been far from any land.

"It's certainly solid ground ahead!"

"Looks like solid ground. I'll not be surprised if it vanishes in a puff of smoke. Sorcery!"

No one disputed any longer that sorcery was at work. What, if anything, might be done about it was another question.

Harl called for a council. After some debate it was decided to row away from the beach, to see if they might get beyond the reach of whatever magic had them in its grip.

Sunset was now certainly overdue, but the garish light filtering down through the mist did not fade. In fact it brightened, for as they rowed the mist began to thin.

Just as they emerged from a fog-bank, they came near driving their ship straight into a boundless black wall that rose from the sea. It was a wall with no edge or top in sight, rising and extending, curving back without limit around the sea and over the mist. From the foot of this wall the men in their tiny ship looked up into an enormous inverted bowl; they saw now that the bank of fog was illumined by fire thrown down from lights that looked as bright and high as sun fragments.

Men cried out prayers to all the gods and devils alive. Men shrieked that they had come to the sky and

the stars at the end of the world. They almost broke their oars, spinning their ship and driving it back into the mist.

Harl was as much shaken as any of them, but he would die before he showed it. "Another enchantment, that's all!" he barked. "Not a real sky or stars, but something put into our eyes by magic. Well, if there are wizards where who mean us harm, I say they can be made to bleed and die like other men!"

The others took some heart from his words. Here in the concealing fog, the world was still sane enough for a man to keep his eyes open and not go mad.

Harl gave the order to row back in the direction of the beach they had glimpsed. It was still there, real and solid. As the log-ship grounded gently Harl, sword in hand, was the first to leap into the shallows. The water was warmer than he had expected, and when a splash touched his lips he discovered that it was fresh, not salt. But by this time he was beyond being surprised at such trifles.

IV

One of Matt's tutors stepped ahead of Derron, tapped on the door of the private hospital room, then slid it open. Putting his head into the room, the tutor spoke slowly and distinctly. "Matt? Here is the man named Derron, who fought beside you in your own time. Now he wants to talk to you."

As Derron entered, the man who had been sitting in an armchair be-

fore the television screen got to his feet, standing tall and erect, dressed in the robe and slippers that were general issue for patients.

In this man Derron could see no resemblance to the dying savage he had helped carry into the hospital. Matt's hair had been depilated and was only now starting to grow back in, a neutral-colored stubble. Most of Matt's face was covered by a plastic membrane, which served as skin while the completion of the healing process was held in abeyance. On the bedside table, half covered by some secondary-level schoolbooks, were several sketches and composite photographs, looking like variations on one basic model of a young man's face. In his pocket Derron now was carrying a photo of a somewhat different face — Ay's, caught by a spy device sent to skim near the young king for a few millionths of a second on the day he began his fateful voyage to Queensland. No machine of the Moderns had been able to get closer than that to the spacetime locus of the assassination itself — spacetime strongly resisted repeated interference in one spot.

"I am pleased to meet you, Derron." Matt put meaning into the ritual phrase; his speech, like his tutor's to him, was slow but distinct.

"I am pleased to see that your health is returning," Derron answered. "And glad to see that you are learning so quickly the ways of a new world."

"And I am pleased to see that you are healthy. I am glad your

spirit could leave the metal-man it fought in, for that metal-man was very much hurt."

Derron smiled. "Don't let them con you with talk of where my spirit was. I was never in any danger there as you were."

"Con me?" Matt had the question-inflection down pat.

The tutor said: "Derron means, don't let us teach you wrong things. He's joking."

Matt nodded. He knew about jokes, but he had something serious in mind. "Derron, but it was your spirit in the metal-man?"

"Well — say it was my electronic presence."

Matt glanced at the television in the wall. "Electronics I have learned a little bit. It moves my spirit from one place to another." Some kind of historical documentary film was being shown at the moment.

"Moves your eyes and thoughts, you mean."

Matt was firm. "Eyes and thought and spirit."

The tutor said: "This spirit-orientation is really his idea, major, not ours."

"I understand."

From Operations' point of view, the important thing would be that firmness in opinion, which would be a very good thing provided the right opinions were held. In these days many things could be taught very quickly to a good student, but character traits were not among them. "All right, Matt, in the spirit I was fighting beside you, though I didn't risk my neck as you

risked yours. When you jumped onto that berserker with arrows in your hands, I know your thought was to save me. I am grateful, and glad that now I can tell you so."

"Will you sit down?" Matt gestured Derron to the room's second chair and then reseated himself. The tutor remained standing, hovering in the background. Matt said: "My thought was partly to save you. Partly for my people there. Partly just to see the — berserker die. But since coming here I have learned that all people, even here, might be dead if we had not won that fight."

"That is true. Now other fighting, just as important, is going on in other times and places." This was the opening for the recruiting speech he had been sent here to make, but Derron paused for a moment before plunging ahead. For the tenth time he wished that Operations had sent someone else to do the job. But the experts thought that Matt would react most favorably to a presentation by the man who had fought beside him. And to use Matt was Derron's own idea, after all. He could wish now that he had kept his mouth shut at the staff meeting. But if he didn't make this sales pitch now, someone else would.

With an inaudible sigh, Derron got down to business. "Already you have done very much for us, Matt, for everyone. But now my chiefs ask you to do more."

He put the essence of the situation before Matt in simplified form. The berserkers, enemies of the tribe-of-all-men, had badly wounded a great chief in another

part of the world, and someone was badly needed to take the chief's place.

Matt sat still, heard the explanation through, his eyes steadily attentive above the plastic skin that masked most of his lower face. His first question was: "What will happen when the great chief is strong again?"

"Then he will resume his own place, and you will be brought back here to live a good new life. We expect that we will be able to bring you back safely, but understand that there will be danger. How much danger we cannot say, because this will be a new thing to do. But some danger, all along the way."

Let him know that, major — don't paint too black a picture, of course. It seemed to be left up to Major Odegard to find the proper shade of gray. Well, Time Ops might be watching over his shoulder now, but Derron was damned if he'd con Matt into a job that he, Derron, wouldn't have volunteered for if it had been open to him. No, Derron told himself, *he* wouldn't have volunteered. The chances of the mission doing any good were too uncertain. Death did not frighten him, but the chance seemed all too great that the volunteer might meet some unknown and unimaginable fate somewhere in the probability-space of half-reality, where the Moderns' knowledge had only begun to reach.

"And if, in spite of all medicine, the great chief should die and can never go back to his own place?"

"Then it would be your job to

continue in his place. We would tell you what to do when necessary. In this king's place you would lead a better life than most men in history have had. And when you had finished his span of years, we would try to bring you here, to live on still longer in our world, with much honor."

"Honor?"

The tutor tried to explain.

Matt soon seemed to understand and went on to another point. "Will I take more magic arrows with me, to fight the berserkers in this king's place?"

Derron thought. "I suppose you might take some weapon like that. But your main job will not be fighting berserkers, but carrying on in the king's place."

Matt nodded. "All is new, all is strange," he said in his slow, precise voice. "I must think about it."

"Of course."

Derron was about to say that he could come back tomorrow for an answer, but Matt already had another question. "What will happen if I say no? If no one can be found to act for this wounded chief?"

"There is no way you can be forced to go. Our wise men think that if no one goes, the war will be lost, and all of us will probably be dead in less than a month."

"And I am the only one who can go?"

"It may be so. You are our wise men's first choice." Derron supposed that some plan was under way to get a back-up man or two from the deep past. But anyone brought up now would be days behind Matt in

training all along the line, and every hour was important.

Matt spread out his healed hands. "I must believe what you tell me, you who have saved my life and made me well again. I do not want to die in a month, and see everyone die. So I must go and take this king's place if I am able."

Derron sighed again, with mixed feelings. He reached into his pocket for the photo.

V

Time Ops, watching through a spy scanner, nodded with faintly surprised satisfaction. Odegard was a sharp young lad all right, using a smooth soft sell to get the volunteer to place himself on the right side of the argument.

Now the operation could roll in earnest. He swiveled in his chair and touched a button. "Where are Ay's ship and crew at this moment?"

"Just brought up to present-time, sir, I was just going to call you. We dropped them into Reservoir H as planned. Colonel Lukas and his psych team are starting to work right now."

The sand beach sloped up to a lowland of gravelly soil and sparse grass. Harl trod it with the six men he had chosen to go exploring with him. The others were left waiting at the water's edge, ready to protect the ship or shove her off again.

Harl's scouting party proceeded slowly inland through the mist. They had not far to go; as soon as they

had passed over the first hillock, they were met by a single tall figure walking out of the mist — a man in white robes such as were worn by Good Enchanters of the old religions.

This man stopped, raising his hands in the gesture of peace, showing not the least surprise or fear at finding himself suddenly confronted by seven armed sea-rovers.

"My name is Lukas," he said simply, in Harl's native language. He had a bad accent, but Harl had managed to understand worse.

"Let us put some pointed questions to this 'chanter," said Torla, putting a hand on his dagger.

The one in wizard's garb raised his eyebrows and his right hand slightly. Perhaps only showing polite dismay, perhaps giving or preparing to give a signal.

"Let us wait!" said Harl sharply. The mist concealed everything that was more than a few paces away; there might be an army in it. He nodded to Lukas politely and named himself and his companions.

The man in white robes bowed in grave acknowledgment, his hands once more at rest. "My house is very near; allow me to offer you its hospitality, at least for a meal."

"We thank you for the offer," said Harl uncertainly. The man's unshaken air of confidence was unsettling. Harl wanted to ask what country they had landed in and how, but was reluctant to reveal his ignorance.

"I pray you, some or all of you come at least for food and drink. If you wish to leave men to guard your

ship, I will order refreshment sent to them."

Harl mumbled for a moment, undecided. How would Ay have met this strange confident courtesy?

"Very well, we seven will go with you," he answered at last. When he walked back over the hillock to explain matters to the rest of the crew, some of them also argued for seizing the wizard at once and asking pointed questions.

Harl shook his head. "We can do that at any moment. But once a man's blood is out, it's hard to pour back into his veins should the bleeding prove a mistake. We'll just watch him close, until we learn more. If food and drink are sent you, I suggest you treat the bearers with some courtesy." No urging of caution and alertness was needed; the men were all ready to strike at shadows now.

Then Harl and his chosen six ringed themselves about Lukas and walked inland with him. The six took their cue from Harl and acted as if it were all accidental and unintentional, their surrounding their prisoner like a prisoner. For his part, Lukas gave no sign of being bothered in the least.

The mist grew ever thicker as the party proceeded inland. Before they had gone a hundred paces Harl could see that the gray billows were coming, rolling down from atop a line of low cliffs. Like a wall, these cliffs blocked further progress; the wizard's house was built right against their foot, a simple stone building, big and solid enough to be a manor or a small fortress, with a look of

newness. At second glance it was hardly a fortress, for the windows were low and wide, and the wide doorway open.

Several people in simple servants' garb emerged from this doorway and bowed to the approaching Lukas and his guests; Harl noticed with some relief that none of the servants looked anything but solidly human. The girls among them were comely in a down-to-earth style and seemed lively as well. They eyed the warriors and giggled before popping back inside.

"No fairy-tale witches there," growled Torla. "Though I make no doubt they know enchantments of a sort."

Torla preceded Lukas through the doorway, and the rest of the searovers followed close on the heels of the white-robed man. Harl came in the last place, looking over his shoulder, his hand on his axe. He could not begin to feel easy about any man who welcomed seven armed strangers into his house.

Inside there was nothing visible to feed Harl's suspicion, save more of the strange confidence. The entrance led them directly into a great manorial room, in which were set more than enough benches and tables to have accommodated the long-ship's entire crew. At the huge fireplace, a smiling, confident servant turned the spitted carcass of a weighty meat animal. Browned and dripping, the roast was so nearly done that it must have been started hours before.

Though a good deal of light came in at the wide-open windows with

the fog, the walls were mounted with torches, making the room quite bright. Through hangings covering the rear wall Harl could now and then glimpse servants going about tasks in distant chambers dug back behind the line of the cliff. There was of course no telling how many armed men might be back there, or lurking somewhere outside; but so far Harl had not seen a single weapon, barring table knives. Another easy-mannered servant was now laying eight places at the head table, setting out worthy but not spectacular silver plates and tankards.

Lukas proceeded straight to the head of this table and turned with a gracious gesture. "Will you be seated? There is wine or ale, as you choose."

"Ale!" barked Harl, in a meaningful tone. He had drugs that blended their taste very smoothly with that of wine; and even honest drink must not be allowed to take the edge of clearness from his and his men's minds. The others took the hint and echoed the call for ale, though Torla looked disappointed.

As the company seated themselves, two girls came from behind the hangings to fill their tankards. Harl watched to see that the wizard's drink was poured from the same vessel as his own, and Harl waited until the wizard was wiping foam from his lips before he tasted the drink himself. And even then Harl took only a sparing swallow.

The ale was neither too strong nor too weak, but still had something slightly peculiar in its taste. In the

place where everything was strange, how could the ale be otherwise? Harl asked himself. And he allowed himself another sip.

"The ale of your country is strong and good," he ventured, being complimentary. "So no doubt you have many strong men here and serve a strong king."

"All that you say is true," Lukas agreed.

"And your king's name?"

"Our present king is called the Planetary Commander." The wizard smacked his lips over ale. "And whom do you serve?"

A tremulous groan passed round the board. The tankards scraped in unison as they were lifted, and then together they thudded down, all lighter than they had been. All except Harl's. He could see no sign of treachery, but still he decided firmly that he would not drink any more, not just now.

"Whom *do* we serve?" he asked the world. "Our good, young lord is dead."

"Young Ay is dead!" Torla roared it out like a man challenging the pain of a wound. A serving girl came to refill his tankard, and Torla seized her and pulled her onto his lap. But when she softly resisted his pawing he only held her there gently, while a comical witless expression slowly grew on his face.

Harl wondered at this. His own mind was perfectly clear . . . and yet he should be more concerned, more alert than he was. Should he not?

"Young Ay's death would be sad news," said Lukas calmly. "If it were true."

Oddly, no one took offense at this implied slur on their truthfulness in such a matter. Only another murmur of mourning passed round the table.

"We saw him die!"

"Ah, yes!"

Harl's big fists were knotted, remembering their helplessness against the dragon. "We saw him die, in such a way that, by all the gods, I can scarce believe it yet myself!"

Lukas leaned forward, intent. "And what way was that?"

In a faltering voice Harl told him. Harl's throat quickly grew dry with speech; hardly realizing that he did so, he swallowed more from his tankard. The truth about the dragon sounded in his own ears like a clumsy lie. What chance was there of King Gorboduc believing it?"

When Harl's recital was finished, Torla tried to stand up and say something; the girl fell from his lap and landed with a yelp on her soft bottom. His face showing uncharacteristic concern, Torla bent as if to help her. But she scurried away, and Torla just kept right on bending until he was seated again, with his head lying on the table. Then he began to snore.

His shipmates only laughed. Something was wrong, the men should not be drunk on one or two tankards apiece of any ale. Harl puzzled over this, took another thoughtful sip himself and decided he had better get to his feet.

"Your king is not dead," the wizard was telling him monotonously. "Not dead, not dead, why should you believe that he is?"

"Why? We saw the dragon take him!" But Harl was no longer quite sure of what he had seen, or what he remembered. What was happening here? He swayed on his feet, half-drew his sword and croaked: "Treachery! Wake up!" But his men's eyes were glassy or closing. Around the table some of these men started to rise, but then they sank back, letting weapons slide forgotten to the floor.

"Wizard?" one man muttered, pleading. "Tell us again that our king lives."

"He lives and shall live."

Alone, Harl staggered back from the table, his sword sighing all the way out of its scabbard into his hand. To hurt anyone for any reason would be a very terrible thing, but he felt so frightened that he might do even that. "Stand back!" he warned the wizard.

The wizard also stood up, not much frightened with the length of the table between himself and Harl. From inside his robe Lukas took a mask like an animal's snout, which he fitted onto his face. His voice came out thickly: "No one will harm you here. I have shared with you the drink that makes men peaceful."

Harl turned and ran for the door. Outside, the mist suddenly turned sparkling in his lungs. When he reached the hillock from which he could see the beached ship, he discovered that all the men he had left to guard her were dead or dying. Half a dozen nearly human monsters with gray snouted faces were busy arranging their bodies in rows on

the beach. The men who could still move were offering no resistance, but letting themselves be led like load-oxen.

It was really too bad that such a thing had happened. Reflexively Harl groped for his sword and axe; then he remembered that he had thrown all his weapons away somewhere.

"It's all right," said Lukas' soothing voice, from just behind Harl. As Harl turned, the wizard continued: "Your men are asleep. They need rest, don't wake them."

"Ahh, that's it!" Harl sighed with deep relief. He might have known there was no reason to worry, on this good island of sparkling ale and sparkling air and friendly people who spoke nothing but truth. He saw now that the snouted monsters were only men who wore masks like the wizard's, taking care of his men. Harl looked confidently at Lukas and waited to be told some more good news.

Sighing behind his mask, Lukas seemed to relax. "Come here," he said. And he led Harl down to the water's very edge, where the wet sand was kept lapped to perfect smoothness by the little wave-lets coming in.

With his finger the wizard drew in the wet sand, making the crude outline of a grotesque head. "Suppose that this is the dragon you thought you saw. What exactly did you think happened?"

Harl groaned wearily and sank to his knees, staring helplessly at the

sketch. Now that he could relax he felt very tired, and he was going to sleep soon; but right now he had to concentrate on what Lukas was showing him.

"It seized Ay," Harl said. "In its mouth."

"Like this?" The wizard's finger drew a stick-figure clenched in the dragon's teeth, waving helpless lines of arms and legs. Even as he drew, the little waves were coming in over the sketch, smoothing and blurring its lines.

"Like that," Harl agreed, sitting down awkwardly.

"But now all that is being wiped out," the wizard intoned. "Wiped away. And when this evil thing is gone, then the truth — what you and I want to be the truth — can be written in."

The waves were erasing the dragon, and Harl could sleep.

VI

Somewhere along the line in his straining Matt asked: "Then King Ay is in fact dead and not wounded, as I was first told?"

"We said he was wounded, because he can be brought back to life. His dying and his wounds will be as if they had never happened."

"Then if I fail, someone else may try again? If I am killed back there, my life too may be brought back?"

He had his answer at once from the gravity of their faces, but they went into explanations. "All this that you see here, all this work, is to give that one man back his life. If we

can do that, then all the other bent and altered lives around his will also flow back where they were. But not yours, for your life was not there in the original pattern. If you die back there, that death will be real and final for you — as death will be for all of us here, if you should fail. No one else will be able to try again."

One of the perquisites of Derron's new rank was a small, private cubicle of an office, and right now he was silently cursing his promotion for giving Lisa a fine place in which to corner him. She was angry as he had never seen her before.

"Whose fault is it if not yours?" she was demanding. "You admit you're the one who suggested using Matt. Why didn't you suggest they go back and grab someone else from the past instead?"

So far Derron was keeping his patience. "Operations can't just go and pull someone out of history every time they feel like it. Ay's crew is a special case; they're going right back where they belong. And Matt's a special case, he was about to die when we brought him up. Operations has finally been able to bring up a couple of other men who were about to die in their own time, but those two haven't had time to learn where they are, let alone what the mission they're wanted for is all about. When they do know, they may refuse."

"Refuse! What chance does Matt have to refuse it, when you demand it of him? He thinks you're some

kind of a great hero — he's still like a child in so many ways!"

"Beg your pardon, but he's not a child. Far from it. And he won't be helpless. Before we drop him he'll be trained in everything he'll need, from politics to weapons."

"Weapons?" She was still like a child herself, in some ways.

"Certainly, weapons. Although we hope he's only going to be in Queensland for a few days and won't get involved in any fighting. We're going to try to bring him back before the wedding."

"Wedding!"

Derron hastened on. "Matt can take care of himself, and he can do this job. He's a natural leader. Anyone who can lead Neolithic people — "

"Never mind all that!" Lisa was now on the brink of tears. "Of course he can do it, if he must. If he's really the only one who can go. He'll go, and I wouldn't stop him. But why were *you* the one to suggest that he be used? Right after I talked to you about him. Why? Did you just have to make sure that *he* was temporary, too?"

"Lisa. What do you think I am?"

Her angry eyes were brimming over, and she hurried to the door. At the last moment she turned. "I don't know! I don't know you any more!" And she was gone.

Days ago the plastic membrane had fallen away from his face. The new skin had appeared already weathered, thanks to the Moderns' magic, and the new beard had then grown almost visibly for two days

before slowing to a normal rate.

Now, on the day he was to be dropped, Matt stood for the last time before the mirror in his room, getting a last good look at his new face. Turning his head from side to side, he pondered the different angles of Ay's cheeks and nose and chin. He wondered if the spirit behind the face had also changed enough. It did not seem to Matt that he was yet possessed of the spirit of a king.

"Just a few more questions, sire," said one of the tutors, standing now at Matt's elbow. For days now they had conversed with him only in Ay's language, while wearing for him airs of respect suitable for subordinates addressing a warrior chief. But that was just play acting, no help in changing a spirit.

"First, how will you spend the evening on the day of your arrival in Queensland?"

Turning away from the mirror, Matt answered patiently. "That is one of the times we cannot be sure of, where Ay's lifeline is hard to see. I will stay in character and try to avoid making decisions, especially big ones. I will use my communicator if I think I need help."

"And if you see the dragonlike machine that killed your predecessor?"

"I will try to make it come after me or somehow get it to move around as much as possible. This will help you find the keyhole to cancel out the dragon with all the harm it has done. And the sword I will carry will give me some chance to defend myself."

The tutors' questioning went on,

while the time for the drop neared. A team of technicians came in to dress Matt in the best copies that could be made of the garments Ay had worn when embarking for Queensland.

They treated him more like a statue than a king. When it was time for the finishing touches, one of the costumers complained: "If they've decided at last that we should use the original helmet, where is it?"

The other answered: "Both helmets are out at the reservoir. The communications people were still working on them."

The tutors kept thinking up more last-minute questions, which Matt answered patiently while the dressers put a plastic coverall on him over his clothes, and another officer came to lead him out to the little train that would take him through a tunnel to Reservoir H.

Once before he had ridden the train, when he had been taken to see the sleeping men and the ship. He did not expect to enjoy riding the ship. As if in tune with this thought, one of the tutors now looked at his timepiece and handed Matt what he knew was a motion-sickness pill.

Halfway to the Reservoir the train made a stop, and two men got on, the chief called Time Ops and another whom Matt recognized from pictures as the Planetary Commander. The latter took the seat facing Matt. He sat there swaying lightly with the car's renewed motion, holding Matt in steady scrutiny.

Matt's own face was sweating, but only because of the plastic coverall. So, he was thinking: this is what a king looks like in the flesh. At once, heavier and less rocklike than his television image. But this was after all a Modern king, and so the king-spirit in him would not be the same as it had been for Ay.

The ruler of the Moderns asked: "I understand you thought it important to see me before you dropped?" When there was no immediate response he added: "You understand me?"

"Yes. Learning Ay's speech has not driven yours out of my head. I wanted to see you, to see with my own eyes what it is that makes a man a king." Some of the faces in the background wanted to laugh when they heard that, but they were afraid to laugh and quickly smoothed themselves out into immobility.

The Planetary Commander did not laugh, but only glanced sideways at Time Ops before asking Matt: "They've taught you what to do if the dragon-machine comes after you?"

Matt saw Time Ops nod slightly to the Planetary Commander.

"Yes," said Matt. "I am to make the machine chase me, get it to move around as much as possible . . ."

When the train stopped, the Planetary Commander waved the others to get off first, so he and Matt were left alone in the car. He said then: "I will tell you the real secret of being a king. It is to be ready to lay down your life for your people, whenever and however it is needed."

The Planetary Commander was not lying; he meant what he said, or he thought he meant it. Maybe the words concealed some deeper meaning, too, for in the next moment he seemed to fear that perhaps he had said too much. He began to speak in loud words of encouragement, smiling and clapping Matt on the shoulder as they walked off the train together.

Derron was waiting on the track-side platform in the low, rough-hewn cavern to grip hands with Matt in the style of Ay's time. Matt looked for Lisa, but only those were here who had work to do. He associated Lisa with Derron in his mind and wondered vaguely why his two friends did not mate. Maybe he would mate with Lisa himself, if he came back from this mission and she were willing.

The tutors and others hustled Matt off to wait by himself in a small room. He was told he could get out of the coverall, which he did thankfully. He heard another door open somewhere nearby, and into his room came the smell of the vast body of clean water being preserved in the reservoir during the siege.

On a table lay the sword designed for him by Modern wizards; he picked it up and drew it from its scabbard, looking at it curiously. The edge looked keen, but no more than naturally so. The unaided eye could see nothing of what the Moderns had shown him through a microscope — the supersharp edge that rose from the ordinary-looking one when Matt's hand, and his alone,

gripped the hilt. In his hand this sword cut ordinary metal like cheese and armor plate like wood, nor was the blade dulled in doing so. The Moderns said it had been forged of a single molecule; Matt had no need to understand that and did not try.

But he had come to understand much. In recent days, sleeping and waking, Matt had had history poured like a river through his mind. And there was a new strength in his mind that the Moderns had not put there, which they said was due to his twenty thousand years' passage from the direction of the beginning of the world toward the direction of its end.

With this teaching and this strength he saw now very clearly that it was the Moderns who were the odd culture, the misfits in Sirgol's history. By mere count of years, the Moderns were far closer to Ay than Ay was to Matt's original People. But in their basic modes of thinking and feeling, Ay and The People were much the closer, to each other and to the rest of humanity.

Only such physical power as the Moderns now wielded was going to destroy the berserkers — or could have created them. But when it came to things of the spirit, the Moderns were stunted children. From their very physical powers came their troubled minds, or from their troubled minds came their power over matter — it was hard to say which; but in either case, they had not been able to show Matt how to put on the spirit of a king, which he was now required to do.

Another thing he had come to un-

derstand — the spirits of life were very strong in the universe, or they would long ago have been driven from it, by the berserker-machines of accident and disease and hatred, if not by those that came in metal bodies. So now, as Ay would have done before embarking on a dangerous voyage, Matt raised his hands in the wedge-sign of Ay's religion and murmured a brief prayer, putting what he felt into the form that Ay would have used.

That done, he saw no reason to stay any longer shut up in this little room. So he buckled on his sheathed sword, opened the door and stepped out.

The scene was busy, as he had known it would be. Officers and workers hurried past, this way and that, calling out orders and information. Others worked singly and in little groups. Most were utterly intent on their tasks; but a few faces turned toward Matt as he emerged from the little room where they had put him away until it was time for him to be used. The faces were annoyed, fearful lest he cause some disruption of the schedule.

He ignored the faces when he saw Ay's helmet waiting for him on a stand. He went to it and picked it up, and with his own hands placed the silver-winged thing on his head.

It had been an instinctive gesture, and the faces watching were enough to show him that the instinct had been right. Not that the faces were pleased. Watching him, they fell into an unwilling silence that was mirror enough to show his kingship. Then in another moment they were turn-

ing back to their tasks with loud practical enthusiasm, ignoring as best they could the new presence in their midst.

Some of his tutors came hurrying up again, saying they had just a few more questions. He understood they had sudden need to reassure themselves that they were his teachers still and not his subjects. He would not give them such comfort. Their time of power over him had passed, and he ignored them.

He strode impatiently through the knots of technicians. Some looked up angrily when they were jostled, but when they saw him they kept silent and made way. Soon he was looking down once more into the wrinkle-circled eyes of the Planetary Commander.

"I grow impatient," said Matt. "Are my ship and my men ready, or are they not?"

VII

On his earlier trip to Reservoir H, Matt had seen the crew of Ay's ship asleep while machines stretched their muscles to keep them strong, lamps threw slivers of sunlight on their faces and arms to keep them tanned, and electronic familiars whispered tirelessly to them that their young lord lived.

This time, the men were on their feet, though they moved like sleepwalkers, with eyes still shut. They had been dressed again in their own clothes, armed again with their own harness and weapons. Now they were being led from Lukas' manor down to the beach and hoisted back

aboard their ship. The mist generators had long ago been turned off, and the cave of Reservoir H, with its thin crescent of beach, was an eerie sight under the black distant curve of its ceiling. From high up under that ceiling, lights like cold little suns threw shadow-petals round every man and object on the sand.

Matt shook Derron's hand again and the hands of one or two more he liked, then waded briefly through the fresh water and swung himself up onto the deck. A machine was coming to push the ship out into deep water.

Time Ops followed Matt on board and on a quick tour of inspection that took both of them into the royal tent. " . . . stick to your briefing especially regarding the dragon. Try to make it move around as much as possible if you should see it. Even if there's damage or casualties. Those can be reversed . . ."

He ceased talking as Matt turned to face him, holding in his hands a replica of the winged helmet on his head. He had just picked the second helmet up from atop the treasure chest. "I have heard all your lectures before. Take this with you and give a lecture to those you command. And now, get off my ship, unless you mean to pull an oar."

Time Ops glared in anger at the superfluous helmet, grabbed it and got it. After that, Matt paid the Modern world no more attention. He went to stand beside Harl, who had been set like a sleepy statue beside his steering oar. The other men were all unconscious on their benches.

Their hands moved slightly on their oars' worn wood as if glad to be back, making sure they were where they really fitted.

With a hum of power, the ship was pushed free of the beach. Matt saw a shimmering circle grow beneath her — and then, with scarcely a splash, the overhead lights and the black water and the cave were gone. Seabirds wheeled away into an open morning sky, crying their surprise at the sudden appearance of a ship. There was free, salt air in Matt's face and a groundswell under his feet. The horizon dead ahead was marked with the blue vague line he had been told to expect — Queensland. Off to starboard, a reddened sun was just climbing clear of dawn.

"Harl!" Matt roared out the name, at the same time thwacking his steersman so hard on the shoulder that Harl nearly toppled even as his eyes broke open. "Must I watch alone all day, as well as through the end of the night?"

He had been told that these words in his voice would wake the men, and so it happened. The warriors blinked and growled their way out of their long slumber, and some started rowing before their spirits were fully back in control of their bodies. But in the next few seconds they had somehow put a ragged stroke together.

Matt moved between the benches, making sure all were fully awake, bestowing curses and half-affectionate slaps such as no one else but Ay would dare give these men. Before they had been given time to start

thinking or wondering they were established in a familiar routine. And if, against the commanded forgetfulness, any man's mind still harbored visions of a dragon and a slaughtered chief, no doubt that man would be more than glad to let such nightmare vapors vanish with the daylight.

"Row, boys! Ahead is the land where, they say, all women are queens!"

It was a good harbor they found waiting for them. This was Blanium, the capital, a town of some eight or ten thousand folk, a big city in this age. Immediately inland from the harbor, on the highest point of hill, there rose the gray keep of a small castle. From the high battlements the Princess Alix was doubtless peering down at the ship, to catch a first distant look at her husband-to-be.

In the harbor were eight or ten other vessels, traders and wanderers, few for the season and for all the length of quay. Empire trade was falling off steadily over the years, civilized seamen and landsmen alike faced evil days. But let Ay live, and a part of the civilized world would outlast this storm.

In scattered rivulets of folk a throng was dribbling down Blanium's steep streets, to form along the quay as the long-ship entered the harbor. By the time the oarsmen had pulled into easy hailing distance, and the cheers on shore had started, Matt beheld nearly a thousand people of all ranks waiting to see him land. From the castle, whence of course

the ship had been spied a great distance out, there had come down two large chariots of gilded wood, drawn by hump-backed loadbeasts. These had halted near the water's edge, where men of rank had dismounted and now stood waiting.

The moment of arrival came, of songs and tossed flowers of welcome. Ropes were thrown ashore, and a crew of dockmen began to make the long-ship fast beside the quay, riding against a bumper of straw mats. Matt leaped ashore, concealing a sigh of relief at being released from the rise and fall of the sea. It was probably well for Ay's reputation that the voyage had been no longer.

Voicing sentiments spoken more plainly by the crowd, the delegation of nobles earnestly bade him welcome. King Gorboduc sent his regret that he ailed too much to come down to the harbor himself. Matt knew that Gorboduc was old and historically had only about a month to live beyond this day. He was still without a male heir, and the Queensland nobles would not long submit to the rule of any woman. And for Alix to marry any one of the Queensland nobles might displease the others enough to bring on the very civil war that she and her father sought desperately to avoid. So the king's thoughts had turned to Ay — a princely man of royal blood, young and capable, respected if not liked by all, with no lands of his own to divide his loyalty.

Leaving orders with Harl to see to the unloading of the ship and the quartering of the crew, Matt took

from Ay's coffer the jewels he had been told would be most suitable as gifts for king and princess. And then he of course accepted a chariot ride up the hill.

In the Moderns' world he had heard of places in the universe where loadbeasts came in shapes that allowed men to straddle and ride them. He was just as well satisfied that such was not the case on Sirgol. Learning to drive a chariot had presented problems enough, and today he was happy to be able to leave the reins in another's hands. In fact Matt needed one hand to hold on and the other to wave to the crowd. As the chariots clattered up through the steep streets of the town, folk came pouring out of buildings and alleys to salute Matt with cries of welcome. He hoped they were making no mistake.

The high gray walls of the castle loomed close. The chariots at last rumbled over a drawbridge and into a narrow courtyard. Matt was saluted by sword and pike and given a mass introduction to a hundred minor officials and gentry.

In the great hall of the castle there were gathered a score of more important men and women. When Matt was ushered in to the sound of trumpet and drum, only a few of these showed anything like the enthusiasm of the crowds outside. From history Matt knew that most of these powerful people were suspending judgment on Ay, their smiles no more than polite and waiting. And there were others among them whose smiles were

totally false. Matt knew Nomis' tall, white-robed figure at sight; he had been warned against the wizard as being Ay's bitter enemy.

But there was pure joy in the lined and wasted face of King Gorboduc. He rose from his chair of state to cry welcome, though his legs would support him only for a moment. After the exchange of formal greetings the king sank back into his seat and added, in his quavery voice: "Young man, your father and I shared many a fight and many a feast. May he rouse well in the Warriors' Castle, tonight and always."

Ay would certainly have mixed feelings regarding such a wish, and Ay was never the man to speak out what he felt. "I thank you, Gorboduc, for meaning to wish my father well. May his spirit rest forever in the Garden of the Blessed above."

Gorboduc was taken with a coughing spell, perhaps half-deliberately so he need take no offense at being corrected by an upstart in his own hall. But Nomis in his white robe strode forward to take advantage of the moment.

He did not look at Matt. "You nobles of the realm! Will all of you stand silent while the gods of your fathers are insulted?" There was a murmur of agreement.

"I meant no insult to any here," said Matt, raising his voice slightly. And then at once he wondered if that had been too mild a thing to say, too near an apology to have come from the real Ay. Nomis was sneering openly, and some of the others were looking at Matt with new calculation.

The tension eased as Gorboduc, recovered from his coughing fit, ordered his daughter led forth by her attendant women. From behind a gauzy veil, Alix's lively eyes smiled briefly at Matt; he thought the Moderns had spoken truly, there would be many worse lifelines than Ay's to follow to the end.

While preparations were being made for the exchange of gifts, a friendly noble whispered to Matt that if he had no objection the king preferred that the betrothal ceremony be completed at once. It would mean unusual haste, but there was the matter of the king's health.

"I understand," Matt answered quietly. "If Alix is agreeable, I am."

Her eyes flicked at him again, very briefly and intensely. In a few moments he and she were standing side by side with joined hands.

At the king's order, Nomis came with a great show of reluctance to perform the ceremony of formal betrothal. Midway through, he raised his eyes to the audience when asking the ritual question, whether anyone present had objection to the proposed marriage. And Nomis showed not the least surprise when a loud answer came from one at whom he was staring.

"I do object! I have long sought the princess for my own. And it seems to me that the sea-rover will be better mated with my sword."

The deep voice was perhaps a shade too loud for real confidence to be behind it. But the speaker looked formidable enough; he was young and tall, wide shouldered, with arms thick enough to make the av-

erage man a sturdy pair of legs . . .

There was no historical record of Ay's fighting a duel at his betrothal ceremony, an item not likely to have been overlooked by the chroniclers. Had he already failed to play Ay's part, by giving one too-soft answer that encouraged a challenge?

Anyway there was no doubt about what had to be done now. Matt hooked his thumbs into his wide leather belt and drew a deep breath. "Will you speak your name?"

The giant answered: "I need no introduction to any person of quality here. But that you may address me with the proper respect, know that I am Yunguf, of the house of Yung. And I claim the Princess Alix for my own."

Matt bowed. He was very courteous, as Ay would be. "Since you appear to be a worthy man, Yunguf, we may fight at once to decide this matter. If you have no reason to delay?"

Yunguf flushed; his control slipped for a moment, and Matt saw that beneath it the man was certainly frightened.

Alix put her veil aside and looked soberly at Matt. "May you fare well in this matter, lord. My affections have never belonged to that man, nor indeed has he ever asked for them until now." She had drawn Matt a little aside and spoke in a low voice.

"Then why — ?"

"I do not know, unless — " Her expressive eyes flicked once toward Nomis, who was now intoning a blessing of the Old Religion over Yunguf's arms.

Matt could face the personal danger calmly enough. He had spent most of his life within reach of violence — though as one of The People he had rarely been in danger from another human being. And the Moderns had put not only skill but extra speed into his nerves, had given him Ay's lithe hitting power and endurance, not to mention the sword they had crafted for him, which alone should be advantage enough to win a fight. What bothered Matt was the changes in history that the duel must bring.

Everyone but the king and princess seemed happy at the prospect of a little blood-letting. The others seemed impatient at the delay necessary for Ay's shield to be fetched up from his ship — the sword was already at Matt's side. He thought of going by himself for a minute and reporting developments to Operations, but there was nothing they could tell him now that would get him out of the duel. So Matt passed the time in trying to make light conversation with the ladies, while Yunguf stood glowering and almost silent with a group who were apparently his relatives.

The shield was soon brought by a hurrying Harl, who openly displayed his eagerness to see the fight get started, probably with a view to unsettling Yunguf's nerves some more. The company moved outside. The king, chair and all, was established in the best vantage point, on the edge of a paved space that was evidently consecrated to weaponry, judging by the massive timber butts, much hacked and splintered, which

stood along its farther side. Others arranged themselves as best they could to watch. There seemed to be no judge or referee. Matt took a stand in the arena, saw Yunguf coming with blade and shield ready, slow and powerful as a siege tower, and realized that the combat was on.

The sun had passed the zenith by now, the air was warm, and exercise even when cautious soon raised a sweat. After a few slow feints Yunguf moved quickly at last. And Matt stepped back quickly, his shield, sword, shield parrying in good order the three blows of the attacking combination. He had hoped that at the clash of blades his opponent's sword might break; but the contact had been glancing, and his opponent's weapon evidently tough.

Matt slid away from Yunguf and got back to the center of the arena. Yunguf turned to follow, breathing heavily already, and his balance uneven, with a muscular tension that must be the result of fear. Why such fear now, in such a warrior? It must have another cause than the mere danger of death in combat.

Of course Matt could have no heart at all for this fight. Any killing he did today, any blows he struck, would be to the advantage of the berserkers. But to be beaten himself would do still more damage. Even now the audience was murmuring. No doubt his reluctance for this brawl was showing; he would be near slipping out of Ay's character again. He had to win, and the sooner

the better — but without killing, if that were possible.

Matt raised sword and shield once more as Yunguf moved slowly into attacking range. Yunguf charged again, more smoothly this time, but Matt still beat him to the thrust, aiming along the side of Yunguf's shield to cut the swordarm's shoulder muscles. Yunguf twisted his body with the force of his own thrust — which slid off Matt's shield — and got his torso in the way of Matt's thrust, so it went between his upper ribs.

The wound was shallow, and Yunguf was not yet stopped; but his next slash was weak and slow. Matt swayed back just enough to let it go by, then lunged in again, hooking the wounded man's knee with his foot, with his shield forcing Yunguf's upper body back.

Yunguf fell like a tree, and there was Matt's bloody point hovering at his throat, while Matt's foot pinned Yunguf's sword-wrist to the paving stone.

"Will you yield to me — the combat — and its prize?" Matt was aware of his own panting now, and of Yunguf's whistling, gurgling breath.

"I yield me." The answer, in strangled tones, came quickly enough. There were no grounds for hesitation.

Matt stepped wearily back, wondering what Ay customarily used to wipe a bloody swordblade. Harl came to perform that office, and to scold him about his hesitancy of the start of the fight. Yunguf's relatives had gone to Yunguf's aid, and



the wounded man seemed to be sitting up easily enough. At least a killing had been avoided.

Matt turned to the princess and her father — and stopped. Their frightened eyes were fixed on an object discarded on the ground nearby.

It was Nomis' outer robe, snowy in the sunlight. The wizard himself was no longer in sight; the white garment discarded would mean that he was donning black.

A cough sounded wetly behind Matt, and he turned to see Yunguf with bright blood on his lips.

VIII

The great metal dragon lay motionless, buried almost completely in the muck of the sea bottom. Around it the dull life of the great depths stirred — in safety, for this berserker was now seeking to avoid killing anything. For it to end even a vegetable lifeline nonhistorically could provide a datum for the Modern's computers, implacable as berserkers themselves, to use in their hunt for the dragon's keyhole.

The dragon was still under direct command of the berserker fleet besieging the planet in Modern times. On their own version of sentry screens the fleet's linked computers had observed the lifting of Ay's ship and crew to Modern times and the subsequent restoration of that ship and crew, with one lifeline added.

It was obvious what the Moderns intended, for the berserkers themselves knew well the theory and practice of baiting traps. But a viable

replacement for Ay was bait they could not afford to ignore. They must strike again, through the dragon or its arsenal of auxiliary devices.

But this time they must be subtle. Matt must not be killed, at least not in any way that would spin a new thread of causation toward the dragon. The linked berserker computers arrived at an ideal solution; capture Matt alive and hold him so, until the pillars of Sirgol's history came crashing down.

Even while in hiding the dragon maintained around itself a net of subtle infraelectronic senses. Among the things it now observed was a black-robed man, standing on a pillar of seaside rock about two miles from the berserker's hiding place, speaking on and on rhythmically, into the empty air. From data in its memory banks the berserker deduced that the man was attempting to call supernatural forces to his aid.

And it caught the name of Ay.

In the full sun of midafternoon Nomis stood chanting on his pinnacle of rock. The spells of deepest evil were best sung in darkness, but his hate and fear had grown until they seemed to spread a darkness of their own about him. He would not wait for the setting of the sun.

While the sea birds wheeled and cried in the wind, he sang in his thin penetrating voice:

Demon or darkness, rise and stalk
put on the bones and make them walk
Dead men's bones through the weed
and slime

Walk and climb

Walk to me here

Speak to me here

Of the secret to bring my enemy's
death.

There was more, much more, cajoling and coercing the dark wet things that waited in the deeps for men to drown — waited for fresh-drowned bones to fall through the fathoms, for limber young corpses that the demons could wear like clothes in their endless revels at the bottom of the sea. The dark wet things down there possessed all the knowledge of death, including how the death of Ay might be accomplished — something Yunguf had been unable to achieve, in spite of all the supernatural threats Nomis had lavished on the lout.

Nomis' thin arms quivered, holding drowned men's fingers over his head. Then his arms swept low as he bowed, still chanting, eyelids closing out the sun. This time the spell would work, today the hatred was in him like a lodestone, drawing to him things of utter evil.

When he came to a place in the chant where he could pause he did so, opening his eyes, wondering if he had heard another sound between the surges of the surf. Under the black robe his old man's chest was heaving with exertion and excitement.

A bird screamed. And from below, from somewhere on the furrowed length of cliff that climbed to his tabletop from the sea, there came once more a scraping sound, almost lost in wind and surf.

He had just given up listening for more and started to chant again, when from much nearer to the top of the cliff there came a small clatter — a tumble of stones dislodged by a climbing foot or hand. The sound in itself was so ordinary that it momentarily drove all thoughts of magic from the magician's tired mind. He could only think angrily that someone was about to discover his hideaway.

Before him as he faced the sea was a cleft that climbed to the tabletop between folds of rock. From just out of sight within his cleft there came now the sound of grit crunched under a heavy foot.

And then Nomis' world was shaken around him, not by doubt but by a proof that put an end to all his nagging doubts. His first sight of his climbing visitor showed him a drowned man's skull, one small tendril of seaweed clinging to its glistening crown.

With quick smooth movements the whole form climbed into his view. It was a man-form, thinner than any living human, but fuller than any skeleton. Drowned skeletons must change when a demon possessed them — this one looked not so much like bone as like metal.

Having emerged completely from the crevice, the demon-shape halted, standing taller than tall Nomis, so that it bent its skull-head down slightly on its cable neck to look at him. He had to struggle to make himself keep looking into the cloudy jewels of its eyes. A drop of water sparkled, falling from one bonelike fingertip. Only when the thing took

another step toward him did Nomis remember to reinforce his chalked protective ring with a gesture and a muttered incantation.

And then at last he also remembered to complete the successful ritual with a binding spell. "Now must you guide and serve me, until you are released! And serve me first by saying how my enemy may be put to death."

The shiny jaw did not move, but a quavery voice came forth from a black square where the mouth have been. "Your enemy is Ay. He landed today on this coast."

"Yes, yes. And the secret of his death?"

Even to order Matt's death would leave a track of causation on the Moderns' screens. "You must bring your enemy here alive, unhurt, and give him to me. Then you will never see him more. For this I will help you gain whatever you desire."

Nomis' mind raced; he had trained himself for nearly a lifetime to seize such an opportunity as this, and he was not going to fail now. So, the demon wanted Ay kept alive! That meant a vital magical connection existed between Ay and this thing from the deeps. That Ay should have enjoyed such help in his seafaring career was not surprising, considering the number of men he had sent to dwell among the fishes and the charmed life he himself seemed to bear.

Nomis' voice came out harsh and bold. "What is Ay to you, demon?"

"My enemy."

Not likely! Nomis almost laughed

the words aloud. He saw now it was his own body and soul the wet thing craved; but behind his spells and his chalked circles Nomis was not afraid. The demon had come to protect Ay. But Nomis would not let the demon know how much he had deduced. Not yet.

"Harken, mud-thing! I will do you ask. Tonight at midnight I will bring your enemy here, bound and helpless." Nomis saw possibilities here of gain so enormous that he would take any risk. "Now begone, and at midnight come here ready to grant me all I ask!"

IX

In the evening Matt walked with Alix along the battlements, watching the stars come out, while the princess's ladies-in-waiting hovered just out of sight around corners.

Matt's preoccupation was evidently obvious. The girl beside him soon gave up a rather one-sided effort to make small talk and asked him plainly: "Do I please you, lord?"

He stopped his moody pacing and turned to her. "You please me very well indeed." And it was so. "If my thoughts go elsewhere, they are forced."

She smiled gently. The Moderns would not think Alix a beautiful girl. But all Matt's life he had seen women's beauty under sunburn and woodsmoke and toughness, and he could see beauty now in this different girl of his third world.

"May I know then, lord, what problem forces your thoughts away?"

"For one thing, the problem of

the man I wounded. I have not made a good beginning here."

"Such concern does you credit. I am pleased to discover you more gentle than I had been led to expect." Alix smiled again. No doubt she understood that his concern over Yunguf rested on reasons of policy; though she could of course have no idea of how very far that policy ranged. She began to tell Matt of some things that she might do, people she could talk to, to help heal the breach between the new house of Ay and that of Yung.

Watching her, he thought he could be king, if she were queen beside him. He would not be Ay. He knew now, as the Moderns surely must, that no man could really live another's life. But in Ay's name, he might perhaps be king enough to serve the world.

He interrupted Alix. "And do you find me pleasing, lady?"

This time those marvelous eyes of hers did not flicker; with a warm light of promise they held fast to his. And as if by instinct the duenas came at that moment to announce that the decent time-limit for keeping company had been reached.

"Until the morning, then," he said, taking the princess's hand briefly in the way permitted by courtly manners.

"Until the morning, my lord." And as the women led her away, she turned back to send him another glance before passing out of sight.

He wished he could see her for ten thousand mornings more. He took off his helmet for a moment and rubbed his head. His communi-

cator was still silent. No doubt he should call the Moderns and report all that had happened.

Instead he put the helmet on again (Ay would wear it as a sort of dress uniform) and went down into the keep, to the chamber where Yunguf had been bedded down on orders of the court physician. Matt hesitated to enter when he saw a pair of the wounded man's male relatives on watch inside. But when they saw Matt they beckoned him in, speaking to him freely and courteously. None of the house of Yung, it seemed, would bear him any ill will for winning a duel.

Yunguf was pale. His difficult breath gurgled in his throat, and when he twisted on his pallet to spit up blood, the bandage loosened from his wound and air gurgled there also with his breath. When Matt asked him how he did, he whispered that he was dying; but he showed no fear now. He wanted to tell Matt something else, but talking came too hard.

"Lord Ay," said one of the relatives, "I think my cousin would warn you that there are things more subtle than swords set against you here." Yunguf nodded.

"I saw the white robe discarded on the ground."

"Ah, then you are warned. I hope your new god may defend you when your sword will avail you nothing."

A sea-bird cried in the night outside. Yunguf's eyes turned to the small window, with fear in them again.

Matt wished them well and went

back to the roof; there he could be alone, since the castle kept only a token watch. Full night had now descended. He took a deep breath, and for the first time switched on the communicator, pressing his helmet's right wing in a certain way.

"Time Ops here." The crisp Modern voice was only a whisper of sound, but it made the castle and the open night somehow unreal. Reality was a cramped cave-fortress, at the center of a fantastic web of machines and energy. In what he felt was a lifeless voice, Matt reported the duel and Nomis' departure.

"Yes, we saw Yunguf's lifeline being hit by something. Nothing vital is involved there, though." Time Ops of course meant that nothing vital to History was involved. "Have you seen or heard anything of the dragon yet?"

"No. Why do you speak of that so much?"

The tiny voice seemed to crackle. "Why? Because it's important!"

"What about my task here, of doing Ay's work? Isn't it important that that's not going well?"

There was a pause before Time Ops' answer came. "You're doing as well as can be expected, Matt. Yes, a damn good job, from what our screens show. As I said, what happened to Yunguf's not vital. Your watching out for that dragon is."

After routinely breaking off the contact, Matt decided to visit Ay's men, who had been quartered in a kind of guardroom built into the castle's massive outer wall. With this

in mind he descended from the keep along an outer stair.

He was deep in thought, and it did not occur to him that the courtyard at the foot of the stair was darker than it ought to have been. A sound of rapid near-by movement alerted him, but too late; before he could draw his sword a wave of men were on him, weighing him down. And before he had shed Ay's pride enough to cry for help, a smothering cover had been clamped tight around his head.

"Sir, can you spare a minute? It's important."

Time Ops looked up from his desk impatiently, but paused when he saw Derron's face. "Come in, then, major. What is it?"

Derron was carrying a metal winged thing under his arm. "Sir, I've been — sort of hanging on to this spare helmet. It's the one Matt tossed off his ship before he was launched. Today some communications people came to see me about it. Turns out there's a continuous noise-signal being generated in its transmitter."

Time Ops just looked up from behind his desk, waiting not too patiently for the point.

"They told me, sir, that the signal from this helmet was interfering with a similar one put out by the helmet Matt's wearing. No matter which one he took, he'd be walking around back there broadcasting a built-in noise, very easy for a berserker to home in on. The berserker must have thought it an obvious trap, sir, since it hasn't homed in and killed him yet."

Time Ops grew angry, as if with Derron's obtuseness. "No, it hasn't killed him." He flicked on his desk screen and spun a selector. "Take a look at this. Odegard. Our present view of the critical section of Ay's lifeline."

During his hitch of sentry duty Derron had learned to read the screens quite well. This was his first look in about a day at Ay's lifeline, and this look confirmed the fear the last one had started. "It looks bad, sir. He's getting way off the track."

"Matt's buying us a little more present-time here, and that's all he's doing. Is it clear now why we want the thing to kill him? Millions have died in this war for *nothing*, major."

"Yes sir, I guess it's clear. We won't win unless we find that dragon's keyhole." Derron held the helmet out in front of him for a moment, looking at it as if it was an archeological find he had just unearthed. "Matt never was anything but bait, was he?"

"No, I wouldn't say that, major. When you first suggested that he be used, we weren't sure but that he'd come out alive. But the first full-scale computer simulation showed us the way things pretty well had to go. No doubt you're right, bugging his helmet made the trap a little too obvious. The way things stand now, he may be safer from berserkers than we are."

X

Matt came painfully awake, trying to cough around a gag of

dirty cloth that had been stuffed into his mouth. His head ached as if he had been drugged. He was being carried in a sickening jogging motion, and when his head cleared a little more he understood that he was riding slung across a loadbeast's humped back, his head hanging down on one side and his feet on the other. His helmet of course had fallen off somewhere; nor was there any bouncing tug at his waist from the weight of sword and scabbard.

Six or eight men had him prisoner; they were walking near the loadbeast in the darkness, guiding and leading it along a narrow winding path. They looked behind them frequently and now and then exchanged low-voiced words.

". . . I think two of them are following, or they were . . ."

Matt heard that much. He tried the cords holding his wrists and ankles, and found them tight. Turning his head, he saw that the trail ahead wound among jagged pillars and outcroppings of rock; from what he knew of the country near Blanium he judged they were right along the coast.

And he saw without surprise that one of his captors, the one who led the way, was tall and thin and robed in black. Round this man's lean waist was belted a sword and scabbard that looked like Matt's. Nomis had taken for himself one of the power-symbols of a king.

The way grew rougher until the little procession came to a thin ridge with deep clefts in the rock on either side of it. Here the loadbeast must be left behind. At Nomis' order some

of the men lifted Matt from its back. Pausing often in their work to look uneasily round them, starting at every sound of the night, they untied Matt's feet but made his arms doubly secure. They seemed to fear Nomis and whatever lay ahead almost as much as they feared the pursuit that must be coming from the castle.

With men ahead and behind holding on to him, Matt was led across the single-file ridge, then made to scramble up through a long twisting passage, almost a tunnel between high walls of rock. Only Nomis, going ahead, seemed to know the way. The sound of surf became audible.

A cloud was over the moon when the party straggled at last onto a tiny tableland of rock. Only Nomis immediately saw the figure, motionless as stone, which waited for them. Nomis quickly drew Matt's sword, and when Matt was pushed up within his reach he gripped Matt's hair with one hand and with the other laid the bare blade against Matt's throat.

The moon came out then, and the other men saw the thing that stood watching them. Like odd chicks of some gaunt black bird, they scrambled then to get behind Nomis, all making sure they were within the old chalked diagram. It was very still, save for the faint wind and the surf, and one man's low muttering in fear.

Keeping the sword against Matt's neck, Nomis pulled the gag from his face and displayed him to the berserker. "Mud-thing, is this man indeed your enemy? Shall I slay him, then?"

The metal puppet might have been sent charging forward, far faster than any man could move, to pull Matt away to captivity. But there was the keen edge right against the jugular. The berserkers would not risk a thread of responsibility for Matt's death.

"I will give you power," said the demon, "and wealth, and the pleasures of the flesh, and then life everlasting. But you must give me that man alive."

Nomis crooned in his certainty of victory, while at his back his men huddled in terror. "I want Alix," he whispered. To him the breaking of her pride would mean more than her young body. In this moment when all desires seemed possible a memory came of a day long ago, when Alix's mocking child-laughter had burned at him.

"I will give her to you," lied the demon solemnly, "when you have given me that man alive."

In Nomis' ecstasy of triumph his arm wavered slightly, holding the long sword. Matt was ready. His bound wrists allowed him still some arm-movement. As he jerked free with all his strength his elbow struck old ribs with force enough to send Nomis sprawling, the sword spinning in the air.

The other men's terror was triggered into panic flight. They burst up from their crouched positions, first scattering and then converging on the only path of escape, the narrow way by which they had ascended. Running straight, head down, Matt kicked the fallen sword ahead

of him and still got there first by a stride, thanks to what the Moderns had done for his nerves and muscles.

The berserker had been delayed by its need to avoid mangling the men who were in its way, but even as Matt reached the top of the path he felt a hand harder than flesh scrape down his back. It seized his clothing, but the fabric tore free. Then he was leaping, falling free into the descending passage. At his back the other men were screaming, colliding with one another and the berserker.

He landed, cutting and brusing himself without really feeling the injuries. The way was so narrow that he could not miss finding the sword he had kicked ahead of him. With his bound hands he groped behind him in the dark to pick it up by the blade, heedless of nicked fingers. He got his feet under him and scrambled some further distance downward. He stumbled and fell again, hurting his knee, but he had gained a substantial lead on the tangled terror jamming the way behind him. One or more men had probably fallen with broken bones or other disabling injuries, and the others were stuck with them or behind them. They would be howling with mindless fear and lacerating themselves further in the dark when they felt the chill touch of the berserker; it would be sorting through men to find the one it wanted, trying to get the others out of its way without harming them.

Matt propped the swordblade behind him, and with the skill of his new nerves slid his bonds against its

edge. He had freed himself before he heard the machine's footsteps crunching down toward him in the dark.

XI

“That’s it, that’s it, we’ll nail the damned thing now!” In Time Operations men were crying out in a hunter’s jubilation as old as mankind. On their screens their computers were limning out the radii of a spiderweb, whose center would hold the dragon. The data needed to draw the web was coming from human lifelines being bent and battered; the berserker seemed to be struggling with men in some enclosed space.

But still it had not killed again. And the locus of its keyhole was not yet in sight.

“Only a little more.” Time Ops, staring at his screens, pleaded for bloodshed. “Something?”

But there was no more.

Matt retreated, limping, out into the moonlight where he could see. The thing followed unhurriedly, sure of him now. He backed out onto the thin ridge, between yawning crevices to deep for the moonlight to plumb, holding his sword ready in bleeding fingers. Pale in the moonlight and almost skeleton-thin, it followed carefully. It did not want him to fall. It would choose the precise moment and then rush to catch him, easily as a human athlete picking up a toddler from a broad walk.

When it came, he kept his point centered on the narrow way, and he had just time to steel his arm.

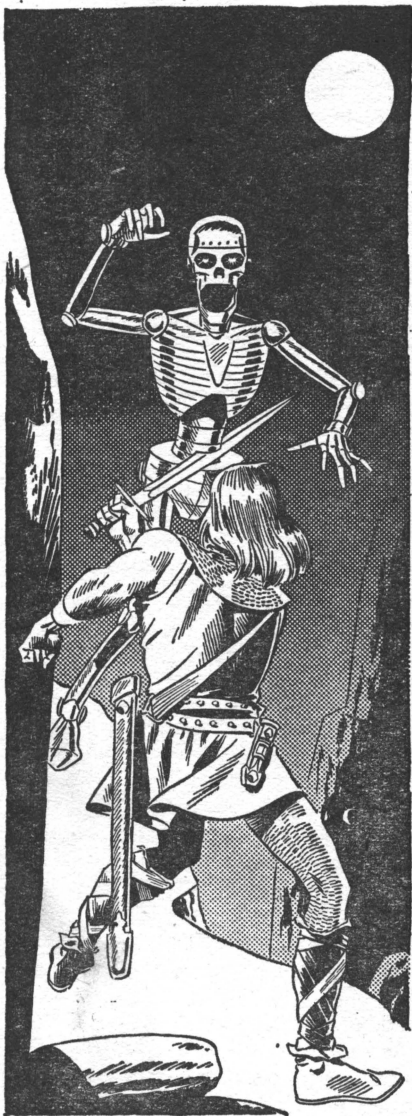
A moment ago the berserker had been twelve feet away, and now it was on him. It made a wiping motion with one hand, to clear what appeared to be an ordinary sword-blade from its path — and four steel fingers leaped free like small silver fish in the moonlight, while the monomolecular blade stayed where it was, centered by Matt's braced muscles.

The inertia of the machine's rush was great. Before it could halt, the swordpoint was through its torso, and what had been a delicately controlled mechanism became dead hurtling weight. Matt went down before the force of it, but he clung to rock somehow and saw it go on over him, falling in an endless slow somersault — taking with it the transfixing sword, which glowed already like a redhot needle with the inner fire it had kindled.

The tumbling demon vanished. From far down inside the crevice came a crash. And then another and another, echoing remotely. Matt pulled himself onto the ridge and crawled a few feet; then he made himself stand and walk before he reached the place where the path was broad and safe.

Trying to keep in shadow, he limped his way past the phlegmatic, waiting loadbeast. He had gone a dozen steps farther when the two men Nomis had left here as sentries pounced out of deeper shadows. As they seized him, the leg he had injured was twisted again, and he fell.

"Best let me go and run your-



selves," he said to the buskined knees standing before him. "Back there, the devil's come for your master."

It made them look back toward the distant commotion, until they themselves were come for; not by the devil but by the two men Matt had seen running up, axe and sword in hand. A brief clashing of metal swirled around Matt and choked cries that were quickly ended.

"Is this leg your worst hurt, lord?" asked Harl anxiously, bending over him.

"Yes, I do well enough."

Torla muttered grimly: "Then we will go on and slaughter the rest of them."

Matt tried to think. "No. Not now, at least. Nomis called up a thing from the sea —"

Torla shuddered now at the distant moaning. "Then let us away!"

"Can you stand, lord?" asked Harl. "Good, then lean on me." And he detached something from under his cloak and held it out. "Your helmet, lad. It fell outside the postern gate, and set us on the right trail."

Harl and Torla might think it was pain in his leg that made him so slow to reach out for the helmet. Harl had carried it under his cloak as if it were only a shell of metal; but put on like a crown, it weighed enough to crush a man.

Down in the sea-bottom muck the dragon stirred. The tantalizing bait-signal of the life-unit that the Moderns had sent as Ay's replacement was now very near the shore.

If that life-unit could be captured without further damage to other life-lines, a berserker victory would be sure, as matters now stood. To pursue the life-unit inland would involve creating too much change — especially since the dragon's auxiliary device had been somehow lost. But the chances of seizing the life-unit right along the coast was too good an opportunity to let slip. Darkening the water with an upheaved cloud of mud, the dragon rose.

Supported by a strong man on either side, Matt could make fair speed along the rough path leading back toward Blanium. Not that there was any great need for speed. Nomis and his men would certainly not be in pursuit. And Matt saw now that it was not the berserker that sought his death. No, it had wanted to be given him alive, and then it had tried to capture him. He shuddered.

"How made you your escape, lord?"

"I will tell you later. Let me think now."

Make the dragon chase you, said Time Ops. A king must be ready to give his life, said the Planetary Commander, speaking from the depths of his own missile-proof shelter. If the berserkers had wanted to kill him, he would be dead, his sword would not have helped.

The Moderns were fighting to save the tribe-of-all-men, true, but to them Matt was only an implement for fighting. Save his life once, and then shove him forward again to

draw the lightning of the stone-lion's eye . . .

In a flash of insight, the scraps of knowledge Matt had picked up about the war of screens and missiles, lifelines and keyholes, suddenly fell into place with what had happened to him here. Of course, the Moderns wanted him killed here, by the berserkers. And the berserkers knew this, and wanted to take him alive.

The communicator in his helmet suddenly began to speak in a tiny voice, as it would for his ears alone. He would throw the helmet away with all its lying voices, he told himself, when he again came close enough to the sea, or to another crevice.

But he gripped his companions' shoulders, stopping them. "Good friends, I would be alone for a little time, to think and — pray."

His good friends exchanged glances. His must seem a strange request, coming at this time. But then their king had been through a day strange enough to put any man in need of thought.

Harl frowned at him. "You are weaponless."

"There are no enemies about. But let your dagger stay with me if you will; only let me have a short time to myself."

And so they left him, though with backward glances. He was their king now, and they loved him; and he smiled now with satisfaction, thinking that he would have them at his side for many a year yet. There was no way for the Moderns to punish him for a refusal to go

anymore a-dragon hunting. They would not dare pull him to the future, not while he worked at living King Ay's life. That might be a second-best defense for the Moderns' world, but it was all they were going to get.

He sat down on a rock in the moonlight and took off the helmet. Holding it before him, he twisted its right wing, letting Time Ops' tiny voice come out above the nearby murmur of surf.

"— Matt, answer me, urgent."

"I am here. What would you have?"

"Where are you? What's going on?"

"I am going on. To my bride and to my kingdom."

There was a pause. "Matt, it may be that won't be enough, your going on trying to take Ay's place."

"No? Enough for me, I think. I have been demon-hunting and used up your sword. So I think I will not hunt a dragon that seems content to let me live."

"Demon-hunting? What?"

Matt explained. He could hear consternation at the other end; they had not thought of the enemy's trying to capture him alive.

Time Ops was soon back. "Matt, you can't let it take you alive. But just avoiding capture isn't going to be good enough, not now. Your filling in for Ay just isn't going to work."

"Then why does the enemy want to stop me?"

"Because you are buying us a little time here. They want to eliminate

any lingering chance we have and finish us off quickly. All I can do is ask you again to make the damned thing chase you and stir up change."

"If it catches me?"

There was a pause. A murmur of voices at the other end, and then another familiar voice came on.

"Matt, this is Derron. These people here are trying to find a way to tell you to die. Get the berserker to kill you, or if it catches you find a way to kill yourself. Kill yourself *because* it's caught you. Die, in one way or another, and make it somehow responsible. All along that's been their objective here. I'm sorry. I didn't know it was like that at first."

Time Ops came back. "Matt, you can shut us off and go on to your bride and your kingdom the way you said you were going to. But if you do that, all your life your world will be slowly decaying around you. Decaying inside, where you won't see it, becoming less and less probable. Up here we'll be dying, all of us. At your end of history the chaos will begin in your children's time — that's what you'll be leaving them."

"You lie!" Matt's voice broke on the cry, for he knew Time Ops was not lying. Or if he was lying again about this fact or that, he was telling the truth about what was needed to win the war. Whatever Time Ops did would be to win the war.

"Matt, this is Derron again. What you just heard is the truth. I don't know what more to say to you."

Matt cried bitterly: "My friend, there is no need for you to say any-

thing more!" He twisted the helmet wing, silencing the voices; he put the helmet back on his head and stood up. Soon he saw Harl and Torla coming toward him.

When they had come up to him he said quietly: "My leg gives me trouble. I think the path will be easier along the water's edge." He knew that the dragon dwelt in the sea.

Between his friends he moved toward the sound of surf. He went slowly, for truthfully his leg felt worse, having stiffened while he sat. He thought of nothing, as the time for thinking was now past. Long long ago he had pulled the stone-man from the poison-digger's pit. Then he had seen the tribe-of-all-men stretching across space and time; he had known something of the spirits of life; he had been a king, and a princess among others had looked at him with love.

Without surprise he saw a shoreline rock ahead suddenly move and become a nightmare head that rose amid moonlit spray on a sinuous column of neck. The dragon's vast body heaved itself from the sea, and lurched toward the men faster than a man could run.

"I have the dagger," he said to the men at his sides. "And right now both of you can use sword and axe better than I." The dragon was not coming for Harl or Torla, and anyway it would be a pointless insult to bid them run.

He kept the dagger hidden in his hand, the blade turned up flat behind his wrist, as the dragon's head came straight for him, on its tree-

trunk neck that could swallow a man and hold him safe. Sword and axe hewed uselessly from either side. Matt was very tired, and in a way he welcomed the grave-wide jaws, which he saw now held no teeth. Only in the instant of the jaws' soft powerful closing did he bring the dagger up, holding the point steady at his heart while the pressure came down . . .

“It killed him.” At first, Time Ops whispered the words unbelievably. Then he let them out in a whoop. “It killed him, it killed him!” The other hunters who had been frozen at their screens, sharing their computers creeping certainty of failure, were galvanized once more into action. On their screens the spiderwebs tightened like nooses, imaging a target greenly solid and sure.

In the deep cave called Operations Stage Two, metallic arms extended a missile sideways from its rack while a silvery circle shimmered into being on the floor beneath. With a click and a jolt the arms released their burden. Falling, the missile was gone —

Derron had seen a keyhole hit and closed before, and he understood perfectly what a victory he was seeing now. On the screens, the whole writhing build-up of change surrounding Ay now burst like a boil, began to straighten itself out like a piece of trickery with string. History flowed strong and safe back into the familiar riverbed. Only the one catalytic lifeline was newly broken; you had to look closely not

to miss that little detail on the screens.

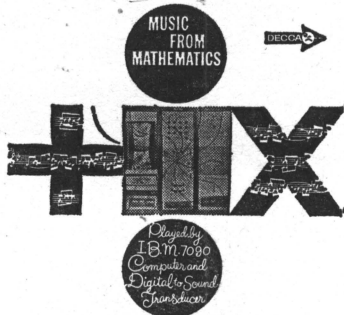
The raw stump of that line left no room for doubt, but still Derron's hand went out to punch his communicator for Stage Three. “Alf? Listen, will you let me know what shape he's in, the moment — all right, thanks.”

Holding the circuit open to Stage Three, he waited, tired eyes gazing blankly at the screens. Around him, the first waves of a celebration curled up around the edges of discipline.

“Derron?” Alf's voice was slow in coming, and slow-spoken when it came, to tell about the knife in the heart and speculate on how the man must have arranged to have it driven. And to confirm that Matt's brain had been too long without oxygen for the medics to do anything useful for him.

Derron flipped off the switch and sat there, tired and immobile. Some of the victorious hunters around him were breaking out cigars, and one was calling jovially for a ration of grog. A few minutes later Time Ops himself strolled by with a glass in his hand, but he was not shouting or even smiling as he paused at Derron's position.

“He was a good man, Odegard. The best, of course. Not many can accomplish a thousandth part of what he did. With their lives or their deaths.” Time Ops raised his glass in a solemn sipping toast to the bit-ten-off green line on the screen. Later of course there would be monuments and ceremonies to do the same thing more elaborately. But, for



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Odegard, none of it would have much practical value.

"The thing is," said Derron, "I don't really care much what happens to the world. Only a person here and there."

Time Ops might not have heard, for the celebration was growing louder. "You did a necessary job, major, and did it well, from the start of the operation until today. We're going to be expanding even more here in Time Operations, and we'll need good men in key positions. I'm going to recommend you for another promotion . . ."

Nomis stood with arms upraised, gray beard and black robes whipping in the wind, while he persisted in the evil endeavor that had kept him here on his secret rock for the past three days. Though Nomis could not escape the feeling that his labors against Ay had all been completely in vain . . .

On the battlement, Alix shaded her fair eyes against the morning sun and strained them seaward to catch sight of sail or mast. She waited, trembling inwardly a little, for her first sight of her future lord . . .

The cliffs of Queensland were dead ahead, Harl knew, though still a day's rowing out of sight. He frowned to port across the sea's gray face, though there was nothing to break the line of the horizon, but a distant line of squalls. Then his face cleared with the thought that young Ay, in his tent amidships, was doubtless planning for the fighting that was sure to come.

END

PAINT 'EM GREEN

by BURT K. FILER

*Nobody wanted to escalate combat.
They just escalated preparedness
—at roughly the speed of light!*

It was drizzling, and my halo was buzzing static. I tweaked the hatband to switch it off, turned up my collar for the thirtieth time and headed for Abe's. I ducked in, only to remain a minute before returning to the street. No luck. Abe hadn't had an antiquated 714 Klystron in stock for five years, but oddly enough "some guy" had asked for one only last week, and now me. Funny, eh? Funny, rats. That just meant the boys at Unipower had got there first. It was the same story at Marco's, Terry's and all the rest. In a half hour my rainsuit was a wet smear and my shoes amounted to no more than portable puddles. Time out; I trudged up to Zero's Heroes.

Vapor rising from the second cup fogged pleasantly at my eyes, and my frustration began to diffuse. "There's still Jack Booth," I thought. "The boys • from U.P.

probably passed his grubby shop without even reading the sign." Eased by this dim hope, I relaxed and ruminated over the dregs.

After the Asians obliterated themselves with a dazzling atomic mistake, Ambrija and Russia, former allies, found themselves opponents once again. Cold war of course. Formal declaration of war was as obsolete as a mace and chain, even back then. We of Ambrija were, as now, trying to maintain an armament edge. That was the first big push for a superweapon. Of course the nonatomic rule was already in effect, so that immediate alternatives were few. Insanity projectors weren't even thought of. The big push was for an effect machine.

In the best democratic tradition Ambrija Council requested bids from both national manufacturing firms for this thing, knowing that it would make one of us and break the

other. Everything but industry was socialized by then, and the regime was getting impatient with the two of us. They had a point, since our squabbles occupied about half the congressional session each year. One would be easier to handle. They didn't care which one. So the death duel carried a fat prize, 20% of the G.N.P. to whichever came up first with an effect machine. Didn't hear about it? Well, we don't hear much about sex-machines either, do we? Same reason; but let me explain how it was supposed to work.

It was to be a device that could affect matter at a distance. It didn't matter how, or how efficiently. The idea is simple, but the implications are tremendous. Here comes an enemy army: turn on the effect machine, raise them twenty feet off the ground and turn off the effect machine. Here comes a missile: turn it around on its own trajectory. Suppose you're taken to General Assembly Trial by an enemy statesman who smokes cigars. He's about to make a crucial speech and condemn you to a 3 per cent cut in wheat credits. Subtly you switch on your effect machine and unobtrusively turn his cigar end-for-end where it rests in the ash-tray. He rises to speak, silence falls in the great chamber, he absently takes a last puff . . .

So you can easily see the effectiveness of such a weapon. No one knew how to build one, and of course no one knew they couldn't be built. It was ignorance on both counts that had me out shopping in

the rain for pre-war Klystrons. (No, the 3rd not the 4th war.) You see, we had a clue. Ten years previous a madman named Kishlar made quite a splash by moving bottle caps around with an electric field. When it turned out that that was all he could do everyone lost interest. He died poor, kneedeep in unsolvable equations and burnt-out Klystron tubes. But at the moment everyone was very anxious to dig up Kishlar's work, since his bottle-cap-mover began to look more and more like a prototype effect machine.

Just then my halo buzzed so I tweaked it on. "Confer, please," it said.

"GX44 reporting; count me in." I vocalized silently so that the halo could pick up my conscious thought over the frustrated subconscious and the usually prurient id. There were half a dozen similar replies in the circuit.

"GX19 requests group nexus on the following: 18 tons sheet type 7071BB Al-alloy @ Cr. 2,600/ton. Accept or reject? Type D vendor—repeat, Type D."

"Have you checked out the shipment, 6X19?" I asked.

"Affirmative."

"How thoroughly?" asked Dorothea Koyto, from our main office across town. She was officially GX27, my secret love.

"Well," said the requestor, 6X19 or Marty Rugys. "I hit the second and sixth sheet of every bundle with a laser spectograph and micro-hardness gauge. All were okay."

"Not good enough," chimed Mike Starkey (6X40). "These Type D

aliens can predict most of our statistical sampling procedures. Run a 100% eyeball check on the first bundle; that'll throw 'em. Then if it's okay, buy. Otherwise reject. 6X circuit, do you agree?"

We agreed. The halo subsided to a buzz, and I tweaked it off. Sometimes these groupthink conferences could be a bore. Of course I wouldn't attempt a decision without group nexus, not then anyway. I finished my coffee and confronted the dismal street once more. "Only three blocks," I said to myself, and winced.

Jack Booth put down his soldering gun as I entered. "Hello, Charlie," he chuckled. "Y'look a bit dampish."

"Typically understated," I muttered. "Jack, have you any 714 Klystrons about?"

"Now, what do you bright lads at Genprod want with an outmoded thing like that, if I may be so bold?"

"Secret; but have you . . ."

"Sorry, Charlie, but no go." His eyes shifted. "Sold two of 'em last week, wouldn't y'know, but they were all I had. Some chap . . ."

"Some chap, some guy, some blankety-blank has beaten me to every WW III Klystron in the city," I exploded, "and he's probably with Unipower!"

"Now, now, calm down. Have a chair and get the blood out of your eye." The little surplus dealer scurried to fetch the duplicate of his own shabby chair and placed it before the space-heater. I shucked my rainsuit and took it gratefully.

PAINT 'EM GREEN

"Hell, Jack, might as well give you the straight scoop," I sighed. "We're trying to build an effect machine. So's U.P. That much must have leaked out by now."

"Oh, yes," he answered, bending once again to gutting the more valuable components from a wrecked radar chassis. "Seems both outfits are taking Kishlar's approach, yes?" He glanced sideways at me over his busy hands.

"Yes."

"So." Jack put down his work and sank back in the chair. "Now I'll level with you. Nobody from U.P. has been scrounging Klystrons around here; I have. What d'you think of that?" he smiled.

Startled, I stared at him across the six inches separating our noses in that museum of electronic skeletons. Jack made a living, picking these bones; an oddly attractive way of life. I was an electronics engineer but seldom got the chance to muck around with all these glorious gadgets. Jack did, though.

"My good friend Charles," he continued, "I've gone on with Kishlar's experiments for a decade, knowing their military significance would sooner or later be realized. Lately there's been headway. I've just been waiting for someone like your paternal Genprod to make me a rich man; and here you are." He rose and bowed flamboyantly before the curtain into his back room. "Charlie, come with me."

Usually unkempt, Jack felt as if the occasion warranted some formality and put on a faded jack-

et. At one time it was viddy British, but the effect was lost since the fuzzy brown tweed matched his fuzzy brown chin in a ludicrous manner. I suppressed a grin. Jack Booth was erratic, but I'd long respected his feel for electronics. "Feel is all it is, though," I told myself. He had had neither the benefits of education nor groupthink nexus.

He walked over to four shelves of equipment. In front of the shelves was a pingpong table with a large birdcage on it. Underneath the table were exactly eleven 715 Klytron tubes. He clunked a very large switch, and they all began to glow. A hoarse hum droned from the assorted gadgetry on the shelves.

"All right, now." He strutted smugly. "Observe. I open the cage and place a small chunk of wood within." The block was undistinguished except that a rusty screw protruded half-length from it. With theatrical carelessness Jack tossed a screwdriver beside the block and closed the door. He retreated to the back of the room and began to diddle with an antique electric typewriter, humming *Hail Britannia* softly beneath his breath.

"P. T. Barnum himself," I muttered, which was closer to the bone than I knew.

He punched keys in a distracted way until the screwdriver arose from the floor of the cage. Then he frowned and plunked a few letters with great deliberation. The driver began to rotate slowly. Jack punched a nicely rhythmic, repetitive sequence a few times, and the screw-

driver advanced toward the screw. The rest is anticlimax.

"Jack, you've got it!" I couldn't contain myself.

"Elementary. For a quarter billion or so I'll tell you the secret." His undernourished face barely had room for its grin. There was a long pause, and then I got suspicious.

"You've been working on this since Kishlar's day. Hmm. How come you've never mentioned it? Hell, Jack, I've been by here off and on for a couple of years, yes? And we've done a little business and shared a few drinks. Funny you'd keep this all quiet 'til now."

"Afraid to talk," Jack shrugged. "Afraid a bright lad like yourself might poke holes in m'little theory. You'd have said it wouldn't work, and right or wrong I'd have believed it. I didn't want to risk being demoralized, y'know. This gadget is all that's kept me going for years. Hell, Charlie, it's still not right. But I got it all by myself in the end, while you groupthink fellows were looking elsewhere. I got it, one man, *me!*"

The diminutive chin was out-thrust, and I really empathized with the lonely man. God knows, no one person can do anything significant these days. But Jack had managed, and maybe I could pick up the ball and do a little something myself. By then I was completely fired up with the machine, with Jack's sincerity and with the desire to get him under the generous aegis of Genprod.

Again the room was silent as I did some more rapid thinking. Jack was enough of a businessman to at

least look unconcerned, and he sat casually on the pingpong table, fingering the birdcage and humming.

"Before I can sell the idea to G.P.," I began. "I'll need some kind of theoretical support. In plain words and circuit math — how's it work?"

Jack got out a bulky notebook and opened it somewhere near the middle. I leaned over his shoulder and tried to follow his scrawl.

"Remember Kishlar's premise?" He pointed. "Saturate any space with three-dimensional radiation and you can sense the position of any particle of matter therein."

"Sure. That much is a proven fact. Three coordinates will locate anything anywhere."

"Well, Kishlar also integrated the information coordinates with respect to frequency." Jack's eyes were aglow as he turned the page.

"True," I answered. "Theoretically he could not only sense position but create position, if those integrals were determinate and the equations solved. But they're not, they're indeterminate, or so everybody says. I can't solve 'em, anyway. Don't tell me you've managed?"

"Not analytically. But in general what's the accepted approach to an indeterminate equation?" he asked.

"Trial and error. But Jack, we've T-and-E'd Kishlar's equations to death and . . ."

"Digitally, yes. Empirically, no. I'll bet you programmed your trials without even once getting down to grit and trying to *build* anything. But I did."

"But, good grief, Jack. That's working a ten-variable matrix on seven equations! There're over a million ways you could set something up and get it wrong!"

"Ah, yes," he sighed. "A million possible solutions, but I was lucky and hit the right one after two hundred thousand or so. I've rebuilt the gadget just about that many times. And though the published notes on Kishlar's later experiments are rather sparse, it appeared he took about twice as many tries before he died, without hitting it right. So I've done pretty well." He glanced up from the notebook, waiting for my next question.

"Can you amplify the effect? Can you expand that birdcage to a battlefield and twist missiles instead of screwdriver? Can you generate enough power?"

"Easily," he said. "Power isn't in it. It's all precision, all in the antenna. But that's all y'get for free, Charlie." He shut the notebook with a snap, turned around and crossed his ankles comfortably. "Not another word from me until you ante up." The cocky beggar closed his eyes and smirked. I took a seat on a dusty spool of magnet wire and feverishly tweaked out a call for groupthink conference. This was big; I needed help.

After I'd made plain this situation, it came down to this:

"What's this 'Jack Booth's' background, 6X44." (That's me.) "Sounds like a well disguised Type L."

"Doubt it," I answered. "He's had no formal training to speak of,

and no groupthink nexus either. He's just a good man with a hell of a lot of practical ken."

"Forget it," said Dorothea Koyto. "The statistical likelihood of his coming up with anything authentically original under those conditions is virtually nil. Charlie, it's got to be a hoax."

"But 6X27," I pleaded. "I know the man. I've *seen* this experiment!"

"Uh-huh," came in Rugys, skeptically. "I agree with 6X27. This man has read the newspapers all right, but probably knows no more about effect machines than we do. Er, I mean . . ."

"I know what you mean, you stuffed shirt. Look, let me push this one on my own hook. I absolve everyone from nexus responsibility. *I'm* convinced, even if it means risking a career."

"Well, if you want to cut it *that* way," mumbled half a dozen voices, and they all tweaked out. I was on my own with one hell of a decision. During the conference I'd been sitting stock still, staring at the birdcage; and Jack was fidgeting.

"I say, are you all right?" he asked anxiously.

"Yeah, yeah; just in nexus. Jack, let's talk this out."

I led the way back to our spraddled wooden chairs in the front room and sat down. If this was totally on my shoulders I was going to be damn sure of what Genprod spent its credits on. Jack sat beside me, and we soaked up the warmth of the space-heater together. Outside the rain continued.

"Look," I stuttered. "I'm on my own now. I've got to sell you to Daddy G.P. with no group . . . no group support." I felt almost sick hearing my own words. "Everyone but me thinks you're a charlatan. We won't be authorized more than a few thousand under conditions. For a while, anyway. But after the machine proves out . . ."

"Be precise," he cut in crisply. "I've waited years for this. How many is a 'few' thousand?"

"Three?" I tendered.

"And after the thing is thoroughly proved?"

"Sky's the limit," I said hastily.

"Sold." He stood and marched proudly down a corridor of junk to the front door. He closed and locked it with a flourish. "Good-by, junkshop, hello laboratory." He returned grabbed his notebook and beckoned me once again into the back. "Now I tell all — partner," he beamed.

"The problem is essentially one of precision. You and I live in a universe that is more or less saturated with electro-magnetic radiation, true? There's light, heat, radiofrequency stuff. . . ." He raised his brows to see if I followed. I nodded.

"Well, the exact E.M. state of any given point in space is influenced by every wave passing through it. As I said, the sources of radiation are nearly infinite so that the condition at a point is unpredictable, unless —"

"Unless you shield the space," I interjected. "Put it in a metal box or screen."

"Just so. When you shield an

area from random radiation you can control the E.M. state precisely, because there's no static. Kishlar's conditions can be broadcast effectively only in a well shielded area. That birdcage is just a shield, with the perch wired as an antenna."

I looked; sure enough. "And you punch in the requisite E.M. variation with that keyboard?"

"Yes."

"Great. You've got the basic phenomena down pat, Jack; but how the hell can you surround a battle-field with a shield? Or air space, or a coastline. . . ."

"D'you know what a Klein bottle is?" he cut in.

"Of course." I was piqued and to rub him back a bit I recited a theorem from one of the better known topology texts: "A Klein bottle is an imperfect surface so convoluted that it is exposed to both its own contained volume and the surrounding space. This . . ."

"Enough." Jack held up his hand. "If that one surface sees both the external and internal volume, who's to say which is contained and which is expelled?"

"I don't quite see. . . ." But I was beginning to. Jack wagged a finger.

"Does a one gallon Klein bottle contain one gallon separate from the universe? Or does it merely expel one gallon from the universe which it contains!"

We were nose to nose again. "My God," Jack shouted. "If we shaped an antenna like a Klein bottle, all the emitted radiation would be self-shielded!"

"Just so," he smiled delightedly.

The next few months were hectic. After showing Jack's apparatus and notebook to Genprod they reluctantly agreed to underwrite us. Reluctantly, because they still mistrusted a single mind in an era when group thought was the rule if not the law. No one could read the scrawled notebook, but that little birdcage was mighty convincing.

The matter of a single antenna that shielded its own broadcasts was a little harder to sell. We were granted about two thousand to test it. Jack and I fabricated a Klein bottle antenna about the size of a basketball in his cluttered back room.

Have you ever seen a Klein bottle? It might most easily be described as a "goosed goose." Suppose a goose tucks his head under a wing, and for the sake of better else to do, chews a hole through his ribs into his belly. He finds it a bit dark and heads for the first glimmer of light he sees. You know where *that* is. When the goose's head emerges from his anus, that goose is a Klein bottle. (Always assuming his mouth is open.)

The damned things are naturally hard to fabricate; not a single flat surface on them, and the longer you stare at the drawings, the more intense your vertigo. Klein must have had the op-art dizzies in a big way. We made it in record time nonetheless.

The last wire was meshed to the circuit, and Jack clonked the switch. The hum came loudly and all the loose hardware in the room began

to rattle. Our K-bottle was dangling loosely from cords to the ceiling, but was at least a dozen feet from the table, now devoid of its cage. When Jack stepped to his keyboard, the buzz from the shelves was almost loud enough to drown his clacking. The screwdriver rose from the table, executed a full gainer with a half twist, and descended upon the screw. I have never seen a more graceful screwdriver.

Jack faked a sober Churchill frown and held two fingers up in V for victory. I joined him.

I was back at Genprod the next day, making an utter fool of myself by daring my boss *not* to give us more money for a bigger K-bottle.

"The range is totally dependent on antenna size," I told him. "We'd better get busy before the spy-gap closes and we're copied and outstripped."

"How good's your security down there," asked Starkey (my boss). "At Booth's shop, I mean."

"Nil," I said cheerfully. "Spy-gap is probably thirty minutes." As if in an answer the door burst open and Rugys fell in waving a newspaper.

"Unipower's got it already," he shouted. On the front page was a picture of Unipower's upstate test facility. In the middle of an open field men were building an immense Klein bottle. It would have filled a barn.

Starkey's barracuda jaw went white. "We'll show those sneaks." He flipped the intercom. "Miss Gedman, see that the Booth project is allocated Cr. 100,000 immediate-

ly," he said. All the explanation in the world wouldn't have sold him. But let our competitor even hint the project warranted attention and wham, instant money.

Dorothea, my secret love, came in thirty seconds behind Rugys. She was out of breath, which considering her physique, required some running.

"The Russians have it," she cried and flung yet another tabloid on the desk. The telecameras in Alaska had focused on the Siberian plains across the Bering Strait. Four thousand workmen were building a Klein bottle at least a mile across.

Starkey hit the switch again. "Make it a billion, Miss Gedman." He stood. "To Alaska!" he said.

As I packed it came to me that mass hysteria is good.

We were ninety miles northwest of Nome, on a very cold and very wide seashore. Facing us was the Bering Strait and beyond it the Chukchi Peninsula of Russia. A naked eye was all that was needed to see the huge Goose taking shape across the water. A hundred miles upshore Unipower's Goose required better eyes to see its *top* than its sides. But *ours*, ours beggared description. We were winning, for the moment.

Then the fatal word came. Dorothea galloped up in a Sno-cat and screamed "They're tearing down!"

"Who?" bellowed Starkey in return.

"Both!" she wailed and galloped off.

"Give me that transmitter," he

said between his teeth. I obliged. "Miss Gedman, give the order to tear down. The new Mark XVI Goose is to be larger than the present structure by two orders of magnitude. And get me the Secretary of the Treasury."

"Hello, Flores?" he said after a pause. "Look, we can't compete any more. You'll have to nationalize U.P. and G.P. to tackle this together. The Russians are building . . ."

Another pause.

"U.P. has called already?"

Pause.

"You mean we *are* nationalized?"

Pause.

"And mobilized. Yes, sir!"

The war of the Geese continued. I hadn't known there was enough metal in the northern hemisphere to build Mark XX. Actually there wasn't; some of it was Bolivian tin. Jack and I were pretty much ignored. He steadfastly insisted that his basic apparatus could operate Klein bottles of any range capacity. I must admit that as Mark XX blotted the sun from above us I felt a few qualms. After all, it *was* my doing all this. So I tried to check out the circuitry on Jack's setup. He didn't mind; in fact he helped from time to time. I couldn't make head or tail of it though. An electronic organ and an antiquated Loran unit formed most of the apparatus. "Music that I can see in the dark, yes; an effect machine, maybe; something *I* can fathom, no." I gave up and tried Jack's notebook for a little reference material. Hentracks, wormtracks, numbers and frustration.

PAINT 'EM GREEN

Jack loafed about and uttered incomprehensibilities to newsmen. His mother was Irish and so was mine, and I swear he was mouthing obscene limericks in Gaelic. My doubts grew. Finally, one day, he came into our trailer and confronted me.

"Charlie, d'you think I'm a phony?" He knocked the snow from his boots.

"Uh — well, Jack, uh — yes, I think I do," I mumbled between mouthfuls of cuticle. There were no nails left.

"Well, you're right." He slapped me on the back. "Absolutely right. Only you won't tell, right?"

"Right. They'd castrate me with a hammer if I even suggested the whole thing was a farce." I was miserable.

"I should think so," he laughed, gazing keenly at our huge folly looming on the Arctic snow. "You are in too deep to defect." He stepped to our cupboard. "Bourbon, Charlie?" I nodded. He filled our glasses and continued.

"How much of Ambrija is tied up in this project by now," he asked.

"All. Every cent everyone has went into Mark XX. We're without metal when it's complete; there's no more ore. You know that."

"And our Slavic competitors?"

"Very likely the same. I understand the Russians have impoverished every resource for the final K-bottle. Only *theirs* won't work either."

"Right. Jupak Budski has perpet-

uated as big a fraud over there as I have here. Wonderful!" Jack hugged himself with glee. "When's 'R' day?" he asked when his mirth subsided.

"Tuesday a week," I answered. Everything has turned to mud, including my lunch. I could almost feel Starkey lighting the match to my pyre. The growing flames obliterated any curiosity I should have had about Jupak Budski. "Oooh," I moaned.

"Cheer up," said Jack. "It's not all bad. R-day will have us at Puget Sound, I believe?"

"Yes," I muttered. 'R' or Rayday would be the day we energized our 600% GNP Klein bottle. An attempt would be made to pour the Atlantic Ocean all over the Chukchi Peninsula. Already political cartoonists had made everything ludicrously graphic. And with the transparent security prevalent back then it was a sure thing the Russians had slated the same event for the same time with equal publicity. Bath and I were supposed to hover near Puget Sound in an airboat as telescanning observers. Observers of nothing.

The day came with awful quickness, and there we were. Six or seven miles away a Russian skyboat hovered, probably our opposite number. A voice on our radio blurted countdown in paroxysms of emotion.

"Nine."

Nothing would happen.

"Eight, seven." (Graver.)

You're in for a shock, pal.

"Six!"

Ooh, I'm sick.

"Five, four, three-ee-ee!"

Nothing's going to happen.

"Two!" (Crowds cheering.)

Nothing's going to happen.

"One!" (Hysteria.)

Nothing.

Jack turned off the radio when it became apparent that anarchy was imminent. After all, four billion Ambrijans had gone, and would go, without their accustomed standard of living for six years to build that Klein bottle. Believe you me, when the switch was thrown they wanted water. And when no water came, they wanted *blood*.

"Mission accomplished," Jack smiled. He steered our vessel over to the Russian launch. We joined and were soon confronted by two Slavic visitors. One looked exactly like Jack Booth. The other, in his youth and general helplessness, looked like me.

Jack and Jupak embraced and chattered eagerly in a weird dialect unlike either Russian or Ambrijan.

Finally the two Jacks broke off and confronted us with benevolent grins. "No war," they said in unison. "Everyone's too poor and disorganized. We're headed back to Argus-Pluto now. We had to stop your warring before you disrupted the whole system."

"And the Klein bottles?" said my Russian friend.

"Oh. Use them as statues. Paint 'em green. No use otherwise."

"Like the Easter Island stone heads?" I snapped in a flash.

"How'd you guess?" said the aliens.

END

WHEN WOMEN RULE

by SAM MOSKOWITZ

Sf's favorite historian discusses
the great sf tradition of women
who rule — and men who like it!

The readers of science fiction are predominantly men. It has been that way virtually ever since science fiction has been written. This tends to perpetuate the formula of what will appeal to men. Men (and certainly boys) are far more interested in wild adventure into the unknown with the assistance of ingeniously contrived devices than they are in the suffering of unrequited love. Satire, which is a legitimate province of science fiction, is also accepted, for satire is a political weapon and men find much greater attraction in politics than do women.

Therefore, while love interest is a standard ingredient in most fiction, the same editors who give lip service to the need for more natural dialogue and clear-cut characterization fail to even note the omission of romance when determining the

acceptability of science fiction. Stories in which female characters *appear at all* are in the minority in the magazines of prophetic literature.

Despite this, there is one theme spotlighting the female sex which, since the beginning, has been regarded as legitimately in the province of science fiction — that is the extrapolation of the woman dominant: the female of the species completely independent of or ruling over the male.

Matriarchies have not been unknown in world history; but whether a successful society ever existed where women were *physically and mentally* the dominant sex rests on such tenuous hearsay that to propose the existence of such a situation is today regarded as speculative enough to be admitted as science fiction.

The word "Amazon" is from the Greek and means "deprived of pap" or *sans* breast. Pliny the Elder wrote of a tribe of women warriors in Asia Minor who burnt off their right breasts to make it easier to draw a bow. The girdle of the Queen of the Amazons was alleged to be the source of her unnatural strength, and in Greek mythology Hercules invades the city of Amazons in Asia Minor to divest their Queen Hippolyte of her girdle as his ninth task for Admeta, daughter of Eurystheus. In still another incident, Theseus, King of Athens, captures an Amazon and makes her his queen. This last legend served as the basis for a modern theatrical hit, *By Jupiter*, with music and lyrics by Rodgers and Hammerstein.

The home of the Amazons was placed in North Africa by Sicily's Diodoros, who links them to the conquest of the lost continent of Atlantis. The great Persian historian, Herodotus, writing in Greek five centuries before Christ, also gave the locations of the Amazonian homeland as North Africa. He appeared to have very specific information on them. The "nation" was composed almost entirely of women. Mating was somehow consummated by arrangement with surrounding tribes. Male children were either killed or sent back to the father, if he and his whereabouts were known. So remote are we from first sources that we can't be sure if Herodotus is actually one of the greatest and most readable historians of all time or so charmingly in-

formative because he was unencumbered by facts.

Herodotus purports to tell of the origin of the Sauromatae nation from an incident involving North African Amazons. It is never completely clear whether the Amazons are white or Negro, though we get the impression they are the former. He tells of a battle between the Greeks and the Amazons (called Oior-pata or "man slayers"), which ends in victory for the Greeks. The Amazonian prisoners are loaded aboard three ships for transport back to Greece, but en route rise up and slaughter every man aboard the ships. Unfamiliar with the art of navigation, they drift helplessly until cast up on the shores of Scythia. They disembark, steal horses and proceed on a ceaseless campaign of plunder of the countryside.

The Scythians fight a pitched battle with them. When bodies of the dead reveal their sex, the Scythians decide on a new tactic.

An army of young unmarried men is ordered to encamp near the Amazons at all times, but to refuse to engage in battle. After weeks of this, the women, feeling there is no danger, make contact. Eventually, the two groups begin living together. A decision is made to leave Scythia because of the difference in customs as well as the animosity that may still persist in the land because of previous plunder. The Amazonian army, with their Scythian mates, takes up residence in a nearby land. The

children of the union of Amazons and Scythians become the people of Sauromatae, who speak a corrupted Scythians become the people though domesticated, still accompany their husbands on the hunt as accomplished horsewomen.

The Spanish explorers Gonzalo Pizarro and Francisco de Orellana, a one-eyed knight, crossed the South American Andes in 1541 and sailed down a giant river. They survived many perils and claimed that toward the end of their journey they were attacked by powerfully built women warriors, from all-female tribes in the area. The story of these skirmishes led to the naming of the river they had navigated as the Amazon. These "Amazons" are actually believed to be the women of an Indian tribe on the banks of the Naranom, who assisted their men in battling the Spanish.

The Spanish were intrigued with the concept of the Amazon, for in 1510 Garcia Ordenez de Montalvo wrote *Sergas of Esplandian*, which was popular enough to warrant other editions in 1519, 1521, 1525 and 1526 (two). The novel told of a race of black women who lived on an island "on the right side of the Indies" called California. They were Amazons in every sense of the word, with their armor and weapons beaten from gold, and they sailed large ships with which they plundered nearby coasts.

Their island was peopled with griffins, creatures with heads, wings and legs of an eagle and bodies of a lion. They caught baby griffins, training them as aerial mounts for

combat and feeding them on killed and captured men, with a supplemental diet of male children.

Hearing of the campaigns against the Christians carried out by the Turks, the Amazon Queen Calafia convinces her nation that they should enter the foray for glory and gain. Her forces are greeted in jubilation by the Turks who had been unable to force a fortified Spanish city. Mounting her women warriors on griffins, Queen Calafia swoops down on the beleaguered Spanish, who find that their swords and arrows cannot pierce the tight-packed feathers of the sky beasts. One by one they are hauled aloft and either chewed up or dropped to their deaths.

The Turks mount ladders against the walls of the city to take it, but griffins indiscriminately repeat their deadly performance on their allies. Finding, for this reason, the griffins unreliable for warfare, the Amazons dismount and scale the heights of the city on ladders, swords in hand, but the attack is repulsed with heavy losses.

The Queen and the Turkish leader challenged the Spanish King and his son to hand-to-hand combat to settle the issue which cannot be resolved by a clash of armies.

In this combat, the Queen and the Turk are vanquished.

The captured Queen Calafia falls in love with Esplandian, son of the emperor, but when he marries the daughter of the Greek king, Leonorina, Calafia bargains with the queen of the Spaniards that she will

convert to Christianity if she is given a husband of suitable rank. Further, she will change the ways of her island of California so that there will henceforth be a normal family relationship. Her offer is accepted and Queen Calafia returns to California and the story ends.

However Edward Everett Hale, famed American theologian and author of *The Man Without a Country* and *The Brick Moon*, was to write still another chapter in the history of that colorful romance. At the meeting of The American Antiquarian Society for April, 1872, he submitted a paper claiming a philological discovery to the effect that this Amazonian story was the origin of the name of the state of California, that his researches indicated no appearance of the name California before first publication of *Sergas of Esplandian*.

He translated sections of the novel, under the title of *Queen of California* for publication in ATLANTIC MONTHLY and later included it in his collection *His Level Best* (Robert Brothers, Boston 1872). Chronology appears to favor Hale's hypothesis that Hernando Cortez, who christened California in 1535, secured the name from *Sergas of Esplandian* and thought the name appropriate because this newly discovered land was on "the right side of the Indies."

The Amazons described by Timothy Savage in *The Amazonian Republic, Recently Discovered in the Interior of Peru* (S. Colman, New York, 1842) weren't as bloodthirsty as the girls from California. A sail-

or, lost in the Peruvian jungles, is captured by cannibals. By chance, he is rescued by an advance party of Amazons. They have men who lack many masculine attributes, but are nevertheless treated with utmost kindness. Their city is well designed and run by an advanced form of government, which is very skillfully administered.

During the 19th century, the movements for the emancipation of women began to gain strength, and this was reflected in Utopian literature of that time. The most widely read novel championing the superiority of women was Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race* (Routledge, London, 1874), which presented an underground civilization, inhabited by a highly scientific people able to control weather, manipulate plant biology and fly with detachable wings. They also have an explosive so powerful it could destroy the world.

The women of the nation are physically and mentally superior to the men and are fully capable, if they so desired, of exterminating the opposite sex. Up until the day of their marriage, they aggressively do the courting. After marriage, they are extremely tactful in playing down their superiority, for the nuptial vows are renewable every three years.

Advanced form of Amazonian society is found in *Mizora* by Princess Vera Zaravitch (pen name of Mary E. Lane), published in New York in 1890. Their land is in the polar

regions, and they have no need of the male at all. They reproduce by parthenogenesis, which is only one of the great marvels of their culture. Long before airships or radio existed in the outside world, they had them. They also attained weather control and have invented a flexible glass with the versatility of plastics.

It is the thought presented in this novel that bothers males the most, the conceivability that women might find a way to dispense with males, even for purposes of reproduction.

Apparently it is a condition which some women, such as the author of the volume, would like to see come to pass. It seems to many women that their problems could easily and quickly be solved if they didn't have men to contend with.

Undoubtedly the reluctance with which man conceded woman the right to vote and the slowness with which they permitted her to find independence outside of marriage reflected the fear of something happening along the lines of Robert Barr's *The Revolt of the —*, "a page from the domestic history of the Twentieth Century," (*THE IDLER*, May, 1894.) Women have indeed "progressed." The wife of John Maddox is a business tycoon, with close-clipped hair, stand-up collar, bright bow tie and a jacket cut like a tuxedo. There are high-pockets in her tailor-made skirt. Mrs. Maddox smokes fine Havana cigars, but Mr. Maddox confines himself to Egyptian cigarettes.

While Mrs. Maddox is out of the commercial world, Mr. Maddox

WHEN WOMEN RULE

stays home and takes care of the children. She is not home very often, but he manages the children well, complaining only that the girl cuffs the boy around a little more than necessary.

In an attempt to gain self-respect, he gambles on the stock market, taking a flyer at wheat. After a slight rise, the bottom drops out and he and his friends lose a pooled sum of a million pounds to his wife, who has headed the group that cornered the wheat market. She comforts him with her personal check for 50,000 pounds and suggests he give up business and relax in Monte Carlo with the children. She'll be too busy to be home for a while.

Women need not become dominant because of natural superiority. The same result may be brought about by chance and is in *A World of Women* by J. D. Beresford, published in America in 1913, but undoubtedly available in England a year earlier. Beresford had scored a critical success with *The Hampdenshire Wonder* (1911), possibly the best single novel on the superman theme ever written. It was expected of him to come up with something equally imaginative, which he did in the form of a plague which killed only men and left the women alive. The novel focuses on one community of women, together with Jasper Thrale, one of the few men left alive. He is marvelously adept with his hands and maintains the equipment needed to run a successful farm. However, his puritanical upbringing makes sex repulsive to him. When he finally

forms a permanent relationship with a single woman, he is regarded as somewhat less moral under the changed circumstances than a man on a nearby farm, Sam Evans, who, acting almost like a "male prostitute", is doing much more to sustain the race.

The women prove unable to keep the mechanical civilization going and begin to take on strange beliefs and perversions. A gradual decline into savagery is forestalled when a ship arrives from America where the plague struck with less virulence. It is expected that a new social order of greater equality will emerge providing the women "will work and be strong instead of spending all their time either doing nothing or pottering about the house in an eternal round of cleaning the stupid things we used."

In *The Hampenshire Wonder*, through indirection and understatement, J. D. Beresford, in his presentation of the superior child in a world of average men, creates the impression of great depth and wisdom. The same technique in *A World of Women* reveals only shallowness and ignorance.

One of the most literal renditions of the Spanish tales of the South American Amazons (with echoes of Greek lore), appeared as a complete novel, *The Other Side of Beyond* by Stephens Chalmers (ADVENTURE, Sept. 18, 1921), which purports to be "Extracts from the Narrative of Francis Sparrow, Scrivener to Sir Walter Raleigh, selected from the Original and Edit-

ed." The story begins in 1607. Sir Walter Raleigh learns that there exists on an island in the Orinoco Delta the descendants of the Amazon women reported by the old Spanish explorers.

After much adventure and searching, the customs and mating procedures of these women are observed. The women, hidden on an island after the destruction of their men by an enemy, established a matriarchal society, where women were warriors and men born into the tribe were serfs. Mating was accomplished by invitation with men of selected tribes during a period of the year called Love Moon. Sexual relations with the lowly males of the Amazon tribe were not only forbidden, but a female suspected of such consort was subject to summary execution.

The British explorers convince the aborigines that the common enemy is the Spanish. For the first time in centuries the Amazons join with certain favored tribes and wipe out a Spanish fortress. They have also been convinced it would be best to resume a normal pattern of life.

This short novel is easily one of the finest and most believable stories of the South American Amazons ever written. Historical names and incidents, legend and local color, are related with such an air of authenticity that it reads like dramatized history. Other myths are interwoven with those of the Amazons. The Greek legends tell of tribes in Atlantis with faces in their chests. Such a tribe is discovered on the Amazon; they paint their bodies with

eyes, nose and mouth, lengthen their breechcloths to resemble beards and drape a straw cover over their heads so as to give the appearance of hair growing from the shoulders.

The possibility that women of the Amazon breed resided in the fabled lost Atlantis crops up again in Booth Tarkington's *The Veiled Feminists of Atlantis*, a satire of the sexes he wrote especially for the 40th anniversary issue of FORUM, March, 1926. Booth Tarkington was reputed to have been extremely fond of science fiction and was a member of the Fortean Society, which taunted scientists with a melange of weird "unexplained" facts. He wrote the introduction for *New Lands* by Charles Fort (Boni and Liveright, 1923).

Written not too long after women had gained the vote, *The Veiled Feminists of Atlantis* tells of a land that was a virtual Utopia run by the men. As the women became educated, they cast aside the modesty of the veils they wore, which also granted them special privilege. They secure all the scientific wisdom of the men and then resume wearing the veil. The men protest, claiming that the women, having attained equality, now want superiority.

A war breaks out between the sexes with weapons far more potent than today's hydrogen bombs; they are so effective that they slow the rotation of the moon to its present rate. It ends with waves a thousand feet high deluging the land and sinking the continent.

With the onset of the all-fantasy magazines, the cropping up of the

Amazon theme, with its delectable plot possibilities, was inevitable.

David H. Keller, M.D., who in dozens of stories showed small sympathy for women, wrote *The Little Husbands* (WEIRD TALES July, 1928), a short tale of 70-foot-tall women who live upriver near the Amazon, capturing normal men whenever they can find them. The men are kept in a high stockade, pampered and well treated as long as they amuse the women. They also must mate with them, and all male children born are killed.

Should one of these giantesses' "tiny" males grow ill or begin to displease her, as soon as she can capture a substitute the undesirable is either crushed with her hands or buried alive or impaled on the giant cactus atop the 50-foot walls. As in most of Keller's stories, there probably was a strong note of allegory present, but the plot elements were handled so clumsily that it is ineffective.

Anything but ineffective is Dr. Keller's long novelette, *The Feminine Metamorphosis* (SCIENCE WONDER STORIES, August, 1929), at once an accurate espousal of the position of women of that year and a savage attack on their loss of femininity.

Outraged by their inability to move into the higher echelons of the business world because of their sex, a group of brilliant women recruit and treat 5,000 superior females with male hormones that will give them all the characteristics of masculinity. They send these al-

tered women forth to manipulate the economy of the world with the aim of putting the preponderance of finances into their hands. Maternity foods are perfected which cause a ratio of three female to each male birth. The ultimate plan is a 100% female world with the perfection of a means of parthenogenesis — female eggs which develop without being fertilized by a male sperm.

Their machinations are uncovered by Keller's laconic detective. Taine of San Francisco, posing as a dainty Chinese girl, and the masculinized women find themselves doomed to insanity by a latent disease present in the male hormones they have been given.

What if the women had succeeded in their ambitious plans? Wallace West, in his popular short story *The Last Man* (AMAZING STORIES, February, 1929), paints a vivid picture of the future, when women gradually usurp man's position and then finally exterminate him as a useless encumbrance, reproducing in laboratory vats and incubators under controlled conditions. A male is born by accident after centuries of strict control and they decide to let him live as a museum exhibit.

Most sex desire and feminine characteristics have been bred out of the women, who toil like bees in a hive, as part of civilization that has ceased to advance. A woman throwback, as Eve in the new Garden of Eden, entices the last male and runs off with him to the mountains to start a new natural cycle.

The late Dr. Thomas S. Gardner, father of the psycho-energizer drugs, deliberately wrote a counter to *The Last Man* appropriately titled *The Last Woman* (WONDER STORIES, April, 1932), in which he demonstrates what would have happened had the women lost their bid to overthrow the male. The men invent a chemical which channels their sex drive into a pursuit of knowledge. The scientists exterminate all females, children and inferior men. They reproduce through the use of synthesized artificial ova. A single woman, born accidentally, has been kept as an exhibit in a museum to show not only the men but visitors from other worlds.

An explorer, returning from a long space voyage, runs out of the drug which redirects his sex drive. He becomes susceptible to the woman, and she is drawn to him. He plots their escape, but his ship is intercepted and shot down. They are both tried and executed. Once again the world is completely male.

One of the relatively rare woman science-fiction writers to take a crack at the theme in the magazines was M. F. Rupert with *Via the Hewitt Ray* (WONDER STORIES QUARTERLY, Spring, 1930). Lucille Hewitt, in search of her father lost in the fourth dimension, enters a world where highly evolved women first obtained equality and then gained superiority. "The Sex War Epoch" ensued and "eventually the women won, and we destroyed millions of the despised masculine sex. For untold centuries they kept women subjugated and we finally

got our revenge." Artificial laboratory births were tried, but the results were monstrous.

A pool of men of high intelligence was kept for reproduction purposes, and handsome men of low intelligence were sterilized and used to gratify the sexual desires of the women. Lucille receives permission to take one of the males used for reproduction purposes who has shown criminal defiance back to the third dimension with her. They are eventually married.

Probably the best single novel of women as a ruling class, particularly from the standpoint of superbly sound science and philosophical argument, was written by Owen M. Johnson, best remembered for *Stover at Yale* (1911) and other light rollicking novels of campus life. His *The Coming of the Amazons* (Longman's, Green, 1931), would have delighted Hugo Gernsback with its excellent blend of science and sex.

John Bogardus is quick frozen in 1929 and is revived by seven-foot-tall, blonde, blue-eyed women in the year 2075. That age possesses "Frigidromes" as a device for suspended animation. Scores of small planes take off and land on the air-decks of gigantic dirigibles, anti-collision devices are built into their vehicles serving the hypnotically instructed, specialties of great chefs are frozen and withdrawn to be eaten 50 or 100 years later as though they were vintage wines.

A woman genius had invented a ray which virtually exterminated

most of the races of the earth, leaving a nominal population. The men are regarded as second-class citizens, degenerating into swivel-hipped fops. Marriage is for six months. The women continue to grow in strength and intelligence. There has been a movement to restore the vote to men, but it has been resisted. The motto of the civilization is: "Whatever woman can conceive in in her imagination she will achieve by her will."

John Bogardus leads men in revolt by reversing the ancient "weapon" of *Lysistrata* in refusal to grant sexual relationship to a female. The book brilliantly retains interest despite lack of action by an examination of the Amazon civilization and in the process mirroring our own. A dream ending almost spoils the story but the author rescues the work artistically with a clever last-page trick.

The women of an up-to-now undiscovered planet between Neptune and Pluto unwillingly take over when their men have virtually destroyed themselves in *The Woman from Space* (WONDER STORIES QUARTERLY, Spring, 1932), by Richard Vaughn. They develop an extraordinary science and successfully clear the asteroid belt and move their planet into that orbit to be closer to the sun. The Earth, almost rendered uninhabitable by a star that has brushed too close to our solar system, has lost a majority of its women. The two worlds, one almost devoid of men, the other short of women, agree to a happy accommodation.

So logical an attitude was not long to prevail in science fiction. Within little more than a year Edmond Hamilton, in *War of the Sexes* (WEIRD TALES, November, 1933) had both factions at each other's jugulars again. Allan Rand of the twentieth century, by an apparent miracle of science, finds his brain in the body of a man 20,000 years in the future, who is Thur, ruler of the Males. For eight thousand years the males and females have been in separate camps warring upon one another. Both sexes have discovered the secret of laboratory production of humans. The ruler of the Females is shot down while air-blasting a male city and imprisoned. Thur offers to let her go (after demonstrating the ancient art of kissing) if she will convince her women to call off the war. She pretends to agree, but knocks him out and flies him to her headquarters. At the last minute, she finds she does not have the heart to execute him; but other females disagree, depose her for her softness and kill both. He comes to in the laboratory in our own time. He has been unconscious and has never gone to the future at all!

Edmond Hamilton, who confesses to having been bossed around by a mother and three sisters, may have been expressing his resentment at this domination by returning to the theme again in *World Without Sex* (MARVEL TALES, May, 1940). MARVEL TALES had switched to a briefly held policy of featuring sex (two issues), so Hamilton assumed the *nom de plume* of Richard Went-

worth to disguise his participation. In this world, sex is abhorrent to both men and women, children are produced in the laboratory and by design, the women have enforced a steadily decreasing quota of males. This stirs a revolt, in which the women destroy most of the remaining men and condemn the few survivors to death. The doomed males escape, overpowering four women in the process and taking them along to the hills. A mutually painful period of overcoming inhibitions and disgust about sexual relations is followed by the birth of a child, and a normal rapport between mother, father and child occurs.

When a political change in the woman's world makes it possible for the men to return to civilization, they choose to remain and are joined by still more females. In conclusion, Edmond Hamilton makes perhaps the most valid and psychologically probable observation on the concept that the elimination or domination of men by women would end war as the females factionalize and begin to destroy each other.

Some measure of sophistication and style came to the theme of women dominant when *The Priestess Who Rebelled* by Nelson S. Bond appeared (AMAZING STORIES, October, 1939). In a devastated world of matriarchal tribes, where three basic strata exist — warriors, breeders and workers, with a few men as studs — Meg, who aspires to be ruler of the tribe, makes a required pilgrimage to The Place of

the Gods. Her meeting of a superior man from an unknown distant land, her realization that the Gods had been *men* and that the present way of life is foredoomed is adroitly and pleasingly told. The internal evidence makes it obvious that Nelson Bond received his inspiration from *The Place of the Gods* by Stephen Vincent Benet (THE SATURDAY EVENING POST, July 31, 1937), which has a similar situation, mood, locale and terminology.

A sequel, *The Judging of the Priestess* (FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, April, 1940) saw a reuniting of the sexes under threat of invasion of the Japcans, who still possess deadly weapons. However, this story is marred by weak humor and pulp treatment, though it possesses entertainment value. There is a final novelette in the series, *Magic City* (ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION, March, 1941), where the matriarchy still nominally lingers, but is now set on bringing the Wild Ones, outcast men, into the fold and in the process the ruins of New York are revisited and certain old truths rediscovered.

Though there seemed to be infinite opportunity for originality and divergence in the notion of a world run by women, the plain truth was that writers displayed almost a religious devotion to a worn formula. *Amazons of a Weird Creation*, an ineptly constructed story by Jep Powell (FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, June, 1941,) has a scientist and a reporter travel by time machine to the year 2450, when ancient crones rule a world

without men; where reproduction is carried on by parthenogenesis and where an atavistic female helps the men escape to their own era. *World Without Men* by Robert Moore Williams (AMAZING STORIES, June, 1950) has two men carried into the future by the queen of an Amazon city, which is threatened by wild males who roam the perimeter searching for a mate as in *The Priestess Who Rebelled*. A sympathetic girl assists the men in their efforts to escape, which finally ends in a grand rape as the hordes of Wild Ones force their way into the city.

Australia's first science-fiction magazine to consistently publish new stories, THRILLS INCORPORATED, devoted the cover of its 17th issue (published about December, 1952) to *Amazons of the Asteroids* by N. K. Hemming, where women warriors ride flying horses between three tiny worlds supporting a communal air bubble, the decadent descendants of the inhabitants of the original planet whose destruction created the asteroids.

Fifteen-foot-tall females rule the world of Krim, with husbands physically half their size. The women carry on all the work and business while the men take care of the home in *Woman's World* by Ted Taine (FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, March, 1953). An earth agent is assigned the task of getting the women to join the Federation, a well-knit association of worlds. To accomplish this, he organizes a revolt of the "undersized" men.

Some attempt to apply logic to the literary device of over-sized Amazonian women was earlier supplied by Clark Ashton Smith in *The Root of Ampoi* (ARKHAM SAMPLER, Winter, 1949). A cockney sailor hears of a tribe of giantesses who live on a plateau in Malaya and who will trade rubies for beads and trinkets. He locates this tribe and confirms the fact that while the women average eight feet in height, the men are of normal size. They are quite civilized and friendly people, and the queen becomes attracted to him and they marry. There is real affection between them, for she is in many ways an excellent wife, but her domineering manner bruises his ego. He learns that the women attain their great size by eating a special root that is forbidden to men. This practice was begun on the part of women many generations back, when they were normal size and the men used to brutalize them. When a female child is born to the cockney and the queen, a supply of this root is brought into the home and he secretly eats quantities of it, achieving eight feet in height and with every intention of asserting himself. They overpower him, excommunicate him from the village, and back in civilization he spends the rest of his life as a circus freak. The story is moralistic in tone, implying that to seek superiority for its own sake is to risk destruction of happiness, security and general respect. It also ranks high in literary craftsmanship.

Science fiction has had its share

of superwomen. There was The Black Margot, beautiful warrior ruler of Urbs, Stanley G. Weinbaum's creation in *Dawn of Flame* (*Dawn of Flame and Other Stories*, 1936); Violet Ray was John Russell Fearn's entry in *The Golden Amazon* (FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, July, 1939), who gained remarkable popularity as the extraordinary heroine of a long series of newspaper novels; and Erani, specially bred female mental genius of a race that lived before recorded history, revived in present-day Australia with the mission and means of destroying all the colored races of the world in Erle Cox's novel *Out of the Silence* (1927).

They were all one of a kind. Typical of an entire culture was Dyann the Amazon in Poul Anderson's *Captive of the Centaurianess* (PLANET STORIES, March, 1952) a beautiful, good natured, formidable fighting machine from Alpha C3, a planet where all women were like her and men were the weaker sex and homemakers. As a bunkmate on the spaceship *Jovian Queen* with earthman Ray Ballentyne and a tenaced Martian genius who has evolved a logical theory for faster-than-light travel, she is involved in a bloody but joyous struggle to forestall the aggressive inhabitants of Jupiter's moons from kidnapping the Martian. Though the tale is a deliberate romp, the aggressive sexuality of the Amazon women strikes a more believable note than most of the previous stories of the type written "straight."

Poul Anderson was to have still

another go at the Amazon concept in *Virgin Planet* which led off the first issue of VENTURE SCIENCE FICTION, January, 1957, which had as its policy stories that were a bit stronger meat than those commonly found in science-fiction magazines. The "meaty" part of this story, of a man who lands on a planet where earthwomen abandoned centuries earlier have continued to reproduce a one-sexed race, consists of inquiries as to the use of the "special" organ he possesses as well as several near-seduction sequences. Unlike the Amazons of most previous stories, the women in *Virgin Planet* actually worship the legend of men and believe that someday a suitable delegation will arrive to join them.

One of the truly outstanding literary efforts involving a dominant female society to be published during the fifties was L. Sprague de Camp's *Rogue Queen* (Doubleday, 1951). The locale is a planet of a distant sun, peopled by a mammalian humanoid race which procreates through an egg-laying queen fertilized by a male "drone." The warriors and workers of the society are all female but are virtually neuters in sexual desire. Males exist solely for their reproductive function and occupy a status scarcely more elevated than that of a drone bee.

The landing of an Earth ship and the impact of a monogamous society in which males occupy a position of superiority, result in a traumatic change in the philosophy of the women.

sophical outlook of the aliens. The story ends with the overthrow of the old system and the creation of a bi-sexual society, but not before the author outlines one of the most elaborately fascinating civilizations depicted in science fiction.

Reading like some bachelor's day-dream are the *lalitha* of Philip Jose Farmer's *The Lovers* (STARTLING STORIES, August, 1952), Not human at all, but an insect parasite which has evolved in the shape of a woman, because their only method of reproducing is with a human male, are the *lalitha*. This group of "females" exist as a separate society. Ages past, they had helped bring about the downfall of the humans by becoming mates or concubines and thereby influencing their decisions. When pregnant, their body slowly forms a hard outshell and they die. Then the "grubs" eat their way out of the body to be cared for by the other "women." Pregnancy is prevented indefinitely by the *lalitha* drinking alcohol. The Earthman, who has been secretly carrying on an affair with one of these creatures, substitutes another beverage for alcohol, causing her pregnancy and death. Made aware of her true nature, the revelation fails to alleviate the sorrow and remorse he feels, for he truly loved her.

Another true masterpiece in this genre is John Wyndham's long novelette *Consider Her Ways*, written as an original for Ballantine Books' paperback anthology *Sometimes, Never* (1956). Jane Summers, M.D., through drugs, regains conscious-

ness in the body of an obese woman of tomorrow, a breeder of that civilization. The society of the future is divided into three casts, all women: workers, breeders and "warriors" as found in *The Priestess Who Rebelled*, except that technology is well advanced. As in *A World of Women* the men died off in a single year from circumstances attributable to a single scientist.

A woman psychologist of that distant day listens to every argument given her by Dr. Summers about the positive values of a world with men and counters them with matchless logic. A superb dialogue between the two points of view is capped with a clever ending, when Jane Summers revives in the present in her own body and kills the scientist who she believes will set off the chain of events that will result in a manless world. Unfortunately, she has not been observant enough to note, that his son, who is also a scientist, bears the same name!

Younger writers began to accept the Amazonian theme as a basic. Harlan Ellison, early in his career, wrote of a special agent sent to Arka III by Galactic Center in the guise of a female in *World of Women* (FANTASTIC SCIENCE FICTION, February, 1957) to investigate reports that one of a five-woman matriarchy had gone insane and wiped out the entire male population. Robert Silverberg in *Woman's World* (IMAGINATION SCIENCE FICTION, June, 1957) has a man awake from 500 years of seeming suspended ani-

mation to find the Earth ruled by women and himself involved in a male bid to regain power. Like Allan Rand of Edmond Hamilton's *War of the Sexes*, he finds he has imagined the experience while undergoing a laboratory test.

Telling the all-female civilization story from the viewpoint of one of the women was the major contribution of Charles Eric Maine in *World Without Men* (Ace Books, 1958). Charles Eric Maine is the pen name for British author David McIlwain and was first used by him for an amateur story in the fan magazine THE SATELLITE, October, 1938, titled *The Mirror*. In *World Without Women*, a birth control drug ends female capacity to bear males. Women, in this manless society, are not sexless. To the contrary they are all required to accept a Lesbian relationship. The discovery of a perfectly preserved male body frozen in the polar wilderness sets off an emotional reaction because the cadaver may be the source of chromosomes which will make possible the artificial creation of a male fetus, a project laboratories have been working on for 5,000 years.

When success is achieved and a male infant incubated, the computer which runs the world orders its destruction. The assistant to the cytologist who has brought the child into being disregards the order and flees with the baby. Word of its existence spreads and violence against the prevailing order flares. As the story closes it is evident that the male will be permitted to live

and a bi-sexual society restored.

Despite a heaviness of style, due in part to the elaborateness of detail, *World Without Men* is one of the outstanding stories of its type. It sustains interest throughout and at times achieves dramatic intensity, pointing the way to a more artistic approach to a subject frequently treated flippantly.

There is little question that the theme of the Amazon, one matriarch, the woman superior will remain a permanent plot staple in science fiction, and without major changes in format. To underscore this conclusion, one but has to read the three-part novel *Amazon Planet* by Mack Reynolds (ANALOG, December, 1966 to February, 1967). Of several thousand civilized worlds of United Planets, only one, Amazonia, is a matriarchy. Originally settled by women, it is believed that no rights are accorded to any male born into the society, and female warriors are permitted a male harem numbering up to three. Women have appeared at United Planets' conferences, but no man has ever been permitted to enter or leave that world.

A man who is an agent from United Planets is allowed a visa for purposes of arranging an exchange for a metal badly needed by the women. The story line utilizes a physical action format, ending with the revelation that the women have actually given a substantial amount of equality to the men and that the impressive display of armed women warriors in a setting of Greek pageantry was a facade cal-

culated to frighten off those who might visit for the purpose of subversion and to cover the fact that the planet actually had no armed forces and could not repel an armed invasion.

The fictional creation of an Amazon world, as has been documented, is one of the oldest themes in science fiction. It has appeared with regularity ever since the Greek Empire flourished. If anything, the battle for equal rights started by women more than 150 years ago has probably contributed to the more frequent use of the plot.

Men in every case seem uneasy about this "equality," claiming that it will end in domination for the reasons given by Booth Tarkington in *The Veiled Feminists of Atlantis*: women will also insist upon retaining their special privilege which will give them superiority. The intensity with which these feelings are held is underscored by the very high percentage of stories in which women literally exterminate the males upon achieving domination. Disquietingly, the same "inevitability" is expressed by the several women who have written stories of their sex gaining the upperhand.

The implication is almost that a male and a female are two completely different species instead of two indispensable facets of the same animal. It requires only a few moments of rational thought to conclude that either an all-male or all-female society makes no sense from the standpoint of nature and is a sterile blind alley for civilization.

The theory that if women ran the world there would be no war reminds one of the same view held by the Marxists if only the entire world were communistic.

Though women have technically gained legal equality with men today, they not only seem no closer to ruling the world, but show small interest in desiring to do so. The "overbearing, domineering" men continue to drive themselves, most with no more sinister motive than providing a better life for their wives and children.

Philip Wylie summed up the matter succinctly in *The Disappearance* (Rinehart & Co., 1951), describing

what would happen to each of the sexes separately, if the other completely, without warning, disappeared. In terms of a single family as well as for the entire world community, he vividly dramatizes the meaninglessness of life in a single-sexed world and describes the almost religious ecstasy of thanksgiving, when, after four years apart, the sexes are abruptly united. They have learned many things by their bizarre experience, but most important appeared to be that though the sexes possess obvious differences, there are overwhelmingly many points of similarity.

END

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The Felled Star

PHILIP JOSÉ FARMER

Illustrated by GAUGHAN

*A treasure in star-sent iron lay
beneath their feet — but Someone
didn't want them to bring it up!*

VIII

He felt insignificant, as weak and helpless as a puppy. What could he, or any human, do to combat beings with powers so vast they could perform this miracle?

Yet there had to be an explanation, a physical explanation. Science and the easy control of vast forces had done this; there was nothing supernatural about it.

There was one comforting hope.

One of the unknown beings might be on the side of mankind. Why? *In what mystical battle?*

By then the entire ship was aroused. Bloodaxe and von Richthofen came up on deck at the same time. Bloodaxe frowned at seeing the German there because he had not authorized him to be on the poop-deck. But the sight of the vegetation shook him so much that he forgot to order the German off.

The sun's rays struck down upon

What Has Gone Before—

The planet was called Riverworld — huge and mysterious, with one central river that flowed for countless thousands of miles from a hidden source to an unknown end. But worse than the violation of all known physical laws that the planet itself displayed, there was the mystery of how — and why — all humanity had been reborn along the shores of the great river. But reborn they were, everyone from the first prehistoric humans to the latter-day inhabitants of the Moon.

Sam Clemens is one who finds himself reborn on Riverworld; and with a shipload of reincarnated Vikings and a blood-brother whose first life was spent hunting saber-tooth tigers and mastodons, he has sailed the great river as he did the Mississippi of old. But his voyage comes to a stop when a great meteorite plunges into the stream. He is knocked out — while he sleeps, the mysterious aliens who own Riverworld repair it once again

the gray mushroom shapes of the grailstones. They sparkled upon hundreds of little exhalations, mounds of seeming fog, that had suddenly appeared on the grass near the stones. The mounds shimmered like heat waves and abruptly coalesced into solidity. Hundreds of men and women lay upon the grass. They were naked, and near each was a pile of towels and a grail.

"It's a wholesale translation," Sam murmured to the German. "Those who died as a result of the western grails being shut off. People from everywhere. One good thing, it'll be some time before they can get organized, and they won't know there's a source of iron under their feet."

Lothar von Richthofen said, "How will we find the meteorite?

All traces of it must be covered up."

"If it's still there," Sam said. He cursed. "Anybody who can do this overnight shouldn't have any trouble removing a meteorite, even of that size."

He groaned and said, "Or maybe it struck in the middle of the river and is now drowned under five hundred feet of water!"

"You look depressed, my friend," Lothar said. "Don't. In the first place, the meteorite may not have been removed. In the second place, what if it is? You can't be worse off than you were before. And there are still wine, women, song."

"I can't be satisfied with that," Sam said. "Moreover, I cannot conceive that we were raised from the dead so that we might enjoy our-

selves for eternity. There's no sense to a belief like that."

"Why not?" Lothar said, grinning. "You don't know what motives these mysterious beings have for creating all this and placing us here. Maybe they feed upon feelings."

Sam was interested. He felt some of his depression lift. A new idea, even though it was in itself depressing, exhilarated him.

"You mean we might be emotional cattle? That our herders might dine upon large juicy steaks of love, ribs of hope, livers of despair, briskets of laughter, hearts of hate, sweetbreads of orgasm?"

"It's only theory," Lothar said. "But it's as good as any I've heard and better than most. I don't mind them feeding off me. In fact, I may be one of their prize bulls, in a manner of speaking. Speaking of which, look at that beauty there. Let me at her!"

Briefly illuminated, Sam now plunged back into the dark shadows. Perhaps the German was right. In which case, a human being had as much chance against the unknown as a prize cow had in outwitting her masters. Still, a bull could gore, could kill before he met inevitable defeat.

He explained the situation to Bloodaxe. The Norwegian looked doubtful. "How can we find this fallen star? We can't dig up the ground everywhere looking for it. You know how tough the grass is. It takes days to dig even a small hole with stone tools. And the grass soon grows to fill up the hole."

"There must be a way," Sam said. "If only we had a lodestone or some kind of metal detector. But we don't."

Lothar had been busy waving at the statuesque blonde on the shore but he had been listening to Sam. He turned and said, "Things look different from the air. Forty generations of peasants can plow land over an ancient building and never know it. But an airman can fly over that land and see at once that something lies buried there. There is a difference in coloration, of vegetation sometimes, though that wouldn't apply here. But the earth reveals subterranean things to him who flies high. The soil is at a different level over the ruins."

Sam became excited. "You mean that if we could build a glider for you, you might be able to detect the site?"

"That would be very nice," Lothar said. "We can do that some day. But it won't be necessary to fly. All we have to do is climb high enough on the mountains to get a good view of the valley."

Sam swore joyfully. "It was a stroke of luck, picking you up! I never would have known about that!"

He frowned. "But we may not be able to climb high enough. Look at those mountains. They go straight up, smooth as a politician denying a campaign promise."

Bloodaxe asked impatiently what they were talking about. Sam replied. Bloodaxe said, "This fellow may be of some use after all. There is no great problem, no unsurmountable

one, anyway, if we can find enough flint. We can chop steps up for a thousand feet. It will take much time, but it will be worth it."

"And if there is no flint?" Sam said.

"We could blast our way up," Bloodaxe said. "Make gun-powder."

"For that we need human excrement, of which there is no dearth," Sam said. "And the bamboo and pine can give us charcoal. But what about sulphur? There may be none within a thousand miles or more."

"We know there's plenty about seven hundred miles downriver," Bloodaxe said. "But first things first. One, we have to locate the meteorite. Two, having done that, we must put off any digging for it until we have established a fort to hold it. I tell you, we may be the first to it, but we won't be the only ones. The wolves will be coming from upriver and downriver now, sniffing for it. There will be many, and we will have to fight to hold the iron. So — first we locate the star, then we dig in to keep it."

Sam swore again. "We might be going right past it right now!" he said.

"Then we'll put in here," Bloodaxe said. "It's as good a place as any to start. Besides, we have to have breakfast."

Three days later, the crew of the *Dreyrgr* had determined that there was no flint or chert in the immediate area. Any that might have been there before must have been burned away by the impact of the meteorite. And when the new

soil and vegetation had been laid down, it had contained no stone.

Sometimes rock useful for making tools and weapons could be found in the foothills, at the base of the mountains. Or, if the mountains were broken at the base, as they sometimes were, they yielded workable rock. This area was barren.

"We're out of luck," Sam moaned one night while talking to von Richthofen. "We haven't any way to find the meteorite. And even if we did, we would have no means for digging down to it. And if we could do that, how would we mine it? Nickel-iron is a very dense and hard material."

"You were the world's greatest humorist," Lothar said. "Have you changed a great deal since you were resurrected?"

"What's that got to do with it?" Sam said. "A humorist is a man whose soul is black, black, but who turns his curdles of darkness into explosions of light. But when the light dies out, the black returns."

Sam stared into the bamboo fire for a while. There were faces in there, compact, squeezed down, then elongating, spreading out, soaring upward — as the sparks fly — and thinning out until the night and the stars absorbed them. Livy, mournful, spiraled up. His daughter Jean, her face as still and cold as when she lay in the casket, on fire but icy, her lids shut, wavered and passed up with the smoke. His father in his casket. His brother Henry, his features burned and blistered by the steam-boiler explosion. And then a smiling grinning face, that of Tom



Blankenship, the boy who was the model for Huckleberry Finn.

There had always been in Sam the child who wanted to float forever on a raft down the Mississippi, having many adventures but no responsibilities. Now he had the chance to drift forever on a raft. He could have uncounted numbers of thrilling experiences, could meet enough dukes and counts and kings to satisfy the most eager. He could be lazy, could fish, could talk night and day, wouldn't ever have to work for a living, could drift for a thousand years doing exactly as he pleased.

The trouble was that he could not do exactly as he wanted. There were too many areas where grail-slavery was practiced. Evil men took captives and deprived their prisoners of the luxuries given by their grails: the cigars, liquor, dreamgum. They kept the prisoner half-starved, just alive enough so his grail could be used. They tied the slaves' hands and feet together, like chickens on the way to market, so they could not kill themselves. And if a man did succeed in committing suicide, then he was translated some place else thousands of miles away and like as not would find himself in the hands of grail-slavers again.

Moreover, he was a grown man and just would not be happy as a boy on a raft. And even if he were, he could not be. No, if he went journeying on the river, he needed protection, comfort and, undeniable desire, authority. Also, there was his other great ambition to be pilot of a riverboat. He had attained that

for a while on Earth. Now, he would be a captain of a riverboat, the largest, fastest, most powerful riverboat that had ever existed, on the longest river in the world, a river that made the Missouri-Mississippi and all its tributaries, and the Nile, the Amazon, the Congo, the Ob, the Yellow River, all strung together, look like a little Ozark creek. His boat would be six decks high above the waterline, would have two tremendous sidewheels, luxurious cabins for the many passengers and crew, all of whom would be men and women famous in their time. And he, Samuel Langhorne Clemens, Mark Twain, would be the captain. And the boat would never stop until it reached the headwaters of the river, where the expedition would be launched against the monsters who had created this place and roused all of mankind again to its pain and disappointments and frustrations and sorrows.

The voyage might take a hundred years, maybe two or three centuries, but that was all right. This world did not have much, but it had more than enough time.

Sam warmed himself on the glow of his images, the mighty riverboat, himself as captain in the wheelhouse, his first mate perhaps Mr. Christopher Columbus or Mr. Francis Drake, his captain of marines — no, not captain, major, since there would be only one aboard with the title of captain — Sam Clemens, himself — his major would perhaps be Alexander the Great or Julius Caesar or Ulysses S. Grant.

A pinprick of a thought pierced

the glorious balloon sailing along in the wind of his dream. Those two ancient bastards, Alexander and Caesar, would never submit long to a subordinate position. They would plot from the very beginning on how they might seize the captainship of the paddle-wheeler. And would that great man, U.S. Grant, take orders from him, Sam Clemens, a mere humorist, a man of letters in a world where letters did not exist?

The luminescent hydrogen of his images whistled out. He sagged. He thought of Livy again, so near but snatched away by the very thing that had made his other dream possible. She had been shown to him briefly, as if by a cruel god, and then taken away again. And was that other dream possible? He could not even find the vast store of iron that must be somewhere around here.

IX

“You look tired and pale, Sam,” Lothar said.

Sam stood up and said, “I’m going to bed.”

“What, and disappoint that 17th-century Venetian beauty who’s been making eyes at you all evening?” Lothar said.

“You take care of her,” Sam said. He walked away. There had been some moments during the past few hours when he had been tempted to take her off to his hut, especially when the whiskey from the grail had first warmed him. Now he felt listless. Moreover, he knew that his

guilt would return if he did take Angela Sangeotti to bed. He had suffered recurrent pangs during the twenty years here and the ten women who had been his mates. And now, strangely enough, he would feel guilt not only because of Livy but because of Temah, his Indonesian companion for the last five years.

“Ridiculous!” he had said to himself many times. “There is no rational reason why I should feel guilty about Livy. We’ve been separated for so long that we would be strangers. Too much has happened to both of us since Resurrection Day.”

His logic made no difference. He suffered. And why not? Rationality had nothing to do with true logic; man was an irrational animal, acting strictly in accordance with his natal temperament and stimulus to which he was peculiarly sensitive.

So why do I torture myself with things that cannot be my fault because I cannot help my responses?

Because it is my nature to torture myself for things that are not my fault. I am doubly damned. The first atom to move on primeval Earth and to knock against another atom started the chain of events that have led, inevitably, mechanically, to my being here and walking through the dark on a strange planet through a crowd of aged youths from everywhere and everytime to a bamboo hut where loneliness and guilt and self-recriminations, all rationally unnecessary but nevertheless unavoidable, await me.

I could kill myself, but suicide is

useless here. You wake up twenty-four hours later, in a different place but the same man who jumped into the river. Knowing that another jump won't solve a thing and probably will make you even more unhappy.

"Stone-hearted relentless bastards!" he said and shook his fist. Then he laughed sorrowfully and said, "But They can't help their hard hearts and cruelty any more than I can help what I am. We're all in it together."

This thought did not, however, make him wish any the less to get his revenge. He would bite the hand that had given him eternal life.

His bamboo hut had one room in which was a large bamboo cot. It was in the foothills under a large iron tree. Although only a shack, it represented genuine luxury in this area, where stone tools to build houses were a rarity. The translatees had had to settle for makeshift housing, bamboo plants bent and tied together with grass ropes at the top and sides and covered with huge elephant ear leaves from the iron trees. Of the five hundred varieties of bamboo in the valley, some could be split and made into knives, which, however, easily lost their edge.

Sam entered his hut, lay down on the cot, and covered himself with several big towels. The faint sound of distant revelry disturbed him. After tossing for a while, he gave in to the temptation to chew a piece of dreamgum. There was no predicting what its effect might be: ecstasy, bright manycolors shifting shapes,

a feeling that all was right with the world, a desire to make love, or abysmal gloom with monsters springing out of the darkness at him, re-criminating ghosts from dead Earth, burning in the flames of hell while faceless devils laughed at his screams.

He chewed and swallowed his saliva and knew at once that he had made a mistake. It was too late then. He continued to chew while he saw before him that time when he was a boy and had drowned, or at least was close to it, and would have drowned if he had not been dragged from the waters. That was the first time I died, he thought, and then, no, I died when I was born. That's strange, my mother never told me about that.

He could see his mother lying on the bed, hair tangled, skin pale, eyelids half-opened, jaw dropped. The doctor was working on the baby — himself, Sam — while he smoked a cigar. He was saying out of the corner of his mouth to Sam's father, "Hardly seems worth saving."

His father said, "You had a choice between saving *that* and saving Jane?"

The doctor had a shock of bright red hair, a thick drooping red moustache, and pale blue eyes. His face was strange and brutal. He said, "I bury my mistakes. You worry too much. I'll salvage this bit of flesh, though it's really not worth doing, and save her, too."

The doctor wrapped him up and put him on the bed, and then the doctor sat down and began writing in a little black book. Sam's father

said, "Must you write at a time like this?"

The doctor said, "I must write, though I'd get more writing done if I didn't talk so much. This is a log I keep on all the souls I bring into the world. I intend some day to write a big case history of the infants, find out if any ever amounted to anything. If I can bring *one* genius, *one*, into this vale of heavy tears, I will think my life worthwhile. Otherwise, I've been wasting my time bringing thousands of idiots, hyocrites, dogs in the mangers, *etc.* into this sad place."

Little Sam wailed, and the doctor said "Sounds as if he's a lost soul before he's dead, don't he? As if he's bearing the blame for all the sins of the world on his tiny shoulders."

His father said, "You're a strange man. Evil, I think. Certainly not God-fearing."

"I pay tribute to the Prince of Darkness, yes," the doctor said.

The room was filled with the odor of blood, the doctor's boozy breath and cigar, sweat from the three adults.

"What're you going to call him? Samuel? That's my name, too! It means "name of God." That's a joke. Two Samuels, heh? Sickly little devil, I don't think he'll live. If he does, he'll wish he hadn't."

His father roared, "Get out of my house, you devil's spawn! What kind of a man are you? Get out! I'll call in another doctor! I won't even let it be known that you attended my wife or had anything to do with this or was even in this house. I'll rid this house of your evil odor."

The doctor, swaying, threw his dirty instruments into the bag and snapped it shut. "Very well. But you have delayed my passage through this miserable village of asses. I'm on my way to bigger and better things, my provincial friend. It was only out of the kindness of my heart that I took pity upon you because the quacks that serve this mudhole were out of town. I left the comforts of the tavern to come here and save an infant who would be better off dead, infinitely better. Which reminds me, though I don't know why, that you must pay my fee."

"I should throw you out of the house and pay you with nothing but curses!" Sam's father said. "But a man has to pay his debts no matter what the circumstances. Here's your thirty pieces of silver."

"Looks more like paper to me," the doctor said. "Well you can call in your dispenser of pills, folly and death, but just remember that it was Doctor Ecks that dragged your wife and baby from the jaws of death. Ecks, the unknown quantity, the eternal passer-through, the mysterious stranger, the devil dedicated to keeping other poor devils alive, also dedicated to the demon whiskey, since I can't abide rum."

"Out! Out!" Sam's father shouted. "Out before I kill you!"

"There's no gratitude in this world," Doctor Ecks mumbled. "Out of nothing I come, through a world populated by asses I pass, and into nothing I go. Ecks equals nothing."

Sweating, eyes open and rigid as those of a stone Apollo, Sam watch-

ed the drama. The scene and the actors were enclosed in a ball of pale yellow light through which veins of red shot like lightning and then faded out. The doctor turned his face once before he walked through the door of the house in Florence, Missouri, on November 30, 1835. He took the cigar from his mouth and grinned mockingly, revealing long yellow teeth with two abnormally white, abnormally long canines.

As if the scene were a film being shut off, it blinked out. Through the door which had been in Sam's birthplace and now was the door of the bamboo hut, another figure entered. It was momentarily silhouetted by the bright starlight, then slid into the shadows. Sam closed his eyes and steeled himself for another frightening experience. He groaned and wished he had not taken the dreamgum. Yet he knew that under the terror was a thread of delight. He hated and enjoyed this. The birth-drama was a fantasy, created by him to explain why he was the kind of man he was. But what was this shadowy figure moving silently and intently as death? From what deep cavern in his mind came this creature?

A baritone voice spoke. "Sam Clemens! Do not be alarmed. I am not here to harm you. I come to help you."

"And what do you want in repayment for your help?" Sam said.

The man chuckled and said, "You're the kind of human being I like. I chose well."

"You mean I chose you to choose me," Sam replied.

There was a pause of several seconds, and then the man said, "I see. You think I'm another fantasy inspired by the gum. I'm not. Touch me."

"What for?" Sam said. "As a gum-inspired fantasy, you should know that you can be felt as well as seen and heard. State your business."

"Entirely? That would take too long. And I don't dare take much time with you. There are others in this area who might notice. That would be too bad for me, since they are very suspicious. They know there is a traitor among them, but they don't have the slightest idea who it could be."

"Others? They?" Sam answered.

"They — we Ethicals — are doing field work in this area now," the figure said. "This is a unique situation, the first time that a completely unhomogenized assortment of humans have been thrown together. It presents a rare chance for study, and we are recording everything. I'm here as chief administrator, since I'm one of The Twelve."

"I'll have to figure you out after I wake up," Sam replied.

"You are awake, and I exist. I have objective reality. And, I repeat, I don't have much time."

Sam started to sit up but was pushed back by a hand which somehow communicated a sense of great power, muscular and mental. Sam shivered upon feeling it.

"You're one of Them," he whispered. "One of Them!" He gave up his idea of seizing the man and calling for help.

"Of them, but not *with* them," the man said. "I'm with you human beings, and I intend to see that my people do not carry out their filthy project. I have a plan, but a plan that will take much time, much patience, a slow and careful, devious development. I have contacted three humans now; you are the fourth. They are aware of parts of the plan but not all of it. If any one of them should be revealed and interrogated, he could tell the Ethicals only a little. The plan must unfold slowly and everything must appear accidental."

"Just as the meteorite must appear accidental."

Sam did start to sit up then but caught himself before the hand touched him. "It was no accident?"

"No. I have known for some time of your dream of building a riverboat and going to the end of the river. It would be impossible without iron. So I deflected the meteorite to bring its orbit within this planet's grip and cause it to crash near you. Not too near you, of course, otherwise you would have died and have been translated far from this area. There are safeguards to prevent such spatial matter from falling on the valley, but I managed to trip them out just long enough for the meteor to get through. Unfortunately, the guardians almost got to the repulsion system in time. When the system went back into action, its effect caused the meteorite to go off the course I'd planned. As a result, we — I mean you — almost got killed. It was just luck that you

weren't. But then I've found out that what you call luck is on my side."

"Then the falling star . . .?"

"Is a deliberately felled star, yes."

Sam thought, if he knows so much about me, he must be one of the crew of the *Dreyrgr*. Unless he's able to make himself invisible. That isn't impossible. That egg-shaped ship I saw in the air was invisible; I only saw it because it was made visible for some reason very briefly. Maybe the lightning interfered with the apparatus that makes the ship invisible.

Then, What am I thinking? This is just another dreamgum fantasy.

The man said, "One of their agents is nearby! Listen carefully! The meteorite wasn't removed because we didn't have time. At least, that was my decision. It's buried under the plains and foothills ten miles from here. Go ten grailstones downriver.

"You'll be on the perimeter of the original crater, where several large masses and many small pieces are buried. Start digging. The rest is up to you. I'll help you when I can, but I can't do anything obvious."

Sam's heart was beating so hard his own voice sounded muted. "Why do you want me to build a boat?"

"You'll find out in time. For the present, be happy that you've been given what you need. Listen! There's a huge deposit of bauxite only five miles further up, under the surface of the mountains, near the base. And near it is a small lode of platinum and two miles up from it, cinnabar."

"Bauxite? Platinum?"

"You fool!"

There was the sound of hard breathing. Sam could almost hear the man's internal struggle to control his disgust and fury. Then, calmly, "You'll need bauxite for aluminum and platinum for a catalyst for the many things you'll have in your boat. I haven't got time to explain. There are several engineers in this area who'll tell you what to do with the minerals. I must go. He's getting closer. Just do what I say. And, oh, yes, there's flint thirty miles up-river!"

"But . . ." Sam said. The man was silhouetted briefly and was gone. Sam rose unsteadily and went to the door. Fires were still blazing on the banks and small figures were capering in front of them. The stranger was gone. Sam went around to the back of the hut but there was no one there. He looked up at the sky, pale with great gas sheets and bright knots of white, blue, red and yellow stars. He had hopes he might catch a glimpse of a vehicle winking from visibility to invisibility. Nothing.

X

On returning to the hut, he was startled by a huge figure standing dark and immobile before his door. His heart hammering, he said, "Joe?"

"Yeah," answered the bass drum voice. Joe advanced to him and said, "There'th been thomeone not human here. I can thmell him. He got a funny ththink, different than you humanth got. You know, it remindth me . . ."

He was silent for a while. Sam waited, knowing that the ponderous stone wheels were grinding out the flour of thought. Then Joe said, "Vell, I'll be damned!"

"What is it, Joe?"

"It'th been tho long ago, it happened on Earth, you know, thome-time before I got killed there. No, it couldn't be. Jethuth Chritht, if vhat you thay ith true about how long ago I lived, it muht've been maybe a hundred thouthand yearth ago!"

"Come on, Joe, don't leave me hanging up in the air."

"Vell, you ain't going to believe thith. But you got to remember that my nothe hath a memory, too."

"It ought to, it's bigger than your brain," Sam said. "Out with it, or are you trying to kill me with frustrated curiosity?"

"All right, Tham. I vath on the track of a *vifthangkruilth* tribethman, they lived about ten mileth from uth on the other thide of a big hill that looked like . . ."

"Never mind the details, Joe," Sam snapped.

"Vell, it vath late in the day and I knew I vath getting clothe to my enemy becauthe hith printth were tho frethh. And then I heard a noithe that made me think maybe the guy I vath following had backtracked on me and I vath going to get hith club thyoved all the vay up inthtead of vithevertha. Tho I dropped to the ground and crawled tvardth the noithe. And gueth vhat I thaw. Great Thcott, vhy didn't I ever tell you thith before? Vat a dummy I am!"

"I'll go along with that. So . . .?"

"Vell, the guy I vath trailing had gotten vind of me, though I don't know how, thinthe I'm ath thilent ath a veathel thneaking up on a bird, big ath I am. Anyway, he had backtracked and might've come up behind me, maybe. But he vath lying on the ground, out cold ath a cavedigger. And there vere two humanth thtanding by him. Now, I'm ath brave ath the nektht guy and maybe braver, but thith vath the firtht time I ever thaw humanth, and it vath poththible I vath thcared. Cauthyiouth, anyway.

"They vere dreththted up in clotheth, vat you've dethcribed to me ath clotheth. They had thome funny looking thingth in their handth, about a foot long, thick black thtickth that veren't vood, looked more like the thteel that Bloodakth'th akthe ith made of.

"I vath vell hidden but thothe bathtardth had thome vay of knowing I vath there. One of them pointed the thtick at me, and I became unconthious. Paththted out. When I came to, the two humanth and the vif were gone. I got to hell out of there, but I never forgot that thmell."

Sam said, "That's the whole story?"

Joe nodded. Sam said, "I'll be damned! Does that mean that these . . . these people . . . have been keeping an eye on us for half a million years? Or more? Or are they the same people?"

"Vhat do you mean?"

Sam told Joe that he must never tell anybody else what he was going to hear. He knew that the titanthrop could be trusted, yet when he ex-

plained he felt misgivings. X had required him not to utter a word to anybody else.

Joe nodded so much that the silhouette of his nose was like a log rising and falling in a heavy sea. "It all tieth in. It'th quite a cointhidden, ain't it? Me theeing them on Earth, then being taken along on Ikhnaton'th ekthpedithion and theeing the tower and airthyip, and now you being picked by thith Ekth to build the thteamboat. How about that, huh?"

Sam was so excited that he could not fall asleep until shortly before dawn. He managed to rouse himself for breakfast, though he would have preferred to stay in bed. While the Vikings, the German, Joe and he were eating the contents of their grails, he told them a heavily censored version of his experience. But he told it as if it had been a dream. If he had not had Joe's olfactory backing for the mysterious stranger's presence, he would have thought it was a dream.

Von Richthofen, of course, pooh-poohed it, but the Norsemen believed in revelation via dream. Rather, most of them did. Among the inevitable sceptics, unfortunately, was Erik Bloodaxe.

"You want us to go traipsing ten miles and dig just because you had a wild nightmare?" he bellowed. "I've always thought you had a mind as weak as your courage, Clemens, and now I know it! Forget about it!"

Sam had been sitting down while eating. He rose to his feet and, glar-

ing beneath the heavy brows, said, "Joe and I will go our own way then. We'll organize the locals to help us dig, and when we find the iron — as we surely will — you won't be able to buy your way into the organization for love or money. The first of which, by the way, you've never had on Earth or here, and the second of which just doesn't exist."

Bloodaxe, bread and steak spewing from his mouth, shouted and swung his axe. "No miserable thrall speaks to me like that! You'll dig nothing but your grave, wretch!"

Joe, who had already risen to stand by Clemens, growled and pulled his huge stone axe from his belt-sheath. The Vikings stopped eating and walked away to arrange themselves a little behind their chief. Von Richtofen had been grinning while Clemens was describing his dream. The grin remained frozen, and he was quivering. The shaking was not from fright. Now he arose and without a word stood by Clemens' right side.

He said to Bloodaxe, "You have sneered at the fighting ability and courage of Germans, my Norse friend. Now you will have that sneer shoved down your throat."

Bloodaxe laughed loudly. "Two gamecocks and an ape! You won't die easy deaths; I'll see that it takes you days to find the joy of death! Before I'm done, you'll be begging me to end your pain!"

"Joel!" Clemens said. "Make sure you kill Bloodaxe first. Then you can get up a little sweat knocking off the rest."

Joe raised the 50-pound weight of the flint head above his shoulder and rotated it through a 45-degree arc, back and forth, as easily as if it weighed an ounce. He said, "I can break hith breathbone with one throw and probably knock down theveral behind him."

The Norsemen knew that he was not bragging; they had seen him smash too many skulls. He was capable of killing half of them before they killed him, maybe of smashing all of them and still be standing. But they had sworn to defend Bloodaxe to the death and, much as many of them disliked him, they would not break their oath.

There should have been no cowards in the Rivervalley; courage should have become universal. Death was not permanent; a man was killed only to rise again. But those who had been brave on Earth were usually brave here, and those cowardly on Earth were cowardly here. The mind might know that death lasted only a day, but the cells of the body, the unconscious, the configurations of emotion, or whatever it was that made up a man's character, these did not recognize the fact. So, Sam Clemens dodged violence and the resultant pain — which he feared more than violent death — as long as he could. He had fought with the Vikings, swung an axe, wielded a spear, wounded and been wounded and once even killed a man, though it had been more by accident than skill. But he was an ineffectual warrior. In battle the valves of his heart were turned



full open, and his strength poured out.

Sam knew this well, but about this he had no self-reproach or shame.

Erik Bloodaxe was furious and not at all afraid. But if he died, and he probably would, he would never be able to take part in Clemens' dream of the great riverboat nor storm the citadels of the north pole. And, though he had scoffed at the dream, he still believed in a part of him that dreams could be revelations sent by the gods. Perhaps he was robbing himself of a glorious future.

Sam Clemens knew his man and was betting that his ambitions would overcome his anger. So they did. The king lowered the axe and forced a smile.

"It is not good to question what the gods send until you look into it," he said. "I have known priests who were given the truth in dreams by Odin and Heimdall, yet they had no hearts for battle and spoke lies except when they spoke for the gods. So we will dig for the iron. If there is iron, good. If not . . . then we will take up the matter where we left off."

Sam sighed with relief and wished he could quit shaking. His bladder and bowels pained him with their urgency to evacuate, but he did not dare to excuse himself at that moment. He had to play the role of the man who had the upper hand. Ten minutes later, unable to bear it any longer, he walked off towards his hut.

X, the Mysterious Stranger, had said that digging could take

place anywhere near the tenth grailstone upriver from their present position. However, the would-be diggers had to straighten out the locals first on who was running things. A Chicago gangster of the 20's and 30's, Alfonso Gilbretti, had allied himself with a Belgian coal-mine and steel-mill magnate of the late nineteenth century and a Turkish sultan of the mid-eighteenth. This triumvirate had followed the by-now classical pattern of organizing a nuclear gang from those who had been merciless exploiters of their fellow men in crime, business and other terrestrial activities. Those who objected to the newly self-constituted rulers had been disposed of the day before, and the gang had determined what share of the grails' output each "citizen" would pay for "protection." Gilbretti had picked out a harem of five women, of whom two were willing and one had died already because she had tried to break his head with a grail when he entered her hut the night before.

Clemens knew all this because of the grapevine. He realized that the Vikings would be faced with two hundred toughs and at least a thousand of the so-called militia. Against them would be forty men and twenty women. But the locals were armed only with bamboo spears with fire-hardened tips while the invaders had riverdragon-armor, flint axes and flint-tipped spears and arrows. And there was Joe Miller.

Bloodaxe announced from the ship what the Norsemen intended to do. If the locals wanted to participate, they could do so under the

rulership of the Norsemen. However, no one would have to "contribute" any of the grain output and no woman would be taken by force.

Gilbretti hurled a spear and a Sicilian oath at Erik. The Norseman escaped the effects of both and threw his axe. Its edge buried itself in Gilbretti's chest, and Bloodaxe was down off the ship and on the land and racing after his precious iron weapon, a flint-studded club in hand, before anybody could move. After him came Joe Miller and thirty men. The women shot arrows while a crew launched the last rocket into the toughts. It struck exactly on target, near the rear ranks of the closely arranged Gilbrettians. About forty were either killed, wounded or stunned.

Within seventy seconds, the Belgian magnate and the Turk were dead, their heads pulped by Joe's axe, and the others were either casualties or running for their lives.

None got away. The militia saw their chance to get revenge and either beat or stabbed most of them to death. The ten left alive were spreadeagled, and burning bamboo splints were thrust into them. Sam Clemens stood the screaming as long as he was able. He did not want to make himself unpopular by cutting the fun too short and so he tried to ignore the spectacle. Lothar von Richthofen said that he certainly understood the desire to hurt by those who had been hurt. But he would not put up with this barbarity a moment longer. He strode up to the nearest sufferer and silenced him with a single chop of his axe. He

then ordered the others done away with immediately. Erik Bloodaxe might have interfered with this order, since he thought it proper that one's enemies should be put through some torture to teach them and others a lesson. But he had been stunned by a piece of the rock-shrapnel thrown by the rocket explosion and was out of the picture for a while.

Reluctantly, the militia obeyed, although in their own fashion. They threw the nine survivors into the river, where the fire was certainly put out but not the pain of the splinters themselves. Some thrashed around for several minutes before drowning. And this was strange, since they could have killed the agony in their bowels by killing themselves, knowing they would be alive again and whole again in a short time. Such was the drive of their instincts for survival, they fought to keep their heads above water as long as possible.

XI

Digging did not begin at once. First the locals had to be organized and definite administrative, judicial and legislative lines laid down and the military formed. The area constituting the new state had to be defined. Clemens and Bloodaxe argued about this for a while before deciding that three miles each way up and down the river from the site of the digging would make a manageable area. A sort of Maginot line was built on the borders; this consisted of a twenty-foot-wide strip

of two-foot-long bamboo stakes, pointing at various angles, protruding from the ground. The line ran from the base of the mountains down to the bank of the river. Huts were built by the chevaux-de-frise, and spearmen and women lived in these as the garrisons.

A third cheval-de-frise was built on the banks. When this was finished, the dragonship was dispatched to the point upriver where there was a flint mine, if the Mysterious Stranger was to be believed. Bloodaxe stayed behind with about fifteen of his men. He put his lieutenant, Snorri Ragnarsson, in charge of the expedition. Snorri was to bargain with the locals for flint by promising them a share of the iron when it was dug up. If the locals refused to part with the flint, then he was to threaten them. Bloodaxe thought that Joe Miller should go with the ship because the titanthrop's huge size and grotesque features would awe the locals.

Sam Clemens agreed with the Norseman's logic on this point but he did not like the idea of being separated from Joe. Yet he did not want to go on the ship with Joe, because of what Bloodaxe might do in his absence. The king was bad-tempered and arrogant, just plain mean and ornery. If he affronted the newly conquered people, he might cause a revolution which could overwhelm the small number of Vikings.

Sam strode back and forth in front of his hut, while he smoked and thought furiously. There was iron under the grass, more than enough to realize The Dream, yet

he could not even start to dig for it until a multitude of preparations were made. And every step he thought to take was balked because a dozen other problems came up. He was so frustrated, he almost bit through his cigar. The people who were sitting on the flint mine needed something like the sight of Joe to be softened up for cooperation. But if Joe were absent, Bloodaxe, might take advantage of this to kill Sam. He would not do it openly, because he feared Joe, but he could easily arrange an *accident*.

Sam cursed and sweated. "If I die, I'll be resurrected somewhere else, so far from this place it might take a thousand years to get back on a canoe. Meanwhile, other men will mine the iron and build *my* riverboat. Mine! Mine! Not theirs! Mine!"

At this moment, Lothar von Richthofen ran up to him. "I've located two of the kind of men you're looking for. Only one isn't a man! Imagine that, a female engineer!"

The man, John Wesley O'Brien, was a mid-20th-century metallurgical engineer. The woman was half-Mongolian, half-Russian, and had spent most of her life in mining communities in Siberia.

Sam Clemens shook hands with them and told them briefly what he had to do now and what he expected to do later. O'Brien said, "If there is a big bauxite deposit near here, then we can probably build the kind of ship you want."

He was very excited, as any man would be who had given up any

hope of carrying on his Terrestrial profession here. There were many like him, men and women who wanted to work if for no other reason than to kill time. There were doctors who had nothing to do but set an occasional broken bone, printers who had no type to set or paper to use, mailmen with no mail to deliver, smiths with no horses to shoe, farmers with no crops to grow, housewives with no children to raise, the food already cooked, housecleaning done in fifteen minutes and no marketing to do, salesmen with nothing to sell, preachers whose religion was thoroughly discredited by the existence of this world, bootleggers with no means of making grain alcohol, buttonmakers with no buttons, pimps and whores whose professions were ruined by an excess of amateurs, mechanics with no autos, admen with no ads, carpetmakers with only grass and bamboo fibers to work with, cowboys without horses or cattle, painters with no paint or canvas, pianists without pianos, railroad men with no iron, stockbrokers with no stocks to deal in and so on.

O'Brien continued, "However, you want a steamboat, and that's not very realistic. You'd have to stop at least once a day to chop wood for fuel, which would mean a long delay even if the locals permitted you to take their limited supply of bamboo and pine trees. Moreover, your axes, the boilers and other parts would wear out long before you reached the end of your journey, and you wouldn't have enough space to carry enough iron for replacements parts. No, what you need are electric motors.

"Now, there's a man in this area I met shortly after translation here. I don't know where he is just now but he must be somewhere close. I'll find him for you. He's an electrical wizard, a late 20th-century engineer who knows how to build the type of motors you'll need."

"Hold your horses!" Sam said. "Where would you get all the tremendous amounts of electrical power you'd need? Would we have to build our own Niagara Falls to carry along with us?"

O'Brien was a short, slight youth with a plume of almost orange hair and a face with features so delicate he looked effeminate. He had a crooked smile which managed nevertheless to be charming. He said, "It's available everywhere up and down the river."

He pointed at the mushroom shape of the nearest grailstone. "Three times a day, those stones output an enormous electrical power. What's to prevent us from hooking up power lines to a number of them and storing the discharges to run the boat's motors?"

Sam goggled for a moment, then said, "Strike me dumb! No, that's a redundant phrase. I am dumb. Right before my eyes, and I never thought of it! Of course!"

Then he slitted his eyes and lowered his thick tangled eyebrows. "How in hell could you store all that energy? I don't know much about electricity, but I do know that you'd need a storage battery taller than the Eiffel tower or a capacitor the size of Pike's Peak."

O'Brien shook his head. "I thought so, too, but this fellow, he's a mulatto, half-Afrikaans, half-Zulu, Lobengula Van Boom, he said that if he had the materials, he could build a storage device — a batacitor, he called it — a ten-meter cube, that could hold ten megakilowatts and feed it out a tenth of a volt per second or all at once.

"Now, if we can mine the bauxite and make aluminum wire, and there are many problems in doing even that, we can use the aluminum in circuits and electrical motors. Aluminum isn't as efficient as copper, but we don't have copper, and aluminum will do the job."

Sam's fury and frustration disappeared. He grinned, snapped his fingers, and made a little leap into the air. "Find van Boom! I want to talk to him!"

He puffed away, the end of his cigar as glowing as the images in his mind. Already, the great white paddlewheeler was steaming (no, electrifying?) up the river with Sam Clemens in the pilothouse, Sam Clemens wearing a riverboat captain's cap of riverdragon leather on his head, Sam Clemens, captain of the fabulous, the unique paddlewheeler, the great vessel churning on the start of its million mile plus journey. Never such a boat, never such a river, never such a trip! Whistles blowing, bells clanging, the crew made up of the great and near-great men and women of all time. From mammoth subhuman Joe Miller of 1,000,000 B.C. to the delicate-bodied but vast-brained scientist of the late 20th-century.

Von Richthofen brought him back to the immediate reality.

"I'm ready to start digging for the iron. But what do you intend to do about Joe?"

Sam groaned and said, "I can't make up my mind what to do. I'm as tense as a diamond cutter before he makes the first tap. One wrong thing, and the Kohinoor shatters. Okay, okay! I'll send Joe. I have to take a chance. But being without him makes me feel as helpless as a honeydipper without a bucket, a banker during a panic. I'll tell Blood-axe and Joe, and you can start your crew. Only we ought to have a ceremony. We'll all have a snort, and I'll dig the first shovelful."

A few minutes later, his stomach warmed by a big shot of Bourbon, cigar in mouth, his speech finished, Sam started to dig. Rather, he tried to dig. The bamboo shovel had a sharp edge, but the grass was so tough and thick that it was necessary to use the shovel as a machete. Sweating, swearing, declaring that he had always hated physical exertion and was not cut out to be a ditch-digger, Sam chopped away the grass. On driving the now-dulled shovel into the earth, Sam found he could not bring up even a half-shovelful. It would be necessary to hack away at the grass and the dirt between.

"By the great horn spoon!" he said, flinging the shovel down on the ground. "Let some peasant who's cut out for this drudgery do it! I'm a brain-worker!"

The crowd laughed and set to work with flint and bamboo knives and flint axes. Sam said, "If that

iron is ten feet down, it'll take us ten years to find it. Joe, you'd better bring back plenty of flint, otherwise we're done for."

"Do I have to go?" Joe Miller said. "I'll mithth you, Tham."

"You gotta go, as all men do," Sam said. "Don't worry about me."

XII

During the next three days, a hole ten feet across and one foot deep was made. Von Richthofen organized the teams so that a new one replaced the previous crew every fifteen minutes. There was no lack of fresh and strong diggers, but delays were caused by resharpenering of the flint tools and making of new bamboo tools. Bloodaxe growled about the damage to the axes and knives, saying that if they were to be attacked, the stone weapons could not cut through the skin of a baby. Clemens begged him for the dozenth time to be allowed to use the steel axe, and Bloodaxe refused.

"If Joe were here, I'd have him take the axe away from him," Clemens said to Lothar. "And where is Joe, anyway? He should be back by now, empty-handed or bearing gifts."

"I think we ought to send somebody in a dugout to find out," von Richthofen said. "I'd go myself, but I think you still need me around to protect you from Bloodaxe."

"If something's happened to Joe, we'll both need protection," Sam said. "All right, that Pathan, Abdul, can be our spy. He could wriggle unnoticed through a basket of rattlesnakes."

At dawn, two days later, Abdul paddled in. He woke Sam and Lothar, who were sleeping in the same hut for mutual protection. In broken English, he explained that Joe Miller was tied up in a strongly built bamboo cage. Abdul had tried to get a chance to free Joe, but the cage had an around-the-clock guard.

The Vikings had been greeted with friendliness and sympathy. The chief of the region had seemed surprised that his flint for their iron would be a very good trade. He had held a big party to celebrate the agreement and had given his guests as much liquor and dreamgum as they wished. The Norse had been overcome while they snored drunkenly. Joe was asleep but had awakened while being tied up. With bare hands only, he had killed twenty men and injured fifteen before the chief had half-stunned him with a club against the back of his neck. The blow would have broken anybody else's neck; it just reduced his fighting ability enough to permit men to swarm over him and restrain him while the chief hit him twice over the head.

"The chief knows Joe is a mighty warrior," Abdul said. "Greater than Rustam himself. I overheard some men talking, and they said their chief plans to use Joe as a hostage. He wants to become partners in the iron mine. If he refused, he will not kill Joe but will make a slave out of him, although I doubt he can do that. He'll attack us, kill us, get the iron for himself.

"He can do it. He's building a huge fleet, many small ships carry-

ing forty men each, hastily put together but serviceable to transport his army. He'll make an all-out attack with warriors armed with flint weapons, bows and arrows and heavy war-boomerangs."

"And who is this would-be Napoleon?" Sam said.

"His men called him King John. They say that he ruled over England when men wore armor and fought with swords. In the time of Saladin. His brother was a very famous warrior, Richard the Lion-Hearted."

Sam cursed and said, "John Lackland! The black-hearted pussyfooting Prince John! So rotten that the English swore never again to have a king named John! I'd sooner have a scoundrel like Leopold of Belgium or Jim Fiske after my hide!"

Thirty minutes later, Sam was shoved into an even deeper gloom. This time, the message came by word-of-mouth, by grapevine. Thirty miles downriver, a huge fleet was sailing towards them. This consisted of sixty large single-masters, each carrying forty warriors. The leader of the armada was a king of an area which had been just outside the destruction caused by the meteorite. His name was Joseph Maria von Radowitz.

"I read about him in school!" von Richthofen said. "Let's see. He was born in 1797, died about 1853, I believe. He was an artillery expert and a good friend of Fredrick Wilhelm IV of Prussia. He was called 'The Warlike Monk' because he was a general who also had strict religious

views. He died when he was about fifty years old, a disappointed man because he had been dropped from favor. So now he's alive again, young, and no doubt trying to impose his puritanism upon others, and killing those who don't agree with him."

An hour later, he got word that King John's fleet had set sail.

"John's force will get here first," he told Bloodaxe. "They'll be faster because the wind and current will be helping them."

"Teach your grandmother to suck eggs," Bloodaxe snorted.

"So what do you plan to do?"

"Smash the Englishman first and then destroy the German later," Bloodaxe replied. He swung his axe and said, "By the shattered hymen of Thor's bride! My ribs still hurt, but I will ignore the pain!"

Sam did not argue. When he was alone with Lothar, he said, "Fighting against hopeless odds until you die is all very admirable. But it doesn't pay off in preferred stock. Now, I know you're going to think I'm as spineless as a cockroach, Lothar, but I have a dream, a great dream, and it transcends all ordinary ideas of faithfulness and morality. I want that boat, Lothar, and I want to pilot it to the end of the river, no matter what.

"If we had a fighting chance, I wouldn't suggest this. But we don't. We're outnumbered and have inferior weapons. So I'm going to suggest that we make a deal."

"With whom?" von Richthofen said. He was grim and pale.

"With John. He may be the most

treacherous king in the world, although the competition is fierce, but he's the one most likely to throw in with us. Radowitz's fleet is bigger than his, and even if John somehow managed to defeat it, he'd be so weakened we could take him. But if we ganged up with John, we could give Radowitz such a beating he'd take off like a hound dog, tail closed down like a latch."

Von Richthofen laughed and said, "For a moment I thought you were going to propose that we hide in the mountains and then come out to offer our services to the victor. I could not stand the idea of playing coward, of leaving these people to fight alone."

"I'll be frank," Clemens said, "even if I am Sam. I'd do that if I thought it was the only way. No, what I'm suggesting is that we get rid, somehow, of Bloodaxe. He'll never go along with taking John in as a partner."

"You'll have to watch John as if he were a poisonous snake," the German said. "But I see no other way out. Nor do I think it's treachery to kill Bloodaxe. It's just insurance. He'll get rid of you the first chance he gets."

"And we'll not really be killing him," Sam said. "Just removing him from the picture."

Clemens wanted to talk more about what they should do, but von Richthofen said that there had been enough talk. Sam was putting off the taking of action — as usual. Things had to be done right now.

Sam gave a sigh and said, "I suppose so."

"What's the matter?" Lothar said.

"I'm suffering from guilt before I've even incurred it," Sam replied. "I feel like a yellow dog, although there's no reason I should. None at all! But I was born to feel guilty about everything, even about being born."

Lothar threw his hands up in disgust and strode off, saying over his shoulder, "Follow me or hang back. But you can't expect me to think of you as the captain of our boat. Captains don't drag their feet."

Sam grimaced but went after him. Lothar talked to twelve men he thought trustworthy enough for what he proposed. The sun began to climb down from the zenith while the details were arranged and then the men went to arm themselves. They came back from their huts with bamboo spears and knives. One had a bamboo bow with six arrows, effective only at close range.

Lothar von Richthofen and Sam Clemens leading, the group strode up to the Norse king's hut. Six Vikings stood guard outside.

"We want to talk to Bloodaxe," Sam said, trying to keep his voice from quavering.

"He's in there with a woman," Ve Grimarsson said.

Sam raised his hand. Lothar ran past him and clubbed Grimarsson over the head. An arrow whistled past Sam's shoulder and stopped in the throat of a guard. Within ten seconds, the others had been killed or wounded too severely to continue fighting. There were shouts from a distance as a dozen other Vikings

came running to protect their chief. Bloodaxe, naked, bellowing, his steel axe held high, rushed through the doorway. Von Richthofen lunged with his spear and impaled the Norseman on it. Bloodaxe dropped the axe and staggered back, driven by the German's weight on the spear, until he slammed into the bamboo wall of the hut. He stared; his mouth worked; blood ran from a corner of his lips; his skin was blue-gray.

The German then yanked the spear out of the Norseman's belly, and Bloodaxe crumpled.

There was a fight afterwards with six rebellors killed and four wounded. The Vikings did not give up until all were silenced and as dead as their king.

Sam Clemens, panting hoarsely, splashed with blood from others and bleeding from a gash on his shoulder, leaned on his spear. He had killed one man, Gunnlaugr Thorfinnsson, puncturing his kidney from behind while the Viking was thrusting at von Richthofen. Too bad about Gunnlaugr. Of all the Norsemen, he enjoyed Sam's jokes the most. Now he was stabbed in the back by a good friend.

Ninety-five years I've lived and been in 38 battles, Sam thought, and I've slain only two men. The other was a severely wounded Turk struggling to get to his feet. Sam Clemens, the mighty warrior, great-hearted hero. Thinking thus, he gazed with the horror and fascination that corpses had always had for him and would have if he lived 10,000 years.

And then he squawked with fright and yanked his left ankle away in a frantic effort to escape the hand gripping it. Unable to do so, he lifted his spear to drive it into the man who held him. He looked down into the pale blue eyes of Erik Bloodaxe. Life had surged up in Bloodaxe for a moment. The glaze was gone from his eyes and the skin was not so gray-blue. His voice was weak but strong enough for Sam, and others nearby, to hear him.

"*Bikkja!* Droppings of Ratatosk! Listen! I will not let you go until I have spoken! The gods have given me the powers of a *voluspa*. They want revenge for your treachery. Listen! I know there is iron beneath this blood-soaked grass. I feel the iron flowing in my veins. Its grayness turns my blood thick and cold. There is iron enough and more than enough for your great white boat. You will dig up this iron, and you will build a boat to rival *Skithblathnir*.

"You will be captain of it, Bitch Clemens, and your boat will sail up the river for more miles than *Sleipnir's* eight legs could cover in a day. You will go back and forth, north and south, east and west, as the river valley takes you. You will go around the world many times.

"But the building of the boat and the sailing thereof will be bitter and full of grief. And after years, two generations as known on Earth, after great sufferings, and some joys, when you think you are at long last near the end of the long long journey, then you will find me!

"Rather, I will find you. I will be

waiting on a distant boat and I will kill you. And you will never get to the end of the river nor storm the gates of Valhalla."

Sam became cold and brittle. Even when he felt the hand slacken its grip on his ankle, he did not move. He heard the death rattle and did not move or look down.

Faintly, Bloodaxe spoke again. "I wait!"

There was another rattle, more drawn out, and the hand fell away. Sam forced himself to step away, not sure that he would not break into a dozen pieces. He looked at von Richthofen and said, "Superstition! A man can't look into the future!"

Von Richthofen said, "I don't think so. But if things are as you believe, Sam, mechanical, automatic, then the future is predetermined. If things are ready-made, why can't the future open up for a minute, lights blaze in the tunnel of time, and a man see down the track?"

Sam did not answer. Von Richthofen laughed to show that he was joking and clapped Sam on the shoulder. Sam said, "I need a drink. Badly." Then he said, "I don't take any stock in that superstitious rot."

But he believed that those dying eyes had seen into the years ahead, and he was thereafter to believe.

XIII

An hour before dusk, King John's fleet arrived. Sam Clemens sent a man out to tell John that he wanted to discuss a possible partnership. John, ever willing to talk to you before he stuck a knife in you,

agreed. Clemens stood on the edge of the bank while John Lackland leaned on the railing of his galley. Sam, his terror unfrozen by a dozen whiskeys, described the situation and spoke glowingly of the great boat to be built.

John, a short, dark man with very broad shoulders, listened. He smiled frequently and spoke in an English not so heavily accented it could not be easily understood. Before coming to this area, he had lived for ten years among late 18th-century Virginians. A fluent linguist, he had disburdened himself of much of the speech patterns of his native 12th-century English and Norman French.

He understood well why it would pay him to team up with Clemens against von Radowitz. No doubt he had mental reservations about what he would do if von Radowitz were disposed of, but he came ashore to swear eternal friendship and partnership. The details of the pact were arranged over drinks, and then King John had Joe Miller released from his cage on the flagship.

Sam did not shed tears easily, but several trickled down his cheeks on seeing the titanthrop. Joe wept like a perambulating Niagara Falls and almost broke Sam's ribs in his embrace.

Von Richthofen, however, told Clemens later, "At least, with Bloodaxe, you knew fairly well where you stood. You've made a bad trade."

"I'm from Missouri," Sam replied, "but I never was much of a mule trader. However, if you're running

for your life, a pack of wolves snapping at your heels, you'll trade a foundered plug for a wild mustang, as long as he'll carry you out of danger. You worry later about how to get down off of him without breaking your neck."

The battle, which started at dawn the next day, was long. Several times, disaster came close for Clemens and King John. The Englishman's fleet had hidden near the east bank in the early morning fog and then had come up behind the German fleet. Flaming pine torches thrown by John's sailors started fires on many of von Radowitz's boats. But the invaders spoke a common language, were well disciplined, had soldiered together a long time, and were far better armed.

Their rockets sank many of John's boats and blasted holes in the cheval-de-frise along the bank. The Germans then stormed ashore under cover of a hail of arrows. During the landing, a rocket exploded in the hole dug to get to the iron. Sam was knocked over by the blast. Half-stunned, he rose. And he became aware of a man he had never seen before standing by him. Where did he come from? Sam was sure that the man had not been in this area until this moment.

The stranger was about five feet seven and stockily, even massively, built. Like an old red ram, Sam thought, though the stranger looked, of course, as if he were 25 years old. His curly auburn hair hung down his back to his waist. His black eyebrows were as thick

as Sam's. His eyes were large, dark-brown with chips of pale green. His face was aquiline and jutting-chinned. His ears were large and stood out at almost right angles from his head.

The body of an old red ram, Sam thought, with the head of a great horned owl.

His bow was made of a material that Sam had seen before, though it was rare. It was made from two of the curved horns that ring a riverdragon-fish's mouth. The two were joined together to make one double recurved bow. This type was by far the most powerful and durable bow in the valley but had one disadvantage. It took extremely powerful arms to bend it.

The stranger's leather quiver held twenty arrows, flint-tipped, the shafts carved laboriously from the fin-bones of the riverdragon and feathered with carved pieces of bone so thin that the sun shone through them.

He spoke in a German with a thick, non-Germanic, unidentifiable accent. "You look like Sam Clemens."

"I am," Clemens replied. "What's left of me. But how did you . . .?"

"You were described to me by — " the stranger paused — "one of Them."

Sam did not understand for a moment. The part-deafness caused by the explosion, the yells of men killing each other only twenty yards away, other, more distant rocket explosions, and the sudden appearance of this man, gave everything an unreal quality.

He said, "He sent . . . the Mysterious Stranger . . . he sent you! You're one of the twelve!"

"He? Not he! *She* sent me!"

Sam did not have time to question him about this. He checked the impulse to ask the man if he were any good with the bow. He looked as if he could wrest from the bow the last atom of potentiality. Instead, Sam climbed to the top of the pile of dirt by the hole and pointed at the nearest enemy ship, its prow against the bank. A man standing on its poopdeck was bellowing orders.

"Von Radowitz, the leader of the enemy," Sam said. "He's out of range of our feeble bows."

Smoothly, swiftly, pausing only to aim briefly, not bothering to gauge the wind which blew always at this time of day at a steady six miles an hour, the bowman loosed his black arrow. Its trajectory ended in the solar plexus of von Radowitz. The German staggered backwards under the impact, whirled to reveal the bloody tip sticking from his back, and fell backwards over the railing and into the waters between boat and bank.

The second-in-command rallied his men, and the bowman drove a shaft through him. Joe Miller, clad in riverdragon-leather armor, swinging his huge oaken club, ravaged among the Germans in the center of the line of battle. He was like an 800-pound lion with a human brain. Death and panic went with him. He smashed twenty skulls by the minute and occasionally picked up a man with his free hand and threw him

to knock down a half-dozen or so.

At different times, five men managed to slip behind Joe, but the black bone-arrows of the newcomer always intercepted them.

The invaders broke and tried to get back to their boats. Von Richthofen, naked, bloody, grinning, danced before Sam. "We've won! We've won!"

"You'll get your flying machine yet," Sam said. He turned to the archer. "What is your name?"

"I have had many names, but when my grandfather first held me in his arms he called me Odysseus."

All Sam could think of to say was, "We've got a lot to talk about."

Could this be the man of whom Homer sang? The real Ulysses, that is, the historical Ulysses, who did fight before the walls of Troy and about whom legends and fairy tales were later collected? Why not? The shadowy man who had talked in Sam's hut had said he had picked twelve men out of the billions available. What his means were for choosing, Sam did not know, but he presumed the reasons were good. And the Mysterious Stranger had told him of one choice: Richard Francis Burton. Was there some kind of aura about the twelve that enabled the renegade to know the man who could do the job? Some tiger color of the soul?

Late that night, Sam, Joe, Lothar and the Achaean, Odysseus, walked to their huts after the victory celebration. Sam's throat was dry from all the talking. He had tried to squeeze out of the Achaean all he

knew about the siege of Troy and his wanderings afterwards. He had been told enough to confuse, not enlighten him.

The Troy that Odysseus knew was not the city near the Hellespont, the ruins that Terrestrial archaeologists called Troy VIIa. The Troy that Odysseus, Agamemnon and Diomedes besieged was farther south, opposite the island of Lesbos but inland and north of the Kaikos River. It had been inhabited by people related to the Etruscans, who lived at that time in Asia Minor and later emigrated to Italy because of the Hellenic invaders. Odysseus knew of the city which later generations had thought was Troy. Dardanians, barbarophones, lived there; they were related to the true Trojans. Their city had fallen five years before the Trojan war to other barbarians from the north.

Three years after the siege of the real Troy, which had lasted for only two years, Odysseus had gone on the great sea-raid of the Danaans, or Achaeans, against the Egypt of Rameses III. The raid had ended in disaster. Odysseus had fled for his life by sea and had indeed gone unwillingly on a journey that took three years and resulted in his visiting Malta, Sicily and parts of Italy, lands unknown then to the Greeks. There had been no Laestrygonians, Aeolus, Calypso, Circe, Polyphemus. His wife was named Penelope, but there were no suitors for him to kill.

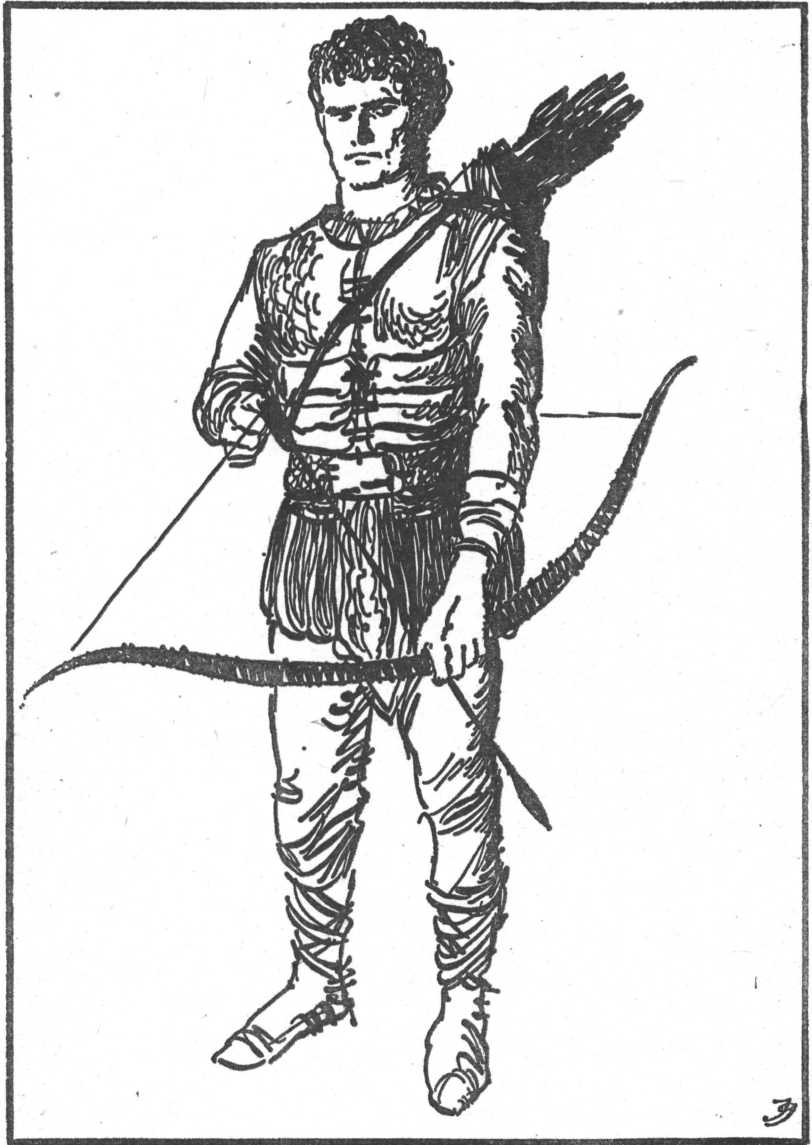
As for Achilles and Hector, Odysseus knew of them only as the principals in a song. He supposed both of them to have been Pelas-

gians, the people who lived in the Hellenic peninsula before the Achaeans came down out of the north to conquer it. The Achaeans had adapted the Pelasgian song to suit their own purposes, and later bards must have incorporated it in the *Iliad*. Odysseus knew *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, because he had met a scholar who could recite both epics from memory.

“What about the Wooden Horse?” Sam said, fully expecting to draw a blank with his question. To his surprise, Odysseus not only knew of it but said that he had indeed been responsible for it. It was a deception conceived in desperation by madness and should have failed.

And this, to Sam, was the most startling of all. The scholars had united in denying any reality to this story, saying that it was patently impossible. They should have been correct, since the idea did seem fantastic, nor was it likely that the Achaeans would be stupid enough to build the horse or the Trojans stupid enough to fall for it. But the wooden horse had existed, and the Achaeans had gotten into the city by hiding inside the horse.

Von Richthofen and Joe listened to the two talk. Sam had decided that, despite the Ethical's warning to tell no one about him, Joe and Lothar should know of him. Otherwise, Sam would be doing so many things that would be inexplicable to anyone closely associated with him. Besides, Sam felt that his taking others into the secret would show



3

the Ethical that Sam was really running things. It was a childish gesture, but Sam made it.

Sam said good night to all but Joe and lay down on the cot. Although very tired, he could not get to sleep. The snores issuing from Joe like a maelstrom through a keyhole did not help soothe his insomnia. Also, his excitement over tomorrow's doings made his nerves ripple and brain pulse. Tomorrow would be a historic day, would be if this world had a history. Eventually, there would be paper, ink, pencils, even a printing press. The great riverboat would have a weekly journey. There would be a book which would tell of how the hole was deepened by exploding rockets captured from von Radowitz's ships. Perhaps the iron would be exposed tomorrow; it surely must.

And there was in addition his worries about King John, the jesting slyboots. God knew what that insidious mind was planning. It was doubtful that John would do anything treacherous until the boat was built, and that would be years from now. There was no need to worry yet, none at all. Despite which, Sam worried.

XIV

Sam awoke with a start, his heart beating as if some monster of his nightmares had kicked it. Wet air was blowing in through the interstices of the bamboo walls and the mat hanging over the entranceway. Rain crashed against the leaf-covered roof, and thunder boomed from the

mountains. Joe was still snoring his private thunder.

Sam stretched, and then he cried out and sat up. His hand had touched flesh. Lightning from far away paled the darkness by two shades and gave vague shape to someone squatting by the cot.

A familiar baritone spoke. "You needn't look for the titanthrop to come to your aid. I've ensured that he'll not wake until dawn."

By this, Sam knew that the Ethical could see where no light was. Sam picked up a cigar from the little folding table and said, "Mind if I smoke?"

The Mysterious Stranger took so long replying that Sam wondered. The glow from the hot wire in Sam's lighter would not be bright enough to reveal the man's features, and probably he was wearing a mask or some device over his face. Did he dislike the odor of cigars, perhaps of tobacco in any form? Yet he hesitated to say so because this characteristic might identify him? Identify whom? The other Ethicals who knew that they had a renegade among them? There were twelve, or so The Stranger had said. If they ever learned that he, Sam Clemens, had been contacted by an Ethical, and learned of the Ethical's dislike of tobacco, would They know at once the renegade's identity?

Sam did not voice his suspicions. He would keep this to himself for possible later use.

"Smoke," the Stranger said. Although Sam could not see him or hear him move, he got the impression that he backed off a little.

"What's the occasion for this unexpected visit?" Sam said.

"To tell you I won't be able to see you again for a long time. I didn't want you to think I'd deserted you. I'm being called away on business you wouldn't understand even if I were to explain it. You're on your own now for a long time. If things should go badly for you, I won't be able to interfere even in a subtle way.

"However, you have all you need at present to occupy you for a decade. You'll have to use your own ingenuity to solve the many technical problems that will arise. I can't supply you with any more metals or materials you might need or extricate you from difficulties with invaders. I took enough chances in getting the meteorite down to you and in telling you where the bauxite and platinum are.

"There will be other Ethicals — not the Twelve but second-order — to watch you, but they won't interfere. They won't think the boat any danger to The Plan. They'd rather you didn't have the iron and they'll be upset when you 'discover' the platinum and bauxite. They want you Terrestrials to be occupied with psychic development, not technological. But they won't stick their noses in."

Sam felt a little panic. For the first time, he realized that, though he hated the Ethical, he had come to depend strongly on him for moral and material support.

"I hope nothing goes wrong," Sam said. "I almost lost my chance

at the iron today. If it hadn't been for Joe and that fellow, Odysseus"

Then he said, "Hold it! Odysseus told me that the Ethical who talked to him was a woman!"

The darkness chuckled. "What does that mean?"

"Either you're not the only renegade or else you can change your voice. Or maybe, maybe you're not telling me the truth at all! Maybe you're *all* in on this and feeding out fine lies for some plan of your own! We're tools in your hands!"

"I'm not lying! And I can't tell you about your other guesses. If you, or the others I've chosen, are detected and questioned, their stories will confuse my colleagues."

There was a rustle. "I must go now. You're on your own. Good luck."

"Wait! What if I fail?"

"Somebody else will build the boat, but I have good reasons for wanting you to do it."

"So I am just a tool. If the tool breaks, throw it away, get another."

"I can't assure your success. I'm not a god."

"Damn you and all your kind!" Sam shouted. "Why couldn't you have let things be as they were on Earth? We had the peace of death forever. No more pain and grief. No more never-ceasing toil and heartache. All that was behind us. We were free, free of the chains of flesh. But you gave us the chains again and fixed it so we couldn't even kill ourselves, you set death beyond our reach. It's as if you put us in hell forever."

"It's not that bad," the Ethical said. "Most of you are better off than you ever were. Or at least as well off. The crippled, the blind, the grotesque, the diseased, the starved are healthy and young. You don't have to sweat for or worry about your daily bread, and most of you are eating better by far than you did on Earth. However, I agree with you in the larger sense. It was a crime, the greatest crime of all, to resurrect you. So . . ."

"I want my Livy back!" Sam cried. "And I want my daughters! They might as well be dead as separated from me, I mean from each other, forever! I'd rather they were dead! At least, I wouldn't be in agony all the time because they might be suffering, be in some terrible plight! How do I know they're not being raped, beaten, tortured? There's so much evil on this planet! There should be, since it has the original population of Earth!"

"I could help you," the Ethical said. "But it might take years for me to locate them. I won't explain the means because they're too complicated and I have to leave before the rain is over."

Sam rose and walked forwards, his hands out.

The Ethical said, "Stop! You touched me once!"

Sam halted. "Could you find Livy for me? My girls?"

"I'll do it. You have my word. Only . . . only what if it does take years? Suppose you have the boat built by then — in fact, are already a million miles up the river. And then I tell you I've found your wife,

but she's three million miles down-river? I can notify you of her location, but I positively cannot bring her to you. You'll have to get her yourself. What will you do then? Will you turn back and spend twenty years backtracking? Would your crew permit you to do so? I doubt it. Moreover, even if you did this, there's no certainty that your woman would still be in the original location. She may have been killed and translated elsewhere, even further out of reach."

"Damn you!" Sam yelled.

"And, of course," the Ethical said, "people change. You may not like her when you find her."

"I'll kill you!" Sam Clemens yelled. "So help me . . . !"

The bamboo mat was lifted. The Stranger was silhouetted briefly, a batlike, cloaked shape with a dome-covering for the head. Sam clenched his fists and forced himself to stand like a block of ice, waiting for his anger to melt away. Then he began pacing back and forth until finally he threw his cigar away. It had turned bitter, even the air he breathed was harsh.

"Damn them! Damn him! I'll build the boat and I'll get to the north pole and I'll find out what's going on! And I'll kill him! Kill them!"

The rains stopped. There were shouts from a distance. Sam went outside, alarmed because the Stranger might have been caught, although it did not seem likely. And he knew then that his boat meant more than anything else, that he did

not want anything to happen to interfere with its building, even if he could take immediate revenge on the Ethical. That would have to come later.

Torches were coming across the plain. Presently, the bearers were close enough for Sam to make out the faces of some guards and that of von Richthofen. There were three unknowns with them.

An arrangement of large towels, held together by magnetic clasps, fell shapelessly about their bodies. A hood shadowed the face of the smallest stranger. The tallest was a man with a long, lean, dark face and a huge hooked nose.

"You're runner-up in the contest," Sam said. "There's someone in my hut who has a nose that beats yours all hollow."

"*Nom d'un con! Va te faire foutre!*" the tall man said. "Must I always be insulted, no matter where I go? Is this the hospitality you give strangers? Did I travel ten thousand leagues under incredibly harsh conditions to find the man who can put good steel in my hand once more, only to have him verbally tweak my nose? Know, ignorant insolent lout, that Savinien de Cyrano II de Bergerac does not turn the other cheek. Unless you apologize, immediately, most sincerely, plead with the tongue of an angel, I will stab you through with this nose that you so mock!"

Sam apologized abjectly, saying that his nerves had been frayed by

the battle. He looked in wonder at the legendary figure, and he wondered if he could be one of the chosen twelve.

The second man, a youth of medium build, blond-haired and blue-eyed, introduced himself as Herrman Goering. A spiral bone, taken from one of the riverfishes, hung from a cord around his neck, and by this Sam knew that he was a member of the Church of Second Chance. This meant trouble, because the Second Chancers preached absolute pacifism.

The third stranger threw the hood back and revealed a pretty face with long black hair done in a Psyche knot.

Sam staggered and almost fainted. "Livy!"

The woman started. She stepped closer to him and, silently, pale in the torchlight, looked at him. She was weaving back and forth, as shocked as he.

"Sam," she said weakly.

He took a step towards her, but she turned and clung to de Bergerac for support. The Frenchman put his arm around her and glared at Sam Clemens. "Courage, my little lamb! He will not harm you while I am here! What does he mean to you?"

She looked up at him with an expression that Sam could not mistake. He howled and shook his fist at the stars, just coming out from the clouds.

END





Dear Editor:

Very interesting was Alma McCormick's letter on the course of science fiction. In particular, the passage, "The authors had . . . characters who seemed 'real' and with whom the reader could identify." Great, I suppose, if you wish to identify with someone . . . to relax after a hard day of work. However, I doubt that you publish a magazine to bore, pardon me, to relax people to sleep. Some people are **trying** to force progress on science fiction, whether some of its readers want it or not; specifically Mrs. McCormick.

The aim of this movement is to profit from the intrinsic nature of science fiction, the characteristics it possesses that no other form does. The desire to do this (without the words science fiction in mind) was in George Orwell when he wrote *1984*; without science fiction could Harlan Ellison have written "*Repent, Harlequin, etc.*"? Science fiction, to preserve its own existence as a separate (but equal) form, must have different aims as well as techniques from other literary forms.

The techniques of science fiction are apparent; for the most part, the hack part, they don't measure up to those of "normal" writers. How many trite and tripe stories are

written as a series of letters, notes, or newspaper clippings? Too many . . . the original idea was good; it is now as overworked as the ray gun. How many stories start out:

"Well, it seemed like a good idea at the time. I mean, Al Schwarz — he's our psycho-mathematician — was just fiddling with Charlie, the two megabit computer we use to blah blah blah"

The techniques need improving. However, as my English teachers are so fond of saying, anything that is without a meaning when stripped of the writer's style and craftsmanship is trash. Sorry. I don't like the word either, for when you strip *Foundation* of its craftsmanship, all you're left with are pithy statements like, "Violence is the last refuge of the incompetent." (Thank you, Salvor Hardin!)

Worlds of If isn't faultless either (is anyone?). The deep philosophical discussions arising from most of Keith Laumer's stories must have just escaped my attention. M. Retief, I'm afraid, is just another manifestation of the James Bond syndrome of the individual's impotence in today's society. (I think I'm going to copyright that sentence.) The reader wants to read about people who can cope with their

bumbling superiors — whom they feel — yea, they know — are truly their inferiors.

Mrs. McCormick, when the story is there, fine; read it and delight in it. But I would rather see a story like *Repent, Harlequin*, or *A Rose for Ecclesiastes* than another *Waldo*. Anyway, Editor Pohl, if you're willing to pay 10c a word, I'm sure you'll have no trouble finding stories to please most of the factions among your readers! — John Goldsmith, 67-74 Dartmouth Street, Forest Hills, New York 11375.

● If it were only as easy as that! It isn't, though. Some of the best-paying magazines print some of the worst stories; you'd be astonished how much of the sf in the big slick magazines arrived there (and fetched multi-thousand-dollar checks for its writers) only after being rejected by science-fiction magazines like this one. We strive to pay our writers fairly (raising rates regularly, so that *If*, for example, now spends more than three times as much on stories for each issue as it did a few years ago), but it is more to reward our contributors for good work than to attempt to lure new ones. — *Editor*.

* * *

Dear Editor:

If you really want to sell more copies of *If*, and don't care overmuch how this is accomplished, I think I can give you a hand.

The first thing any prospective reader sees of your magazine is, of course, the cover. Changing the cover (and, perhaps, putting more pretty girls in tinier costumes on it) should help, but it won't! Because *If*, like all SF mags is roughly pocket-sized, the book stores and magazine depts. keep it in the rack with all the other magazines of the same

size. This means that unless *If* is in the front row, all that shows of the cover is the top inch and a half, i.e. the words *IF Science Fiction*, and the name of the "Big Name" author in that particular issue. While this may be enough to start the heart of a hardened veteran, like myself, pounding, for all the good it does attracting new readers, it may as well be a blank piece of paper.

So, no matter what is done to the rest of the magazine, the most important change must be in the top two inches of the cover. The most drastic and eye-catching change I can think of is one word, in large, iridescent pink type, right after the word *If*, and that word is SEX!

I don't guarantee that this will increase *If's* sales any, but it *will* make *If* the most thumb-through magazine in the business!

You could also promise such articles as "The Sex Life of a Pegasion Zork" or "Is Retief a Hermaphrodite?" You wouldn't even have to come through with such articles, confession magazines have been getting away with *that* for decades!

If you were to change the name of SF to something like "Speculative Fiction" (so the initials would be the same) or something entirely new, I don't think it would help. Despite SF having a "bad" name the only people who would start reading *If* because of the changed name would be those you mentioned in your editorial, they who will read it as long as they don't know what it is.

Going back to the good old days — when writers were story-tellers and not philosophers or sociologists, as Alma McCormick suggested — would not help either. The world

at large would go blissfully on, unaware of this Earth-shaking change.

So far, the only ideas I have mentioned are how to get the people to come to SF. None of them, I admit, have been very brilliant, and that is because of my attitude. If a salesman were to stay at home and wait for the customers to come to him, he wouldn't get very far.

There is one tiny little chance, for which you will have to do absolutely nothing, but it is only a chance! Maybe SF will become "Camp!"

One other thing. The "first" mentioned in the letter column of the April issue, W. I. Johnstone's *Family Loyalty*, was nowhere to be found. I think you goofed; — Jim A. Juracie, P.O. Box 11, Fruitvale, B. C., Canada.

● You're right; we goofed. The proper title for the Johnstone story was *The Purpose of It All*. — Editor.

* * *

Dear Editor:

Just a few lines out there to let you know that I enjoy your magazine immensely, and that it gets better and better. I thought that *Snow White and the Giants* is one of the finest serials in your or anyone's magazine, and *The Iron Thorn* is almost as good. Speaking of serials — got any Heinlein bits around? If so, when do you plan to use them?

I would also like to ask all fanzine publishers to please send me a sample copy of their publications. I am collecting fanzines at the present time, and would also like to subscribe to some.

Another thing: In a recent *Our Man In Fandom*, Lin Carter says that there is a fan group in Charlotte, which I have not been able to get in contact with. If there are any Charlotte members reading this,

please drop me a line and tell me how to join. I really want to.—Edward Smith, 1315 Lexington Ave., Charlotte, N.C. 28203.

* * *

Dear Editor:

In February's *If* Mr. Whitey Knox complained about the art work. I know editors, publishers, etc., feel the front covers and ensuing work inside must help produce sales. I, for one, rarely if ever look at the art work. I look for the authors and titles. These are what help me make up my mind as to what mag I will buy. If I don't know the author I look at the title and blurb. Too many times the art work is not always indicative of what is inside.

I would like to add I never miss an issue of your magazine and while there are some stories I can not consider the best or near best, this has never been a reason for complaint. If we don't read them all, how can we know which are the best? Or if an author is in a slump, or if there are possibilities he will improve?—Toni Jarvis, 2044 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Walnut Creek, California.

* * *

● That's it for another month. Our "first" this time is Roger Deeley's *The Trouble with Vegans*; hope you like it!

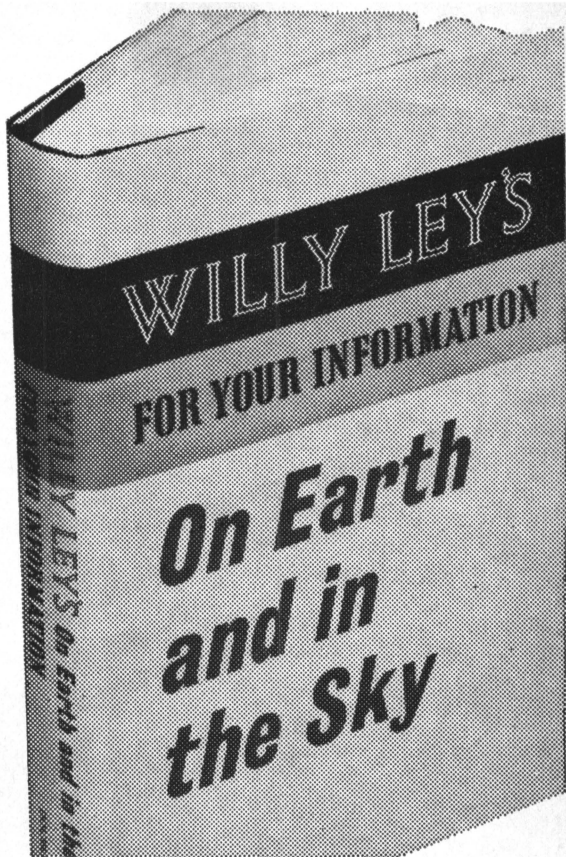
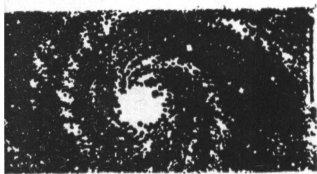
Next month we'll carry on with Jim Blish's *Faust Aleph-Null*. We've just bought two more serials — one by James White, one by Hal Clement — which will be along shortly. Also a long Van Vogt novelette; also some nice new ones by Poul Anderson, Larry Niven, J. G. Ballard — well, stay with us and see for yourself!

—THE EDITOR

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Here are some of the famous stories that appeared in *Galaxy* in its first fifteen years. Will the next fifteen years be as good?

Frankly, we don't think so. We think they'll be better!

Baby Is Three
Theodore Sturgeon

**The Ballad of
Lost C'Mell**
Cordwainer Smith

The Big Time
Fritz Leiber

The Caves of Steel
Isaac Asimov

Day After Doomsday
Poul Anderson

The Demolished Man
Alfred Bester

Do I Wake or Dream?
Frank Herbert

The Dragon Masters
Jack Vance

The Fireman
(*Fahrenheit 451*)
Ray Bradbury

Gravy Planet
(*The Space Merchants*)
Pohl & Kornbluth

Here Gather the Stars
(*Way Station*)
Clifford D. Simak

Home from the Shore
Gordon R. Dickson

Hot Planet
Hal Clement

King of the City
Keith Laumer

Mindswap
Robert Sheckley

Med Ship Man
Murray Leinster

The Men in the Walls
William Tenn

The Old Die Rich
H. L. Gold

The Puppet Masters
Robert A. Heinlein

Surface Tension
James Blish

The Visitor at the Zoo
Damon Knight

**Wind between
the Worlds**
Lester del Rey

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