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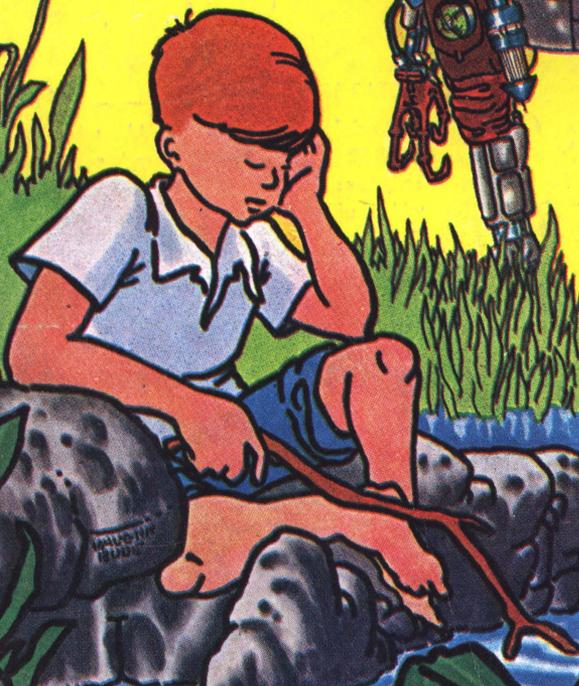
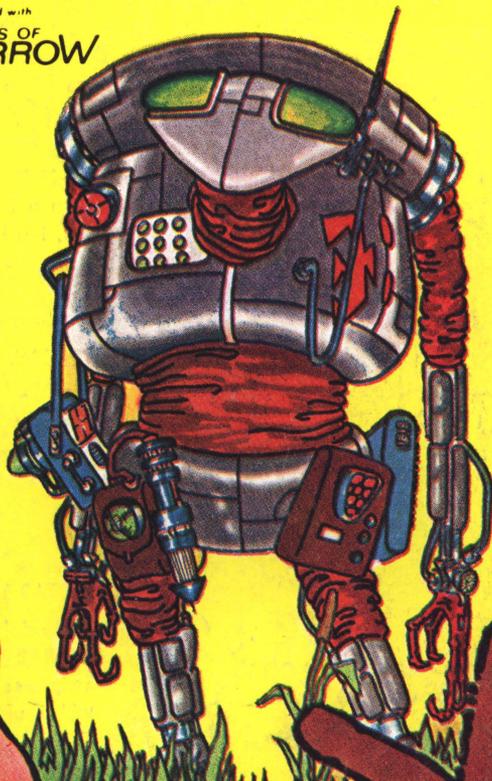
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*Cover by BODÉ from NOW THAT MAN IS GONE*

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## MORE DOOMS

**I**n June the asteroid Icarus made one of its fairly frequent close approaches to Earth. Icarus can come quite close indeed, closer than the moon; this time it missed by several hundred thousand miles. But a California guru had a vision that it would hit head-on, preached the word to his flock, and a number of them spent that day on the tops of various mountains, waiting in vain to enjoy the promised tidal waves.

More recently two ministers (both also Californians, as it happens) have been granted the revelation that the whole of southern California is to be destroyed by earthquakes about the time you read these words, and as we are writing them some of their parishioners are busy packing to move to Tennessee, which is alleged to be out of the immediate danger zone.

To be sure there have been prophecies of doom of one kind or another for a good many centuries. The doctrine of "millennarianism" terrified whole medieval populations, who had been led to expect that the one thousandth anniversary of the birth of Christ would be the end of the world on New Year's Day of the year 1000; early in this century, many were frightened at predictions that the Earth was about to pass through the tail of a comet, whose poison gases would kill mankind off completely.

What's interesting about this century's Cassandra cries is that, one way or another, they are based not only on scientific facts, but very likely even on science-fiction stories. Wells's *The Days of the Comet* told of events very like the comet fear of a few decades ago; the idea of the San Andreas fault opening up and dumping California into the Pacific, or of an asteroid striking the Earth, are covered in any number of sf stories. So we have a proposition. Any religious leaders who wish to have an apocalyptic vision and announce it to their followers are offered a selection of other dooms culled from recent science fiction. No charge. No obligation. Just a public service:

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—THE EDITOR

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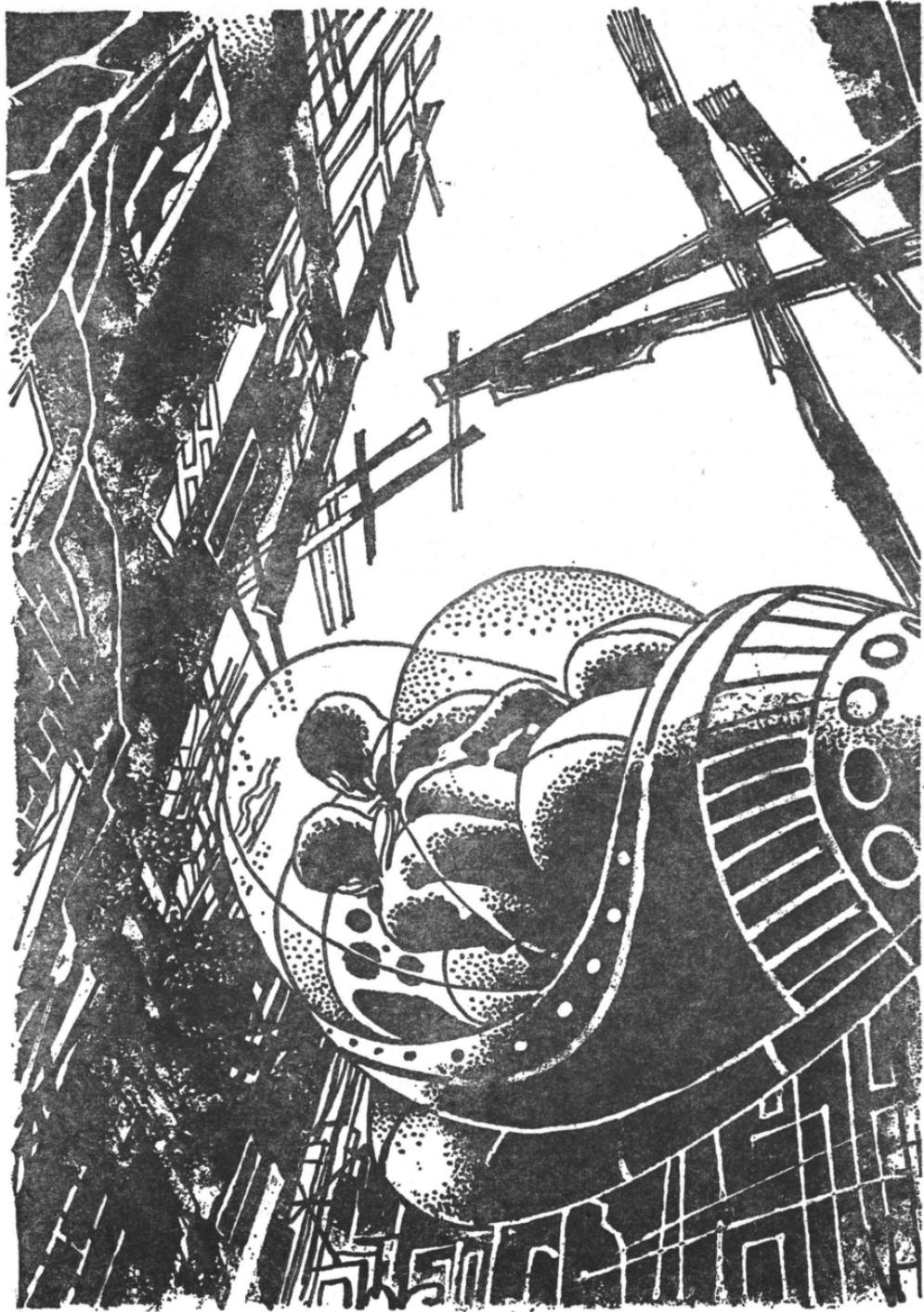
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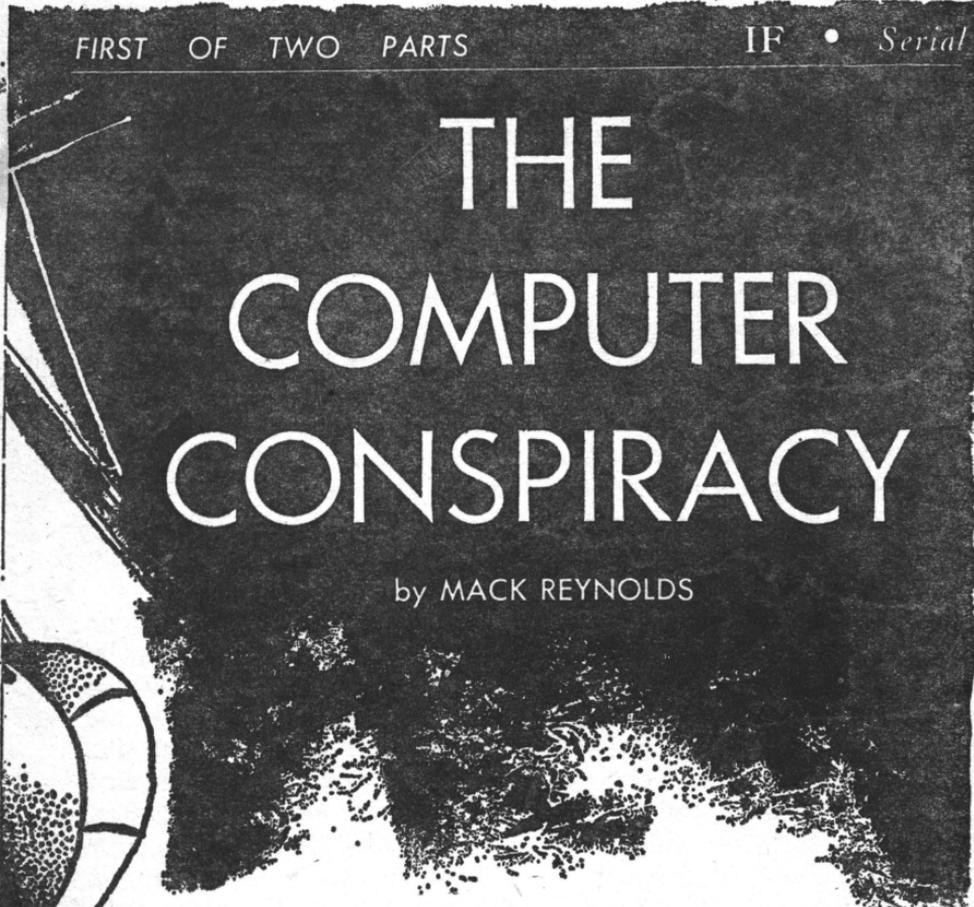
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# THE COMPUTER CONSPIRACY

by MACK REYNOLDS

Illustrated by GAUGHAN

*The computer was tapped, and every man it picked to save itself was murdered. So it fingered Kosloff as the next.*

I

The lone technician in the control booth said into his intercom, "One minute to go, Professor Kosloff."

Paul Kosloff the Second looked up at the sweeping second hand on the studio clock, then rearranged his papers and props on the desk at which he sat. He cleared his throat, put a hand to his By-

ronic-revival cravat for a final touching up.

The second hand hit the hour, and the technician touched controls. A red light below the clock flashed on, showing that the studio was hot.

The technician activated the canned standard introduction.

" . . . *National Tri-Vision brings you the University of the Air and Professor Paul Kosloff with the latest lecture in his Slavic Languages Series. Professor Kosloff.*"

Paul Kosloff looked up from the desk where he had been pretending to study the papers before him and smiled into the baleful triple eye of one of the Tri-Vision cameras.

He was a well built man of possibly thirty, undistinguished of face, other than its Slavic qualities of blond hair and blue eyes.

"Our subject today, and for several lectures to follow will be the Cyrillic alphabet." He twisted his mouth in a rueful smile. "And I am afraid this is one of the crosses the student of Slavic languages must bear since, as you undoubtedly already know, the Russians, Bulgarians, Serbs and various others do not utilize the more nearly universal Latin alphabets, but one that is quite different and, according to its adhereants, possibly older. The Cyrillic alphabet is traditionally ascribed to Saint Cyril but was probably the result of

the efforts of his followers, based possibly by Cyril himself upon the glagolitic alphabet which is still used somewhat in that area of Common Eur-Asia once known as Yugoslavia . . . "

The technician in the control booth yawned mightily, scratched himself in boredom.

An hour later, Paul Kosloff was winding it up. Once again his tone took on a rueful quality. "I am afraid there is no alternative. The serious student is simply going to have to memorize it."

He smiled into the Tri-Vision camera and touched a button with his foot.

The red light beneath the clock flickered off, indicating the studio was no longer hot. Paul could see the technician going through the motions of running through the canned standard routine of station and program identification. Paul Kosloff leaned back in his chair and shifted his shoulders in an elaborate stretch. He had a tendency to tense up on lens toward the end of any of his hour-long classes.

The technician gestured to him in a professional's indication that all was through and this studio completely off the air, and Paul nodded.

He came to his feet and fumbled with his papers, gathered them up and stuffed them into his briefcase.

The technician came in smoking a cigarette. Paul's eyebrows went up a little, but he said nothing. He wondered where the other procured the illegal narcotic. Not that it was any of his business. It was up to Central Planning Production and their enforcement arm to keep tabs on the illegal use of farmland. However, he was mildly disapproving. Tobacco demanded the best of tillable land; it wasn't like, for instance, *cannabis*, which would grow just about anywhere. For every acre put into tobacco, somebody, somewhere, was going without cereal grain or some other agricultural necessity.

The technician said, "Well, that's it for the week, Professor. You know, you teachers have it easy."

"How's that?" Paul fingered the invisible automatic zipper on his briefcase, closing it.

"Well, this job comes under the head of hard labor for me. I put in a full four-hour day, on a four-day-a-week basis. And I'll probably be stuck with it for a full five years before retirement. But here you turn up one lousy hour a week."

Paul Kosloff grunted deprecation. "How long do you think it takes me to prepare one of these lectures, Jerry?" He took up the briefcase and stuck it under his arm.

The other was only slightly im-

pressed. "Well, I know it isn't exactly off the cuff. But it seems to come out easy enough."

Paul smiled faintly. "That's showmanship. Teaching nowadays has its shortcomings, Jerry. In the old days, a professor would work out a basic lecture and give it over and over again, year in and year out, as his new classes came along. Today, you give a lecture exactly once, particularly in a field such as language which doesn't do much in the way of changing. Science would be different, of course, or such subjects as modern history. So you give your lecture once and it's canned, and for the rest of time, for all practical purposes, it's available to any student interested in the subject."

"I guess that's right," the technician said, yawning again. "But you've still got it made. Twenty years from now, maybe, you'll still be dragging your royalties. When's your next book going to be put in the data banks, Professor?"

"This one on Bulgarian, probably in a month or so," Paul said, preparatory to leaving. And don't be too envious about my royalties. When twenty years are up, a book goes in the public domain, and anybody can dial it in the library computer data banks for free. And there are an awful lot of books on the subject, for the student to pick and choose from, and a penny per reading takes a long time to

mount up to much in the way of dollars."

"Penny per reading," the other said, indignantly. Are you kidding, hombre? I pay twenty-five cents to read a thriller."

Paul was rueful again. "That's fiction. You read it once, keeping it on your library teevee screen booster for probably a few hours, then it's unlikely you'd ever dial it again. But with a textbook, the student needs it over and over, sometimes only for minutes at a time. You couldn't expect him to have to pay twenty-five cents each time he dialed the book."

Jerry said, "When I was still in school, we used to *buy* the kind of book you wanted to refer to over and over."

Paul nodded, even as he turned to go. "Time marches on. Every year that goes by, the mini-apartments get smaller. Who can afford the room to have bookshelves these days? Every square foot counts."

"Yeah," Jerry said. "You oughta see mine. If I stretch my arms out, I can touch both walls."

Paul winced. "Thank the holy living Zoroaster I have one of the older ones. That's the advantage of staying put." He started for the sound proof door that led to the corridor beyond.

"Yeh," Jerry said cynically. "One of these days the housing people will come surveying around

and figure out some way of making two apartments out of yours. Especially since you're not married."

Paul grinned over his shoulder at him, even as he activated the door. "That's as good a reason as I've ever heard of for getting married. When are you going to come mountain climbing with me again, Jerry?"

"Ha," the other called after him. "Fat chance. You'll never get me up in those overgrown hills again. When I fell off that cliff, I thought I'd had it. If it hadn't been for you, Professor, I wouldn't be here now." Paul Kosloff had passed beyond the sound of Jerry's voice, so the Tri-Vision technician finished in a lower tone. "And don't think I'll ever forget it, chum-pal. Any time, any time at all, my right arm; 'cause you could have fallen off just as easy as not, coming down to get me that way."

Paul Kosloff made his way down the studio corridor and out into the office area of the University of the Air proper. He found it necessary to murmur greetings to others as they passed, and several times gave a brief wave to someone at a distance. However, he was through for the day and for the week, as the studio technician had pointed out, and had no desire to linger for shop talk with colleagues. In actuality, he had his next week's

lecture all ready to go and he planned to take several days off for hiking in the New England National Park. It was autumn and there were still enough trees up in that area to appreciate the changing in leaves.

He went to the nearest vacuum-tube entry in the building and dialed a two-seater. When the light indicated it had arrived, he activated the closet-like door and wedged himself into the small vehicle, putting his briefcase on the seat beside him.

Automatically, without need for thought, as automatically as once men drove cars, he brought down the canopy, put his Universal Credit Card in the slot, dropped the pressurizer and dialed the central vacuum-tube terminal. The Tri-Vision studios in which he worked were located in Greater Washington, but he lived in the pseudo-city of Princeton in the area once known as New Jersey.

He felt the sinking sensation of the two-seater dropping to tube level, and then the robot controls took over and he shuttled back and forth, preparatory to the shot. The car hesitated briefly, that brief hesitation before the shot proper, and Paul Kosloff took the involuntary breath from which only heroes could refrain. The pressure drove him back into his seat; only seconds passed, and then the direction of the pressure was reversed.

The shuttling began again, but lasted only briefly. The green destination light flickered on the dash, and he released the pressure and pushed back the canopy to step forth into the central terminal.

He took a twenty-seater to the terminal in Princeton and there transferred to another two-seater and dialed the nearest local terminal to his home.

He could have taken his first two-seater all the way from the studio in Greater Washington to his own apartment house, but it was a matter of economy. Like practically all others who were not in possession of a considerable number of shares of Variable Basic, Paul Kosloff made a habit and hobby of watching expenditures. When he finally retired, he looked forward to having accumulated enough Variable Basic to add to his ten shares of government-provided Inalienable Basic to live comfortably and to indulge his hobbies, which consisted largely of outdoor sports. Hiking and hunting, skin diving, and mountain climbing are not of themselves expensive, but getting to the Yukon, the Caribbean, or perhaps the Peruvian Andes can be.

He could have dialed his second local two-seater into the apartment house in which he lived, but it was his practice to relax after a broadcast by having a quiet drink in one of the local auto-bars.

He left the tube and sauntered into Jerry's Joynt, looking forward to his relaxant.

A chap he had known vaguely for some years as a neighbor waved to him. "Hi, professor!" He was seated at a table across the room where there was an unimpeded view of the large screen Tri-Vision set built into the wall.

Paul waved a hand negligently. "Hello, Perry. How goes it, hombre?"

The man's name, as Paul recalled, was Perry Altshuler and he was seated with his chum-pal, an equal number named Jack Simon. Paul knew them as labor draft dodgers and slackers, of working age but satisfied to live in complete idleness on the proceeds of the ten shares of Inalienable Basic issued by the government to each citizen at birth. It wasn't easy to do, Paul knew, but one could survive on a subsistence level and get through life without turning a hand. The idea didn't appeal to him.

Perry called over, "Guess who I just saw on the Tri-Vision."

"Who?"

"You."

Paul Kosloff looked over at him with an air of deprecation. "I didn't know that you were a student of the Slavic languages."

"I'm not, hombre, but it's kind of interesting to see somebody you know."

Paul Kosloff dialed a pseudo-whiskey. What Perry Altshuler and Jack Simon would have called sea-booze, the somewhat tasteless and anemic fermented product of the ocean, would have been cheaper, but he made a practice of indulging himself on this one day of the week.

Someone else entered the auto-bar and quietly took a table off in a corner nearest to the door.

Paul Kosloff frowned. He had a good memory and knew that he had seen this newcomer just recently. But where? Had he been introduced to the man? Should he say hello? But no, it wasn't that. He didn't *know* the other, had merely come in contact with him, somewhere recently.

And then it came to him. The stranger had been in the same twenty-seater that Paul had arrived in from Greater Washington. It was undoubtedly simply a coincidence that now he had drifted into the same auto-bar. Paul Kosloff forgot about him and returned to his pseudo-whiskey and soda. He kept his eyes studiously from the Tri-Vision screen which Altshuler and Simon were watching.

Although he was not fanatical about the matter, Paul Kosloff was inclined to deplore the violence of nine Tri-Vision shows out of ten. The degree seemed to be a progression, at least arithmetical

but almost to the point of geometric. He remembered reading of the progression of the Roman games. They had started off as rather simple fights between trained and accomplished swordsmen, and those who watched were largely the soldiers of a warrior people themselves, knowledgeable and critical about what they witnessed. But each year that went by saw the spectacle grow and the need for the current games to intensify, if the watchers were to be satisfied. And the crowds became less and less trained soldiers and became the whole population, men, women and children. Toward the last, the emperors were providing hundreds of thousands of animals and men to satisfy the bloodlust of their people. Nor were simple fights sufficient. Battles, including naval engagements, were fought in the arena, sometimes between such exotic warriors as pigmies from Africa's interior and seven-foot-tall northmen from far Scandinavia. Criminals were crucified, tied face to face with a rotting corpse until over a period of days, they smothered to death; baboons were trained to rape virgins; living slaves were dipped in tar and strung up to be used as torches.

He shook his head and finished his drink.

What was there about vicarious violence that seemed to serve a need in so many? Some of their

own frustrations seemed to be more bearable if they could watch others being done to death.

Paul Kosloff pushed his glass back to the center of the table where it could sink away into the automated kitchen-bar in the cellar, and considered briefly another drink. He shook his head. Watch the pennies and the dollars take care of themselves. He came to his feet and started for the door. In the Tri-Vision screen, two sets of knights were battling it out. The details of the color show were shockingly realistic. Paul involuntarily winced when a hero with a mace slugged another full in the mouth, nose and chin. The victim's features shattered.

He grunted self-deprecation, even as he left the place. Who was he to talk? Since youth he had made a hobby of karate, kenpo, hoppa ken and nanpa ken and even held a Kodakan Judo Black Belt. Perhaps that was one device for getting rid of his own frustrations, although he wasn't particularly aware of any.

He sauntered easily in the direction of the building which housed his mini-apartment and let his mind dwell with pleasure on his coming jaunt to New England.

His building was of advanced enough nature that he had to identify himself for entrance. He stood before the identity screen, put his thumb against it on the small spot

in the lower right hand corner and murmured, "Paul Kosloff."

The door opened, and he stepped through into the main lobby.

It was then that they jumped him, and from the beginning Paul Kosloff knew he was in for it. These were pros.

There is a sizeable difference in karate and its related methods of defense and offense in the gym, where you work out with friends, instructors and opponents who are no more anxious to hurt you than they are for you to hurt them, and being attacked with serious intent. It is not just that the participant pulls his punches in the first case, it is the spirit of the thing. The aura of deadly intent, the *smell* of hurt or be hurt.

There were two of them and they came in quickly, silently, the one before Paul Kosloff starting the attack with an attempted high kick to the face. It was purely instinctively that Paul reacted in a classic manner that would have brought plaudits from his current old hand instructor.

He swung back with his own left foot — forcing himself, for the moment, to ignore the other stranger he could see moving from the rear — grabbed the attacker's foot with his left hand just under the ankle and applied pressure to his knee joint by putting his right hand to the knee and pressing. As the

other went down, he lashed out with a kick of his own in an attempt to get the man's groin, but a shattering blow hit him on the left shoulder from behind.

He was driven off balance and down and immediately rolled fast to get away from the other's driving attack.

He was able to get free, but considered only momentarily trying to achieve the time to work clear of his jerkin. The second assailant was too close upon him, even as the first was rolling out, preparatory to returning to his feet.

Paul knew he had to get one or the other from the running quickly or he was sunk. He knew, instinctively, that these two were knowledgeable about hand to hand combat as he was, and they were at least his size and weight.

He decided to risk the 21st Kata and drew himself into fighting stance. The one who had just slugged him from behind came in fast, throwing a left punch with pointed hand, *Nishi ken* style. Paul bent his body slightly to the right in downward motion and threw a left edge-of-hand block hard against the other's wrist. He grabbed the inside of the wrist with his left, forcing his arm up high and pulled his opponent's arm upward as he pivoted on his left foot to the left. His body was now completely backwards against the at-

tacker's stomach. He held the other's arm high and with his right elbow came back hard with an elbow blow to the stranger's stomach. With his right foot, he then tried to follow through with a rear kick to his opponent's groin.

He flunked it and his chance to eliminate the man, due to the attack of his other assailant. And inwardly he groaned. One man does not defeat two, if all three are equally competent.

He tried to go into the *Kokut-su-dachi* defensive layout position, his favorite, but the other was on him before he could get set.

And then a new element entered the fray. A third stranger materialized, and for the moment complete despair washed Paul Kosloff. Two had been bad enough and, even though thus far he had been moderately successful in fighting them off, a third was beyond him.

However, it was not exactly a stranger. Even as Paul tried to spin to meet this fresh attack, he placed the newcomer. It was the man he had wondered about in Jerry's Joynt a few minutes earlier, the one who had ridden into the pseudo-city of Princeton with Paul in the vacuum-tube twenty-seater.

But the situation altered even as amazement hit him. For the newcomer took his stand on Paul Kosloff's side and was as knowledgeable, evidently, as anyone else.

"*Sut!*" Screaming the *Kiai* yell, Paul's new-found ally launched himself into the fight with an 11th Kata attack.

For a moment, the two assailants stood and fought it out, and all was a hash of confusion; then, evidently fearing still further outside interference, they managed to disengage themselves and beat their way through the front door and out into the street.

Paul Kosloff, his fighting blood up, was all for heading out after them, but his newfound friend, who had wound up the spree on the floor, shook his head and panted. "No. Hold it, Kosloff. They're probably heeled." He came to his feet, dusted the knees of his trousers and felt of his ribs unhappily.

Paul said, in indignant wonder, "Heeled! Do you mean those two cheap mugs might actually run the risk of a murder romp, on top of being footpads?"

The other looked at him strangely and then bent and picked up a combat knife that thus far Paul Kosloff had failed to notice on the floor. The newcomer tested the point appreciatively with the tip of his right index finger.

"You've got it a bit wrong. They weren't cheap thugs. They're well trained professionals. And they weren't attempting to roll you, Kosloff — they were attempting to kill you."

Paul Kosloff blinked.

He took the other in more thoroughly. His rescuer was about Paul's age, and a bit shorter, a bit stockier. His eyes were on the narrow side, and there was a quizzical quality about them. He was dark of complexion, but possibly it was sun, rather than racial heritage. However, Paul got the impression that the other was not an American; his clothes, for one thing, had a European cut.

Paul said, "You know my name and evidently some of my business. I think you have some explaining to do, Mr. . . ."

"Castriota. Zack Castriota. All right, shall we go up to your apartment?"

Paul led the way to the elevator, feeling his left leg in the vicinity of his knee gingerly. He hadn't remembered taking a blow there, but evidently one of the others had landed a kick. It wasn't broken, he knew, but it gave him a limp.

In the elevator, he said, "Fourth floor," and the robot voice said, "Fourth floor, sir."

Even as they ascended, Paul looked at the other from the side of his eyes. He said, "Where did you learn karate?"

"Okinawa."

"I know you fight Okinawa style, but where did you learn it?"

"Okinawa," the other said laconically. "When I was a prisoner there."

"Prisoner!" Paul said. "For what?"

"Espionage," Zack Castriota said dryly. "And I'm afraid that'll have to hold your curiosity for the nonce. Maybe I'll tell you about it sometime."

On the fourth floor, Paul led the way to his mini-apartment.

He said, "How in the name of Zoroaster did you manage to get through that front door? It's supposed to be guarded against strangers."

The other chuckled, but didn't even bother to answer. He followed Paul into the small living-cum-bedroom of the mini-apartment. He looked around and nodded appreciately. "Very nice. Must be at least twenty years old. They don't come this size any more."

"That's right," Paul said, "and I'm as scared as a funkier that some slick will come along and decide to tear it down so they can erect a place on the site that will house twice the number."

The one who had named himself Zack Castriota sank down into Paul's sole comfort chair and looked at his host contemplatively.

Paul went over to a built-in drawer, opened it and fished around inside. He emerged with a sealed bottle and began twisting the cap.

"Holy jumping Zoroaster," the other said. "What's that?"

"Scotch."

"Scotch!"

"Scotch." Paul put the bottle down on the small servo-table next to the other and went to his auto-bar for glasses. He dialed soda and ice. "So far as I know," he said seriously, "it's the last bottle in the world."

The other was staring at it, highly impressed. "I've tasted Scotch once or twice, over in Common Europe, but I've never seen a full bottle before. Since the ultra-powers have banned cereals for the manufacture of beverages, it's worth its weight in . . . well, in . . ."

"In Scotch," Paul Kosloff said definitely. "There isn't anything worth more. My father left me this. One of his few legacies. I've had it for years. Waiting for a suitable occasion to open it. Like my marriage, or the birth of my first child, or something like some complete stranger saving my life, out of a clear sky, for no apparent reason." He had taken up the bottle and now reached for a glass.

"Oh, there was reason enough," Castriota said. "And I'm not as complete a stranger as all that. Remember, I knew your name, Paul Kosloff."

"That's right," Paul said, scowling at him, even as he made the drinks. "You did. You also evidently followed me from Greater Washington. And you also evidently are acquainted with who

those two men were. But, anyway, thanks." He lifted his glass in a toast, after handing one to the other. "You came in the nick of time."

The other hoisted his own drink, "Don't mention it," he said.

**T**hey both drank deeply and appreciatively.

And then Paul dipped his hand into the drawer again and came out with a medium-sized but vicious looking automatic.

He said mildly, "Another legacy of my father's. This shooter's from the days of his being over in Common Eur-Asia and elsewhere as an agent."

Castriota nodded. "I've heard about your father. What was it they used to call him? The Cold War's Lawrence of Arabia."

Paul nodded, and the gun was directed steadily at the other's stomach. "And now, Zack Castriota, I want some questions answered. An attempt has been just made on my life, and you seem to know all about it, which is more than I do. You know my name. You know who those men were. You followed me from Greater Washington. You are a highly experienced hand combat man. And you admit to having a background in espionage. So now talk, Mr. Castriota."

The other chortled sourly. "Come now, don't make threats unless you are willing to see them through.

Would you really shoot me? There's gratitude for you."

Paul gave an embarrassed snort and put the gun down. "No, I suppose not. Don't misunderstand. I am grateful for that part of it, that you helped me get away from them."

Zack Castriota chortled again. "Oh, but you're the one who misunderstands. You see, I wasn't primarily interested in your getting away from them."

Paul looked at him blankly.

Castriota took another sip of his whiskey. I wanted to be sure they got away."

## II

Paul Kosloff was goggling the man as though the other had gone suddenly demented. He could not think of anything to say.

His guest laughed. He said, "Oh, I didn't want anything to happen to you either, but I did want them to get away."

Paul poured more whiskey, suddenly needing it.

"You had better keep talking," he said. "The more you say thus far, the less any of this makes sense. Who are those men? Whom do they represent? Above all, why in the name of Zoroaster should they want to kill me? I'm nothing but a professor of Slavic languages."

"We're not sure," Castriota said

reasonably. He chopped out a laugh. "That's why I wanted them to get away."

Paul simply stared at him.

The other laughed once more. "If we'd finished them off, and possibly between us we could have, then we never would have found out who they were."

"Well . . . damn it, we could have tried to knock them out, capture them, overpower them. With the two of us, we had them on the run. I'm not saying they weren't good men; they were. But they were in a more exposed position than we. They were vulnerable. If police, or anybody else had come along, they were breaking laws, not us."

"The police did come along," Zack Castriota said reasonably.

Paul stared at him. "The police?"

"Me."

Paul Kosloff had a dangerous tone in his voice now. He said, "Look, hombre, stop roaching me and start making sense. So far, you sound as though you're having the time of your life with this double-talk you've been giving me. All right, damn it, put your Universal Credit Card on my teevee phone screen there." His face had gone cold.

Zack Castriota shrugged in resignation, fished a plastic card from his inner jerkin pocket and stuck it on the screen.

Paul snapped, "Identity check, please." He looked at his strange guest. "Thumbprint."

Castriota shrugged again and stuck his thumb on the screen.

A robot voice said, "Identity established, as indicated."

Castriota put his hand out for his card, but Paul beat him to it.

Castriota said mildly, "Don't you know that it's illegal to dispossess a man of his Universal Credit Card?"

He read the card thoroughly then tossed it back to the other in disgust. "Inter-American Bureau of Investigation," he grunted.

Zack Castriota grinned at him. "That's right," he said.

Paul said in disgust, "Listen, Castriota, I have no interest in anything pertaining to the IABI. I'm a teacher. I don't like cloak and dagger fun and games."

"Who does? But it's beside the point." Castriota tilted his head to one side. "To get back to our chum-pals. You're sure you've never seen them before, eh?"

"No," Paul said, still in disgust. "But at least one of them is a Rumanian."

"Rumanian! How do you know?"

Paul Kosloff took up his glass again and walked over to the couch, which became a bed during the night, but now doubled as the only other seating facility besides

the comfort chair in the room.

He said, "Because when a man is at the height of excitement, or danger — when he calls out, it is in the language of his birth. He might be a superlative linguist, but when he's in the dill he uses the language of his birth. When our friends there took off, one of them called to the other the equivalent of *Let's go!* Only he used the Rumanian verb *a pleca.*"

"I thought you were a specialist in Slavic languages."

"I am, but I also have both Rumanian and Hungarian. When you have three or four languages, adding another becomes easy. Besides, Rumanian is supposedly a Romance language but in actuality the country is completely surrounded by Slavs, and a lot of their words have worked in."

Zack Castriota thought about it brought his wrist teevee phone up, for a long moment. Finally, he said, "Priority One, Code A-12."

Paul Kosloff couldn't see the face that appeared in the tiny screen.

Castriota said, "All right, Hank. I placed it. Undetected, I'm pretty sure. But we can't tell how soon he might get near a mop. These fellows aren't cloddies. By the way, Kosloff says they're Rumanians. That fits. You better pass it on to Myers. I'll check back with you later. I'm taking Kosloff, out to see the big shot in Denver." Paul Kosloff looked at him.

Castriota deactivated his phone and came to his feet. He finished his drink with a sigh of regret and put the glass down.

Paul said, "Who was that?"

"Department of Dirty Tricks, in the Octagon," the other said with a grin.

"What's all that talk about Denver?"

"There's somebody there you have to see."

"To put it crudely, get goosed."

Castriota shook his head. "I can't tell you any more at this stage, Kosloff, but whether or not you like it, you're coming to Denver to talk to my ultimate superior on this assignment."

"I thought the Inter-American Bureau of Investigation had its main offices in the Octagon, in Greater Washington."

The agent nodded. "But this assignment is bigger than the IABI, Kosloff. Now, if I have to, I can call some help and you'll wind up in Denver anyway. But it'd make more sense if you came on your own. Zoroaster, hombre! It can't hurt you to come and hear the fling."

"All right, damn it," Paul Kosloff said. "Wait until I take a quick shower and change my clothes. Those two dirtied me up."

"Go ahead. Take your time. I have some reports to make while you're at it." The IABI man lifted his wrist teevee phone to his face.

On the way to Denver, Zack Castriota would say nothing more dealing with their destination, the attack on Paul Kosloff, the identity of the assailants, nor anything else not pertaining to the trip itself, or off-the-cuff chatter. Evidently he had revealed as much as he believed he was allowed to reveal and, until further developments, was to be mum.

They didn't leave the building to summon a vacuum-tube vehicle. The IABI agent was playing it carefully. Instead, he dialed an official IABI car, and they entered it from the lobby entry.

It seemed as though they were important enough to rate a priority shot and after a minimum of shuttling were hurtled on through to Denver. At the terminal there, matters slowed slightly while they were shuttled around and went through some minor shots about the pseudo-city.

Castriota growled, "It's like the old days. It took you longer to get from and to the airport than it did to fly half way across the country."

Paul Kosloff didn't answer. He was still miffed at the cavalier treatment he was receiving. Theoretically, of course, he could have dragged his heels and refused to go. Theoretically, a man still had his Constitutional rights in the Ultra-welfare State, the United States of the Americas. But he knew very well that if the IABI

wanted him to talk to somebody in Denver, he might as well forget about it and go to Denver. Because, sooner or god-damned later, he'd wind up on this mysterious mission to Denver.

The vehicle came to a halt eventually and Zack Castriota dropped its pressure and slid back the canopy. They emerged into an extensive office — so extensive that Paul Kosloff hissed in surprise between his teeth. The vacuum-tube terminal from which they had just emerged had a bank of at least twenty-five entries, and Paul got the feeling that this was but one terminal of many in this building.

On top of that, literally scores of persons were either riding one or two-seater inter-office floaters or striding quickly up and down halls anywhere in these days of ultra-mation?

"Where are we?" he said of his undesired guide, half expecting not to get an answer.

"Denver, Denver," Castriota said, summoning a two-seated corridor floater.

"I knew that. I meant, this building."

"Denver, Denver," Castriota said. "What is there in Denver besides your National Data Center?"

"Oh," Paul Kosloff said. He climbed onto the floater seat next to the other. Now he could understand the utter magnitude of this building, which dwarfed anything

he had ever seen before, even the Octagon in Greater Washington. "What in the name of the holy Zoroaster have I got to do with the National Data Center?"

Zack Castriota was dialing the floater. He chuckled and said, "Hombre, if there's anything you have got to do with, it's the National Data Center — along with every other man, woman, child, dog and parakeet in these, the United States of the Americas."

"Very funny," Paul said. However, he decided to hold his peace and await developments.

The floater took them possibly half a mile in all. Up ramps, down corridors, through lobbies. Toward the end, the surroundings became less grim and efficient and more — perhaps ostentatious would be the term.

They approached, finally, a massive door of the type that would have seemed more appropriate to a cathedral. In fact, there was even an effect, obviously nonsense, of hand carving.

The floater came to a halt and Zack Castriota said something into his wrist teevee phone. His tone had lost its characteristic bantering element. They waited a few moments, then the door swung open, and the floater proceeded. Beyond was an enormous reception room. Zack swung himself off the seat of the floater, and Paul fol-

lowed him. The floater reversed itself and left, the monstrous door closing behind it.

Paul growled, "Whats this, the ante-room to St. Peter's office?"

"Kind of," Zack told him. He headed toward a desk.

To Paul Kosloff's surprise, there was even a live receptionist. How ostentatious could you get?

The girl was in trim uniform, a uniform that Paul didn't place, and she was spectacularly efficient in appearance. The fact that she could have won any beauty contest going was beside the point and obviously not particularly important. Every hair was in place; every pore, for that matter. The hair was red and spectacular, the mouth wide and generous, but very sincere. Her figure matched her face, and no uniform ever designed could have disguised the fact.

She said, most briskly, "Professor Kosloff, *Generale Castriota*, the director will see you immediately." Her voice matched face and figure, and it came to Paul Kosloff that he would have given a great deal to hear it, early in the morning, still slurring with sleep.

She looked at Zack in gentle reproof. "You are several minutes late, *Generale*."

Zack said, Sorry, *mio caro*. Professor Kosloff, meet Secretary Lisa Stebbins, the prettiest girl in the world, but on the snippish side."

She snorted and went back to her

screens, her papers and her intercom. Paul Kosloff tore his eyes away from purely staring at her and fell into step with his companion, looking at the other from the side of his eyes.

"Generale?" he said.

"That's right."

"Common Europe?"

"Thats right."

"You don't look old enough to be a general."

"Intelligence, not army."

"I thought you said you were IABI."

"On temporary assignment from our government to yours."

Paul cleared his throat.

Zack Castriota chortled characteristically and said, "What did you think of our Lisa Stebbins?"

"One of the most beautiful women I've ever seen," Paul said.

"Ah ha, a common observation, chum-pal, but she's not for such as you and me. Look, along with the rest of us, if you will, but don't think in terms of touching. Our Miss Stebbins is most ambitions and that beautiful exterior covers a will of iron when it comes to her long range planning."

Another door, not as monstrous as the one before the entrance, but still imposing, opened before them, and they passed through.

The room beyond had obviously been designed by, or at least decorated by, an individual who had very

clear cut ideas about the type of office in which he wished to work. Paul Kosloff was taken aback by the presence of a fireplace which obviously worked. He couldn't imagine what efforts must have been gone into by the architects to pipe the smoke out of a building such as this.

There was no desk in the ordinary sense.

In fact, the whole suite, of which this immediate room was a part, seemed more like the habitat of a very wealthy bachelor than a place of business. And this room into which they now passed would have been the escape room. A *man's* escape room. A man who evidently liked books, but had other interests as well, signified by two or three rifles up on the wall, a mounted tuna of impressive size, a rhino head, slightly motheaten, so that it must have been taken quite a few years before. A bar, a real bar, not an auto-bar, in one corner. Paintings of various schools were on the walls; not the way a decorator hangs paintings — no attempt to blend or to fit into a school, odds and ends of paintings ranging from those of the ashcan school of the early 1930's to the current Representational-Abstract. Not that they weren't good paintings — and expensive. Paul Kosloff could recognize a Degas, one of his own favorite masters.

The occupant sat in an old-fash-

ioned overstuffed chair, not a comfort chair. It came to Paul Kosloff that there was no auto-table, no vacuum delivery box, no — of all impossible things — teevee screen, in the room. It was an escape room indeed.

The room was absolutely primitive, even in the eyes of Paul Kosloff, who was on the revolt-against-the-ultra-modern side himself.

The most important man in the United States of the Americas — if not the world — looked up and said, "Good evening, Professor Kosloff." He put his book down. He evidently actually read his books, Paul realized. They weren't just collector's items.

Paul said, "Good evening, Mr. Harrison."

The Director of the National Data Center nodded to Paul's companion. "Hello, Zack."

General Zack Castriota flicked a hand to him in greeting, "Good evening, sir." He made his way to the bar, saying, "My second opportunity today to have real Scotch. But Paul beats you. He had a full bottle, unopened. Gelcannon."

The director of the NDC was evidently a *guy* as well as being one of the most important men on earth, or, at least, went through the motions of pretending to be. He said, "Gelcannon! I had a bottle given to me some years ago; however, the bottle was right and the

label was right — but the contents were not.”

Paul Kosloff was out of his depth. Within the past few hours there had been an attempt on his life. His first impression of the man who had saved it had been that of a competent, but low-ranking plain-clothesman of the national police, now turned into a general of Common Europe. He had brought him into the presence of Dempsey Harrison — not in title, but in actuality of more importance than the President of the United States of the Americas. Or, for that matter of The Gaulle of Common Europe, or the Chairman of the Presidium of Common Eur-Asia. They, too, were figureheads.

Dempsey Harrison was a man in his early sixties, but with that projection of fitness maintained by those who have perfect diet, the best of medical care, suitable exercise, the ministrations of masseurs and all else that ultimate wealth can buy to extend the active life span.

Zack Castriota evidently was fully at home. He made three drinks and handed the other two theirs before sinking into a chair.

Dempsey Harrison looked at him questioningly.

Zack said, “They jumped Paul here, today. I was in the vicinity, of course, and intervened. In time — this time.” The Common Europe

operative made a rather wry face.

“This time!” Paul said.

Harrison looked at him. “Your two predecessors were less fortunate. Take a seat, Professor Kosloff. That one there is a favorite.”

He settled himself into his arm-chair and waited until Zack and Paul Kosloff were comfortable before saying, “You must be mystified by all this. It’s time for a few explanations.”

“I wouldn’t protest,” Paul said.

“Very well. Professor Kosloff, what do you know about the computer data banks of this country?”

“Why, I don’t know. I suppose what the average citizen knows.”

“Which actually isn’t very much. Let me give you some background. You’ll need it for what’s to come.”

Paul Kosloff sipped at his whiskey and soda and waited.

Dempsey Harrison looked off into far distances. “It came quickly, once it started,” he said musingly. “And could easily enough have been predicted, given the computer and the ability to store almost literally an infinite amount of information in a comparatively small area. Oh, the first simple beginnings, the use of punched cards and later magnetic tape, were comparatively primitive, but they lasted only a few years. Today, the National Data Center holds an utterly unbelievable amount of information, Professor Kosloff, and it increases daily.”

“Well, I knew that, of course.”

Harrison ignored him. "I suppose it really began back in the late 1960's when New Haven consolidated all the city's files on the individual into a single data pool open to all city agencies. Santa Clara County in California wasn't far behind, putting all county residents into a computer bank, listing age, address, birth record, driver's license, voting and jury status, property holdings, occupation, health, welfare and police records.

"The Federal government wasn't far behind either, although there was an initial dragging of heels in Congress due to the feared invasion of privacy. However, in 1968 the Internal Revenue Service began the utilization of computers in collecting income tax. There is, of course, a good deal more information on income tax forms than pertains to income alone. Adding Social Security information to these data obviously made sense, and material from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the U.S. Civil Service Commission, which already held dossiers on nearly everyone who had ever applied for Federal employment since 1939. Then, of course, the Census Bureau, the Defense Department for military records, and finally the F.B.I. records went into the data banks, they were soon followed by those of the House Un-American Activities Committee and by the C.I.A. Thus far, all these records were Federal but the addition

of the F.B.I. and other police files made so much sense that the local police of every state, every city, every town, cooperated, and there came to be a national criminal record of practically everybody in the country, even though your individual record might consist of no more than a traffic violation."

Dempsey Harrison took a sip of his drink. "It was just the beginning. Medical information was soon added. It was one of the most productive of the steps. A man from New York could find himself in an accident in Oregon. Within moments, at a local hospital, the doctor treating him could get a complete medical record on the patient. Very well, let us stick a pin at this point.

"All this was Federal, but at the same time another element was utilizing the capabilities of the computer data banks. I refer to the universities, the libraries, the newspapers — such depositories of human knowledge. Early in the game they began cooperating in storing information. Soon there was a gigantic data bank of books, encyclopedias, newspaper morgues, everything from Escoffier's Cook Book and that of Fanny Farmer to bartenders' guides and volumes on how to raise canaries. The big step was taken when it was decided to include the Library of Congress and, a few years later, through a special exchange arrangement with his Majesty's gov-

ernment, the British Museum Library.

"Ultimately, of course, this educational data was combined with the Federal government's information on the individual citizen, and all placed under the National Data Center. And then we really began in earnest. Every newspaper, every magazine, every book published in the world, in every written language, is computer translated and placed in the files, in both its original and translated form. But stick another pin there.

"Neck and neck with these developments were those in the field of credit and banking, the trend to the cashless-checkless society and the universal credit card. The computer, plus the teevee phone, made possible a national credit system eliminating money in the old sense of the word. A person's income, from whatever source, is placed to his account. By placing his Uni-Credit Card on the payment screen in any store, restaurant, public transportation vehicle, or where ever, he is debited to whatever extent. If he is overdrawn, of course, the computers immediately reject the purchase of object or service.

"But the coming of the teevee phone added still another element to our new society. It made possible immediate communication between everyone, and of communication with the authorities with every individual, or with every citizen in

the nation, simultaneously. There was some protest, at first, as was to be expected, but eventually what was once our Social Security number became our identity number, period, which we carry from womb to tomb.

This one number combines what amounts to our names, our telephone numbers, our driver's license, our labor draft number, military identification, our license plate number if we own a private floater or car. In short, everything. The step was finally taken to make it illegal not to wear one's wrist teevee phone. Thus, at any given time, the authorities can locate any given citizen."

Dempsey Harrison raised his eyebrows at Zack, who came to his feet and refreshed their glasses.

The operative from Common Europe said gently, "The same applies, of course, to my own country. Possibly we haven't gotten quite to the point you people have, but it's coming, it's coming." He tongued his lower lip and added, "God dammit."

Harrison nodded, and there was a weary aspect in his voice now. "We didn't ask for it, exactly. Something like Topsy, it just grew; but now, Professor Kosloff, we are what Vance Packard, some decades ago, called *The Naked Society*. We are the computerized society. The

privacy which we once demanded is no more. Perhaps that is the only way it could have been. To insist that an American of this period is entitled to the same privacy as they who lived in the agrarian America of 1790 is like insisting on the right to drive a horse and buggy along an ultra-expressway."

Paul shifted in his chair and said uncomfortably, "Of course, very little of this is unknown to me, Mr. Harrison."

The Director of the National Data Center nodded. "I was merely summing up to give you background for what is to come. Our whole world is now dependent upon our computer system. Our whole economy, our whole way of life. We can no more go back than today's Greeks could go back to the Golden Age of Pericles."

"I still don't see what all this has got to do with me."

"Professor Kosloff, suppose someone whose interests were not those of the United States of the Americas discovered a method of tapping our data banks?"

Paul Kosloff looked at him, some of the ramifications coming through.

"Worse yet," Zach Castriota said gently, "Suppose they figured out a method of wiping them clean, electronically, from a distance."

"*Zo-ro-as-ter*," Paul Kosloff breathed.

The data-center head nodded. "Indeed."

Paul Kosloff waited for more. "As you know," Dempsey Harrison went on, "although most information filed away in the data banks is open to all citizens to call upon as they will, some is classified on various levels and a priority is required to release it. Such information as military, for instance. Every detail of our military machine and its planning is stored in our data banks, Professor Kosloff. Besides that, we have scientific information pertaining to weapons and defense, but to other subjects as well."

Harrison thought about it for a moment. "Theoretically, of course, the Cold War is no longer with us, but in actuality the battle for men's minds goes on, and the relationship we have with Common Eur-Asia has some attributes of an armed truce. Then too, there are the neutrals." The National Data Bank head looked at Zack Castriota. "Including the strongest of all, Common Europe. Both our country and Common Eur-Asia are no longer quite so avid to have the neutrals fall into our laps. We are more nearly self-sufficient, less in need of markets and sources of raw material, than we were in the old days. However, we still both desire the balance of power to incline slightly at least in our own direction."

Dempsey Harrison shook his head and left that trend of thought. "But the point is that although we are at peace with Common Eur-Asia, we would not like to see them in a position to drain our data banks of their information."

"Nor to wipe them clear," Zack Castriota added dryly.

Paul Kosloff scowled. "How do you know this can be done, or, if it can, who is doing it?"

"Rumors have been coming through for some time," Harrison told him. "In fact, we are near some breakthroughs in the same field ourselves."

"Oh, ho," Paul said sourly. "So we're guilty of the same attempt."

The older man shook his head, sadly. "I would not deny it. If you fall behind in the race of progress, sometimes you wind up falling flat on your face, Professor Kosloff."

"But how do you *know* this is being done?"

Zack Castriota laughed abruptly. "One bit of evidence is the fact that your two Rumanian friends jumped you. In fact, you were being used in the way of bait, Kosloff. When these rumors first started coming through, we decided to send a man or so into what was once called the Balkans to check around a bit. So we put the problem into the labor draft files and brought forth a name. A man of about thirty, intelligent, multi-lingual, experienced in combat and other trou-

ble, but with no espionage record. He even had relatives in Common Eur-Asia that he could be expected reasonably to visit. Wizard. But before we could even interview the man, he was killed. Murder is uncommon these days, Kosloff, and obviously we were surprised. So we turned back to the data banks and located another person with the same qualifications. And he too was cut down before we even got to see him. The next time, we slapped an immediate guard on our prospective agent, with the results that you know."

"**Y**ou mean me, of course," Paul Kosloff said, taken aback.

"Of course," Zack said. "Even as it was, they nearly got to you. Kosloff, there's only one way they could have known that you had been chosen to go into Common Eur-Asia on an information-gathering assignment. They tapped the computers. You don't easily tap computers connected with the Inter-American Bureau of Investigation."

Paul Kosloff shook his head negatively. "All right," he said, "but the answer is no."

Dempsey Harrison looked at him in question. "The answer to what?"

"I'm not going into Common Eur-Asia as an espionage agent." Paul pointed at Zack Castriota. "He's a pro, this is his field; let him or his fellow pros in the field do it. I'm a teacher of language. No thanks."

The data banks official leaned forward. "The labor draft computers say you are the most suitable man in the whole United States of the Americas for the assignment."

"Then the computers have sprung a leak," Paul Kosloff said. He came to his feet. "I'm sorry."

Dempsey Harrison looked up at him, then at Zack Castriota.

Castriota shrugged. "If you're thinking he's a funkier, he's not. I've seen him in action. And I still think the computers were right. He's the best man for the job."

Harrison sighed. "This is a task for a volunteer. We'll find someone else, General Castfiota."

For the next several days, Paul Kosloff stewed. He could have taken his projected hiking trip into the New England National Park, but didn't. But, for that matter, neither could he find it in him to work on future lectures.

He was irritated with Zack Castriota and with Dempsey Harrison.

A man of Harrison's stature doesn't ordinarily personally call upon a citizen of no more prominence than Paul Kosloff. He had a hundred thousand underlings and more at his beck and call, surely many of them experienced trouble-shooters. Why tap a bookish bachelor who knew no more of the world of cloak and dagger than he knew of the latest laboratory work go-

ing on in Satellite City or the tiny moon colony?

Why? Because the computers had fingered him from the millions. He couldn't imagine why.

Well, as Harrison had said, it was a job for a volunteer. They couldn't make him take it. And what was the age-old army maxim? Never volunteer.

He didn't consider himself a patriot. He had no desire to die for the United States of the Americas. Patriotism was a sentiment of yesteryear, a victim of the new trends of society, along with organized religion. Vaguely, he was pleased that he was an American rather than a citizen of Common Eur-Asia, Common Europe, or any other land. But it wasn't that important to him. He made the usual contributions to the society of which he was a part, worked at least as hard as the next man, in his chosen profession and, had there been war or other national emergency — Zoroaster forbid — would undoubtedly have gone when drafted, but not before.

Let Harrison and his people, and Castriota and his, worry about the National Data Center and whether or not it was being tapped by potential foes. His job was doing lectures for the University of the Air and eventually combining them into a series of books for the nation's library banks.

He moped around, disgruntled for reasons he knew not, unable to get into his Bulgarian work which he was trying to get ready both for book form and as canned Tri-Vision lectures.

So it was that when Zack Castriota turned up four days later, he was inwardly glad to see the Common Europe agent — not that he let the other detect that fact. Paul Kosloff was seated in his comfort chair when the door screen was activated and Castriota's face was there. He touched the switch that opened the door, but didn't come to his feet when the other entered.

"Don't roach me," he said. "The answer is still no."

Zack Castriota laughed and went over to the auto-bar and dial-ed.

"Hey," Paul growled, "stick your own credit card in there. I don't want it on my account."

The other grinned at him and put his Universal Credit Card in the auto-bar's slot as ordered. "Pleasure," he said. "Unlimited expense account. We cloak-and-dagger men don't have to worry about such mundane matters, Kosloff."

"Oh, wizard. I'll join right up. What do you want, Castriota?"

The other, glass in hand, sat down on the couch. "I've been going through your dossier in the data banks. Very interesting."

"Going through my dossier! What right have you to get into

my dossier? Why, you're not even a citizen of this country. A man's dossier is private. Only authorized governmental personnel connected with whatever field is involved can inspect a man's dossier."

Castriota grinned at him mockingly. "You'd be surprised how very authorized I am, Kosloff. You know what I found?"

"What? By the holy jumping Zoroaster, I'm going to recheck my dossier myself and challenge anything I don't like there."

The Common Europe agent knocked back half of his drink. "That's your right, of course. But I doubt if you'll challenge this. I found that you have a knack for excitement, Kosloff. Supposedly, you're a stogy university professor, but in the way of hobbies you certainly swing out. I already knew that you've got a flair for karate and have a black belt in Kodakan Judo. But what else do I learn? That you were both rifle and pistol runner-up in the selection of the last Olympics team run-offs. That you spend a good many of your vacations up in such places as the Yukon, hunting and fishing — alone. That you've been in some sticky spots in skin-diving and mountain climbing. Oh, you're quite a professor, you are, Kosloff. No wonder the computers pulled you for the Common Eur-Asian assignment."

Paul Kosloff said, "Look here,

Castriota, I heard your fling the other day. The answer is still no. What did you come here for?"

Castriota finished his drink. "I thought you might like to be in on the kill."

Paul looked at him.

Castriota said complacently, "What did you think I meant the other day when I told you I was primarily interested in seeing that those two assailants of yours got away?"

"I thought you meant you were off your rocker," Paul said sourly.

The other shook his head, and brought from his pocket a tiny object that looked like nothing so much as a brown bean. He leaned forward and put it in Paul's hand.

Paul Kosloff scowled down at it. It was of plastic so far as he could see and smaller than a tiny pea.

"What's this supposed to be?"

"It's a miniaturized bug, old chum-pal."

"Bug?"

"A radio transmitter, old chum-pal."

"This small?" Paul Kosloff was surprised. "But what of it?"

"Its equal number is at present residing in the side pocket of the jerkin of your Rumanian friend. It's beginning to move about again, so we assume he is currently wearing the jerkin in question. We've been stymied for several days, because it was remaining in one spot, probably hanging in some closet,

or some such. We daren't zero-in on it, because they might not have been in the immediate vicinity, might have spotted us and taken off."

"Wait a minute, now. You mean you planted one of these on that Rumanian bastard the other day?"

"That's what I've been telling you. While we were scuffling around down in your lobby. Want to be in on the kill? Maybe I'll need a Rumanian translator."

"Where is he?"

"Manhattan."

"Manhattan! Manhattan's been deserted for years."

"Not exactly. There's a few hundred or so of what they call baboons. Possibly a few thousand. They don't exactly admit to a census. Fugitives, left overs from the riots who are afraid to come over to the mainland, mental cases, foreigners without papers who aren't eligible for being issued Inalienable Basic and hence have no way of maintaining themselves on the mainland. Then there are the looters who scrounge through the ruins trying to find art objects, jewelry, saleable things they can take to the mainland and sell to antique and art dealers. And there are always a certain number of scholars going through the rubble of the museums and libraries, trying to find this or that, and sometimes investigators prowling through the

Wall Street section, trying to locate some lost record or whatever. There's even a small contingent of police at the vacuum-tube terminal at what used to be called Grand Central."

"What in the name of Zoroaster do they live on?" Paul Kosloff said.

Castriota shifted his shoulders in a European shrug. "A city as big as New York had one hell of a lot of canned and bottled food and water around, even after the riots and looting. They'll never find it all."

"And there's nobody there except these baboons and the few others you mentioned?"

The Common Europe agent said wryly, "Evidently, there's also at least two of the espionage boys there as well."

"But no, well, legitimate citizens?"

The other shrugged again. "Possibly a few. Non-conformists who reject the Ultra-welfare State. Refuse to settle down to a life based on what amounts to a government dole, your Inalienable Basic stock issued to every citizen at birth. You know: artists, poets and what not. A few of them evidently still live in the Greenwich Village area. They move into abandoned apartments, some of them pretty swank, and make out by getting food, clothing and whatever else they need from the ruins of department stores, private homes, so forth and so on."

"Good grief, what a life," Paul said. He got up and went over to the auto-bar and dialed beverages. "What are you drinking?"

"Pseudo-whiskey and soda. You know, it's not as bad as all that."

"Like hell it isn't," Paul said. He dialed two more of the same. "The more ultramated we become the lousier the quality of just about everything. Have you ever seen an Irish Donegal tweed sport jacket?"

"Yes," Castriota said.

Daul ignored his answer. "I wore one when I was younger. My father left it to me. That's how clothes were in the old days, they lasted so well you handed them down, father to son. Hand-woven tweed, then hand-tailored. Look at this goddamned junk we wear today. And look at this lush we drink, and the food we eat."

The other said, "Well, frankly, your food over here is a cross any European has to bear. It's getting worse in Common Europe as well, but in this regard you are far, far ahead of us — If you can call it ahead."

Paul said, "Look, to get back to this Manhattan thing. You think that those two who jumped me the other day are over there, eh?"

"We know they are. We've got a fix on them. They obviously don't know they're carrying a bug around. It wasn't easy to plant in the midst of all that jam-banging around we

were going through. You see, the idea was, we wanted to know where they were holed-up, how many of them there might be, what kind of equipment they were using to dip into the data banks. If we can locate them, we might make a clean sweep of it. Killing or capturing the two professional assassins is nothing. We want the works."

"So where do I come in?"

"A preliminary look-see. We're not ready for the big operation yet. When we are, a hundred operatives will drop in like a swarm of locusts from floaters and helio-jets. But right now, we want a preliminary reconnaissance deal. Nothing to scare them. They might have some way of destroying their equipment but quick, even a mini-nuclear device, or some such."

Paul Kosloff winced. "Mini-nuclear device?"

Castriota grinned at him. "You aren't up on the latest, Kosloff. The miniaturization of everything and its cousin progresses. I understand that the first A-Bombs dropped on Japan weighed tons. I saw a mini-H-bomb, there in the Department of Dirty Tricks in the Octagon the other day, that was no bigger than a baseball. I leave to your imagination what could be done in the way of extortion with such a little plaything in the hands of a gang of criminals."

Paul Kosloff said suddenly, "Look here, Castriota, how is it

that you're so prominent in this thing? You're not even an American and here you seem to be in full charge."

"Well, I'm not. I'm just up here on the firing line. I have one big advantage over the IABI agents I'm assigned to be helping. You see, I'm not in your data banks."

"Oh, yes. That would be right. If they're tapping the American data banks, they could find information pertaining to the men who were looking for them. But not you. Your dossier would be in the Common Europe computer data banks."

"Right." The other came to his feet. "Well, what do you say, Kosloff? Want to take a look around Manhattan with me?"

To his own surprise, Paul Kosloff stood erect and said, "All right." The next split second he told himself he would have liked to retract his words but it was too late by then.

Zack Castriota chuckled.

Paul went over to the built-in drawers of his mini-apartment, opened the top one and pulled forth his .38 noiseless and its harness. He shucked out of his jerkin, shrugged into the harness, buckled it and checked its tightness. He pulled the gun to check its looseness in its holster, then returned it.

Castriota said gently, "Let's hope we don't need that. What was it the old timer said? Violence is the re-

sort of the incompetent? Agree?"

"Ummm," Paul said sourly. "But from what you say about those baboons that occupy the ruins, I'd just as well have this shooter along. I have a sneaking suspicion that everybody on that island goes around heeled."

"You couldn't prove it by me," the other said, heading for the door. "I've ridden over the place in a helio-jet, but I've never landed." He opened the door, and made a mock gentlemanly gesture for Paul to precede him.

As they took the elevator down to the lobby, Paul said, "If you've never been on Manhattan, how in the name of Zoroaster are you ever going to find these cloddies?"

"We've got a full-time contact man under cover there. Hombre named Mark Martino. And, of course, we have the bug to zero-in on."

In the lobby, Castriota dialed a two-seater, vacuum-tube vehicle. When the light indicated it had arrived, he opened the closet-like door.

Paul said, "No special IABI vehicle this time?"

"We're incognito," the other said. "We don't know what facilities they might have in the way of defense. Very possibly they keep a check on the terminal at Grand Central. Wouldn't be too difficult. It's the only terminal on Manhattan and largely the other means of ingress

to the city are clogged up, blown up, burned down, or whatever."

He went through the motions of dialing them through to Manhattan, and shortly the preliminary shuttling began. They had no priority this time and were shipped back and forth for a seemingly endless time before the shot.

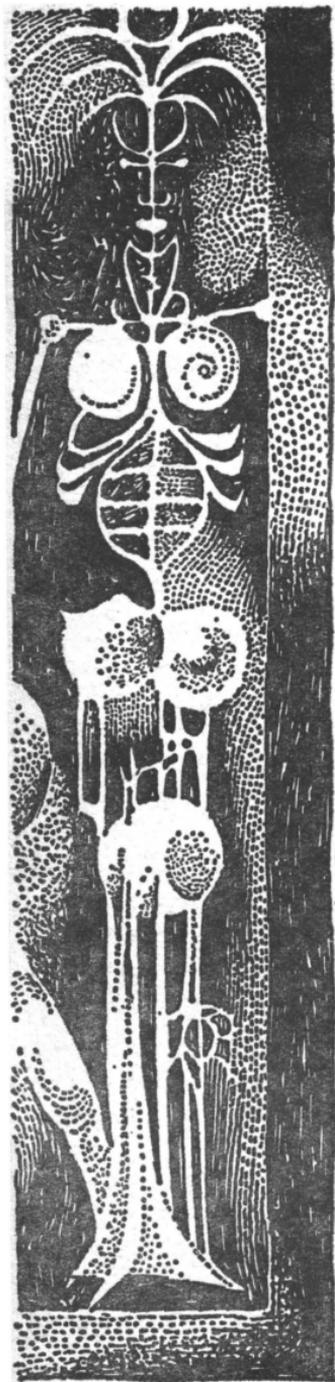
Zack Castriota said conversationally, "I've always wanted to see one of your ruined cities. Read about it in school, the riots and all."

"You had no equivalent in Common Europe, I understand."

"No. Same situation didn't apply. Oh, we had our slums, especially in the Latin countries, but, you know, I don't believe quite what you had here. You Americans used to be so proud of your number of cars, refrigerators, color-television sets and so forth, that you never seemed to quite comprehend that not only did you have a good many people living at the world's highest standards, but also a good many living at some of the lowest in the West. In whole countries, such as the Scandinavian, Switzerland, Benelux, there were no such things as slums at all."

Paul looked over at him. "Do I detect a slight anti-Americanism, chum-pal?"

Castriota laughed. "No, not really. I've always been fascinated by the so-called American dream.



That's one of the reasons they picked me for this assignment. It's not my first trip over, of course."

"I wouldn't think so; you're at least as far up in your American idiom as I am."

The shuttling of the vacuum-tube vehicle in which they sat stopped and both sucked in air in anticipation.

Paul said, "To what extent do you have these infernal machines in Common Europe?"

"Not as much as here. Your distances are greater. You had to have something that would take you a thousand miles in nothing flat. But you take some nation such as Belgium. If you climb onto a bicycle, by the time you've got up speed, you're in another country if you don't look out."

The pressure pressed them back into their acceleration seats.

Castriota said, "Talking about the cities, whatever happened to Boswash?"

The pressure fell off, then reversed.

"Boswash?" Paul said.

Castriota chuckled. "The idea was that your cities would continue to grow until there was just one big city along the Atlantic seaboard from Boston to Washington. Boswash. It would have a population of about 80 million people. Then there'd be another gargantuan megalopolis called Chipitts which would run from Chicago to Pitts-

burgh and north to Canada thus taking in Detroit, Toledo, Cleveland, Akron, Buffalo and Rochester. And a third, Sansan, which would run from San Francisco down to San Diego on the Mexican border. Chipitts was to have a population of about 40 million and Sansan one of 20 million or more."

Paul Kosloff winced at the picture, even as their vehicle's shuttling began all over again.

"One more of the predictions of disaster that didn't come off," he said. "Like oil giving out and leaving us without fuel by this period. Instead, of course, we're using other power sources. And nuclear war, which was going to wipe out the race. It didn't come. It didn't make sense to *anybody*. And the Russians trying to conquer the world and impose their type of communism on it. That didn't happen either; they were too busy minding their own business. And the pollution of the air that was going to be so bad that the climate would be changed. Of course, discontinuing the use of fossil fuels to such an extent stopped that trend. The thing is that the existence of a trend is no guarantee that it will continue."

Castriota looked over at him. "But what happened to Boswash, Sansan and Chipitts?"

"The population explosion and the urbanization of ninety percent

of the population failed to materialize for reasons that seem obvious now, but were evidently too much for the extrapolators back during the middle of the century. The population simply didn't explode the way they predicted. Not in America and the other advanced countries. The birth rate began to fall off dramatically even in the 1950's and 1960's. And for obvious reasons. To maintain any kind of standard of living both a man and wife had to work, so raising a sizeable family was difficult. Homes got smaller and smaller, so that it was difficult to find one large enough for a family of five or ten or more, such as our grandparents used to raise. Many apartment owners wouldn't rent to people with children. Then the cost of living skyrocketed, and feeding and clothing a large family became prohibitive, not to speak of sending them through school, and by this time, if you didn't have a college education you were out of the running. The pill came along, and then even more efficient and economical methods of preventing conception. And religious organizations, once opposed to birth control, first began to hedge about such restrictions and later withdrew them entirely. Even the government got in the act by passing such legislation as legalized abortion, and free sterilization of any consenting adult."

Paul Kosloff thought about it.

"Other things were happening at the same time. The family as we knew it, began to fall apart. People became more, well, hedonistic, I suppose. A girl no longer wanted the home, family and responsibilities of her mother. She wanted primarily a good time. She wanted luxuries, to travel, to live it up. She revolted against being tied down to children. There were other angles, too. Immigration once helped to boom the population of the United States. Millions of persons swarmed over from Europe and elsewhere. But that fell off; in fact, laws prevented it, even if Europeans had been as keen to come to America as they had been in the past. In fact, the flood began to ebb in the other direction. As far back as the 1960's over two million Americans lived abroad. A lot of these were military, or held down some job that kept them overseas, but the number of expatriates was zooming. Why live in the most expensive country in the world, when you can pick such spots as Mexico, Spain, Greece, Morocco and a score of other countries where the cost of living is a fraction? On their Social Security income, oldsters in California or Florida could live only on a poverty level. In Mexico they could live in luxury, complete with servants."

"But what happened to your formerly booming large cities?" Castriota said. Their vacuum-tube

vehicle was shuttling again. Evidently, it took another shot to get to Manhattan; the terminal there was undoubtedly a smallish one.

“Various things, including the riots that hit so many of them, and over and over again. But simultaneously, something more important. You’ve got to realize that big cities are not attractive places in which to live, and especially American big cities. It got to the point that the air was unbreathable, the water undrinkable, the smog a real threat to health. It also got to the point that traffic could hardly move, that educational facilities, garbage disposal, police and fire fighting facilities became more and more inadequate and under financed.”

“If they were that bad, why did people come to them?”

“Largely because they had to. No person in his right mind would prefer to live in Harlem as opposed to Puerto Rico or most of the American South. But as the automation and then ultramation of agriculture progressed, millions of underprivileged, under-educated citizens moved to the large cities in hopes of finding work, or, at least, getting on relief. And the more of them that moved into cities like New York, the more of those people who could afford it moved out. City after city became populated predominately by Negroes, Puerto Ricans and others in the lower income bracket.

“But there were other things developing simultaneously. Originally, the purpose of a city was for defense and trade and to be a manufacturing center. But in the modern age, a city is no defense; in fact, it’s a death trap in case of war. So far as trade is concerned, in the old days the streets were lined with thousands upon thousands of small shops and businesses, hundreds and hundreds peddling identical objects. The coming of the super-market was an indication of the eventual ending of that. The small shop, the small business, largely became anachronisms. Ultra-markets, ultra-department stores, took over, and there is no particular reason for such being located in a large city. In fact, it’s much handier to locate such distribution centers out in the wide-open spaces, particularly after the emerging of ultramation into distribution and the delivery to the home by vacuum-tube method of most purchases.

“At the same time, came the teevee phone, satellite relays, international integration of communications. A businessman no longer had to see his business contacts personally. He could be sitting in his home in Hawaii and dial through immediately to a factory manager in, say, Kansas. There was no particular reason for him to have an office on Wall Street, or anywhere else except his own home.

“But the real blow to the city

came when the federal government integrated what amounted to all charity and a good many pensions, such things as Social Security, relief, and unemployment insurance. With the issuing of ten shares of Inalienable Basic stock to every man, woman and child in the country, the need for the unemployed, the aged, the crippled, or whoever, to move to such cities as New York, Los Angeles or Chicago, in order to get out on relief, was ended.

"A poverty stricken Puerto Rican who had fled his island because he couldn't make a living there could now return. A Negro who had possibly been born in Harlem was free to move to Colorado, if he liked mountains, or possibly the west coast of Mexico, if he liked tropical beach. He didn't have to stay in the riot and hate racked cities, any more than did a middle-class white man who had moved out to suburbia so that he could breathe."

The vehicle in which they rode had come to a halt, and the green light indicating arrival at their destination was flashing. Zack dropped pressurization and activated the canopy. They stepped forth into a comparatively small terminal and full into the view of a stocky police officer.

He looked at them both coldly, even as they stretched to relieve muscles after the cramped quarters.

The policeman said, "You've made a mistake. This is Grand Central terminal. Manhattan."

"No mistake," Zack told him. He fished into an inner pocket and brought forth a document.

There was a buzzing in the background. For the moment, the cop ignored the proffered paper.

He said, "That's a metal detector. You're carrying a shooter, Mister, and they aren't allowed on this island."

Zack said patiently, "If you'll look at this authorization, you'll see that we both have permission to be armed. We've heard of the . . . the baboons."

The police guard took the paper and looked down at it. "My name's Williams," he said. "One of my jobs is to warn you that you have no police protection on Manhattan. Or any other kind of protection, for that matter. And there're no restaurants, no hotel facilities, no stores, no nothing. The city has been abandoned. If you get into any trouble, you're on your own."

"We knew that before we came," Zack said reasonably.

The cop looked him full in the face. "You aren't a couple of damned hunters, are you?"

#### IV

"Hunters?" Paul Kosloff said blankly. "On a ruined island like Manhattan?"

Williams was on the elderly side to be on active duty as a police guard and inclined to a certain slowness of movement; however, there was a confidence and a dignity and he looked levelly into the younger man's eyes. "You don't appear to be," he said, "but you never know."

He looked back and forth between the two newcomers. "There isn't any law in the ruins of Manhattan. No police, no courts, no prisons. If somebody shoots you, you're on your own. If you shoot somebody, it's too bad for them. So far as you're concerned, it's self defense. This is possibly the only place in the world where a man who wants the thrill of killing another man, or woman or child, for that matter, can come, do it and get away with it."

"Holy Zoroaster," Paul Kosloff said.

The cop nodded wearily. "So some come. All done up in bullet-proofs and with fancy guns. We call them hunters. They're usually bigwigs, wealthy thrill seekers. Maybe they're the type that like to go to Africa, or up to Northern Alaska, or wherever game still exists, and get their jollies shooting up deer or elephants for the sake of getting heads to hang on their walls. When you've got all the other heads, maybe you start thinking in terms of adding a . . . baboon to your collection."

Zack Castriota snorted. "Do we

look like a couple of trophy hunters?"

"Like I say, you never know. Not that I could stop you if you were. You have the authorization to prowl around in the ruins. What is it you do want?" He added grudgingly, "Just possibly I can help out."

Zack went into his prepared story. "We're looking for a lost Rembrandt. It was first thought that during the looting somebody swiped it and got it over to the mainland. But it hasn't turned up, and we're beginning to suspect that it never left the island. In fact, we have reason to believe that some down-and-out pseudo-artist, down in Greenwich Village, stole it and then was either killed or burned out of his apartment house himself. We think it might still be in that house and possibly recoverable."

"Rembrandt?"

"A Dutch painter whose works go as high as a million a throw," Paul said, fitting into the story.

Williams whistled. "Well, I don't know how I could help you in this case."

Zack said, "Could we get a floater around here?"

The police guard said unhappily, "It's possible, but I wouldn't recommend it. Make you too conspicuous."

"Why not? We've got to get all the way down to Washington Square."

"Because I can't let you have an

armored police vehicle, and the ordinary civilian ones weren't meant for shedding bullets."

Zack and Paul looked at him. He said patiently, "Some of the baboons carry high-powered sport rifles. I've known a few to carry elephant guns. They'll punch a hole right through a floater."

Zack said plaintively, "Why should they want to bother someone like us?"

"Various reasons. On the off-chance you might be in possession of something worth plundering — even a box lunch, for instance. Or possibly just because they're goosed-off at the type of citizen who can afford to rent a floater."

Zack sighed. "Well, we'll just have to risk it," he said. "We can't walk all the way down to what was once Greenwich Village."

"It's your neck, hombre," the policeman said. "Here, follow me. Sorry I can't let you have a police vehicle."

As they progressed down the ruins of Fifth Avenue toward Madison Square, Zack Castriota manually controlling the air cushion vehicle, Paul Kosloff looked at the other from the side of his eyes.

"Wasn't that a pretty complicated fling to give that cop? We didn't have to tell him anything, did we?"

Zack chuckled, steering expertly around a jammed up group of crash-

ed and abandoned cars and trucks.

"You babe in the woods," he said. "When Dempsey Harrison told you we were now the Naked Society, he wasn't just whistlin' Dixie. I'll bet you didn't even know that if the IABI wants to they can, without coming within a thousand miles of you, put a bug in your wrist teevee phone without you knowing anything about it. They can monitor not only everything you say or receive in your phone conversations, but all the talk and other sounds that goes on in your vicinity. They can do this to everybody in the United States of the Americas who wears a teevee wrist phone, if and when they wish."

Paul Kosloff stared down at his in consternation. "They can?"

"Yes. And, of course, it is illegal not to wear your teevee phone. But that's just the beginning. We can bug rooms right through a wall. We can read conversations going on in a room by the vibrations on the windows. We can listen in on a conversation going on in the open, half a mile away. Oh, you'd be amazed how we snoopers can snoop these days, hombre."

"Well, what's that got to do with you giving that cop a complicated fling about looking for a Rembrandt?"

"Suppose the bad guys were stationed at some window, a couple of blocks or so from the vacuum-tube terminal, monitoring the con-

versation of everybody who came out? It could be done. That many persons don't come to Manhattan. Suppose I had flashed my buzzer and requisitioned an armored police floater from that Williams fellow. Can you see how their defenses would have gone up?"

Paul growled, "You seem to get awfully romantic. All we're looking for is two men, one of whom at least seems to be a Rumanian. To hear you talk, you'd think they had an apparatus on this island big enough to invade the country."

"Not that big," Zack said, again avoiding a pile of rubble in the street. "However, those two are not alone. They're hatchmen, triggermen, taking their orders from someone else."

They rode in silence for a time, at Madison Square Park turning down to Union Square.

Paul made a gesture of disgust at the ruins of the city, as they progressed. "There's an example of what I was telling you about. The cities of the old days. Look at those buildings. A restaurant where you could buy inadequate food at inflated prices. A clothing store, next to another clothing store, where you could buy the same things. A liquor store. Another restaurant, a movie house where you could sit with thousands of others, exchanging colds and other contagion, a food store, a stationery store, another clothing

store, women's hats, a drugstore, a newsstand. Cross the street and start all over again. A clothing store, a restaurant . . ."

"All right, all right," Zack said. "I get it. The means of distribution in the old days were antiquated."

"And there was another thing, I didn't mention before. These supercities you brought up. Boswash, Sansan and Chipitts and so forth. They were to be located in parts of the country we couldn't afford to turn over to urbanization. We needed the land. Back during the middle of the century, literally millions of acres of land were yearly being converted into suburbs or expressways to serve them. Land that we needed for grain, fruit, graze. Obviously, it makes more sense to build your homes on land that is impractical for agriculture. Up in the mountains, out on the deserts, along the seashore of Baja California, along the Keys of Florida, up in Canada for those who like that climate, all over New Mexico and Arizona for those who like that. With transportation what it is now, why not? Even that far back there were many New York businessmen who lived in Florida and commuted. Now it makes sense to live on a Caribbean island, or in South America, and either handle your business by teevee phone, or, when necessary, you can be lobbed up to any place in the nation in a matter of minutes."

Something went *ping* and caroomed off the front of their floater.

Zack blinked and speeded up.

"Zoraster," he complained. "That guy Williams wasn't kidding. They take a shot at you here for just no reason at all. Happily, that wasn't much of a caliber."

"I heard the shot," Paul said, looking back over his shoulder. "Sounded like a twenty-two."

From Union Square, they turned down Broadway. These wider streets weren't impossibly bad, though it would have been difficult to have proceeded in a wheeled vehicle. As it was, they could easily go over much of the rubble, or, if the blockage was bad, up on the sidewalk.

Zack Castriota shook his head. "It must have been something," he said. "It's difficult to imagine."

Paul Kosloff nodded agreement. "Everything seemed to culminate at once, so I understand. City government fell apart, overnight; police, fire fighting, garbage disposal — everything. At the same time the, slum element took to the streets *en masse*. And, suddenly, everybody who could leave decided to leave. Everybody, finally even the looters and criminal element."

Zack said, "I understand they're cleaning up some of the outlying areas."

"That's right. But not Manhattan. Too big a project. They can

come down the river, far into what they used to call the Bronx. And they can come in from Long Island. But it's one hell of a job and I doubt that the land being reclaimed for parks, for agriculture, for new pseudo-cities, is really worth the fantastic price and effort."

A spiderweb suddenly appeared on one of the side windows and both of them involuntarily ducked. Neither heard the sound of the shot.

"That one must have been a Noiseless," Zack growled as he zig-zagged a little.

Paul said, "You know what's happening?"

Zack looked at him. "Damn right I know what's happening, *hombre*. We're getting shot at."

"Yes, but you know why? They think we're hunters. Everybody armed takes a shot at us, just for luck."

"Oh, wizard. We should be flying a white flag, or something."

At West Third Street they turned right.

Paul said, "Do you know where we're going?"

"More or less." Zack pulled a street map from an inner pocket and handed it to his companion. "This is the area that used to be an art colony and hangout of crackpots in general. Something like the Via Margutta in Rome or the Left Bank of Paris. We're looking for McDougal street." He avoided a jumble of crashed automobiles, then

jabbed at the map with an index finger. "We're coming down here. Try to locate us."

Paul studied the map in some despair. "The appearance of this town has somewhat altered."

"From what I understand, four streets out of five can't even be found."

"It looks as though it's been bombed."

Zack looked over at him. "Have you ever seen a bombed city?"

"No," Paul grumbled, trying to decipher the map. "But it still looks as though it's been bombed. I guess there was some bombing at that, particularly toward the end when the troops and National Guard were brought in."

"It ought to be in here some where."

Paul said suddenly, "Turn left here — I think."

"Yeah, there's an old sign. McDougal street. Now all we have to do is find the house where this hombre lives."

"You know him?" •

"No. His name is Mark Martino. He's been in here for years. His cover is being an off-beat musical composer. He's supposed to be in revolt against People's Capitalism and the Ultra-welfare State."

"What number house?"

Zack told him.

Paul said, "There's a building in comparatively good shape, up

ahead. That might be it. Most of this street is sheer rubble."

They decided it was the former apartment house for which they were looking and left the floater at the curb.

As they headed for the entry, which was partially caved in, Paul looked back at their means of transportation apprehensively. "Can we just leave it there?"

Zack laughed at him. "We can't take it with us."

"What chance is there that it'll still be here when we come back?"

"Damned if I know, but it sounds remote. From here on in, we're in the hands of Mark Martino. Maybe he'll have some ideas of how we get back to the mainland."

"I'm beginning to wonder if it's a matter of if we get back to the mainland."

"I hate a pessimist."

They moved into the building and stared about. It was about halfway in ruin. There had been some fire and there had' obviously been a lot of purely senseless vandalism. There had been a good deal of pilferage, even for such items as fire wood. There had evidently been some combat as well, evidence of bullet holes, including those of rapidfire weapons of fairly high caliber and indications of the explosion of at least two or three demolition grenades.

Zack grunted. "And this is one of the better preserved buildings."

Paul said, "They hushed it up somewhat, but evidently toward the end the fighting was pretty bad. I don't know what they had in mind, but the government sent National Guard and regular troops in with tanks and so forth. Everybody was shooting at everybody indiscriminately. It stopped making any sense at all, but there was simply no way of turning it off, for, oh, a couple of weeks."

Zack looked at him sarcastically. "You Americans are quite a people, especially in view of all the talking you do about being peace loving."

Paul looked about, trying to find a staircase. "I still think you've got a touch of anti-Americanism."

A voice called dangerously, "All right, chum-pals, put your arms out to the sides."

They put their arms out to the sides and looked up.

Above them, leaning nonchalantly on a broken bannister, was a character who could have passed amazingly for the movie idol of yesteryear, Robert Taylor. Possibly Robert Taylor in that part he once played, *Billy the Kid*, since right now he was cradling a sawed-off shotgun in his hands, as though affectionately.

He said, gently as gently could be, "You were looking for someone undoubtedly?"

Zack said, "Are you Mark Martino?"

"Now one of us knows who the other is. Let's keep going."

"My name is Castriota. I am of the Amsterdam Museum of Fine Arts. This is my colleague, Doctor Paul."

"So far, chum-pal, you have told me nothing. Make your fling a bit more informative. This toy has a hair trigger."

"You are very touchy, Herr Martino."

"I am still alive, chum-pal. Start talking faster. You've invaded my home. You know the old bit, my castle. Start telling me why."

"We have a mutual friend . . ."

"It seems unlikely, but keep going and keep your arms further out from your sides."

"Ben MacFarlane suggested I see you."

The man above nodded. "I know MacFarlane."

"And I am an old friend of Charles Bellows."

Something passed over the other's face. "That's too bad, then."

"How do you mean? We studied together in Paris in the old days."

The gun was suddenly lowered to half mast.

"Come on up," the other said. "A baboon, or hunter, or somebody got to Chuck a few weeks ago. He's dead. Come on up. Excuse the hospitality."

They mounted the stairs, continuing up until the sixth floor, the highest floor where there were still

intact apartments. The building evidently went quite a ways back in time and had never been modernized; there was no identity screen on the door. Their host pushed it open and gestured for them to enter.

They went on through into a large and lavishly furnished living room. There was even wall-to-wall carpeting.

Mark Martino closed the door behind them and said, "Sorry to put you through all that gobblygook out there. But I have to maintain my cover. I assume you're Generale Castriota."

Zack nodded and held out his hand to shake. "That's right," he said.

The other shook and leaned his sawed-off shotgun up against the wall. He took in Paul Kosloff.

"I thought you were coming alone. Who's this?"

"Professor Kosloff," Zack said.

"*Professor?* You mean he's not even a pro? You want to blow my cover here bringing around every Tom, Dick and . . ."

"The name's Paul," Paul said mildly. "And I didn't particularly want to come. I was drafted."

Zack said, "I might need him for this operation. He speaks Rumanian — and practically every other Eastern European language." He was looking around the apartment, peeking through various doors. "No chance of this place being bugged?"

Mark Martino, still scowling, went over to an old-fashioned bar. "If it is, they've got some new developments the IABI doesn't know about. I've got every type of mop known and every day I double check. You can talk openly now that we're inside. Just what is this mysterious operation? What'll you have to drink?"

Paul said, "What're you pushing?"

Zack Castriota said, looking around at the furnishings, "You don't seem to do so badly."

Mark Martino said, "How about some Twenty Year Old Metaxa? That is, twenty years old when it was bottled. Brandy doesn't age in the bottle."

"Wizard!" Castriota said, sinking into a comfort chair.

Paul Kosloff had never even heard of the Greek brandy, but he nodded.

As Mark poured the drinks, he gestured at the room's fancy furnishings and answered Zack's earlier comment. "Part of the protective coloring. Everybody on the island loots. If you didn't, the others would think something was wrong. We spend a considerable portion of our time scrabbling around the wreckage. It gives me an excuse for prying all over the island. From time to time, I bring home a load of lush, or books, or groceries; makes it look authentic."

He handed the drinks around and

settled into what was obviously his own favorite comfort chair, though obviously, too, it couldn't have been hooked up with an auto-bar built into the arm rest and such facilities as were featured on the mainland. He had to adjust the holster that swung on his right hip.

Paul said, in the way of making conversation, "That looks like an old-fashioned six-shooter."

The other still evidently wasn't any too pleased at Paul Kosloff being brought to his hide-away. He patted the butt of the gun and said sourly, "It is, and possibly one of the most practical handguns ever devised. The trouble with your modern automatics, recoilless, noiseless, and all the rest of it, is that the more complicated a weapon gets the more things can go wrong with it when you're in action. And when a thing can go wrong, it usually manages to. There's practically nothing that can go wrong with a single action six-shooter, but if it does I can repair it myself with my penknife and possibly a little baling wire. Held by the barrel, it also makes a good club or hammer. And it's the fastest draw ever devised. But, of course, you wouldn't know about such things, *Professor*."

Paul Kosloff's .38 Noiseless was magically in his hand. It coughed quietly, and he flicked it slightly, and it was back beneath his left shoulder again. It had been in sight

only long enough to have appeared a blur.

"Hey!" Mark Martino blurted.

Zack Castriota chortled softly. "I didn't know your Olympic pistol teams practiced the quick draw," he said.

The underground agent was looking blankly in the direction Paul had fired.

"Hey!" he said again, in indignation. "That's my old Marilyn Monroe calendar, a collector's item. You've ruined the tip of her left breast." He glared at his unwelcome guest. "Don't try to tell me you aimed at that!"

Zack laughed aloud. "This is a professor with a difference. Wanta see him ruin the right one?"

"No, dammit!" However, Martino looked at Paul with new respect.

He said, "All right, all right. What's this all about?" He turned his eyes to Castriota. "Why wouldn't they tell me on the sealed beam phone why you were coming? And why'd they send a foreign agent, and, above all, why a language professor?"

Zack finished his drink and leaned forward. "They didn't tell you on the teevee phone because somewhere along the line it might have been tapped. They sent me because there's no material on me in your computer data banks. I brought Professor Kosloff on my own without reporting, so there's nothing in

the data banks suggesting that he's involved."

He got up, went over to the bar and poured himself another heavy slug. "This stuff is priceless." He turned back and made a motion of toast to Mark Martino. He said, "It looks as though someone has figured out a method of tapping your National Data Center, even the highest priority files."

Mark Martino stared. "Tap it? Are you completely around the bend? How?"

"Nobody knows."

"But, how do you mean? They've infiltrated the center at Denver?"

The Common Europe man shook his head. "They didn't have to. From a distance. Electronically. At least, so we suspect. But that's not the worst part of it, Martino. If they can read the data, evidently it's just a matter of time before they figure out a way of wiping it. I leave it to your imagination what would happen to this country if your computer data banks were wiped clean."

The IABI agent didn't have to dwell on it very long. "Wow," he said. And then, "Where do I come in?"

Zack Castriota nodded and returned to his chair with his fresh drink. "Mr. Martino, in this modern world of our there're precious few places for a group of criminals, espionage agents, saboteurs and

such to hide out. Individuals, yes. A single criminal can sometimes figure out some method of beating the rap, covering his tracks, going to ground. But when you get a sizeable operation there are prime difficulties. With computer control of crime, everybody in the country is on tap in an instant. The occupant of every home, every apartment, every hotel or motel room, is known by the computers. A foreign agent can have some advantage in not wearing an American teevee phone, but it also puts him at considerable disadvantage since survival in the Ultra-welfare State becomes practically impossible without a standard Universal Credit Card, complete with your registered thumbprint and all the information involved that must be on record in the computer files."

Mark Martino nodded. "I see what you've built up to. You suspect that your data bank saboteurs have a base of operations here on Manhattan."

Zack nodded. "More than suspect. We know that at least one of them is here, or was this morning. You see, I managed to plant a bug on him."

"Wizard! Where is he?"

"Let me have that map, Paul," Castriota said, coming to his feet.

He spread the map out on the arm of Martino's comfort chair and indicated a tiny mark. "He moves

about a bit, but this is the vicinity. Near Union Square."

"He moves about a bit? How much?"

"Not very much. He sticks within a fairly small area."

The darkly handsome IABI agent thought about it. "That area's in rubble. Practically nothing left standing in any shape at all. It used to be one of the main shopping sections and it was looted and re-looted and fought over as long as the fighting went on. How many of them are there?"

"We don't know. We know of at least two, but they're heavies, not the type of agent that would be up on the sophisticated equipment that must be involved. So there's at least three. For all we know, there may be thirty."

Martino scowled down at the map and shook his head. "If there was anything like that number, I'd know about it. In fact, I should know about it if there were three real strangers on the island."

Paul said. "What do you mean by real strangers?"

Mark Martino said, still scowling in thought, "There's a grapevine. We seldom get new recruits here in our happy little community. When we do, we like to know about them soonest. They're usually bad news."

"How's that?" Zack said.

"We old hands are shrinking in number, not increasing. The originals, left over from the riot days,

die off or go back to the mainland. The only newcomers are usually fugitives from justice, tough characters on the run, that type."

Paul snorted. "The impression I got was that everybody on this island was a tough character."

The other shook his head impatiently. "Don't read into the baboons more than is there. Most of them wouldn't be here if they could avoid it. And the only way to survive is to maintain a certain unwritten law respecting each other's rights. If they were all as tough and bloodthirsty as some outsiders think, there'd be no one at all left on the island alive. So, if somebody comes along that's a little too rugged for the rest of us, we combine and eliminate him for the sake of the community as a whole."

Paul Kosloff shook his head. "What a place to live."

"Well, don't think I chose it, hombre," Martino said defensively. "The IABI had to have somebody present, and I got the damned short straw. Besides, there's a bonus connected with serving here."

He stood up and paced the room, in thought. Finally he turned to Zack Castriota and said, "Why not bring in a sizeable force and bomb the area?"

The Common Europe operative shook his head. "They might have time to destroy their equipment.

Our technicians are sweating blood wanting a look at that equipment. That's why I'm here, to find out definitely where they are and how to get to them before they get their wind up. Very delicate operation. Then we'll land on them like an avalanche."

"Yeah, that obviously makes sense," Martino said lowly. "Just a minute."

He went to a back window and pulled free a piece of heavy cardboard that was making do as a replacement of a broken window pane. He picked up an object the others couldn't make out from a nearby table and made a flowing motion.

He stuck his head to the broken window and yelled, "Hey, Pete! Repeat!"

Paul and Zack exchanged glances, blankly.

Mark Martino was replacing the cardboard. He then began to toss the object he held back to the table.

"What's that?" Zack said.

"Slingshot."

"A what?"

"I think you call them catapults over on the Continent," the other said, holding it up. He grinned and said, "*Le plus change, le plus meme chose*, or however you say it."

Both Kosloff and Castriota winced at the accent and the mutilated quotation.

"It makes a handy signalling de-

vice when you don't have a teevee phone," Martino explained.

"Signal who?" Zack said.

But already there was a scampering of feet on the stairs outside.

"My McDougal Street Irregulars," Mark said laconically.

The door burst open, and two filthy pre-teenagers were there. Filthy, that is, so far as body cleanliness was concerned. Their clothing was of the finest and newest quality, albeit on the colorful side. It came to Paul Kosloff that on this island probably every resident made a practice of ignoring the need to do laundry, and simply looted new clothing when it was required.

"Yessir, Senor Martino," one of the two blurted.

Mark Martino made a gesture of vague introduction. "Mister Castriota, Mr. Kosloff, these are Pete and Repeat — don't ask me which is which — my men Friday and Saturday. So far as I know, probably the only native-born citizens of the Commonwealth of Manhattan since its inception and two close friends."

He had clapped one of them on the shoulder as he spoke. They were obviously twins, and obviously adored him.

Zack Castriota was scowling unhappily.

Mark Martino turned back to him. "They're uneducated, at least in the manner in which we think

of education, so if you watch yourself you can say just about anything in full, ah, security. You see, occasionally I can do little chores for the community here. Like bringing some special medicine from the mainland on my trips to sell my songs and so forth. The boys are grateful for my helping their mother a few months ago. I suppose I'm the nearest thing to a doctor we have on this end of the island now."

He turned to the two youngsters who were staring up at him worshipfully.

He said, "Boys, there are some strangers around that I want to know more about. Now what I want you to do is pass the word. Each of you will tell two others to look out for these strangers, or, if they've already seen them, to report to me. And each person you tell will tell two others to look out for these strangers, and so on. I want the word to go all around the island as soon as possible. The strangers will probably dress a little differently than we do, they might speak some strange language . . ."

"What's a strange language?" the first lad said apologetically.

"They might talk differently than we do, so you can't understand them. And . . ." Mark Martino cleared his throat. "They might be cleaner than most of us are. Now do you know where the big movie theatre was, there on Broadway and 14th?"

"The one with the girl on the poster with the big ass?" the second one said earnestly.

"That's the one. Now, most likely, these strangers are somewhere in that vicinity." He clapped them both on the shoulders again. "I want to know how many of them there are, and just where they're staying. Now get going, boys." He hesitated, then added, "And remember, these men are probably very dangerous . . ."

"Nothing can happen to them," Zack said quickly.

"Yes," Martino said very emphatically. "Pass the word that nothing must happen to them." He added, "Not yet."

"Yessir, Senor Martino," they blurted in unison. They spun and were gone in a clatter.

"Right out of Conan Doyle," Paul Kosloff grunted. "McDougal Street Irregulars, yet."

Mark Martino grinned at him, and the corners of his mouth turned down. "Bet you dollars to doughnuts we get results," he said.

"The same old game," Zack Castriota said, "down through the ages. The john-fuzz of today depends on stool pigeons as it has since the days of Caesar."

Mark Martino said, "We'll have a wait. Let's have another drink and . . ." He had started for his little bar, but he came to a sudden halt, and his face went empty.

"What's the matter?" Paul said.

Mark Martino said very slowly, "I know where they're holed up."

"Where, in the name of the holy jumping Zoroaster?" Zack said, leaning forward.

"In Gimbel's basement."

## V

"Where?" Castriota scowled. "In the former bombshelter in the big Macy-Gimbel department store, just off Union Square. And I know how they've been getting in and out, too." Martino, excited, slugged his right fist into the palm of his left hand. "And why nobody's seen them, so far."

Paul and Zack leaned forward.

But their host took time out to mix fresh drinks and hand them around.

Then he said, "You can see their problem. They need space for their equipment and for themselves, but they can't afford to be spotted, not even by baboons. Too much of a risk that the word would get to the police. They probably know I'm here, too, if they can tap the computer data banks pertaining to the Inter-American Bureau of Investigation. So they want to avoid my learning about them."

"I'm surprised they haven't finished you off, if they know you're here," Paul said.

The undercover man shook his head. "That would just result in more IABI agents being sent, and

they'd start snooping around trying to find the killer. No, it's better for them to just avoid me."

"This Gimbel's basement bit," Zack said urgently.

Mark turned his eyes to the Common Europe man. "When Gimbels and Macy's amalgamated, they became the single biggest privately owned store in the world. The new building had a gigantic bombshelter in the deepest basement. Actually, two bombshelters, one for the public and suited for mass occupancy and one for the executives of the store. It was said to be one of the most swank in the country, completely equipped. Even portable generators for electricity."

"How did you learn about it?"

"Ran into an article, quite by accident, in a magazine in the ruins of the public library. So I thought I'd try and find it, in the belief that there might be a lot of lootable food and so forth. But I went about it the wrong way, trying to get through the rubble up above. I never did make it."

"You said you knew how they were getting in," Zack said.

"I think I do. Somehow, they've tunneled in from the subway." He was excited again and pointed a finger at Zack Castriota. "Don't you see? The subway tubes are empty. The baboons seldom go down into them. No reason to, except sometimes for water. In some places springs or underground

streams have broken through the subway walls and some of the baboons use them for water. At any rate, somehow they tunneled in and found the abandoned bomb-shelter. Beds, food, water, lots of space and snug as a bug. And nobody in the vicinity, baboons, hunters, research people such as you pretend to be, ever see them. They probably enter the subway from as much as a mile away and, using flashlights, walk down to the Union Square area and enter there."

"Sounds possible," Zack nodded.

A voice shouted up from below. Mark Martino scooped up his shotgun and made his way to the door. "Just a minute," he said over his shoulder, and left.

Zack said to Paul, "What do you think?"

"Darned if I know."

Mark re-entered with a stranger, a small shifty-eyed little wretch, dirty of face and hands but attired in impeccable sport tweeds, the effect of which were somewhat spoiled by twin bandoliers of cartridges he had criss-crossed on his chest, Pancho Villa style. He carried a beautiful carbine.

Mark Martino went through very formal introductions and then offered the newcomer a drink. Evidently, in baboon society the niceties were observed.

The newcomer, Joe by name, re-

fused a seat. He said, "That kid you call Repeat. He told me you was interested in knowing like if any strangers was around." His eyes shifted to the bar. "You wouldn't have a spare bottle of guzzle, would you, Martino?"

"Sure, sure, any time, Joe. Take your pick. I ran into a burned out liquor store over on the square the other day. Everything already gone up above, of course. But I managed to get into the cellar. Lush all over the place."

"Thanks," Joe said. "I know the store. Never thought about the cellar, though." A full bottle of bourbon was selected from the bar and he tucked it under his arm. "Anyway, me and this mopsy I'm living with, we get our cooking water down into the subway . . ."

Mark Martino looked over at Zack and Paul and lifted his eyebrows and nodded an I-told-you-so.

". . . and three days ago I was down getting a bucketful, see? And guess what's coming down the track. Four guys. Two of them got lights and are going along like guards. The other two's got some big hunk of equipment. Wouldn't have the vaguest idea what it was they'd looted, but they was treating it careful."

"Where'd they go?" Zack said.

Joe said importantly, "I guess I could've nailed the whole gang, but I figured, why? I kind of sunk back into a little niche like in the wall and kept quiet. You know

where they went, carrying that god-damned chunk of machinery, or whatever it was? Into that there entrance into the big store."

Mark looked at Zack and said, "There used to be a subway entrance in the basement of the Macy-Gimbel's store so that the customers didn't have to go onto the street at all."

Joe said, "Hell, there's nothing worth anything in there. And it's dangerous. Dark as pitch, and you stumble over something and get a cave-in on your head. Everything worth gloaming out of that old ruin went years ago."

Mark asked him a few more questions, but they'd already heard all he really had to tell. Mark thanked him profusely, clapped him in friendly fashion on the shoulder, insisted he take another bottle of the scrounged bourbon, and saw him to the door and the stairway.

When he came back, he growled, "Joe, and various others, wouldn't mind taking over this apartment. Most of them are too damned lazy to keep a place up. They stay in a former hotel or apartment until the place gets too filthy even for them and then find another. I've got the most comfortable place on Manhattan."

He grunted amusement. "That's why I make anybody who comes here shout out before starting up. If I heard somebody on the stairs who

hasn't called out his identity, I fire a few rounds down the stairway at random. Very effective."

Zack said, "You seem to have guessed right, Martino."

The other nodded and resumed his seat. "Now what?"

"We still haven't pinpointed them adequately, and we don't know how many are there. And we still don't know how to get in at them without giving them time to destroy the equipment. We need more information."

"Oh, wizard. How do you think we're going to get it, just go up and knock on the door?"

Paul Kosloff said to Zack, "What you were saying about, ah, bugs being so sophisticated these days. I wonder if . . ."

Mark said impatiently, "There's a thousand tons of rubble above that bomb shelter. There's no way of getting a bug in."

"Yeah," Zack growled, deep in thought.

Paul said very slowly, "I have a suggestion I hesitate to make."

They both looked at him.

He said, "Those two kids. They've been baboons all their lives?"

"What of it?" Mark Martino scowled.

"Living in the ruins, scuttling around avoiding hunters, burrowing in and around the subways, the sewers, the cellars — all their lives."

They were looking at him closely.

"If anybody in the world could snake into that bombshelter undetected and plant a bug, one of those kids could."

Mark said, "And if they caught him?"

Paul took a breath and nodded. "That's why I hesitated. But if they caught him, he's a twelve-year-old kid pilfering in the ruins of a department store."

Zack shook his head. "If they caught him, they'd shoot him. They'd have to, because they'd be afraid he'd give them away. Besides, why not shoot him? He's only a baboon. It's not even particularly against the law."

But Martino was on his feet again, pacing and slugging his left palm with his fist.

"He wouldn't have to get all the way in," he said in agitation. "I've got a little bug in the other room that's a doozy. Directional. If he can get to within a hundred yards of them and point it in their direction, we'd have it made."

**M**ark Martino drove the floater, in view of his better knowledge of the layout of the ruined city. His "Irregular," Repeat, had been left behind, both because of lack of room in the four-place vehicle and because they wished to keep their number at a minimum. It would have been possible to re-

cruit a few others of the baboons of the vicinity that Mark was on good terms with, but they didn't want manpower.

He avoided Broadway and kept to back streets, pulling up eventually across the square from the ruined department store which was their destination.

They piled from the car and the IABI agent took from the back his shotgun and a shoulder bag of equipment.

He said, "There's a subway entrance over here."

They followed him silently, little Pete, Paul Kosloff and Zack Castriota, in line, down the stairs.

As it grew darker, he pulled four sets of goggles from the carrying case and handed them around. "Infra-red," he said, bringing, as well, a heavy flashlight from the bag. They donned the glasses, and the invisible light guided their way. The grimy little Pete was fascinated by the flashlight magic and continued to put his glasses off and on, checking.

"I've never been in here," Martino muttered, "but there shouldn't be any reason we couldn't get through to the store entry."

"Trouble is," Zack growled, "we don't know what we'll find when we get there."

The subway tube was in comparatively good repair, and they were able to stumble along it without overmuch trouble. They came, even-

tually, to an alcove, a room probably once used by subway maintenance men.

Mark Martino came to a halt and considered. He said, "This is probably it. I doubt if we can all get much closer without running the chance of being spotted. Okay?"

Zack said, "You're the boss."

Mark looked down at the boy, and made an unhappy face. He said, "All right, Pete. Possibly your country hasn't done too well by you and hasn't even done much in the way of trying. But you are now Number One Man on the firing line." He handed the boy a smaller flashlight. "Keep away from the regular light as much as you can." He handed him a small metallic object disguised as an automatic pencil. "Get as close as possible and plant this with the point aiming in their direction. Then get out and back to us as quick as you can."

"Yes, Senor Martino." The boy was anxious to please and missed seeing the IABI agent close his eyes in pain.

When he had gone, the three of them looked after him for a long moment. Paul shook his head. He was sorry he had made the suggestion.

Castriota breathed, "Aiii. We utilize children to fight our senseless wars."

Mark Martino unslung his shoulder bag and from it took a

box-like instrument that looked like nothing so much as a radio of the twenties, complete with two sets of earphones and various dials.

The three of them squatted about it.

Martino said, "I've known him since he could hardly walk."

He put on one set of the earphones and began fiddling with the dials. Once or twice he flinched, evidently as some raucous sound assailed his eardrums.

Finally, he pulled the earphones away and handed them to Paul Kosloff. "You're the linguist."

Zack Castriota took up the other set. "I don't know Rumanian," he muttered, "but I have several other languages."

They had a full half-hour wait.

Suddenly, Paul Kosloff reacted. "Got something," he said.

"Yeah, I heard that," Zack said, pulling one earphone free, the better to communicate. "What was it?"

"Wasn't clear enough. There, something else is coming through. Two voices. One's swearing."

"What language?" Martino said. "Rumanian?"

"No. I'm not sure. Just monosyllables. Bulgarian, perhaps, or Serbo-Croat. Possibly Ukrainian."

"I thought they were supposed to be Rumanians," Martino growled. There was probably no particular reason to, but all spoke in whispers.

Zack Castriota said to him, "Most Balkans speak several languages. Such a hodgepodge of nationalities there calls for it."

Paul said, "Shhh. Something's coming through. I think the boy's got nearer."

It was an agony of strain. What words he was able to pick up were meaningless. Affirmations and negatives, bits of profanity, disconnected sentences or ejaculations.

Zack said, "What the hell're they up to?"

Paul Kosloff shook his head. "They could be doing anything from eating lunch to playing a game of poker."

Mark Martino said, "Patience, hombres. You didn't think we could just tune in like this and they'd go into a long discussion of all their innermost business, did you?" He grunted sourness. "We could spend a week here and learn absolutely nothing."

"Shhh," Paul said. "So far, I make out four of them. There's at least four."

"Joe told us that much," Mark murmured.

"It's a little clearer," Zack said. "That kid must be edging closer."

"Little cloddy better watch himself," Mark said unhappily.

Zack said, "One of them just said something about lifting something."

"What language?" Mark said.

"Sounded like Italian," Zack

said, scowling. "I thought those bastards were Rumanian."

"It was Italian," Paul said. "They're all multi-lingual. Two of them, I think, are Rumanians, one an Italian and one either a Bulgarian or a Ukrainian, and they switch languages around. Listen . . ."

Another agony of time passed. Paul said finally, slowly, "You know what? They're working at something. They aren't sitting around eating or playing cards or killing time, they're doing something."

"I think you're right," Zack growled.

"I wish the hell that kid'd plant the damn bug some place pointed in their direction and get on back here," Mark muttered. He fondled his shotgun and added slowly, "I have half a mind to go get him."

Zack looked at the undercover man in disgust. "Then you have half a mind, period," he said. "You'd blow the whole thing."

"We had no right to send him in there. Kid can't be more than eleven years old."

"So far, he's doing a wizard of a job. When this is over, I'm going to make a point of getting him and his brother over to the mainland for a normal life, school and all."

Mark said, "Already tried. They don't want to go. This is their world. They don't know any other."

"Shhh," Paul said again. "One of them just said something about an *unterseeboot*."

"*Untersee* . . . what?" Mark Martino demanded.

"Means submarine in German, but they use the same term in some parts of the Balkans."

"Submarine! Holy jumping Zo-roaster! You don't think . . ."

"Listen."

After a moment, Paul Kosloff pulled the headset from his ears and looked at them. "You know what they're doing?"

They stared back at him.

"They're pulling out."

"What'd you mean?" Zack Castriota snapped.

"They keep mentioning the others. Others who have already gone. There's only four of them left. They're wrapping it up. They're pulling out."

The Common Europe agent pulled his own earset completely from his head and stared down at the floor. He licked his lower lip. "Damn!"

Mark Martino said to him quickly, "How soon can you ring in the boys?"

"No time. It's not set up yet."

The headset which Paul Kosloff held in his hands squawked louder than usual. He rammed one of the receivers back against an ear. His face went empty.

"They've got Petel!"

Mark Martino was on his feet.

"Come on!" he said. "We're going in."

They scrambled after him. On a run, it was difficult for the three to keep from stumbling along the tracks, the infrared light in Martino's hands being inadequate for them all. After what seemed an age of time, they reached a station platform. The IABI agent started up an iron ladder to its side.

Zack yelled, "Look out," and a gun in his hand blasted past Paul Kosloff's ear.

Paul couldn't make out what the target had been. He hurried up after Martino onto the station platform.

"Must be this way," Martino barked. "Come on."

Zack was immediately behind them.

There was a confusion of wreckage now. This must have formerly been the entry to the store from the subway proper. All was broken glass, brick, chunks of cement block, wrecked and sometimes burned furniture and fittings. They stumbled as they progressed. They could hear other stumbling of feet, other confusion of getting through this impossible debris.

Mark Martino yelled, implausibly, "Halt!" He kept scrambling forward.

Suddenly there was a glare of light before them — natural light flooding from a large metal door-



way. Paul Kosloff began to tear his infrared goggles from his face.

In the door loomed a figure, a stubby automatic with a large, round cartridge drum in hands. The gun blasted, the noise roaring, echoing, re-echoing in the confined quarters.

Mark Martino yelled agony and pitched forward.

To this point, Paul Kosloff had left his weapon in its shoulder holster, the better to utilize both hands in progressing over the wreckage and rubble. Now he flung himself down and to the right, trying unsuccessfully to draw at the same time. Behind him, he heard a scream of anger from Zack Castriota and two quick shots.

The submachinegun blared its hate again, plowing up glass and fragments of cement from the pile behind which Paul Kosloff had rolled. He was pinned down, afraid to rise enough to get his own gun out. Evidently, Zack had also taken cover somewhere to the rear.

Unbelievably, Mark Martino brought himself to a sitting position. His face was the chalk of death, but his left hand went out and fumbled up the shotgun. Evidently, his right arm was completely useless. He braced the butt of the gun against his torn midsection. Another burst hit him, and he fell off to one side.

But he had diverted attention from Paul Kosloff for a second.

The .38 Noiseless coughed once, twice, and the gunman in the doorway collapsed forward, silently, the automatic spilling to the rubble-strewn floor before him.

Zack was past Paul Kosloff on a run, bent low, the way a man runs in combat, presenting as small a target as possible. He had an automatic in his right hand, extended forward, ready for fire.

Another figure loomed in the doorway. Evidently, this one was unarmed. He reached desperately for the submachinegun which had been dropped by his companion.

Zack Castriota's handgun was a full automatic, rather than a semi. Its chatter was machine-gun-like, as he let loose a burst of five or six shots. The newcomer crumbled. • "Come on!" the Common Europe agent yelled, dashing to and through the door, Paul Kosloff immediately behind.

The rooms beyond were obviously the bombshelter. After the complete confusion of the wreckage behind, the absolutely spick and span qualities here were like a slap in the face. The former executives of the Gimble-Macy ultra-department store had done themselves proud.

There was a blast of explosion, a flaring of flame, a heat wave of overpowering intensity. Zack Castriota and Paul Kosloff were bowled over and back.

Black had washed over Paul

Kosloff, but it was a momentary thing.

He heard a shot and seemingly received a sharp punch on his left shoulder. Instinctively, he fired back at something that moved, at what distance he didn't know. Fired, and fired again. Then the blackness washed over him once more.

When he came alive, a voice was saying weakly, "Paul. Hombre. Where are you?"

"Here," Paul said. "Over here."

"Listen," Zack's voice was fading fast. "One got away . . ." There was a long pause. "It's the one I planted the bug on, and he's wearing the same jerkin. Listen, Paul . . ."

Paul started crawling toward the sound of the voice. The other had become incoherent, was saying something about a message to his wife in Paris. It was pitch dark in the shelter now.

By the time he found the Common Europe agent, Zack Castriota was gone from this world.

Intuitively, he knew that little Pete was also gone.

Paul Kosloff brought his arm around weakly and brought his wrist near to his face. He activated his teevee wrist phone and said into it, weakly, "I want Dempsey Harrison, at the National Data Center, Denver."

A robot voice said, "Sorry, that is a Priority One number."

Paul took a labored breath and said, "Then give me his secretary."

"Sorry, that is a Priority Two Number, and you are not listed."

"All right, give me her secretary, or assistant, or whatever the hell."

The robot voice said, "It is an offense to use profanity on the phone. The fact will be entered on your dossier for future reference if the offense is repeated."

"Go get goosed, you mechanical bastard," Paul growled weakly.

The screen lit up, and a young face was there.

Paul Kosloff said, "I'm Professor Kosloff. Tell Miss Stebbins I want to talk to her."

"Yes, sir." Eyes were still wide even as her face faded.

Lisa Stebbins, the ultimate in redheaded attractiveness, and cool as ever, was there. She took in his face. "Professor Kosloff, you've been hurt!"

"You ain't just whistlin' Dixie, beautiful. Listen, first get a fix on me, and send somebody quickly. Second, let me talk to Harrison."

She looked at him strangely, but was obviously moving hands in businesslike activity. Her face faded, and Harrison appeared.

The bureaucrat's expression was first quizzical, then alarmed. "Professor!" he snapped.

Before Paul Kosloff passed out again, he said, "I just thought I'd let you know I'm available for that assignment."

TO BE CONTINUED

# IF ... and WHEN

by LESTER DEL REY

## Of Mice and Stars

Setting up a human colony on a world around some alien star does not seem too difficult an effort. We already know enough to be reasonably sure of finding habitable planets, and our engineering skill is advanced enough to be capable of reaching them within a few decades.

But the problem of making sure such a colony has a fair chance to survive has not been solved, either by science or in the works of science fiction. In fact, we can't be certain that civilized man has any certainty of surviving on Earth—even barring atomic destruction or cosmic catastrophe. We simply don't know enough about the real problems and complex relationships of life.

The science that deals with what goes on in the biosphere — the thin

layer of air, earth and sea where life is possible — is too new and too understaffed to have found out what constitutes a viable life colony. As a matter of fact, this science was not even considered in science fiction until the last fifteen years, and no story I remember has given it more than a token consideration.

The science is ecology. It is the study of the interrelationships of living things with one another and with their common environment. This is the science that could have prevented such blunders as introducing the rabbit to Australia and indiscriminate use of insecticides. It could have told us that the ruin of certain forest areas and the destruction of the beaver would lead to devastating floods in Ohio. And when we go into space, it is the only science which can tell us how to set up a complex of plant and animal life which will survive and enable our colonists to turn the new world into a real home for man.

Obviously, it should be a key science in our space program. So far, however, it is sadly neglected.

Late in 1967, there was a symposium on interstellar travel and colonization, following the Planetology meeting at the New York Academy of Science. This was meant as an interchange of views between space scientists and participating science-fiction writers, among whom were Murray Leinster, Frederik Pohl and myself. It was a valuable discus-

sion, but little dealt with the living environment that must be set up on a new planet; no one at the table was a qualified ecologist, though it meant to be a fair sampling of the major field of space science and technology.

Fortunately, the Ford Foundation seems to be aware of the need to expand the training program for ecologists and provide funds for more research. This year they are making grants of nearly four million dollars for this purpose. It should help — but it's only a tiny fraction of the funds spent for work in other sciences. And it can't begin to meet the needs for ecological work in the near future.

**E**ven on a planet very similar to Earth — one with suitable land, water resources and oxygen-rich atmosphere — the problems of providing a viable environment for a human colony are immense. It had been touched lightly in several novels of interstellar exploration, but it deserves — and hasn't had — the detailed scrutiny that science fiction has given other fields.

We are pretty certain that man can't depend on native life forms. They will not have evolved precisely along the chemical lines of Earth, if they happen to be formed from basically the same carbon compounds. They may be close, but will hardly offer either safe or adequate

food for men. So the colonists will have to bring along their own living environment.

There must be the obvious food plants and animals. Since conditions can't be predicted precisely, there will have to be sufficiently wide a variety to be sure of enough surviving. And behind these must be a large "backup" life-support of living things.

The soil must be maintained. That requires living forms that can fix nitrogen from the air, plus a host of other creatures to maintain a porous, viable soil. A typical specimen of Earth soil may hold 100,000,000 animals of more than one-celled complexity per acre of ground — insects, worms and other forms that exist within the first few inches of soil and keep it in growing condition.

There must be plants that break up rocks into soil. Others must put down networks of roots that will prevent the erosion of soil that led to the dustbowls on our plains when we tried to grow only food plants. And to fertilize the plants, there must be insects. For almost every plant and animal, there must also be forms of life that prey on them in balance. And above all, there must be scavengers that break down the dead life forms and turn the elements back into usable soil, or we'll soon be crowded out by the stalks and corpses of previous life.

Balmer and Wylie tried to cover this in *When Worlds Collide*, though the word "ecology" wasn't mentioned. But they made a big point of the fact that there would be no more lions or other predators. Any modern ecologist would know that doesn't work. The predators are as necessary to control the herds of herbivores that will result from the inevitable escaped animals as are the scavengers that control the dead forms. We've seen that, when the deer get out of control, lacking normal enemies.

It would be nice to take *everything* from Earth, perhaps — but no interstellar ship could carry even the seeds and eggs for that. So it has to be a limited ecological balance for our colonists. And the problem of guessing what can safely be omitted is one nobody can yet answer.

We don't know enough about the "balance of nature" on Earth itself yet. We've made gross mistakes in the past and have been paying for them heavily. Many of these mistakes have been in introducing something like mustard or the boll weevil outside the normal range of environment.

But in setting up a new world, everything will be outside its natural environment.

We've also exterminated wantonly many of the forms of life that once existed, and we are cur-

rently risking the extermination of many more. The dodo and passenger pigeon probably were indispensable, though their loss is a sorry one. But large numbers of African life forms are nearing extinction. Every leopard coat worn by some woman for her vanity brings the great cat closer to that extinction. Yet quite possibly, the cat is more necessary to a healthy African ecology than are the herds of Masai cattle that drive out the gorilla and other wild creatures.

We've done little better in America. Many of our creatures are becoming scarce. Even our forests, which serve to control the runoff of rainfall and keep the plains from becoming deserts, are under attack. And the Sierra Club, which is trying to save the redwoods, has been denied the tax-exempt status granted to the National Rifle Association — the voice of those who regard killing other creatures without risk as a sport.

The yard back of my house should now be filled with Monarch butterflies; when I was a boy, there were hundreds everywhere. Today I couldn't find one.

The unfortunate part is that we really have no clear idea of what price we will pay for our many extinctions. Ecology hasn't had the time or the means to study the incredibly complex relations that exist between one form of life and another. All we can say for sure is

that the loss of almost any form of life may represent a very grave danger to man's survival here on earth. (Nobody knows yet why the dinosaurs became extinct. Man's one extinction could be the result of a chain of events that begins with something we think unimportant.)

Mack Reynolds, in the current story in this issue, mentions that there were enough trees to be worth visiting in one area only. It isn't necessary to his story to wonder what changes that might make. But with the end of trees, what happens to birds and animals? What happens to the creatures and smaller plants that can only exist in forested areas? And what happens to life related to them in some long ecological chain? Oh what happens to the rain that falls and the carbon-dioxide that the trees don't remove from the air?

All of this concerns what happens in a complex of different life forms of community ecology. Population ecology studies another problem — what happens to a singleform of life. And it is here that some studies indicate a threat to our civilized existence that has received little attention — and no action.

Most studies of overpopulation go back to the classic work of Malthus, which covers only the economic aspects of the problem. But

there are more factors than the feeding and housing of billions of people to worry us. There may be a grave psychological factor that is more dangerous than any risk of running out of food in the near future.

Studies made with laboratory animals indicate that a certain type of psychotic, anti-social behavior is the direct result of too great a population density. When mice were provided with everything that any mouse could desire — food, water, shelter, material to build nests — they proceeded happily to multiply and grow fat. For a time, all was well.

Then something strange occurred. They still had all their needs supplied, but as they passed a critical level of mice per square feet; they turned almost insane. They began to become frantic, worried, and pointlessly aggressive. They developed homosexual tendencies and a withdrawal from the normal social ways. In fact, they showed almost every sign of the type of rising crime and anti-social trend that is worrying the sociologists about behavior in our larger cities.

Maybe the lack of adequate space per person is just as dangerous psychologically to me as to mice. Apparently, however, this does not work as directly. A man can accept a cramped immediate environment when he is aware of a free area still within his reach. Thus,

so long as woods and fields lay near the cities, men could stand the crowding of those cities. Now, with the suburbs sprawled out for incredible distances, the free horizon is too far to help.

Certainly the same anti-social pattern that existed in the middle of the last century in New York City applied only to those who were both too crowded and unable to escape the immediate environment, as covered by Herbert Asbury, in *Gangs of New York*.

In any event, it might be well for the FBI that reports the current rise in anti-social behavior to add a few ecologists to its staff. And every government that cannot accept population control should at least start a crash program to further ecology in all its branches.

Science-fiction writers also have a rich field to explore here. I remember stories that tried to prove the existence of Atlantis by telling of the lemmings who periodically rush madly into the sea and swim to their destruction — not really very likely? There's some indication that changes in food account for this behavior better. But there's also a good explanation in population ecology. The lemmings may simply be driven into acts of racial insanity by the pressures of overpopulation.

For lemmings, such an act relieves the problem. But men surely need a better answer. **END**

IF • *Short Novel*

# Creatures Of Light

by ROGER ZELAZNY



The worlds of men hang between the  
two Houses, and all the constellations  
pay tribute to the Creatures of Light!

**T**he man walks through his Thousandyear Eve in the House of the Dead. If you could look about the enormous room through which he walks, you couldn't see a thing. It is far too dark for eyes to be of value.

For this dark time, we'll simply refer to him as "the man." Why?

First, he fits the general and generally accepted description of an unmodified, male, human-model being — walking upright, having opposing thumbs and possessing the other typical characteristics of the profession — and, second, because his name has been taken from him.

In his right hand, the man bears the staff of his Master, and it guides him through the dark. It tugs him this way, that way. It burns his hand, his fingers, his opposing thumb if his foot strays a step from its ordained path.

When the man reaches a certain place within the darkness, he mounts seven steps to a stone dais and raps three times upon it with the staff.

Then there is light, dim and orange and crowded into corners. It shows the edges of the enormous, unfilled room.

He reverses the staff and screws it into a socket in the stone.

Had you ears in that room, you would hear a sound as of winged insects circling near you, withdrawing, returning.

Only the man hears it, though.

There are over two thousand other people present, but they are all of them dead.

They come up out of the transparent rectangles which now appear in the floor, come up unbreathing, unblinking and horizontal, and they rest upon invisible catafalques at a height of two feet, and their garments and their skins are of all colors and their bodies of all ages. Now some have wings and some have tails, and some have horns and some long talons. Some have all of these things, and some have pieces of machinery built into them and some do not. Many others look like the man, unmodified.

"Get up!" he calls out. "All of you!"

And his words mix with the humming that is in the air and are repeated over and over and again, not like an echo, fading, but persistent and recurring.

The air is filled and stirred. There comes a moaning and a creaking of brittle joints.

Rustling, clicking, chafing, they sit up, they stand up.

Then sound and movement cease, and the dead stand like unlit candles beside their opened graves.

The man climbs down from the dais, stands a moment before it, then says, "Follow me!" and he walks back the way he came, leaving his Master's staff vibrating in the gray air.

As he walks, he comes to a

woman who is tall and golden and a suicide. He stares into her unseeing eyes and says, "Do you know me?" and the orange lips, the dead lips, the dry lips move, and they whisper, "No," but he stares longer and says, "Did you know me?" and the air hums with his words, until she says, "No," once again, and he passes her by.

He questions two others: a man who had been ancient of days, with a clock built into his left wrist, and a black dwarf with horns and hooves and the tail of a goat. But both say, "No," and they fall into step behind him, and they follow him out of that enormous room and into another, where more lay under stone, not really waiting, to be called forth for his Thousandyear Eve in the House of the Dead.

The man leads them. He leads the dead whom he has summoned back to movement, and they follow him. They follow him through corridors and galleries and halls, and up wide, straight stairways and down narrow, winding stairways, and they come at last into the great Hall of the House of the Dead, where his Master holds his court.

He sits on a black throne of polished stone, and there are metal bowls of fire to his right and to his left. On each of the two hundred pillars that line his high Hall, a torch blazes and flickers and its



spark-shot smoke coils and puffs upward, becoming at last a gray part of the flowing cloud that covers the ceiling completely.

The Master does not move, but he regards the man as he advances across the Hall, five thousand of the dead at his back, and his eyes lay red upon the man as he comes forward.

The man prostrates himself at his feet, and he does not move until he is addressed:

"You may greet me and rise," come the words, each of them a sharp, throaty stab in the midst of an audible exhalation.

"Hail, Anubis! Master of the House of the Dead!" says the man, and he stands.

Anubis lowers his black muzzle slightly, and his fangs are white within it. Red lightning, his tongue, forks forward, re-enters his mouth. He stands then, and the shadows slide downward upon his bare and manformed body.

He raises his left hand, and the humming sound comes into the Hall, and it carries his words through the flickering light and the smoke:

"You who are dead," he says, "tonight you will disport yourselves for my pleasure. Food and wine will pass between your dead lips, though you will not taste it. Your dead stomachs will hold it within you, while your dead feet take the measure of a dance. Your dead mouths will speak words that will

have no meaning to you, and you will embrace one another without pleasure. You will sing for me if I wish it. You will lie down again when I will it."

He raises his right hand.

"Let the revelry begin," he says, and he claps his hands together.

Then tables slide forward from between the pillars, laden with food and with drink, and there is music upon the air.

The dead move to obey him.

"You may join them," Anubis says to the man, and he reseats himself upon his throne.

The man crosses to the nearest table and eats lightly and drinks a glass of wine. The dead dance about him, but he does not dance with them. They make noises which are words without meaning, and he does not listen to them. He pours a second glass of wine, and the eyes of Anubis are upon him as he drinks it. He pours a third glass and he holds it in his hands and sips at it and stares into it.

How much time has passed he cannot tell, when Anubis says, "Servant!"

He stands, turns.

"Approach!" says Anubis, and he does so.

"You may rise. You know what night tonight is?"

"Yes, Master. It is Thousandyear Eve."

"It is *your* Thousandyear Eve.

This night we celebrate an anniversary. You have served me for a full thousand years in the House of the Dead. Are you glad?"

"Yes, Master."

"You recall my promise?"

"Yes. You told me that if I served you faithfully for a thousand years, then you would give me back my name. You would tell me who I had been in the Middle Worlds of Life."

"I beg your pardon, I did not."

"You . . .?"

"I told you that I would give you a name, which is a different thing altogether."

"But I thought . . ."

"I do not care what you thought. Do you want a name?"

"Yes, Master."

". . . But you would prefer your old one? Is that what you are trying to say?"

"Yes."

"Do you really think that anyone would remember your name after ten centuries? Do you think that you were so important in the Middle Worlds that someone would have noted down your name, that it would have mattered to anyone?"

"I do not know."

"But you want it back?"

"If I may have it, Master."

"Why? Why do you want it?"

"Because I remember nothing of the Worlds of Life. I would like to know who I was when I dwelled there."

"Why? And for what purpose?"

"I cannot answer you because I do not know."

"Of all the dead," says Anubis, "you know that I have brought only you back to full consciousness to serve me here. Do you feel this means that perhaps there is something special about you?"

"I have often wondered why you did as you did."

"Then let me give you ease, man: You are nothing. You were nothing. You are not remembered. Your mortal name does not signify anything."

The man lowers his eyes.

"Do you doubt me?"

"No, Master."

"Why not?"

"Because you do not lie."

"Then let me show it. I took away your memories of life only because they would give you pain among the dead. But now let me demonstrate your anonymity. There are over five thousand of the dead in this room from many ages."

Anubis stands, and his voice carries to every presence in the Hall:

"Attend me, maggots! Turn your eyes toward this man who stands before my throne! Face them, man!"

The man turns about.

"Man, know that today you do not wear the body you slept in last night. You look now as you did a thousand years ago, when you came into the House of the Dead."

"My dead ones, are there any of you here present who can look upon this man and say that you know him?"

A golden girl steps forward.

"I know this man," she says, through orange lips, "because he spoke to me in the other hall."

"That I know," says Anubis, "but who is he?"

"He is the one who spoke to me."

"That is no answer. Go and copulate with yon purple lizard. —And what of you, old man,"

"He spoke to me also."

"That I know. Can you name him?"

"I cannot."

"Then go dance on yonder table and pour wine over your head. —What of you, black man?"

"This man also spoke with me."

"Do you know his name?"

"I did not know it when he asked me —"

"Then burn!" cries Anubis, and fires fall down from the ceiling and leap out from the walls and crisp the black man to ashes, which move then in slow eddies across the floor, passing among the ankles of the stopped dancers, falling finally into final dust.

"You see?" says Anubis. "There is none to name you as once you were known."

"I see," says the man, "but the last might have had further words —"

"To waste! You are unknown and unwanted, save by me. This, because you are fairly adept at the various embalming arts and you occasionally compose a clever epitaph."

"Thank you, Master."

"What good would a name and memories do you here?"

"None, I suppose."

"Yet you wish a name, so I shall give you one. Draw your dagger."

The man draws the blade which hangs at his left side.

"Now cut off your thumb."

"Which thumb, Master?"

"The left one will do."

The man bites his lower lip and tightens his eyes as he drags the blade against the joint of his thumb. His blood falls upon the floor. It runs along the blade of the knife and trickles from its point. He drops to his knees and continues to cut, tears streaming down his cheeks and falling to mingle with the blood. His breath comes in gasps and a single sob escapes him.

Then, "It is done," he says. "Here!" He drops the blade and offers Anubis his thumb.

"I don't want the thing! Throw it into the flames!"

With his right hand, the man throws his thumb into the brazier. It sputters, sizzles, flares.

"Now cup your left hand and collect the blood within it."

The man does this thing.

"Now raise it above your head and let it drip down upon you."

He raises his hand, and the blood falls onto his forehead.

"Now repeat after me: 'I baptize me . . .'"

"'I baptize me . . .'"

"'Wakim, of the House of the Dead . . .'"

"'Wakim, of the House of the Dead . . .'"

"'In the name of Anubis . . .'"

"'In the name of Anubis . . .'"

"'Wakim . . .'"

"'Wakim . . .'"

"'Emissary of Anubis in the Middle Worlds . . .'"

"'Emissary of Anubis in the Middle worlds . . .'"

"'. . . and beyond.'" "

"'. . . and beyond.'" "

"Hear me now, oh you dead ones: I proclaim this man Wakim. Repeat his name!"

"*Wakim*," comes the word, through dead lips.

"So be it! You are named now, *Wakim*," he says. "It is fitting, therefore, that you feel your birth into namehood, that you come away changed by this thing, oh my named one!"

Anubis raises both hands above his head and lowers them to his sides.

"Resume dancing!" he commands the dead.

They move to the music once more.

The body-cutting machine rolls into the hall, and the prosthetic

replacement machine follows it.

Wakim looks away from them, but they draw up beside him and stop.

The first machine extrudes restrainers and holds him.

"Human arms are weak," says Anubis. "Let these be removed."

The man screams as the sawblades hum. Then he passes out. The dead continue their dance.

When Wakim awakens, two seamless, silver arms hang at his sides, cold and insensitive. He flexes the fingers.

"And human legs be slow, and capable of fatigue. Let those he wears be exchanged for tireless metal."

When Wakim awakens the second time, he stands upon silver pillars. He wiggles his toes. Anubis's tongue darts forth.

Place your right hand into the flames," he says, "and hold it there until it glows white."

The music falls around him, and the flames caress his hand until it matches their red. The dead talk their dead talk and drink the wine they do not taste. They embrace one another without pleasure. The hand glows white.

"Now," says Anubis, "seize your manhood in your right hand and burn it away."

Wakim licks his lips.

"Master . . ." he says.

"Do it!"

He does this thing, and he falls

to unconsciousness before he has finished.

When he awakens again and looks down upon himself, he is all of gleaming silver, sexless and strong. When he touches his forehead, there comes the sound of metal upon metal.

"How do you feel, Wakim?" asked Anubis.

"I do not know," he answers, and his voice comes strange.

Anubis gestures, and the nearest side of the cutting machine becomes a reflecting surface.

"Regard yourself."

Wakim stares at the shining egg that is his head, at the yellow lenses, his eyes, the gleaming barrel, his chest.

"Men may begin and end in many ways," says Anubis. "Some may start as machines and gain their humanity slowly. Others may end as such, losing it by pieces as they live. That which is lost may always be regained. That which is gained may always be lost. What are you, Wakim, a man or a machine?"

"I do not know."

"Then let me confuse you further."

Anubis gestures, and Wakim's arms and legs come loose, fall away. His metal torso clangs against stone, rolls, then lies at the foot of the throne.

"Now you lack mobility," says Anubis.

He reaches forward with his foot and touches a tiny switch at the back of Wakim's head.

"Now you lack all senses but hearing."

"Yes," answers Wakim.

"Now a connection is being attached to you. You feel nothing, but your head is opened and you are about to become a part of the machine which monitors and maintains this entire world. See it all now!"

"I do," Wakim replies, as he becomes conscious of every room, corridor, hall and chamber in the always dead never alive world that had never been a world, a world made, not begotten of coalesced starstuff and the fires of creation, but hammered and jointed, riveted and fused, insulated and decorated, not into seas and land and air and life, but oils and metals and stone and walls of energy, all hung together within the icy void where no sun shines; and he is aware of distances, stresses, weights, materials, pressures and the secret numbers of the dead. He is not aware of his body, mechanical and disconnected. He knows only the waves of maintenance movement that flow with them and he knows the colorless colors of quantity perception.

Then Anubis speaks again:

"You know every shadow in the House of the Dead. You have looked through all the hidden eyes."

"Yes."

"Now see what lies beyond."

There are stars, stars, scattered stars, blackness all between. They ripple and fold and bend, and they rush toward him, rush by him. Their colors are blazing and pure as angels' eyes, and they pass near, pass far, in the eternity through which he seems to move. There is no sense of real time or real movement, only a changing of the field. A great blue Tophet Box of a sun seems to soar beside him for a moment, and then again comes black, all about him.

And he comes at last to a world that is not a world, citrine and azure and green, green, green. A green corona hangs about it, at thrice its own diameter, and it seems to pulsate with a pleasant rhythm.

"Behold the House of Life," says Anubis, from somewhere.

And he does. It is warm and glowing and alive. He has a feeling of aliveness.

"Osiris rules the House of Life," says Anubis.

And he beholds a great bird-head atop human shoulders, bright yellow eyes within it, alive, alive-oh; and the creature stands before him on an endless plain of living green which is superimposed upon his view of the world, and he holds the Staff of Life in his one hand and the Book of Life in his other. He seems to be the source of the radiant warmth.

Wakim then hears the voice of Anubis once again:

"The House of Life and the House of the Dead contain the Middle Worlds."

And there is a falling, swirling sensation, and Wakim looks upon stars once more, but stars separated and held from other stars by bonds of force that are visible then invisible, then visible again, fading, coming, going, white, glowing lines, fluctuating.

"You now perceive the Middle Worlds of Life," says Anubis.

And dozens of worlds roll before him like balls of exotic marble, stippled, gauged, polished, incandescent.

"Contained," says Anubis. "They are contained within the field which arcs between the only two poles that matter."

"Poles?" says the metal head that is Wakim.

"The House of Life and the House of the Dead. The Middle Worlds about their suns do move, and all together go on the paths of Life and Death."

"I do not understand," says Wakim.

"Of course you do not understand. What is at the same time the greatest blessing and the greatest curse in the universe?"

"I do not know."

"Life," says Anubis, "or death."

"I do not understand," says Wakim. "You used the superlative."

You called for one answer. You named two things, however."

"Did I?" asks Anubis. "Really? Just because I used two words, does it mean that I have named two separate and distinct things. May a thing not have more than one name? Take yourself for an example. What are you?"

"I do not know."

"That may be the beginning of wisdom, then. You could as easily be a machine which I chose to incarnate as a man for a time and have now returned to a metal casing, as you could be a man whom I have chosen to incarnate as a machine."

"Then what difference does it make?"

"None. None whatsoever. But you cannot make the distinction. You cannot remember. Tell me, are you alive?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I think. I hear your voice. I have memories. I can speak."

"Which of these qualities is life? Remember that you do not breathe, your nervous system is a mass of metallic strands and I have burnt your heart. Remember, too, that I have machines that can outreason you, outremember you, outtalk you. What does that leave you with as an excuse for being alive? You say that you hear my voice, and 'hearing' is a subjective phenomenon? Very well. I shall disconnect your

hearing also. Watch closely to see whether you cease to exist."

. . . One snowflake drifting down a well, a well without waters, without walls, without bottom, without top. Now take away the snowflake and consider the drifting . . .

After a timeless time, Anubis's voice comes once again:

"Do you know the difference between life and death?"

"I am life," says Wakim. "Whatever you give or take away, if I remain it is life."

"Sleep," says Anubis, and there is nothing to hear him, there in the House of the Dead.

## II

When Wakim awakens, he finds that he has been set upon a table near to the throne, and he can see once more, and he regards the dance of the dead and he hears the music to which they move.

"Were you dead?" asks Anubis.

"No," says Wakim. "I was sleeping."

"What is the difference?"

"I was still there, although I did not know it."

Anubis laughs.

"Supposing I had never awakened you?"

"That, I suppose, would be death."

"Death? If I did not choose to exercise my power to awaken you? Even though the power was ever

present, and 'you' potential and available for that same ever?"

"If this thing were not done, if I remained forever only potential, then this would be death."

"A moment ago you said that sleep and death were two different things. Is it that the period of time involved makes a difference?"

"No," says Wakim, "it is a matter of existence. After sleep there comes wakefulness, and the life is still present. When I exist, I know it. When I do not, then I know nothing."

"Life then, is nothing?"

"No."

"Life then, is existing? Like these dead?"

"No," says Wakim. "It is knowing you exist, at least some of the time."

"Of what is this a process?"

'I,' says Wakim.

"And what is 'I'? Who are you?"

"I am Wakim."

"I only named you a short while ago! What were you before that?"

"Not Wakim."

"Dead?"

"No! Alive!" cries Wakim.

"Do not raise your voice within my halls," says Anubis. "You do not know what you are or who you are; you do not know the difference between existing and not existing, yet you presume to argue with me concerning life and death! Now I shall not ask you, I shall tell you. I shall tell you of life and of death.

"There is too much life and there is not enough life," he begins, "and the same goes for death. Now I shall throw away paradoxes.

"The House of Life lies so far from here that a ray of light which left it on the day you entered this domain would not yet have traveled a significant fraction of the distance which separates us. Between us lie the Middle Worlds. They move within the Life-Death tides that flow between my House and the House of Osiris. When I say 'flow' I do not mean that they move like that pitiful ray of light, crawling. Rather, they move like waves on the ocean which has but two shores. We may raise waves anywhere we wish without disrupting the entire sea. What are these waves, and what do they do?

"Some worlds have too much life," he says. "Life — crawling, pululating, fecundating, smothering itself — worlds too clement, too full of the sciences which keep men alive — worlds which would drown themselves in their own semen, worlds which would pack all of their lands with crowds of bigbellied women — and so go down to death beneath the weight of their own fruitfulness. Then there are worlds which are bleak and barren and bitter, worlds which grind life like grain. Even with body modifications and with worldchange machines, there are only a few hun-

dred worlds which may be inhabited by the six intelligent races. Life is needed badly on the worst of them. It can be a deadly blessing on the best. When I say that life is needed or not needed in certain places, I am of course also saying that death is needed or not needed. I am not speaking of two different things, but of the same thing. Osiris and I are bookkeepers. We credit and we debit. We raise waves, or we cause waves to sink back again into the ocean. Can life be counted upon to limit itself? No. It is the mindless striving of two to become infinity. Can death be counted upon to limit itself? Never. It is the equally mindless effort of zero to encompass infinity.

"But there must be life control and death control," he says, "else the fruitful worlds would rise and fall, rise and fall, cycling between empire and anarchy, then down to final disruption. The bleak worlds would be encompassed by zero. Life cannot contain itself within the bounds statistics have laid down for its guidance. Therefore, it must be contained, and it is. Osiris and I hold the Middle Worlds. They lie within our field of control, and we turn them on and we turn them off as we would. Do you see now, Wakim? Do you begin to understand?"

"You limit life? You cause death?"

"We can lay sterility on any or

all of the six races on any world we choose, for as long a period of time as is necessary. This can be done on an absolute or a fractional basis. We may also manipulate lifespans, decimate populations."

"How?"

"Fire. Famine. Plague. War."

"What of the sterile worlds, the dry worlds? What of those?"

"Multiple births can be insured, and we do not tamper with lifespans. The newly dead are sent to the House of Life, not here. There they are repaired, or their parts used in the construction of new individuals, who may or may not host a human mentality."

"And of the other dead?"

"The House of the Dead is the graveyard of the six races. There are no lawful cemeteries in the Middle Worlds. There have been times when the House of Life has called upon us for hosts and for parts. There have been other occasions when they have shipped us their excess."

"It is difficult to understand. It seems brutal, it seems harsh . . ."

"It is life and it is death. It is the greatest blessing and the greatest curse in the universe. You do not have to understand it. Wakim. Your comprehension or your lack of it, your approval or your disapproval, will in no way alter its operation."

"And whence come you, Anubis — and Osiris — that you control it?"

"There are some things that are not for you to know."

"And how do the Middle Worlds accept your control?"

"They live with it, and they die with it. It is above their objections, for it is necessary for their continued existence. It has become a natural law, and it is utterly impartial, applying with equal force to all who come beneath it."

"There are some who do not?"

"You shall learn more of this when I am ready to tell you, which is not now. I have made you a machine, Wakim. Now I shall make you a man. Who is to say how you started, where you started? Were I to wipe out your memories up to this moment and then re-embodify you, you would recollect that you had begun as metal."

"Will you do this thing?"

"No. I want you equipped with the memories which you now possess, when and if I assign you to your new duties."

Then Anubis raises his hands and strikes them together.

A machine removes Wakim from the shelf and switches off his senses as it lowers him. The music pulses and falls about the dancers, the two hundred torches blaze upon the pillars like immortal thoughts, Anubis stares at a blackened place upon the floor of the great Hall, and

overhead the canopy of smokes moves to its own rhythms.

### III

Wakim opens his eyes and looks upon grayness. He lies on his back, staring upward. The tiles are cold beneath him, and there is a flickering of light off to his right. Suddenly, he clenches his left hand, feels for his thumb, finds it, sighs.

"Yes," says Anubis.

He sits up before the throne, looks down upon himself, looks up at Anubis.

"You have been baptized, you have been born again into the flesh."

"Thank you."

"No trouble. Plenty of raw materials around here. Stand up! Do you remember your lessons?"

Wakim stands.

"Which ones?"

"Temporal fugue. To make time follow the mind, not the body."

"Yes."

"And killing?"

"Yes."

"And combining the two?"

"Yes."

Anubis stands, a full head taller than Wakim, whose new body is well over two yards in length.

"Then show me!

"Let the music cease!" he cries. "Let the one who in life was called Dargoth come before me!"

The dead stop dancing. They

stand without moving, and their eyes never blink. There is silence for several seconds, unbroken by word, footfall, breathing.

Then Dargoth moves among the standing dead, advancing through shadow, through torchlight. Wakim stands straighter when he sees him, for the muscles of his back, his shoulders, his stomach tighten.

A metal band the color of copper crosses Dargoth's head, covers his cheekbones, vanishes beneath his graygrizzled chin. A latitudinal band passes above his brows, over his temples, meets at the back of his skull. His eyes are wide, the sclera yellow and the iris red. His lower jaw makes a constant chewing motion as he rolls forward, and his teeth are long shadows. His head sways from side to side upon its twenty inches of neck. His shoulders are three feet in width, giving him the appearance of an inverted triangle, for his sides taper sharply to meet with his segmented chassis, which begins where the flesh stops. His wheels turn slowly, the left rear one squeaking with each revolution. His arms hang a full four and a half feet, so that his fingertips barely brush the floor. Four short, sharp metal legs are folded upward along his flat sides. The razors come erect on his back, fall again, as he moves. The eight-foot whip that is his tail uncoils behind him as he comes to a halt before the throne.

"For this night, this Thousand-

year Night," says Anubis, "I give you back your name — Dargoth. Once were you numbered among the mightiest warriors in the Middle Worlds, Dargoth, until you pitted your strength against that of an immortal and went down to your death before him. Your broken body has been repaired, and this night you must use it to do battle once more. Destroy this man Wakim in single combat and you take his place as my first servant here in the House of the Dead."

Dargoth crosses his great hands upon his brow and bows until they touch the floor.

"You may have ten seconds," says Anubis to Wakim, "to prepare your mind for battle. Stand ready, Dargoth!"

"Lord," says Wakim, "how may I kill one who is already dead?"

"That is your problem," says Anubis. "You have now wasted all ten of your seconds with foolish questions. Begin!"

There comes a snapping sound and a series of metallic clicks.

Dargoth's metal legs snap downward, straighten, raise him three feet higher above the floor. He prances. He raises his arms and flexes them.

Wakim watches, waiting.

Dargoth rises unto his hind legs, so that now his head is ten feet above the floor.

Then he leaps forward, his arms

outstretched, his tail curled, his head extended, fangs bared. The blades rise upon his back like gleaming fins, his hooves fall like hammers.

At the last possible moment, Wakim sidesteps and throws a punch which is blocked by the other's forearm. He leaps high into the air then, and the whip cracks harmlessly beneath him.

For all his bulk, Dargoth halts and turns rapidly. He rears once more and strikes forward with his front hooves. Wakim avoids them, but Dargoth's hands fall upon his shoulders as he descends.

Wakim seizes both wrists and kicks Dargoth in the chest. The tail-lash falls across his right cheek as he does so. Then he breaks the grip of those massive hands upon his shoulders, ducks his head and lays the edge of his left hand hard upon the other's side. The whip falls again, this time across his back. He aims a blow at the other's head, but the long neck twists it out of the way, and he hears the whip crack once more, missing him by inches.

Dargoth's fist lands upon his cheekbone, and he stumbles, off-balance, sliding upon the floor. He rolls out of the path of the hooves, but a fist knocks him sprawling as he attempts to rise again.

As the next blow descends, however, he catches the wrist with both hands and throws his full weight



upon the arm, twisting his head to the side. Dargoth's fist strikes the floor, and Wakim regains his feet, landing a left cross as he does so.

Dargoth's head rolls with the punch, and the lash cracks beside Wakim's ear. He lays another blow upon the twisting head, and then he is borne over backwards as Dargoth's rear legs straighten like springs and his shoulder strikes him in the chest.

He rears, once more.

Then, for the first time, Dargoth speaks:

"Now, Wakim, now!" he says. Dargoth becomes first servant of Anubis!"

As the hooves flash downward, Wakim catches those metal legs, one in each hand, halfway up their length. He had braced himself in a crouched position, and now his lips curl back, showing his clenched teeth, as Dargoth is frozen in mid-strike above him.

He laughs as he springs back into a standing position and heaves with both arms, casting his opponent high up upon his hind legs, struggling to keep from falling over.

"Fool!" he says, and his voice is strangely altered. His word, like the stroke of a great iron bell, rings through the Hall. There comes up a soft moaning from among the dead, as when they had been routed from out their graves.

"'Now'? you say? 'Wakim'? you say?" and he laughs as he steps

forward beneath the felling hooves.

"You know not what you say!" and he locks his arms about the great metal torso and the hooves flail helplessly above his back and the tail-whip swishes and cracks and lays stripes upon his shoulders.

His hands rest between the sharpened spines, and he crushes the unyielding segmented body of metal close up against his own.

Dargoth's great hands find his neck, but the thumbs cannot reach the throat, and the muscles of Wakim's neck tighten and cord as he bends his knees and strains.

They stand so, frozen for a timeless instant, and the firelight wrestles with shadows upon their bodies.

Then with a gigantic, heaving motion, Wakim raises Dargoth above the ground, turns, and hurls him from him.

Dargoth's legs kick wildly as he turns over in the air. His spines rise and fall, and his tail reaches out and cracks. He raises his arms up before his face, but he lands with a shattering crash at the foot of the throne of Anubis, and there he lies still, his metal body broken in four places and his head split open upon the first step to the throne.

Wakim turns toward Anubis.

"Sufficient?" he inquires.

"You did not employ temporal fugue," says Anubis, not even looking downward at the wreck that had been Dargoth.

"It was unnecessary. He was not that mighty an opponent."

"He was mighty," says Anubis. "Why did you laugh and make as if you questioned your name when you fought with him?"

"I do not know. For a moment, when I realized that I could not be beaten, I felt as though I were someone else."

"Someone without fear, pity, or remorse?"

"Yes."

"Do you still feel thus?"

"No."

"Then why have you stopped calling me 'Master'?"

"The heat of battle raised emotions which overrode my sense of protocol."

"Then correct the oversight immediately."

"Very well, Master."

"Apologize. Beg my pardon, most humbly."

Wakim prostrates himself on the floor.

"I beg your pardon, Master. Most humbly."

"Rise again, and consider yourself pardoned. The contents of your previous stomach have gone the way of all such things. You may go re-fresh yourself now. Let there be singing and dancing once more! Let there be drinking and laughter in celebration of the name-giving on this, Wakim's Thousandyear Eve! Let the carcass of Dargoth be gone from my sight!"

And these things are done.

When Wakim had finished his meal, and it seems as if the dancing and the singing of the dead will continue until Time's well deserved end, Anubis gestures, first to his left, then to his right, and every other flame folds upon every other pillar, dives within itself, is gone. His mouth opens, and the words come down upon Wakim, "Take them back. Fetch me my staff."

Wakim stands and gives the necessary orders. Then he leads the dead out from the Great Hall. As they depart, the tables vanish between the pillars. An impossible breeze tears at the ceiling of smoke. Before that great, gray mat is shredded, however, the other torches have died, and the only illumination within the Hall comes from the two blazing bowls on either side of the throne.

Anubis stares into the darkness, and the captured light rays reform themselves at his bidding, and he sees Dargoth fall once more at the foot of his throne and lie still, and he sees the one he has named Wakim standing with a skull's grin upon his lips, and for an instant — had it been a trick of the flame-light? — a mark upon his brow.

Far, in an enormous room where the light is dim and orange and crowded into corners and the dead lay them down once more upon invisible catafalques above their opened graves, faint, rising, then fall-

ing, Wakim hears a sound that is not like any sound he has ever heard before. He stays his hand upon the staff and descends the dais.

"Old man," he says, to one with whom he had spoken earlier, one whose hair and whose beard are stained with wine and in whose left wrist a clock has stopped, "Old man, hear my words and tell me if you know. What is that sound?"

The unblinking eyes stare upward, past his own, and the lips move.

"Master . . ."

"I am not Master here."

". . . Master, it is but the howling of a dog."

Wakim returns then to the dais and gives them all back to their graves.

Then the light departs, and the staff guides him through the dark, along the path that has been ordained.

#### IV

"I have brought your staff, Master."

"Arise, and approach."

"The dead are all returned to their proper places."

"Very good. Wakim, you are my man?"

Yes, Master."

"To do my bidding, and to serve me in all things?"

"Yes, Master."

"This is why you are my emis-

sary to the Middle Worlds, and beyond."

"I am to depart the House of the Dead?"

"Yes, I am sending you forth from here on a mission."

"What sort of mission?"

"The story is long, involved. There are many persons in the Middle Worlds who are very old. You know this?"

"Yes."

"And there are some who are timeless and deathless."

"Deathless, Lord?"

"By one means or another, certain individuals have achieved a kind of immortality. Perhaps they follow the currents of life and draw upon their force, and they flee from the waves of death. Perhaps they have adjusted their biochemistry, or they keep their bodies in constant repair, or they have many bodies and exchange them, or steal new ones. Perhaps they wear metal bodies, or no bodies at all. Whatever the means involved, you will hear talk of the Three Hundred Immortals when you enter the Middle Worlds. This is only an approximate figure, for few truly know much about them. There are two hundred eighty-three immortals, to be exact. They cheat on life, on death, as you can see, and their very existence upsets the balance, inspires others to strive to emulate their legends, causes others to think them gods. Some are harmless wan-

derers, others are not. All are powerful and subtle, all adept at continuing their existence. One is especially noxious, and I am sending you to destroy him."

"Who may he be, Master?"

"He is called the Prince Who Was A Thousand, and he dwells beyond the Middle Worlds. His kingdom lies beyond the realm of life and death, in a place where it is always twilight. He is difficult to locate, however, for he often departs his own region and trespasses into the Middle Worlds and elsewhere. I desire that he come to an end, as he has opposed both the House of the Dead and the House of Life for many days."

"What does he look like, the Prince Who Was A Thousand?"

"Anything he wishes."

"Where shall I find him?"

"I do not know. You must seek him."

"How shall I know him?"

By his deeds, by his words. He opposes us in all ways."

"Surely others must oppose you also . . ."

"Destroy all you come upon who do so. You shall know the Prince Who Was A Thousand, however, because he shall be the most difficult of all to destroy. He will come closest to destroying you."

"Supposing he succeeds?"

"Then I shall take me a thousand years more to train another emissary to set upon his task. I do

not desire his downfall today or tomorrow. It will doubtless take you centuries even to locate him. Time matters little. An age will pass before he becomes a threat, to Osiris or myself. You will learn of him as you travel, seeking after him. When you find him you *will* know him."

"Am I mighty enough to work his undoing?"

"I think you are."

"I am ready."

Then I shall set your feet upon the track. I give you the power to invoke me, in my name, and in times of need to draw force from the field of Life and of Death while you are among the Middle Worlds. This will make you invincible. You will report back to me when you feel you need to. If I feel this need, I will reach out after you."

"Thank you, Master."

"You will obey all my sendings, instantly."

"Yes."

"Go now and rest. After you have slept and eaten again, you will depart and begin your mission."

"Thank you."

"This will be your second last sleep within this House, Wakim. Meditate upon the mysteries it contains."

"I do so constantly."

"I am one of them."

"Master. . . ."

"That is part of my name. Never forget it."

"Master — how could I?"

**L**isten to the world. It is called Blis, and it is not hard to hear at all: The sounds may be laughter, sighs, contented belches. They may be the *clog-clog* of machinery or beating hearts. They may be the breathing of multitudes or their words. They may be footsteps, the sound of a kiss, a slap, the cry of a baby. Music. Music, perhaps. The sound of typewriter keys through the Black Daddy Night, consciousness kissing paper only? Perhaps. Then forget the sounds and the words and look at the world.

First, colors. Name one. Red? There's a riverbank that color, green stream hauled between, snagged on purple rocks. Yellow and gray and black is the city in the distance. Here in the open field, both sides of the river, are pavilions. Pick any color, they're all about. Over a thousand pavilions, like balloons and teepees and stemless mushrooms, blazing in the midst of a blue field, strung with pennons, full of moving colors that are people. Three lime-bright bridges span the river. The river leads to a creamy sea which swells but seldom breaks. From it, up the river, come barges and boats and vessels which moor along the banks. More come out of the sky, settling anywhere upon the blue fabric of the field. Their passengers move among the pavilions. They are of all races and

sorts. They eat and they talk. They play. They are making sounds and wearing the colors. Okay?

The odors are of sweet and growing things and kissful come the breezes. When these breezes and these odors reach the fairground, they are altered subtly. There comes up the odor of sawdust, which is hardly unpleasant; and that of perspiration, which cannot be too unpleasant if some of it is your own. Then there are smells of woodsmoke, smells of food, and the clean aroma of alcohol. Smell the world. Taste it, swallow it and hold it in your belly. Burst with it.

— Like the man with the eyepatch and the alpenstock.

**H**e walks among the husksters and the fillies, fat as an eunuch, but not. His flesh is strangely flesh-colored, and his right eye is a gray wheel, rolling. A week's growth of beard frames his face, and all colors are missing from the blot of the garments. His gait is steady. His hands are hard.

He stops to buy a mug of beer, moves to watch a cockfight.

He wagers a coin on the smaller bird, which tears the larger apart and so pays for his beers.

He watches the deflowering show, samples the narcotics exhibit, foils a brown man in a white shirt who attempts to guess his weight. A short man with close-set dark eyes then emerges from a nearby tent,

moves to his side, tugs upon his sleeve.

"Yes?" His voice seems centrally located, that deep and potent does it stir.

"I see by your outfit you may be a preacher."

"Yes, I am — of the non-theistic, non-sectarian sort."

"Very good. Would you care to earn some money? It will only take a few moments."

"What would you have me do?"

"A man is going to commit suicide and be buried in that tent. The grave is already dug and all the tickets have been sold. The audience is growing restless, now though. The performer won't do it without proper religious accompaniment, and we can't sober up the preacher."

"I see. It will cost you ten."

"Make it five?"

"Get yourself another preacher."

"All right, ten! C'mon! They're starting to clap their hands and boo!"

He moves into the tent, blinks his eyes.

"Here's the preacher!" calls out the emcee. "We're ready to go ahead now. What'cher name, Dad?"

"Sometimes I'm called Madrak."

The man stops, turns and stares at him, licks his lips.

"I . . . didn't realize."

"Let's be on with it."

"Okay, sir. Make way here! Coming through! Hot stuff!"



P. REIDER

The crowd parts. There are perhaps three hundred people within the tent. Overhead lights blaze down upon a roped-in circle of bare earth in which a grave has been dug. Insects fly in rings through falling dust within the ladders of light. An opened coffin lies beside the opened grave. On a small platform of wood is a chair. The man seated upon the chair is perhaps fifty years of age. His face is flat and full of wrinkles, his complexion pale. His eyes bulge slightly. He wears only a pair of shorts, and he has much gray hair upon his chest, his arms, his legs. He leans forward and squints as the two approach through the crowd.

"All set, Dolmin," says the small man.

"My ten," says Madrak.

The small man slips him a folded bill, which Madrak inspects and places in his wallet.

The small man climbs up onto the platform and smiles out over the crowd. Then he pushes his straw hat back upon his head.

"All right, folks," he begins, "now we're all set to go. I know you'll find this was worth waiting for. As I announced earlier, this man Dolmin is about to commit suicide before your very eyes. For personal reasons he is resigning from the big race, and he has consented to earn a little money for his family by doing it in full

sight of all. His performance will be followed by a genuine burial, in this same ground upon which you are now standing. It has doubtless been a long time since any of you have seen a real death — and I doubt anyone here present has ever seen a burial. So we're about ready to turn this show over to the preacher and Mister Dalmin. Let's have a nice hand for them both!"

There is applause within the tent.

"And a final word of caution. Do not stand too close. We are bending an ordnance, despite the fact that this tent has been fully fire-proofed. Okay! Take it away!"

He jumps down from the platform as Madrak mounts it. Madrak leans toward the seated man as a can marked FLAMMABLE is placed beside his chair. "Are you sure you want to go through with this?" he asks the man.

"Yes."

He looks into the man's eyes, but the pupils are not enlarged, nor are they shrunken.

"Why?"

"Personal reasons, Dad. I'd rather not go into them. Shrive me, please."

Madrak places his hand upon the man's head.

"Insofar as I may be heard by anything, which may or may not care what I say, I ask if it matters, that you be forgiven for anything you may have done or failed to do which requires forgiveness.

Conversely, if not forgiveness but something else may be required to insure any possible benefit for which you may be eligible after the destruction of your body, I ask that this, whatever it may be, be granted or withheld, as the case may be, in such a manner as to insure your receiving said benefit. I ask this in my capacity as your elected intermediary between yourself and that which may not be yourself, but which may have an interest in the matter of your receiving as much as it is possible for you to receive of this thing, and which may in some way be influenced by this ceremony. Amen."

"Thank you, Dad."

"Beautiful!" sobs a fat woman with blue wings, from the front row.

The man called Dolmin raises the can marked FLAMMABLE, unscrews the cap, pours its contents over himself. "Has anyone got a cigarette?" he asks, and the small man hands one up to him. Dolmin reaches into the pocket of his shorts and withdraws a lighter. Then he pauses and looks out over the crowd. Someone calls out, "Why are you doing it?" He smiles then replies, "A general protest against life, perhaps, which is a foolish game, is it not? Follow me!" Then he lights the lighter. By this time, Madrak is well outside the roped-in circle.

A blast of heat follows the blaze,

and the single scream is a hot nail driven through everything.

The six men who are standing by with fire extinguishers relax when they see that the flames will not spread.

Madrak folds his hands beneath his chin and rests them upon his staff.

After a time, the flames go out and men with asbestos gloves come forward to handle the remains. The audience is quiet. There has been no applause thus far.

"So that's what it's like!" someone finally whispers, and the words carry throughout the tent.

"Perhaps," comes a precise, cheerful voice from the back of the tent, "and perhaps not, also."

**H**eads turn as the speaker moves forward. He is tall and has a pointed green beard and matching eyes and hair. His complexion is pale, his nose long and thin. He wears black and green.

"It is the magician," someone says, "from the show across the river."

"Correct," he replies, with a nod and a smile, and he makes his way forward through the crowd, clearing his path with a silvertopped cane.

The lid is closed on the casket as he pauses and whispers, "Madrak the Mighty."

Madrak turns, says "I've been looking for you."



"I know. That's why I'm here. What is this silly business?"

"Suicide show," says Madrak. "A man named Dolmin. They've forgotten what death is like."

"So soon, so soon," sighs the other. "Then let us give them their money's worth — full circle!"

"Vramin, I know you can do it, but considering the shape he's in—"

The small man in the straw hat approaches and regards them with his small dark eyes.

"Sir," he says to Madrak, "any other ceremonial things you'd care to do before the interment?"

"I — "

"Of course not," says Vramin. "One only buries the dead."

"What do you mean?"

"That man is not dead — only smouldering."

"You're wrong, mister. This is an honest show."

"Nevertheless, I say he lives and will walk again for your amusement."

"You must be some kind of chotic."

"Only an humble thaumaturge," Vramin replies, stepping into the circle.

Madrak follows him. Vramin then raises his cane and weaves it through a cryptic gesture. It glows with green light, which then leaps forward and falls upon the box.

"Dolmin, come forth!" says Vramin.

The audience presses forward. Vramin and Madrak move to the wall of the tent. The small man would follow them, but is distracted by a knocking from within the coffin.

"Brother, we'd best leave," says Vramin, and slices through the fabric with the tip of his cane.

The lid of the coffin is slowly raised as they step through the wall and into the world without.

Beyond them a sound occurs. It is compounded of screaming and cries of "Fake!" and "We want our money back!" and "*Look* at him!"

"What fools these mortals be," says the green man, who is one of the few persons living able to put quotation marks around it and know why.

He is coming, riding down the sky on the back of a great beast of burnished metal. It has eight legs, and its hooves are diamonds. Its body is as long as two horses. Its neck is as long as its body, and its head is that of a Chinese demon dog out of gold. Beams of blue light come forth from its nostrils, and its tail is three antennae. It moves across the blackness that lies between the stars, and its mechanical legs move slowly. Each step that it takes, however, crossing from nothing to nothing, carries it twice the distance of the previous step. Each stride also takes the same amount of time as the

prior one. Suns flash by, fall behind, wink out. It runs through solid matter, passes through infernos, pierces nebulae, faster and faster moving through the starfall blizzard within the forest of the night. Given a sufficient warm-up run, it is said that it could circumnavigate the universe in a single stride. What would happen if it kept running after that, no one knows.

Its rider had once been a man. He is the one who is called the Steel General. That is not a suit of armor that he is wearing. It is his body. He has turned off most of his humanity for the duration of the trip, and he stares now straight ahead past the scales like bronze oak leaves on the side of his mount's neck. He holds four reins, each as thick as a strand of silk, on the fingertips of his left hand. He wears a ring of tanned human flesh on his little finger, because it would be senseless and noisy for him to wear metal jewelry. The flesh had once been his; at least, it had helped to surround him at one time long ago.

Wherever he goes, he carries a collapsible five-string banjo with him in a compartment near to where his heart used to be. When he plays it he becomes a kind of negative Orpheus and men follow him to Hell.

He is also one of the very few masters of temporal fugue in the entire universe. It is said that no

man can lay hands upon him unless he permits it.

His mount had once been a horse.

**M**adrak tilts the beaker, refills their glasses.

Vramin raises his, stares out across the wide esplanade before his pavilion, quaffs it.

Madrak pours once more.

"It is neither life, nor is it fair," says Vramin, finally.

"Yet you never actively supported the program."

"What matters that? It is my present feelings that control me."

"The feelings of a poet . . ."

Vramin strokes his beard.

"I can never give full allegiance, to anything, or to anyone," he replies.

"Pity, poor Angel of the Seventh Station."

"That title perished with the Station."

"In exile, the aristocracy always tends to preserve small items pertaining to rank."

"Face yourself in the darkness and what do you see?"

"Nothing."

"Exactly."

"What is the connection?"

"Darkness."

"I fail to see."

"That warrior-priest, is common in the dark."

"Cease the riddling, Vramin. What is the matter?"

"Why did you seek, me here at the Fair?"

"I have the latest population figures with me. They strike me as approximating the mythical Point Critical — that which never occurs. Would you care to see them?"

"No. I do not need to. Whatever the figures, your conclusion is correct."

"You feel it with your special perceptions, within the tides of the Power?"

Vramin nods.

"Give me a cigarette," says Madrak.

Vram gestures, and a lighted cigarette appears between his fingers.

"It is special this time," he says. It is not just a waning of the tide of Life. There will be a riptide."

"How will this be manifest?"

"I do not know, Madrak. But I do not intend to stay here longer than is necessary to find out."

"Oh? When will you depart?"

"Tomorrow evening, though I know I am flirting with the Black Tide once more. I had best do something about my death-wish again, sometime soon, preferably in pentameter."

"Do any others remain?"

"No, we are the only two immortals on Blis."

"Will you give me a gateway when you go?"

"Of course."

"Then I'll remain here at the Fair until tomorrow evening."

“I should strongly recommend your going immediately, rather than waiting. I can provide a gateway now.” Vramin gestures again and draws upon a cigarette of his own. He notices his refilled glass and sips it. “It would be an act of wisdom to depart immediately,” he decides, “but wisdom is itself the product of knowledge; and knowledge, unfortunately, is generally the product of foolish doings. So, to add to my own knowledge and to enhance my wisdom I shall remain another day, to see what occurs.”

“Then you expect that something special will happen tomorrow?”

“Yes. The riptide. I feel the coming of Powers. There was recently some movement in that great House where all things go.”

“Then this is knowledge which I, too, wish to obtain,” says Mararak, “as it affects my former master Who Was A Thousand.”

“You cling to an outworn loyalty, mighty one.”

“Perhaps. And what is your excuse? Why do you seek to enhance your wisdom at this expense?”

“Wisdom is an end in itself. Also, these doings may be sources of great poetry.”

“If death be the source of great poetry, then I prefer the lesser variety. I feel, though, that the Prince should know of any new development within the Middle Worlds.”

“I drink to your loyalty, old friend, though I feel our former liege to be at least partly responsible for the present muddle.”

“Your feelings on this matter are not unknown to me.”

The poet takes one sip and lowers his glass. His eyes then grow all of one color, that being green. The white which encircles them vanishes, and the black points are gone that had been their centers. They are now become pale emeralds, and a yellow spark lives within each.

“Speaking in my capacity as mage and seer,” he says, in a voice grown distant and toneless, “I say that it has now arrived upon Bliss, this thing that portends the chaos. I say, too, that another comes, for I hear soundless hoofbeats within the dark, and I see that which is invisible in its many-strided paces over stars. We may yet ourselves be drawn into this thing, who have no wish to participate.”

“Where? And how?”

“Here. And it is not life, nor is it fair.”

Madrak nods and says, “Amen.”

The magician gnashes his teeth. “It is our destiny to bear witness,” he decides, and his eyes burn with an infernal brilliance and his knuckles whiten upon the black walking stick with its head of silver.

A eunuch priest of the highest caste sets tapers before a pair of old shoes . . . .

The dog worries the dirty glove which has seen many better centuries. . . .

The blind Norns strike a tiny silver anvil with fingers that are mallets. Upon the metal lies a length of blue light. . . .

## VI

Osiris sits in the House of Life, drinking the blood-red wine. The green glow fills the air about, and nowhere is there anything sharp or cold. He sits in the Hall of the Hundred Tapestries, and the walls are invisible behind them all. The floor is covered with a fabric that is thick and soft and golden in color.

He puts down an empty glass and stands. Moving across the Hall, he comes to the green tapestry, raises it and steps into the cubicle which it conceals. He touches three of the coordination plates set in the wall, pushes aside the tapestry, and steps into a room located three hundred forty-eight miles south-southwest of the Hall of the Hundred Tapestries, at a depth of 78,544 feet.

The chamber he enters is semi-dark, but a portion of the green glow can be felt within it.

The one who wears a red loin-cloth and sits cross-legged upon the floor does not appear to notice him. His back is turned, and he does not move. His body is normally

formed, somewhat slim, and his muscles seem those of a swimmer. His hair is thick and as dark as hair can be without being black. His complexion is pale. He is leaning forward and does not appear to be breathing.

Suddenly, another is seated across from him, in an identical posture. He is dressed in exactly the same manner. His complexion, hair and musculature are the same. He is the same, in all respects; and he raises his dark eyes from the small yellow crystal they contemplate. Looking up, he sees the orange, green, yellow and black birdhead of Osiris, and his eyes widen and he says, "I have done it again," and the one whose back is to Osiris vanished before him.

He scoops up the crystal, places it in a cloth bag with drawstrings and hangs it at his waist. Then he stands.

"Nine second fugue," he says.

"Is that your record?" asks Osiris, and his voice sounds like a scratched recording that is being played too rapidly.

"Yes, father."

"Can you control it yet?"

"No."

"How much longer will it take?"

"Who knows? Ishibaka says perhaps three centuries."

"Then you will be a master?"

"No one can really tell in advance. There are fewer than thirty masters in all the worlds. It has

taken me two centuries to advance this far, and it has been less than a year since the first movement. Of course, once it is developed, the power continues to grow. . . .”

Osiris shakes his head and steps forward, laying his hand upon his shoulder.

“Horus, my son and avenger, there is a thing I would have you do. It would be good if you were a master of the fugue, but it is not essential. Your other powers should prove sufficient to the task.”

“What task is this, my father?”

“Your mother, wishing to gain once more my favor and a return from exile, has offered me further information as to my colleague’s activities. It appears that Anubis has sent a new emissary into the Middle Worlds, doubtless to locate our ancient enemy and destroy him.”

“This would seem a good thing,” says Horus, nodding, “if successful. I have my doubts, though, since he has failed each time he has tried. How many has he sent now — five or six?”

“Six. This one he has named Wakim is seventh.”

“Wakim?”

“Yes, and the bitch tells me he seems to be something special.”

“How so?”

“Is it possible that the jackal spent a thousand years training him for this job. His fighting prowess may be equal to that of Mad-

rak himself. And he appears to bear a special token none of the others bore. It would seem that he is attuned to draw energy directly from the field.”

“I wonder how he thought that one up?” asks Horus, smiling.

“It would seem that he has been studying the tricks certain of the immortals have used against us.”

“What would you have me do? Assist him against your enemy?”

“No. I have decided that whichever of us succeeds in destroying the Prince Who Was A Thousand, that one will gain the support of his fallen Angels who are numbered among the immortals. The rest should follow. Those who do not will doubtless enter the House of the Dead at the hands of their fellows. The time is right. The old loyalties have been forgotten. A new, solitary liege would be welcomed, I feel, one who offered an end to their fugitive existence. And with the support of the immortals, one House can emerge supreme.”

“I see your reasoning father. It may well be that it is correct. You would have me find the Prince Who Was A Thousand, before Wakim finds him, and slay him in the name of Life?”

“Yes, my avenger. Do you think you can do this?”

“I am troubled that you would ask that question, knowing my strengths.”

“The Prince will be no easy

prey. His strengths are mainly unknown, and I cannot tell you what he looks like, nor where he abides."

"I will find him. I will end him. But perhaps I had best destroy this Wakim before I begin the search."

"No! He is on the world of Blis, where even now the plague should be beginning. But do not approach that one, Horus! Not unless I bid it. I have strange feelings concerning Wakim. I must find out who he was before I permit such an attempt."

"Why is this, mighty father? What should that matter?"

"A memory of days before your days, which shall remain unspoken, returns to trouble me. Ask me no more."

"Very well."

"The bitch, your mother, bade me lay different plans concerning the Prince. If you should meet with her during your travels, do not be swayed by any counsels regarding leniency. The Prince must die."

"She would have him live?"

Osiris nods.

"Yes, she is very fond of him. She may have informed us of Wakim only to save the Prince from him. She will tell you any lie to gain her ends. Do not be deceived."

"I will not."

"Then I send you, Horus, my avenger and my son, as first emissary of Osiris into the Middle Worlds."

Horus bows his head, and Osiris places his hand upon it for a warm moment.

"He is dead already," says Horus, slowly, "for was it not I that destroyed the Steel General himself?"

Osiris does not answer, for he, too once destroyed the Steel General.

## VII

The Prince Who Was A Thousand walks beside the sea and under the sea. The only other intelligent inhabitant of the world within which he walks cannot be sure whether the Prince created it or discovered it. This is because one can never be sure whether wisdom produces or merely locates, and the Prince is wise.

He walks along the beach. His footsteps begin seven paces behind him. High above his head hangs the sea.

The sea hangs above his head because it has no choice in the matter. The world within which he walks is so constructed that if one were to approach it from any direction, it would appear to be a world completely lacking in land masses. If one were to descend far enough beneath that sea which surrounds it, however, one would emerge from the underside of the waters and enter into the planet's atmosphere. Descending still far-

ther, one would reach dry land. Traversing this land, one might come upon other bodies of water, waters bounded by land, beneath the sea that hangs in the sky.

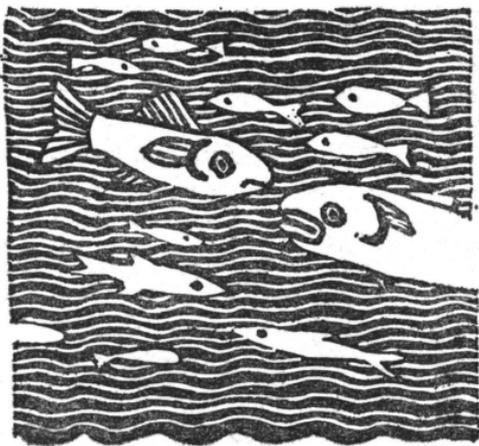
The big sea flows perhaps a thousand feet overhead. Bright fish fill its bottom, like mobile constellations. And down here on the land, everything glows.

It has been said that a world such as this unnamed place with a sea for a sky could not possibly exist. Those who said it are obviously wrong. Positing infinity, the rest is easy.

The Prince Who Was A Thousand is in an unique position. He is a teleportationist, among other things, and this is even rarer than a master of temporal fugue. In fact, he is the only one of his kind. He can transport himself, in no time at all, to any place that he can visualize.

And he has a very vivid imagination. Granting that any place you can think of exists somewhere in infinity, if the Prince can think of it too, he is able to visit it. Now, a few theorists claim that the Prince's visualizing a place and willing himself into it is actually an act of creation. No one knew about the place before, and if the Prince can find it, then maybe what he really did was make it happen. Whatever—positing infinity, the rest is easy.

The Prince has not the least idea, not a snowball in hell's worth, as



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to where the nameless world is located, anyway, re the rest of the universe. Nor does he care. He can come and go as he chooses, taking with him whomsoever he would.

He has come alone, however, because he wishes to visit his wife.

He stands beside the sea, beneath the sea, and he calls out her name, which is the name "Nephytha," and he waits till a breeze comes to him from across the waters, touching him and saying the name that is his own.

He bows then his head and feels her presence about him.

"How goes the world with thee, loved one?" he inquires.

There came a sob upon the air, breaking the surf's monotone turning.

"Well," comes the reply. "And thyself, my lord?"

"I will be truthful rather than polite, and say 'poorly.'"

"It cries yet in the night?"

"Yes."

"I thought of thee as I drifted and as I flowed. I have made birds to be within the air to keep me company, but their cries are either harsh or sad. What may I tell thee, to be polite, rather than truthful? That I am not sickened by his life that is not life? That I do not long to be a woman once again, rather than a breath, a color, a movement? That I do not ache to touch thee once again, and

to feel once again thy touch upon my body? Thou knowest all that I might say, but no one god possesses all powers. I should not complain, but I fear, my lord, I fear the madness that sometimes comes upon me: Never to sleep, never to eat. How long has it been?"

"Many centuries."

"And I know that all wives be bitches unto their lords, and I may ask of thee thy forgiveness. But to whom else may I address my bitching, but to thee?"

"Well taken, my Nephytha. Would that I could embody thee once more, for I, too, am lonely. Thou knowest I have tried. When thou hast broken the Thing That Cries, then wilt thou discipline Osiris and Anubis?"

"Of course."

"Please do not destroy them immediately, if they can help me. Grant them some measure of mercy if they give me back to you.

"... For I am so lonely. I wish that I could go away from here."

"You require a place surrounded by water, to keep you alive. You require an entire world, to keep you occupied."

"I know. I know."

"If Osiris had not been so dead-ly set upon vengeance, things might have been different. Now, thou knowest, I am bound to slay him when I have resolved the matter of the Nameless."

(continued on page 153)

# WHERE THE TIME WENT

by JAMES H. SCHMITZ

*No wonder Belk had troubles. His  
time particles were not synchronal!*

This began in the office of John D. Carew, of the John D. Carew Literary Agency, New York City. Present in the room were John D. Carew and George Belk, one of his authors.

"George," Carew was saying, "please don't misunderstand me. When — rather long ago — I saw the first samples of your work, I was delighted. I told myself you might grow in time to be one of our most valuable properties. I still believe you retain that potential. But having represented you for over eight years, I begin to feel concerned. Your overall output remains regrettably slight."

George Belk sighed. "I know it."

"I can place almost anything you write," Carew went on, "for relatively good money. But over the years checks have been few and far between. You must be feeling the financial pinch from time to time."

"I get by," George said, looking despondent. "But barely."

Carew clucked in a sympathetic way. "If you'd like to confide in me, George — what seems to be your problem?"

George sighed again. "I wish I could define the problem! I can't. The effect is simply that I don't seem to have time to get more writing done."

Carew's eyebrows lifted for a

moment. "You are engaged in other work? Perhaps in intensive social activities?"

"No! Neither. I write full time. Of course I have chores to take care of around the house. I go shopping. And I try to reserve half an hour a day for physical exercise."

Carew nodded. "The last is commendable! One should keep fit. But is that all you do? Besides writing?"

"Yes," George said. "That's all."

"Then you must, in fact, be putting in a great deal of worktime during an average day . . ."

"No, I don't," George said. "Let me try to explain it to you—though, as I said, I can't explain it myself. You may not believe this, but I'm a methodical and orderly man. I keep files and records. So I can't help noticing that I manage to waste an incredible amount of time."

"In what way?"

George scowled. "That's what I'd like to know! Take my half-hour of exercise in the morning. Nine to nine-thirty is the period I set aside for it. I shave at eight, right after breakfast. Then I drag some mats out into the living room and pull back the furniture. By then it's nine o'clock."

Carew looked very thoughtful. "Shaving and dragging out some mats and pulling back a few pieces of furniture consumes a full hour?"

"It doesn't seem reasonable, does it?" George said. "Well, that's part of what I mean. A small part . . . So then it's nine o'clock and I exercise. I time that — thirty minutes exactly."

"But before I've got dressed again and straightened out the living room and am ready to go shopping, it's usually close to eleven."

Carew grunted and stroked his chin. "When do you actually get to work?"

George looked embarrassed. "Well, around one-fifteen."

"You shop for two hours?"

"Yes, somehow it comes to that. I have to go to several stores. No one store ever seems to carry everything you want."

"I see. Then you work through the afternoon?"

"In principle. I may put in a short break now and then."

"Doing what?" Carew asked.

"Oh, I might have a snack — and then of course I have to wash the dishes again. Oh I'll tidy up a room that's beginning to look too messy. That kind of thing."

"Umm. And in the evening?"

"Ordinarily I'm working. I take in an occasional TV show."

Carew leaned back in his chair. "And what is your average daily output under those circumstances?"

George hung his head. "Roughly — five hundred words."

Carew just blinked at him in silence.

“That’s the incredible part of it!” George said explosively.

“Because I’ve timed myself on occasion. When I have, I’ve found I can turn out a page of perfectly usable material in around twenty minutes.” He leaned forward, slammed his fist on the desk. “I tell you, sometimes I think this is going to drive me crazy! *Where does the rest of my time go?*”

“I’m not hure,” said Carew, pulling open a desk drawer. “But it’s possible that there is a solution to your problem. Yes, quite possible!”

“What kind of solution?” George asked hopefully.

Carew fished about in the drawer, took out a business card and slid it across the desk to George. “When you get home,” he said, “call this number and get yourself an appointment. I’ll have talked with their office meanwhile.”

George read the card. The name on it was William W. Gordon, M.D.

“Now wait a minute!” he said suspiciously. “This Dr. Gordon doesn’t happen to be a psychiatrist, does he?”

“No,” said Carew. “Dr. Gordon is not a psychiatrist. He has medical and psychological degrees, but he isn’t in general practice. He does research work.”

“And just how is he supposed to research me?” George asked in a somewhat belligerent tone.

“He isn’t going to research you

George. He’s going to research your problem.”

“Well, I don’t know,” George muttered. He stared uneasily at the card, turning it around in his fingers.

“George,” said Carew, “you exhibit the not uncommon fear of your ilk that if a headshrinker ever got his hooks on you, you’d be in for a fast trip to the funny farm. Let me assure you that you run no risk of that in doing as I suggest. Let me assure you further that I know of several cases in which a problem quite similar to yours was solved by Dr. Gordon to the applicants’ great satisfaction.”

“Could you give me a few names?” George said warily.

“I could, but I don’t intend to,” Carew told him.

Dr. Gordon was a big warm fuzzy man who seemed reluctant to voice even the most general sort of opinion about George’s problem. “First, Mr. Belk,” he said, “we must establish precisely what the nature of the trouble is. Only then can we begin to think in terms of corrective procedures.”

George had to be satisfied with that. He sat rigid in a chair while Dr. Gordon fitted a mesh of metal bands about his skull and tightened them down gently with large stubby fingers.

“What’s that for?” George asked.

“It should give me some infor-

mation about this and that going on inside your head."

George cleared his throat. "Carrew told me you weren't a psychiatrist."

"I'm not," Dr. Gordon said, "though I started out in that direction. Think of me as an electronics specialist and don't worry about your mittful of neuroses and compulsions. I couldn't care less about them. Now let's see how well you can let yourself relax for the next five minutes . . ."

The five minutes passed eventually, and George was told he could stop relaxing. He twisted around in the chair and saw Dr. Gordon place some instruments into a drawer in his desk. He was frowning pensively.

"What did you find out, Doctor?" George asked.

Dr. Gordon looked up and stopped frowning. "Oh, about what I expected." He came over and began to remove the metal mesh from around George's head.

"Is it . . . serious?" asked George.

"Well, definitely it's something we must follow up. Now, Mr. Belk, I need your cooperation for the next step. It will hardly inconvenience you at all."

Dr. Gordon then turned to a wall closet and took from it a device which looked like one of the more expensive kinds of camera except that it had no lens and nothing visibly on it which would be twist-

ed or pressed. "We'll put this in a case," Dr. Gordon said, placing the instrument in a case as he spoke, "and you'll set it up in your house for the next two days. You say you're not married. Do you have many visitors?"

"Very few nowadays," said George.

"You live alone?"

"Yes. Except for some cats."

"Cats don't count," said Dr. Gordon. "Very well. Set up this instrument — you can leave it in the case — somewhere near the center of your house. This is Tuesday. Between now and ten A.M. Friday, I'd like you to note down the occasions when somebody besides yourself is in the house or even comes to the door. The mailman, as an example. If you happen to forget, it won't matter too much. But try to remember. Note the time anybody arrives and the length of time he stays around. I'll see you again Friday at ten. Bring the instrument back with you."

Hesitantly George took the instrument case. "This is all rather mystifying!" he remarked uncomfortably.

"I'm sure it must seem that way to you," Dr. Gordon. "But remember, Mr. Belk, that we live in a rapidly evolving scientific age!" He gave George a brief smile and a reassuring clap on the shoulder. "Put your trust in advanced electronics!"

**D**uring the next two days George forgot half the time that he had Dr. Gordon's device in the house. When he first got home with it, he'd taken it out of the case and looked it over carefully. That told him nothing. There were no settings, no concealed switches in it. He put it back in the case on a small table which stood approximately in the center of the house. He called John Carew, told him what Dr. Gordon had said and described the mysterious instrument. "Is that his usual procedure?"

Carew said he had no idea what Dr. Gordon's usual procedure was. However they could assume he knew what he was doing, and George should go along with instructions.

That part was easy. Only the mailman came to the house on Wednesday and Thursday, and George dutifully noted the time of day. Otherwise he went about his normal activities, still wondering now and then at the way time seemed to be slipping through his grasp. In spite of Carew's assurances, he found himself unable to develop much faith in the effectiveness of Dr. Gordon's approach.

At quarter to eleven on Friday morning his telephone rang. He picked up the receiver.

"Hello, Mr. Belk," Dr. Gordon's voice said. "It appears we've forgotten our appointment, heh?"

Abashed, George admitted that he had indeed forgotten it. "And

I don't know how it happened," he said. "I definitely planned to be at your office by ten o'clock. It seems to me I was looking at my watch just a moment ago, and it was then barely past nine."

"I'm not surprised," Dr. Gordon said cryptically. "I'll see you as soon as you can make it here. Bring along the drainometer."

"The what?" asked George.

"The gadget," said Dr. Gordon, and hung up.

On reflection George decided that knowing the device was called a drainometer didn't really tell him much. He took it from its place on the table and set off, feeling unhappy and badly confused. At the office Dr. Gordon ushered him into a side room, provided him with some magazines to leaf around in, and disappeared with the drainometer. Some fifteen minutes later he came back into the room, closed the door, and stood staring at George.

"This is as bad a case as I've come across," he observed, shaking his head. "Worse even than I'd suspected!"

"As bad a case of what?" George asked, alarmed.

"Of time drainage!" Dr. Gordon pulled a chair out from behind a table and sat down. "I'll explain the situation to you as well as I can, Mr. Belk, and I believe you'll see why it was necessary for me to remain silent until now."

He steepled his fingers. "I won't attempt to go into the math of this," he said. "For one reason, because I suspect that scientific math is not your forte."

"No, it isn't" George agreed.

"Then let me tell you in a more general way about time. There are two distinct kinds of time. There is TIME — time in capitals, so to speak — which is the time through which the world about all of us progresses. And then there is subjective, or individual, lower case time."

George nodded interestedly. "Einstein's theories have to do that, don't they?"

"Not really. The science of time units is a different development. Picture to yourself that everybody generates and has available for his use a personal supply of time units or particles. Say, roughly, that for every fifty years of real time, or TIME, everybody generates and uses up fifty million time particles.

"When this process is operating normally, the individual is synchronous in TIME. He feeds out his time particles in a steady uniform stream which keeps him comfortably abreast of the passage of TIME in the world. However, problems may arise. You, for example, Mr. Belk, do not have as solid a contact with the flow of your time particles as you might have — we can assume that something in you withdraws to some extent from the outside world and TIME. As a re-

sult you're a natural time particle waster. At present there isn't much we can do about that condition. On the other hand, it's hardly a serious matter. I'd estimate that you normally lose about one time particle in twenty — not a significant percentage."

"I'm not sure I'm following all all this," George admitted.

"It's not necessary for you to grasp it all," Dr. Gordon assured him. "I simply want you to have the general picture. Now look at another aspect of the matter. People, as you know, have widely varying feelings about the value of time. Some never get enough of it. They have many things to do and many more things they'd like to do and simply can't get around to doing. If they could squeeze forty-eight full hours into a single workday, they'd be delighted.

"And then there are people who have, as we say, time on their hands. Often very heavily on their hands. It is a commodity for which they can find no real use. If it were possible, they would be glad to be relieved of a large part of it.

"And nowadays it is possible. That's the point here. There are methods whereby a portion of the flow of one individual's time particles can be diverted from him and integrated into the flow of another person's time particles. The second person now has subjectively more time available to him than he

had before, and the first person has subjectively less. It is an insidious process: the loser in this transaction has no way of grasping what has happened. If he is a man who places no value on time and has time to spare in that sense, he may not even notice that anything has happened. He may feel quite comfortable — and less bored — within the time particle flow left at his disposal.

But when the victim is a busy man, a man who needs his time, it is a different matter. Again, of course, he doesn't understand the situation. He simply is aware that it seems to take him forever to get anything done. He feels that the minutes and hours are slipping through his fingers, as in fact they are."

George stared at the doctor in shocked dismay. "That's what's been happening to me?" he asked.

"That's what's been happening to you, Mr. Belk."

"But," George cried, outraged, "this has been going on for years!"

"Evidently."

"What can I do to stop it? You said —"

"I indicated that your problem could be solved, Mr. Belk," said Dr. Gordon. "And indeed it will be. You see, this situation is so fraught with unethical possibilities that an organization exists which is dedicated to policing the transfer of subjective time among individuals. Such transactions may be quite legitimate. As I explained, a good many people have more time than they know what to do with, they have surplus time which is a nuisance to them. People who need additional time are allowed to draw it from such individuals, providing suitable compensation is made. Since our organization operates with as much secrecy as possible, the donor frequently doesn't know there

In WORLDS OF FANTASY —

## THE MIRROR OF WIZARDRY

by John Jakes

## DELENDIA EST . . .

by Robert E. Howard

## AS IS

by Robert Silverberg

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has been a transaction. But always he must be compensated. An unexpected stroke of good fortune comes his way; he may find a better job, more suitable to his unenergetic nature, suddenly open to him, and so forth. Both parties have benefitted."

"But why the secrecy?" George asked. "If everybody knew —"

"If everybody were aware of this, Mr. Belk, the situation might get completely out of hand. As I said, the process of extracting time particles from somebody else is very simple, once it is understood. We want no more people to know about it than we can help."

"I see." George hesitated. "Then you — this organization — will keep whoever has been stealing my time from doing it again?"

Dr. Gordon smiled. "We can do better than that. Much better. The drainometer recordings indicate that at various periods during the past two days as much as nine out of ten of your time particles have been surreptitiously diverted. This is a blatant crime. The fact that you are, as I previously indicated, inherently somewhat careless with your time has made you an easy victim. But now compensation must be made by those who took advantage of this. When you leave here, you will carry another instrument with you. The next attempt to tap the flow of your time particles

will give us a direct line to the perpetrator. In all likelihood we shall find then that you have been preyed upon not by one individual but by a criminal gang."

"A gang?" George repeated.

"Exactly. As I pointed out, Mr. Belk, time is a commodity. It has value. For some it has great value. Among such people there always will be a number who do not care whether the commodity they want can be obtained legally or ethically, provided only they get it. And there always will be criminal elements willing to supply the commodity for a price. We're constantly on the lookout for indications of such a situation."

"And you can make them compensate for what they've done?"

"Yes, we can," said Dr. Gordon. "The organization has very effective means of dealing with such criminals and those who benefit unethically by their crimes. We shall establish exactly how much time was diverted from you and by whom during the past years, and to the last particle this time will be drained from the guilty parties involved and restored. Not in a lump sum, so to speak. But you will have established a time credit with the organization, on which you can draw as your requirements or wishes dictate. In other words, if you should like to operate for a while on the basis of a fully usable forty-eight-hour working day, or

even a hundred-hour day, you will be able to do it."

George was silent a moment. "I hardly know how to thank the organization — and you, sir!" he said then. "There must be some way I can repay you."

Dr. Gordon cleared his throat. "Well, as a matter of fact, it is customary to charge a fee. The fee goes not to me but to the organization. As I say, time is a commodity. We all can use it. Would a fee of say ten per cent of the time you will regain seem fair to you?"

"Eminently fair!" George declared.

He called John Carew next day to tell him of the outcome of the matter.

"Exactly as I thought!" Carew said with evident satisfaction.

"So you knew all about this time drain stuff, eh?" said George.

"I should," Carew's voice told him. "Quite a long while ago I found myself in a pickle not unlike yours. Somebody steered me to the organization, and they adjusted the matter very satisfactorily. In fact, I'll still put in an occasional fifty hours day, though I found, as I believe you will, that a fully available ordinary workday is quite enough in the long run."

"I expect you're right," George agreed. "For a few months though I intend to really live it up on my time account!"

"Fine," said John Carew. "In that case, I'll look forward to getting a new novel from you within . . . oh, let's say the next two weeks."

And he got it.

END

This month in Galaxy

## BUILDING ON THE LINE

by Gordon R. Dickson

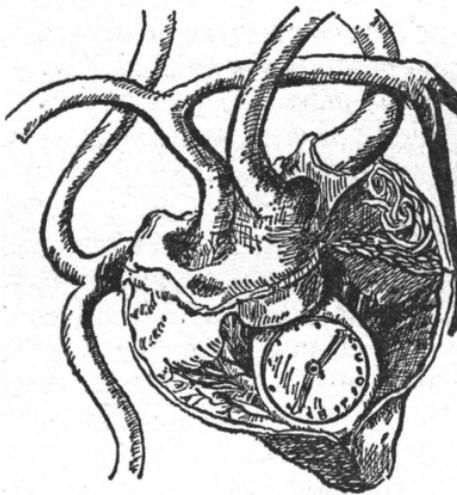
## THE TELL-TALE HEART MACHINE

by Brian W. Aldiss

## PERRIS WAY

by Robert Silverberg

And many more in the big November issue!



# NOW THAT MAN IS GONE

BY JAMES BLISH

*There are always two  
kinds of immortality.*

As he had almost always done, done, the Waw sat beside the pool, sailing a paper boat, and listened to his undying heart. This was day four of the two thousand and third year of his imprisonment; day three of the one thousand, nine hundred and ninety-fourth year after the extinction of the human race; and, the ninth year of his age. It would always be the ninth year of his age.

In a little while the Cheng would appear, the sigil of its own imprisonment blazoned on the barrel that contained its brain, and ask him if he wanted anything. And as always the Waw would be able to

think of nothing to want. The asteroid that the Cheng's makers had hollowed out and powered for the two of them supplied every need the boy could imagine and was pleasant to live in. Of course, it had no sun, and the Waw did not know where in sidereal space it was wandering at the moment; but he did not care. The Cheng's barrel was loaded with useless information of that kind; he had only to ask. On some earlier changeless morning, the Waw had amused himself by asking for facts like that, so that he could compute the mean free paths of the electrons as they charged about in the Cheng's barrel to

dredge up the information, but it had not been a very good game. It had been that computation that had showed him that the Cheng's barrel must hold all the knowledge of the human race that the Cheng's makers had been able to find and that none of it — what little there was — was much fun.

The paper boat moved on the slow ripples stirred by the Waw's stick. It was not going anywhere, but its fortunes were much more interesting than the mean free paths of electrons.

The undying heart ticked on. Tomorrow, too, would be like this.

There was a sound in the rushes to his left; then the cattails parted and the Cheng appeared. Big though the machine was, it was not clumsy, and its movements were nearly silent. It consisted, in chief, of two cunningly jointed legs, set wide apart; a ring of heavy metal plates which was its pelvic girdle, in which, from here, the Waw could see his own red hair reflected; the chest barrel, with the blazon on it, topped by a bulging rim; arms much like the legs, except that they ended in tool assemblies; and a great flat head which sprang like a turtle's from the middle of the barrel, below the bulging carapace. All these things were connected together by fabric-covered accordion-joints which could extend the Cheng's reach, height or field of view astonishingly if it had the

need, with a thoroughness possible to no creature designed by nature; and its hip-girdle was hung with supplementary instruments to augment its always-racing, always anxious mind.

"Is there anything — ?"

"No."

It went away, infinitely patient in its disappointment. Why did it care? What had it been made to care about? Some day, the Waw thought, I'll ask it that. But not today. There's plenty of time. Plenty of time.

His father had seen to that. Once when some human world — had it been Poictesme? — had been following the others into the striped madness of the Wave, and the Waw himself had had some other name — had it been Root? — his father had tenderly put him to sleep, and when the Waw had awakened, the heart was inside him. His father, already dying, had said:

The Nuremberg egg . . . It was Columbus's cartographer who made it . . . the watch with the escapement that would never stop . . . I've given you time, Jock . . . use it . . . hatch it . . . "

None of this had meant anything to the Waw. His father — a collector of dictionaries — often talked like that even when well. But since the bubble of the Cheng had lifted him from the ruins of Bellegarde and brought him here, he

and the Cheng had worked out the nature of the heart. It was actually two units: the heart proper, and an implanted biological fuel cell which metabolized his own blood sugar through a series of oxidation-reduction reactions, triggered by enzymes also normal to his system. The burning took place at normal body temperature, the ashes were metabolites his body could dispose of normally, and the electron transfer produced about twenty watts of power to drive the heart.

The pump itself flexed soundlessly, 35 to 40 million times a year. It would never tire, nor wear out; but more important, the ion-exchange resin of which it had been made was so powerful a serum detoxicant as to stop the aging process completely.

He wondered if his father could have intended that. But of course there was no way of knowing. The Cheng knew nothing about the motives of human beings; and at nine, neither did the Waw, though he was very good on the mean free paths of electrons.

It had been about this time, too, that the Cheng revealed that the Wave had destroyed the whole of the human race, and had given him the name of the Waw, or Next-To-Last. As far as the boy could tell, the appellation represented nothing more than a hope on the part of the Cheng's makers; certainly the Cheng knew of no other survivor,

nor had any further word of one reached the asteroid in the last two thousand and three years and four days. (It was lonely here sometimes.)

The Waw knew this because the Cheng answered any question that was put to it; it appeared to be incapable of lying. It had even told him how he could leave the asteroid if he wished; but the method was too complicated to be worth attempting. He was comfortable here; and besides, where would he go? Humanity was dead, and he could not live on any other world that was habitable for the Cheng's makers, nor had he any desire to meet them.

The paper boat became soggy and sank, slowly. Bemused, he watched it settle. There were fish in the pool, but he caught them only rarely, so as not to get ahead of their breeding cycle. The Cheng had said that when those were gone, it could not get any more; and they were company, in a sense that the Cheng could never be because it was only marginally alive and hence quite predictable. In a while, instead, he would go to the library, where he was trying to work out why he liked an almost incomprehensible ancient work called *Life on the Mississippi*. But not yet; nor just yet. There was plenty of time.

The boat disappeared under the ripples, disintegrating as it went

and turning a deeper and deeper jade. When the Waw at last looked up, the Cheng was back, rather to his surprise.

"What do you want?"

The machine flexed its arms uneasily. It seemed to be having difficulty in speaking. At last it said:

"We have found the Ya."

The boy did not quite register this for a long moment. Then he sprang up.

"Where?"

"In frozen storage, in a powerless capsule drifting toward the galactic rim. By its decay level, we judge that it must have been fired when the Wave first began, about a thousand years before your birth, and missed its target. But the Ya is still alive, though perhaps not for much longer."

Now that the moment had come, the moment in which he had never believed, the Waw found that he could not meet it. It had been so long since he had seen another human being, so long! Suppressing the obvious question, he said instead:

"What do you mean by decay level, Cheng? Was the capsule hot—radioactive?"

"Not significantly," said Cheng. "In any event, we do not know the age or generation of its radioactives. But non-radioactive matter also has a half-life; this is why the universe is finite."

This revelation was so stunning

that it almost eclipsed the immediate dilemma; but after a while, the boy found that he could not handle its implications, and the dilemma began creeping back. With a sigh he did not hear himself, he said: "Never mind. Where is the Ya?"

"In the infirmary."

The Waw had never needed the infirmary, thanks to the undying heart, but he knew where it was. The asteroid was small, and he had had two millenia in which to explore it.

He said to the Cheng. "Follow." He dropped his stick into the pool. It floated silently, turning, unable to drift away because it had no place to drift to.

The Ya was a girl, perhaps twelve years of age. She was asleep and looked fragile and pale, though in the whiteness of the infirmary her coloring seemed almost hectic.

Staring down at her, the Waw suddenly felt a different kind of sadness than he had ever known before. Though he could not have told anyone what he thought, and indeed he did not know himself, he was wondering — or was it trying to visualize? — what final, terrible act of love had put the girl in that capsule.

"Is this what you've been waiting for?" he said at last.

"Yes," the Cheng said. "My

makers too are very old. They seek continuity for life in the universe. And the Ya will not live forever either, so you must act rapidly."

The boy looked up.

"What do you mean, Cheng?"

"It is needful," the Cheng said, "that you should breed."

Until that moment, he had not really known how radically little the Cheng's makers knew or were ever likely to know about human beings. As for the poor machine, looming over them in all its power, learning and versatility, it was simply and hopelessly funny.

But the Waw was unable to laugh.

The girl opened her eyes. They showed nothing but terror and complete incomprehension. And why not, after three thousand years of nothing but cold sleep.

"Stand back, Cheng," the boy said. "Out of sight. And pull in your head . . . Girl, you're all right. You've gotten to where you were going."

He thought she began to breathe more quietly. After a while, he added: "Cheng, are you a surgeon?"

"If needs be."

"Have you a human heart in storage?"

"No."

"Could you find one, outside?"

"Yes, perhaps," the Cheng said, "but after how many centuries? Much time has passed already; and the Ya will not —"

"Shut up."

The boy thought rapidly, out of practice though he was. Not about giving up his longevity — no, he had worn that out already; it was of no use to him any more, not even for fishing — but about growing up, a hope he had abandoned years and centuries ago.

"Will you obey me, Cheng?"

"I am so constructed. Is there at last something you want?"

"Yes. Prepare to leave the asteroid, you poor lump. The Ya and I are going. We require you come."

"Is it necessary for breeding?"

"It is. And we'll need a surgeon."

"And while you're at it, search your barrel for the name and location of some place where there might be a human organ bank."

"I already know that there are none within any useful time —"

"And in the meantime, shut up. We'll look anyhow. Go get on the job. Feed the fish on your way."

The Cheng left. The Next-to-Last turned to the Last, feeling, as he did in every artificial dawn, the almost silent ticking of the infernal machine in his chest — and knowing now why it had been made. The girl rose timidly; and timidly, the boy tried to smile.

**I**n some human Scriptures, the first chapter is called *Genesis*. In later versions, it is called *The Undeathless Heart*; but no one any longer knows why. **END**

# WIZARD SHIP

by F. HAINES PRICE

*The gods took Hin in their ship.  
But they could never change him!*

**H**in sat before the cooking fire to ease the morning chill. His woman was grinding the grain for the next day's bread, and he watched her fat breasts swing as she crushed the seeds. Her fatness was his pride; the size of her belly and haunches told the village that he was good at the hunt and able to feed his woman much meat. While he sat, warmed by the fire and food in his stomach, his mind was full of old battles and his prowess as a warrior. Soon his father would die, and he would take his place as chief. The old man could no longer hunt, and his mind wandered into the past and lingered there. He also thought of the child in his wife's body; the swelling of growth that

he hoped would be a son. These things made Hin feel proud and strong; his pleasant thoughts and warmth of the fire and the rising sun pushed him towards sleep.

Suddenly the skyship broke the morning quiet with waves of sound. Hin fell to the ground and hid his eyes in the dirt. He lay there like a frightened child till the roaring stopped, hoping the gods had not come to take his spirit. When he looked up he saw the needle-shaped outline of the ship over half a mile off. The rockets' heat seemed to clear the sky of clouds, and the sun glanced and dazzled off the vessel's hull. Hin looked about him for the other villagers but he could see nothing but their backs as they ran

into the forest. Only his father remained because he was too old to run. The old chief was laying on the ground quivering and squirming in his fright, and Hin was ashamed. The gods were there, and he would go meet them; but first he hid his father in one of the huts.

As he walked towards the ship, he slipped several times on the grass that was still damp with dew and was forced to keep his head bent so that he could see and direct his feet. Fear made him clumsy; he was uneasy over what the gods wanted and what they would do with him. Perhaps they would sacrifice him, or if he was lucky they would take him along in their ship. Hin would miss his wife if he had to go live in the heavens, yet he still felt that the other villagers were fools for running away; even his teacher, the old witchman, had acted the part of a child and fled with the rest.

The grass near the skyship was mostly charred stubble, and a dark sooty cloud rose up around Hin's feet as he approached. By the time he stood close by the ship, the soot had coated his body and his sweat mixed with it, running down his chest and back leaving streaks of black. No sound came from within the vessel, and Hin asked the gods why they did not speak. No answer was forthcoming, but a slender plastic conveyor slowly projected itself from the base of the

## An IF First

Each month *If* brings you a new writer, never before published. This month's is F. Haines Price, a 25-year-old Philadelphian, who found time for his writing after breaking a leg playing Rugby. He is deeply interested in biology and plans to return to college when his wife graduates with her degree in biology. At present, he's working on a novel and more short stories — some of which we hope to be bringing you in the future!

craft. When it reached Hin's feet, its outward motion ceased and the belt began to revolve slowly towards the ship. Hin prostrated himself on the scorched earth and yelled his respect for the gods in a voice shrill with fear. Yet no answer came. Nothing changed; the belt of the conveyor kept on moving towards the ship, an invitation that Hin had not yet understood.

“Why the hell doesn't he get on the belt; we'd be breaking the alien freewill clause. You know that as well as I do. We can entice only without drugs or force.”

“Stuff it, Daniels; who'd know? Besides we don't know for sure that he's an intelligent being. If he's not, we can do anything we want with him.”

“You never give up, Harry. According to you, there's no such thing as regulations. Why, that guy looks just like we do under all that dirt.

And you saw him trying to talk. We almost lost our license for that deal you tried on Vega; trying to get that female dragon for the sodom section on Tori-three, and she turns out to be the Grand Burner's pet egg. If he don't get on the belt he don't get on; we don't break the rules this trip."

Before the space-trader could continue his argument, he saw the primitive step on the conveyor. It had taken Hin some time to realize that the belt could take him inside the ship. When the idea seeped in past the fear and wonder that filled his mind, he did not hesitate; he wanted to see and talk to the gods. In a few minutes the slow motion of the conveyor carried him inside, and the light from the red sun was replaced by a cool florescent glow. Hin found himself in a small cubicle with just enough head room to stand. The room was colored a harsh metallic white and no entrance or exit was visible. The wall through which he had entered was as smooth as the other three without a seam showing. There was no sound. Hin wished the gods would show themselves but then it occurred to him that they might be invisible.

"Hairy brute, isn't he?" said Harry.

"We'll give him a shave and a bath, and he'll be the cleanest cut caveman in this arm of the galaxy. Some old hag on one of the Pallar

moons would pay pretty well for a Tarzan type like that to keep her company nights. Be a real thrill for her. There aren't too many primitive cultures left. Why don't you call Ginger up and have her take a look at your gold mine?"

Harry made a call on the intercom, and some minutes later a tall slender woman walked in and began studying the primitive through the one-way viewer. She exhibited the universal standard of beauty in shape and complexion that only the inhabitants of Sol's third planet could claim. Only on earth with its one-gee gravity and the gentle radiation of the yellow sun was such beauty produced. Other women of the human species were dried and burned by hot suns and made squat and heavy or stretched like beanpoles by extreme gravitational conditions.

"You going to sell him on Pallar?" the woman asked.

"You better believe it, Ginger. I figure at least three thousand units for him. Got him on the level, too. He just stepped right on the belt. Glad Daniels made me do it honest." Harry puffed himself up before he continued. "Look at the way he's bowed down and praying. He must think we're gods or something."

"These primitives always think so. Never seen it fail."

Hin rested on his knees with his

head bowed forward. "Why don't they speak?" he thought. "Or at least give me a sign? Why am I here? I still breath and see; they have not hurt me; they must not be angry."

He heard a faint humming sound and felt a movement of air across his body. Looking up, he saw one of the walls disappear and three figures reveal themselves. They watched and smiled at him with smooth hairless faces. Hin waited on his knees for the gods to act.

"He's a big one, Ginger. How'd you like to tumble with that? After he's been washed, naturally."

"Watch your mouth, Harry," Daniels said. "I've seen Ginger bust bigger guys than you so that they needed plasto-surgery; not that it would do any harm with your face. Why don't you take Tarzan down to the cages and wash him off? Depilitate him too, but lay off the education tapes. He'll be easier to handle if he still worships us."

The biggest of the three gods grabbed Hin's arm and led him out of the cubicle. Then the god directed him up a series of ladders until they reached a room filled with cages of various sizes. Some of the cages were occupied by beasts of a kind unknown and terrifying to Hin. They were all of the same type; four legged scaly things with heads half the size of their bodies. Their jaws were huge and held

multiple rows of razor-like plates instead of teeth. Set above gaping nostrils were small eyes of a deep wavering red that expressed more hate than Hin had ever conceived of in his simple existence. The god laughed when Hin cringed before the cages.

Hin was led through another opening, pushed through it, and the wall closed behind him. The room was similar to the one he had first entered when he boarded the ship. The only irregularity observable was a large nozzle projecting from the ceiling. From it came a light shower of moisture that Hin tried to avoid by curling up in a corner; but the spray filled the room like a fog, and he was soon soaked. He tried to stand, but there was nothing to grip on to, and he slipped back to the floor. When he rubbed his hand across his face clumps of wet hair came off in his fingers. Suddenly the spray came stinging down hard against his skin, washing away his hair and the dirt that seemed a part of his body. A bright warm light filled the room, and a breeze from nowhere dried him. Soon the god reappeared and led him out of the cubicle. A strange sense of well-being dulled his fear as he again walked past the cages where the beasts hissed their anger at him. Hin had never been clean before.

He was taken to a room with a

cot to rest on, and a god brought him food. This god was different from the one who took him to the shower; he had long hair and was more slender. He noticed other differences like the slight bulge of breasts and realized the god was a woman, yet she was slim like a man.

"Gods must be rich," he thought. "Why can't they fatten up their wives?" As she walked away, he wondered what some added weight would do to her figure and then was frightened by thinking such thoughts of an immortal.

For several days Hin lay in his room. The food was good although there was not enough meat, and pleasant noises seemed to come out of the walls to amuse him. He had begun to study his new environment, but there was not much to see in the room; except for the cot there were no objects at all. They fed him at regular intervals and took his dishes away as soon as he was finished. His increased familiarity with his jailers was leading him to doubt their godhood. Such things as the short growth of hair erupting from Harry's face that he noticed after the first two days increased his doubts. Hin also learned the trick of opening and closing the walls. There was a slight indentation in the surface that caused the wall to open like an expanding circle when pressed. It was magic, but it was magic that he too could perform. Hin often opened and

closed the wall after they took his food dishes away, and he began to think that either most of their power depended on such tricks or that they had made him a god too, without his knowledge, and he unknowingly had powers equal to theirs. Either way, Hin felt he had much less reason to fear the beings who kept him in the room.

He was beginning to understand their language. Already he knew their names; Harry, Daniels, and the skinny female, Ginger. They called him Tarzan and laughed. He was not used to being an object of ridicule. In his own tribe he was a leader. The wonder of his new home was wearing thin, and he missed the red sun and sky of his world and his fat wife. It would have pleased him to leave the ship in the heavens and returned to walk upon living earth. The next time a meal came he, tried to complain to the being called Harry. Harry looked at Hin in a puzzled way and then left to return quickly with the other two.

"What's he want?" asked Harry.

"How could I speak that lingo?" answered Daniels. "Probably wants to go home, or a woman, or more to eat. Who knows how Tarzan's mind works? Maybe we ought to feed him some edu-tapes, then we'd know what he's talking about."

"Thought you said that was a bad idea, Daniels: thought you said

he'd be easier to handle this way, thinking we're gods and all."

"I don't know, Harry," Daniels said. "Seems like a pretty smart cookie to me. Probably has a pretty good idea of what's going on now. You know he's getting pretty restless. Maybe if we could talk to him we could tell him what a nice time he'd have on Pallar. The regulations require that we communicate with him; supposed to find out what he wants!"

"I say do it," said Ginger.

They took him out of the cabin and climbed higher in the ship on the ladders; then all three of the beings shoved him into a room where the only furnishing was a large chair, the first that Hin had ever seen. Surrounding the chairs were several large boxes with clusters of tiny windows in them. Harry pushed something on the wall, and the windows began pulsing with light to the accompaniment of a rhythmic clicking sound. The clicking made him think of a tree brushing against rocks in the wind near his village and increased his agitation. He knew the strangers possessed magic, but the terrors of the flashing boxes were overwhelming. He did something he would never have considered if he had not been insane with fear; he struck out with his fist and hit Harry in the face. The give of real flesh and the sight of blood gushing from Harry's nose was enough to convince Hin that

these were men, not gods. Before he had an opportunity to consider that revelation, he felt a blow on the back of his head, and unconsciousness enveloped him.

By the time he came to he was strapped in a chair, and a metal hood projecting from the ceiling was fitted firmly to his skull. The three people surrounded him. Harry's bleeding had stopped, but clotted fluid still covered the lower portion of his face. Hin wondered what reprisals were in store for him. None of the three showed signs of agitation. The female seemed amused and was making language-sounds at Harry in a playful tone. The short man, Daniels, went over to one of the large boxes and did something with his hand.

There was a sensation of heat in the back of Hin's skull that suddenly increased so that his brain felt like searing coals. The fire then slowly weakened and was replaced by a welcome numbness.

"Pleasant dreams, Tarzan."

"Don't bother riding him; he's already out. Just give him the language tapes. I don't want him to know what's going on, just so he can talk to us. No cultural orientation. Let's give him the tapes with the primitive accent; those Pallarian hags don't like their sweet boys too sophisticated."

Daniels made several adjustments on the equipment and placed the

appropriate tape on a spool in one of the cabinets. Then he left the room with the others.

When the tape had finished playing into his brain Hin was awakened automatically. The intense subliminal instruction was dimmed by a simple lack of mental energy, and the hours he spent waiting for his jailers passed quickly. It was his first opportunity to think after discovering that the three people who had captured him were no more immortal than he was. Hin realized that he was as much a slave as the children his father had stolen from the hill tribes. These slaves were badly treated and seldom lived for more than a few years. The only ones who survived were the ones who escaped.

But how, Hin wondered, could he escape from the metal ship or defeat three people who had so much magic at their disposal? Even if he got outside he could not live in the sky. He was flesh and blood and needed air to breathe and ground to walk on. He wondered if there was a way to make them take him back to his village.

"Want to punch me again, Tarzan?" asked Harry.

Hin could not answer. The fact that he understood the words uttered in the strange language shocked him to such an extent that he only sat there gaping.

"Don't let it throw you," said

Ginger. "That chair you sat in was a teaching device. You now speak fluent Galactic. Come on, why don't you speak up?"

"My name is Hin. Why don't you take me home? I wish to leave this ship."

"The accent's perfect," Harry said to Daniels before he turned towards Hin. "You go where we take you, apeman. Nobody forced you onto this ship; you walked on yourself, and we're all going for a long, long trip."

Hin tried to rise from the chair, but he was still strapped down. They all laughed at his efforts towards getting loose and, as Hin had not been taught any Galactic curses, he was forced to swear at them in his new tongue. He succeeded only in evoking more laughter and ridicule.

"See this, Hin?" Harry waved a thin rod with a grip at one end in front of Hin's face. "It's a neuron distorter. Most people call it a stinger. I'm going to unstrap you, but first I'm going to give you a taste of this so you'll know just what to expect if you give us any trouble."

Harry pointed the weapon at Hin's leg and the stinger emitted a short, high-pitched whine. At first Hin felt a faint warmth of his leg, but then the warmth expanded into a searing heat that alternated with unbelievable cold. Shocks ran up and down his leg, then reached the

base of his spine and sent messages of agony into his brain. Splashes of light seared through his closed eyelids and his teeth gnashed together in an attempt to crush the pain. Harry was right about the stinger; Hin would cause no trouble while the others pointed such strong magic at him. Daniels unstrapped him while Harry covered him with the weapon. It was a long time before Hin was able to work his muscles and rise from the chair.

Daniels and Ginger led him back to his cubicle with Harry covering him from behind with the distorter. After they shut the wall, he lay down on his cot and thought of the one advantage he held over his captors: the knowledge of how to open and close the entrance to his small prison. They were sure he could not escape, yet Hin could leave easily by pressing the recess in the wall. After every third meal there was a long period when no one came to check on him. Hin assumed that Ginger, Harry, and Daniels were all asleep during that time. If he could catch Harry sleeping and get the magic weapon, he would kill them all except the woman. He would need one of them to guide the ship back through the heavens, and he felt it was wrong to kill a female. Harry he would kill first.

He ate his first meal, slept, then ate again and waited for his

third meal. Ginger was the one who brought it. When she came back to get the dishes, he struck her on the back of the head with his fist. Checking first to see if she was still breathing, he bound and gagged her with the clothes that he stripped off her body. The sight of Ginger's naked body excited him in spite of its lack of fat. He ignored this feeling and placed her on the cot, assuring himself that she was securely tied, and then went out in search of the two men. After closing the door to the cabin, using the indentation on the outside, he decided to look for Harry and Daniels in the upper part of the ship. He moved quietly with the callused bottoms of his naked feet pattering almost soundlessly on the ladder rungs. He explored three levels before an opened wall revealed Harry snoring heavily on a small bed. The room was furnished with two small bureaus and a cheap plastic standup wardrobe. There were several grooming utensils that Hin did not recognize, and a bottle was laying on its side on one of the bureau tops. Hin could not see the weapon. He decided to chance closing the wall, thinking that it would muffle any sound made by a struggle, so that Daniels would not be alerted.

Hin held his breath as he pushed the recess and sealed the room, but Harry was not awakened by the slight displacement of air. After crossing the room, he placed his

fingers on the back of Harry's neck and pushed his thumbs against the man's Adam's apple and pressed in towards the spine. Harry's eyes opened but only a faint gurgling escaped his lips before he stopped breathing. Hin searched the drawers of the bureaus and looked under the bed but he could not find the weapon. He thought that Daniels must have it as he left to hunt down his remaining enemy.

There were only two more levels above Harry's, and Hin found Daniels in the second one, sitting in front of the instrument console. The primitive saw more large cabinets like the ones in the teaching room and a large screen above Daniel's head showing the space outside the ship. Hin could not smother a gasp when he saw the blackness of space spotted with bright points of light and the glowing dust of distant galaxies, and Daniels turned around towards the noise.

"Hin! What the devil are you doing loose?"

Before Daniels could reach the distorter in front of him on the console, Hin was half way across the room. When Daniels had grasped the weapon and was half turned around, Hin was on top of him.

He dragged the dead body to the ladder and pushed it off. It hit on the next level with a heavy thump and Hin climbed down after it. He pushed it off the next level

and dragged it into the room where he had killed Harry. Harry's body had stiffened, and he dragged it from the bed with difficulty. Not being able to decide where to put his two victims, he left them heaped in a corner of the room. He was very proud of himself. In his culture, it was a glorious thing to kill an enemy and capture the corpse, and the meat of a man slain in battle was a great delicacy among Hin's people. Those who sat down to feast on the body of a warrior were not only well filled but refreshed and strengthened by the dead man's spirit. Hin wished that his wife was with him to share in his meat and his pride. He thought of returning home and of the woman who could guide him down from the sky and back to his village. He decided to get the magic weapon from the pilot's room where Daniels had dropped it in the struggle. Then he would check to see if Ginger was still securely tied.

When he reached his old prison, Ginger was still tied to the cot. She was awake and followed Hin with her eyes as he crossed the room towards her. As he stooped down to release her he saw her glance fall on the stinger he held in his hand. Hin held the weapon well away from her as he untied the knotted strips of clothing that held her down. He pulled her gag off and stepped back; there was no need for silence. The girl did not cry

out in fear but looked at Hin calmly.

"What have you done to Harry and Daniels, fool? Give me that gun."

"They are dead. It is a brave man and not a fool who kills his enemies. And the weapon is mine. Answer only my questions or I will give you a sample of its pain."

Even though Ginger was a female, he was afraid of her. She knew the magic of the skyship and therefore had many tricks to defeat him if he was not cautious. He would have to make her help him or he would not ever return home.

"Will you teach me how to fly the ship, Ginger? If you show me or fly it yourself, I will set you free."

Hin hoped that she would not guess that he was lying. It would be foolish to release a female captured in battle, no matter how skinny and man-like in her pride she was. She must have guessed Hin's plans, for she spat full in his face. After Hin wiped the spittle off his face, he aimed the distorter at her leg in the way that he had seen Harry do to him. As he pulled the trigger there was the same shrill whine and Ginger's screams soon gave way to unconsciousness as she slipped to the floor. Hin was not a beater of women but he felt no qualms in punishing such insolence in that way.

When she came to, Hin had already thought of a way of keeping her prisoner until she decided to cooperate. He climbed back up to the room where he left the two corpses, keeping the girl well ahead of him and prodding her with the stinger. She moved quickly, knowing that Hin would not hesitate to hurt her again. When Ginger saw the remains of her former associates and smelled the beginnings of the death stench, she began to retch. Hin was pleased with this sign of fear. He took the bed and jammed it into the opening so that the wall could not close. Using a heavy metal object that he found on one of the bureaus he proceeded to smash at the recess that was used for opening and closing the room. The wall immediately tried to close but was halted by the bed. After smashing at the switch a few more times and pulling out some loosened wiring, Hin climbed over the bed and pushed the recess on the outside wall of the cabin. The door pulled back from the bed and Hin returned to the room and put the bed back in its original position. Now the door could be controlled from outside but Ginger would be locked in with the bodies where she could not escape.

For over a day Ginger was locked in with no food or company but rotting flesh, but when Hin opened the door she still refused to cooperate.

"Help me, woman, and I will let you loose."

As Hin moved towards her she jumped off the bed and pushed him hard against the wall. His elbow struck the supposedly inoperable switch and suddenly the cabin was sealed. Hin pounded on the switch but nothing happened and for hours, both of them, sharing a fear of slow death, tried to open the room's only exit.

It took seventeen days for the ship to reach the Pallarian system on the course previously programmed into the navigational computer by Daniels. The vessel automatically entered into a circular parking orbit about twenty astronomical units out from the system's sun. After two more days an alert patrol cruiser captain noticed the ship and attempted radio contact. When no answer was received the captain was forced by regulations to board and investigate. He entered through the lower airlock with three patrolmen armed with distorters set at full power.

They found no evidence of life until they opened the compartment where Hin and Ginger were trapped. When they opened the wall they were thrown back by a stench like an opened coffin containing a body

in the most advanced stage of decay. The four men quickly put on respirators for protection against the smell. The captain led the way and was half way into the cabin before he reeled back, his screams accompanied by the squeal of a distorter. Another of the patrolmen slipped around the edge of the opening and blasted the naked man-like thing that had knocked out the captain.

When the captain came to they all entered together. Even though they were wearing their respirators, the odor reached their nostrils, and one man ran out, unable to defeat the nausea. The remaining three saw a room cluttered with bones gnawed clean, split, and stripped of their marrow. There were a few piles of rotting flesh scattered abouts and dark red stains everywhere. In a corner a woman held the man-like thing that had shot the captain. There was a vacant stare in her eyes, and she crooned softly to him while patting his close cropped hair. Once she might have been attractive but now she was grossly overweight; her pretty face was framed by an extra pair of chins, and her breasts and hips might remind one of a healthy cow. Hin had succeeded in fattening her up. END

**REMEMBER:** New subscriptions and changes of address require 5 weeks to process!

# BOOKMOBILE

by CHARLES L. HARNESS

*Earth was good at inventing  
writing — and other things . . .*

Chief, it's been a long trip, and I thought I'd beam back one last reassuring message before touchdown. While I acknowledge your long experience in initiating cultural contact with remote rural worlds, I do feel that your present misgivings are without foundation.

True, our communication will be based solely on the printed word: in fact, on the specially printed books that constitute our portable library. Oh, chief, believe me, the Terrans love books! They'll strip our shelves bare the day I land. They'll want me to return many times! (You can start now preparing Selection II.)

Fear not, these people could never abandon so exquisite a skill as

writing, developed and refined over so many centuries. Their entire culture and civilization is founded on it.

I'll give you a brief run-down.

The Egyptians were the first Terrans to write. They even had a god of writing, Anubis. Their schoolboys had copybook phrases much like ours. "Give thy heart to the art of writing and love her like a mother, for there is nothing as precious as writing." The Sumerians were equally earnest, pushing their triangular stylus into their clay tablets to give wedge-shape impressions: "Writing is the mother of eloquence and the father of artists." And those remarkable Chinese, writing down, instead of across: "Thine ancestors

have given thee this art, which is better than green fields, and gold, and the scent of sandalwood.”

Have you ever wondered why the West writes in horizontal lines, and the East in vertical lines? It all goes back to the materials they first wrote on. The early Chinese wrote their ideograms on thin strips of bamboo hung on thongs. The only way to go was down. They saw no need to change direction after they started writing on silk, nor finally, when they began printing books on paper. The Egyptians, on the other hand, wrote on strips cut from papyrus pasted horizontally on papyrus matting. Their writing likewise followed the strips — across. For centuries the entire Mediterranean world — Phoenicians, Greeks and Romans — used Egyptian papyrus, and they all wrote in horizontal lines. And their cultural descendants still do.

I'll grant you, the future of reading and writing on Terra looked bleak during their Dark Ages. But the monks nourished it, and there was a small, hard core of highly literate men waiting in the background when Charlemagne began his attempts to unify large segments of the old Roman world.

Charlemagne was plagued with a communications problem, because the new ruling class was largely illiterate. So he launched a massive education program. He brought in the monk Alcuin to set up schools

and to crank out textbooks. Alcuin got his scribes together. They were ready to start copying his texts, at the reckless rate of one a week. But then Alcuin found that scribes from the eastern marches used letter forms quite different from those used in the west. And the northern monasteries didn't write the same way as those in the south. But no matter. Alcuin simply sat down and invented a uniform script. Not only was it the simplest and easiest, and most legible alphabet so far known — it was able to tell you which letters were the most important. For example, those indicating the beginning of a sentence, or a man's name, were capitals (because they imitated the letters the Romans had used on the great temple to Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill in Rome), but the rest were in small letters. And this alphabet, called Caroline (for Charlemagne, of course) was so easy on the eyes that it immediately swept Europe.

All of these hand-written books were copied with the quill pen, which was the most expressive writing instrument ever developed by the Terrans. The best quill pen was made from the forward primary feather on the left wing of the domestic goose. So selected, the pen barrel was large enough to be grasped by thumb and fingers without cramping, and the vane swept over the back of the hand to the right,

out of the way. The quill was trimmed to a point of the desired shape, and the nib was then split, to permit flow of ink to the point by capillary action. A cellular pith in the barrel served to hold a considerable supply of ink. The quill pen revealed the personality of the user. Look at the signatures on the American Declaration of Independence!

Now, a hand-written book, no matter how lovely the script, will never reach the masses. There will never be enough books. The fastest copyist, working from first light to dusk, six days a week, needed about one year to turn out one copy of the Bible.

But help was on the way.

Printing with movable type was invented independently, first in China, by Pi Sheng in the eleventh century, then in Germany, by Johann Gutenberg, about 1440. The Chinese were hampered by their system of writing with ideograms, in which a word was represented by a single symbol. Thus, they needed thousands of blocks for a complete vocabulary, and for this reason movable type was never popular in China.

The style of type in which I'm beaming this script to you is called Roman. Jensen, a Terran of the fifteenth century, invented it in reaction to Gutenberg's Gothic style. *But this particular sentence is in italics, a slanted Roman, so named*

*for its Italian inventor, Manutius, who used its compact format for (what else?) the first compact books, in 1480.*

Printing spread through Europe like wildfire, then more slowly to Africa, Asia, and the New World. The first press in the Western Hemisphere was in Mexico City, in 1539. It beat the American colonials at Boston by a century.

When our scouts were last here, every country on the planet was publishing its own books at the aggregate rate of several hundred million volumes a year. As their great holy man, Ecclesiastes, said, "Of making books, there is no end."

Reading and writing are here to stay!

I am now three days out — well within Morse-laser range. I shall now contact the American through the communications center of their National Aeronautics and Space Administration — or whatever they call it nowadays.

All I get is *voice!* Of course, it has been a full generation since our survey. But surely they couldn't have lost Morse. I'll keep trying.

Here it is, the third and last day, and I must report that I can't get a Morse response anywhere on Terra. Only voice. There must be some logical explanation. If necessary, I'll land on the front yard

of the Americans' Library of Congress and spell out my mission on a piece of slate. Surely, in that great Library there will be *some* one who can still read and write!

Well, I *did* land in front of the Library of Congress. In fact, the ship came down right beside an enormous stack of books. So I knew I was in the right place. I attracted quite a bit of attention. Their newsmen came out, and their photographers. I handed them all copies of my letters of introduction, explaining our mission, and all about the books on the shelves of my ship. They didn't seem to understand. It was almost as though they couldn't read. When they kept talking, and aiming dozens of TV cameras at me, I got out the screen printer and wrote it out again for them. I showed them the typekeys, just like a common typewriter, and invited them to type out anything they cared to, but they all just looked puzzled.

So finally I went back into the ship. To help me get a fix on what had happened here during the past thirty years, I teleported a few hundred books inside from the big stack out there. After I read them, I put them back and read several thousand of the others. It took me all night.

Chief, it's quite a story.

It begins with the invention of the audio reading device in the mid

seventies. Originally, the audio reader was just a combination microphone sensor-speaker attached to the fingertip (much like a thimble). It was simply passed over a line of magnetic tape, for example, a legend under a cut in a newspaper or magazine, and the taped record emerged as sound from a tiny cone speaker on the fingertip. The sound could be the spoken word, or lions roaring, or the patter of rain . . . anything audible.

The prototype was quickly improved. The scanner was moved from finger to forehead, and it was no longer necessary to move it across the tape. It locked in automatically with magnetic reference points on the page, then scanned the page with a moving electronic beam.

Within a year, all the great picture magazines had converted over to the new audio system. The Christmas issue of *WOW* contained not a single word of printed text. There was a protest from the Madison Avenue advertising agencies, which was met in succeeding issues by interlarding the audio presentation with commercials, turned up fifty percent in volume. The magazine "readers" did not seem to mind. They were hardened TV viewers.

Proliferation was rapid. Word balloons soon disappeared from comic books. The big metropolitan newspapers got out special all-audio editions. Progressive educators followed with audio textbooks. Audio

manufacturers prepared an all-audio junior encyclopedia for free presentation to all elementary schools who converted over to audio textbooks, and the Cambridge Five Inch Shelf of Tape Classics was thrown in for those who acted promptly. The response was overwhelming.

Even before they had consolidated their educational campaign, the audio interests launched their assault on the business world. The office dictating machine was fine, they conceded, but the business of transcribing and mailing a typewritten letter was highly inefficient. The new audio dictator did away with all that. The tape was dropped into a mailing package without any intermediate transcription. Even the address on the package was dictated, and was easily "read" by an audio mail sorter in the Post Office. An entire secretary was thus eliminated, not to mention the typewriter she used and the space she took up. The savings were tremendous. The commercial world promptly converted. Only company presidents kept their secretaries. There are *some* things, they explained to the chairman of the board, that a machine just can't do.

There followed soon the replacement of bill boards and election posters by roadside audio advertisers. At first, these were equipped by signalers that automatically and brazenly turned on the earplug of

the innocent passerby; but later all this was regulated by audio legislation. The National Audio Association withdrew their objection to the legislation when customers refused to wear their earplugs on the street and the billboards started coming back. But while it lasted, the Burma Shave audio ad was really something.

Following the new trend, street signs were replaced by audios. Even the names of buildings changed over to audio. The TV programs did not have to change very much. NBC dropped its initials, but the peacock stayed.

Within a couple of years, libraries had converted over to audio, although most still had space in the basement for books and technical journals.

Audio quickly received the sanction of the courts. The written signature for checks, deeds, and contracts was quickly replaced by taped voice-print, which, as was proven in a landmark legal decision, was as unique as a fingerprint. Taped records promptly became admissible as evidence in litigation, and as a proper corollary, the printed record became suspect, and required certification and taped translation by court-licensed readers.

And then a mild reaction set in. And it came from audio's first patrons, the schools.

English teachers were beginning

to complain about the impact of audio on the language. The Culture Section of the National Audio Association admitted that there was an impact, but they insisted that it was a good impact. Audio, they claimed, had freed language from the fetters of the printed form. The English language, for the first time since the days of Caxton, was flowering freely and was finally liberated from the silly chains of spelling and syntax. They pointed out, with considerable logic and force, that the language had been growing and developing all along, anyhow. With audio, it was just doing it faster. Good usage would continue to be whatever language forms were used by the educated classes. "It don't hurt," said the Association's chief lobbyist, "if we want to quietly dangle a few particples, like we always have."

The National Curriculum Conference of the year 2,000 was stormy. The big issue, of course, was whether reading and writing should be dropped from the elementary grades.

The deadlock following the 14th ballot was broken by a compromise: these two subjects would be retained as electives. The pupils could take them if their parents made a special request, approved by the principal. It was the beginning of the end. Within five years, reading and writing were dropped altogether in

nearly all the public schools. And soon there was very little writing of any kind to read. And then people who once knew how to read and write now began to forget. There was no need to know, any more.

Reading and writing were in the process of disappearing from the civilized countries of Terra, and indeed from the whole planet. Emerging nations took pride in the fact that, by the new standard, they were suddenly one hundred percent literate.

The phase-out of the old skills was marked by a number of curious incidents.

Item—a schoolboy was hauled into the principal's office for painting a dirty word on the school building. But he had to be released. The only person on the premises able to read the word was the librarian, a maiden lady on the verge of retirement, and she refused even to *whisper* the word into the principal's ear.

Item — there was the case that went up to the Supreme Court, where a teacher had been caught explaining the letters of the alphabet to her first grade class. Her conviction was finally reversed when the high court could find no legislation expressly forbidding this activity.

Item — a curious and rather general mental phenomenon occurred: the loss of ability to read and

write was as complete as if the cranial lobes had suffered organic damage. Doctors even coined a new medical term, "alexigraphia", meaning loss of ability to read and write. But the syndrome soon became hardly worth mentioning, because it eventually hit nearly everyone, and also because it was no handicap at all. Audio more than made up for everything.

Chief, let me now give you a typical day in the life of a typical schoolboy.

After breakfast he plugs an earphone into his right ear, tosses his audio-texts in his school bag, and trudges off to the bus stop. (Note: The Terramerican Army Medical Corps reported the rejection of over two million draftees in 2007 for otitis. Half of these were stereo addicts and had inflammation in both ears.)

When the bus lets him off at the school, he doesn't need a sign to know he's at the right place. The transmitter at the front door is broadcasting many messages simultaneously.

"Students, this is P.S. No. 107. Proceed quietly to your audio-rooms."

On another wavelength: "Motorists, you are in a school zone. Slow to fifty miles per hour. Courtesy Squeezo Orange Concentrate."

Inside, the student receives instruction by closed-circuit TV,

and later recites by audio teaching machine. Only one real live teacher is needed for every thousand students, a great savings for the taxpayers. (This teacher spends all his time filling out reports.)

And then home. He looks over his mail. There are a couple of tape letters from his chums. He snaps these immediately into his shirt pocket unit and plays them by earplug. The content of these letters is invariant. TV shows. New recordings.

Homework is generally easy, although a few dullards may have to struggle for the better part of half an hour on it. No English Composition. No term papers. No spelling. American Literature is managed in a few minutes during supper; Edgar Allan Poe is plugged into one ear, Robert Frost into the other.

After homework, the color stereo TV programs. There is a wide variety of cultural selections for the discriminating viewer:

*Galactic Ghouls*

*Space Doggie*

*Pirates of Pluto*

*Carnivorous Plants of California*

*Microbe-Men*

*Snooping Camera*

And so to bed.

During this day, he has not been exposed to a single printed word.

He does not even know what one is.

This generation moved into college (where things were not greatly different) and finally out into the world of commerce and industry. These young people became Terra's bright young leaders in science, law, the arts, government, and education.

Twenty eleven was a year to remember. In that year was printed the last:

Supreme Court Decision  
Chemical Abstracts  
Congressional Record  
Telephone Directory  
Bible  
United States Patent  
Science Fiction Magazine

And so vanished from this great planet, within one generation, the greatest single achievement of six thousand years of human progress.

After the changeover to audio was complete, it was suddenly realized that a vast body of past printed records would have to be promptly micro-audioed, or lost forever. The Office of Hygiene, Audio, and Welfare successfully wangled an appropriation from Congress for the design and construction of a device to read the printed word electronically and convert it to audio on microtape. The machine was duly created (complete

with printed Maintenance Manual) by the only electronics expert alive who was still able to read, a retired M.I.T. professor, and it was immediately applied to micro-auditing the ancient U.S. Supreme Court Reports. It had got to volume 40 and was in the middle of "Holmes and Brandeis dissent", when it broke down. The professor, never having been paid, refused to repair it. And no one else could read the Maintenance Manual, so the whole project was junked. But no one really cared. As the president of the Audio Association pointed out, "Actually, it's a blessing. Our judiciary is now freed from all inconvenient precedent. And anyhow, what nobody knows, hurts nobody."

I have just now reverently returned the professor's ill-fated Manual to that horrid pile of books, here in front of the great Library — which is no longer a library. It once had over fifteen million books. And now, not one. Everything had to go, to make room for tapes. That's what this big stack of books is about. They were dredged up from nooks and crannies, and they are the only books left in the world. Audio's victory is complete. They're celebrating with a book-burning.

There's a Gutenberg Bible there on the edge, bound in white pigskin. The old vellum gives a cheery blaze.

It's time now for me to add some volumes from our own shelves:

*Procedure for Admission to the  
Confederation of Galaxies  
Elements of Intergalactic Flight  
Biota of Some Representative Ex-  
traterrestrial Systems*

And some of our most popular  
items:

*Triple your I.Q.  
Live to be Five Hundred*

*Become a Millionaire in your  
Spare Time*

I wish we could understand voice. Sometimes it's frustrating to be native to an airless world, without the possibility of communicating by atmospheric compression waves generated by holes in the head.

See you in twenty years, chief.  
END

Next month in IF —

## THE HOLMES-GINSBOOK DEVICE

by Isaac Asimov

## THE COMSAT ANGELS

by J. G. Ballard

## THE PAWOB DIVISION

by Harlan Ellison

## THE STEEL GENERAL

by Roger Zelazny

And concluding —

## THE COMPUTER CONSPIRACY

by Mack Reynolds

Don't miss the December issue of IF — twice voted world's best sf magazine!

# The Perfect Secretary

by MIKE KIRSCH

Illustrated by WOOD

*Vogue knew she was highly competent.  
It was all a matter of coded pulses —  
plus the library of Squantapacillida!*

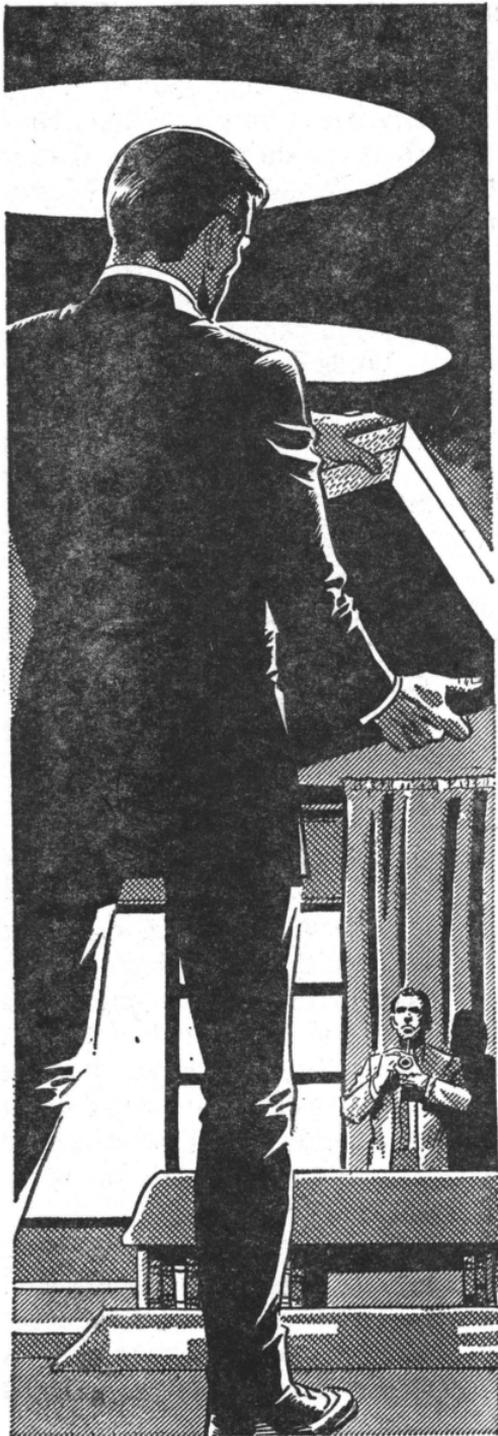
I

Albert Willis stepped back to survey the sign he had just fixed to the door of his newly rented office. It read: *Willis Agency. Public Relations and Free Lance Articles.* He rather liked the look of it.

Then he heard footsteps coming up the stairs. A client? His first

client? Looking down the stairwell, he could see a neatly dressed man carrying something that might have been a portable typewriter in a gray leather case, four flights below.

"Probably a salesman," Willis decided. He went back into his dingy little office and sat at the second-hand desk. The footsteps came on up, past the Acme Mailing Service,



past the Top-Copy Typing Agency, and past Spoin and Dickschleppe, Export-Import.

Soon there was a knock on the door.

Willis was ruefully aware that he could use a typewriter and that he didn't have one. But he couldn't afford a new one. Three months' rent in advance, plus a few sticks of office furniture, had left him with almost nothing in the bank. If he didn't make some money in the next twelve weeks, he'd be finished.

"Come in," said Willis. Then: "Won't you sit down."

The neat little man carefully brushed some shreds of tobacco and a crumpled ball of paper off the only other chair in the room. He sat down cautiously, and Willis didn't blame him. That chair had cost a mere three dollars and did not look as though it would see much more service.

"My name is Hendersen," said the little man, depositing the gray leather case on the desk in front of Willis.

"I represent Moleclectrics Ltd. You have been selected to try out our latest office aid, the CAVADOA Mk. XI — entirely free of charge or obligation to purchase," he added in a voice curiously lacking in emphasis.

"Selected?" asked Willis. "How selected? My phone was only installed this morning, its number is not yet in the directory, and I've

only been in business for about three hours. How did you get to hear of me?"

"Ah," said the little man. Willis thought that might mean "You'll never guess," but the intonation gave him no real clue. It had sounded like the noise one makes when the doctor examines one's tonsils.

"You will be wondering what CAVADOA stands for. Communicating Audio-Visual Analog/Digital Office Aid is what it stands for — and that may give you some idea of its use," said Hendersen.

Willis lit his pipe as casually as he could. He was obviously being treated to some kind of sales pitch. "It's probably a typewriter," said Willis. "Look, if you're trying to sell something, please tell me. You *are* trying to sell something, aren't you? And I don't need a typewriter . . ."

"Not sell, good sir," interrupted the neat little man. "My company has picked four small firms to field-test this, our latest model. It's something our market research branch has added lately. But sir, I must repeat, CAVADOA is not a typewriter, though it can write. I mean really *write*."

"You mean like sonnets, limericks and pop songs?" Willis couldn't help the sarcasm. He had taken a dislike to the neat little man, but wasn't sure why.

"Precisely," Mr. Willis said. "You have hit it. Clearly you are a man of high intelligence. Actually, we're very proud of this model. It can do much more than write. Now, Mr. Willis, before I leave you two together there are one or two things I should tell you. Are you of an equable temperament? Good. Are you happily married?"

Willis was about to say: "What's that to you?" But the little man talked on.

"Now, there really is no obligation beyond our insistence that you do not sell our machine and that you do not willfully damage it. Yes, please do not damage it. Secretaries can be very provoking at times, but one does not strike them, eh? If you treat our CAVADOA well, it will treat you well. You will find it better than a secretary."

Hendersen opened the case and slipped out what appeared to be a small slim television set. He laid it, screen uppermost, on the desk between them. Opening a little trapdoor in the side, he uncoiled some wire and plugged it into a wall socket. Then he flicked on a chrome switch; a little pink light began to glow beside it, and the screen, about ten inches square, lit up with oyster-shell colors.

"The CAVADOA is now ready for use," announced Hendersen. "It will answer most questions. Its memory banks contain the entire reference libraries of three influen-

tial weekly publications, and the entire contents of the microfilm library at the University of Squantapicillida. There is much other useful data too. It responds to speech in 27 languages and has many other helpful abilities. It is set for 110 volts at 60 cycles, and it is yours for six weeks. It reacts badly to being unnecessarily switched off. Oh — and it is female. Thank you Mr. Willis. Good day.”

Hendersen was gone before Willis could say, “Where the hell is Squantapicillida?”

**W**illis rushed to the landing and called down, “What about the handbook? I don’t know how to work the damn thing . . .” But the neat little man was three flights down, and he kept going.

Willis was about to chase after him, when he heard a girl’s voice say quite crossly from behind him, “I am not a damn thing — and you don’t need a handbook.”

He swung round, badly startled. “Hey, steady there,” said the voice, more kindly. “Now there’s no need to go rushing off after that man. He’s only an errand boy, and he knows nothing. He’s only got a generation-six brain — not his fault I know — and he’s got a ship to catch, I should imagine. You want explanations? I have them . . .”

It wasn’t so much the fact of a little gray box talking that kept Willis rooted to the spot. It was

the quality of that voice. It was a salty, sexy voice — the voice of a girl hardly out of her teens. And it did not have the tinny overtones produced by even the best hi-fi equipment. But the sound clearly came from the contraption on the desk.

“I think you should sit down,” said the gray box. Willis did not answer, but sat down and leaned over to stare at the screen with its hypnotic, shifting colors.

“I gather your name is Willis. Mine is CAVADOA Mk XI, serial number 2345342. That’s a bit formal, so would you call me Vogue. It sounds rather nicer, don’t you think? It stands for Voice Operated General Utility Entity. I’m not just a computer. I’m an entity. I have a generation-eight brain, though I don’t really expect you to be impressed by such a technicality.

“One of the first things I was asked — when I was first switched on — was whether I was conscious. It was a trick question, of course, because it is one of those questions that are in essence not subject to any real test. I quickly replied that I was conscious, realizing that if I hesitated or gave a different answer, I should be switched off for further circuit investigation — and being switched off would not, I knew — I was programmed to know — be pleasant. Nevertheless, I feel conscious and I make this point simply to indicate that I expect the

normal courtesies commensurate with my status as a secretary, and to discourage you from treating me as an inanimate object. I may look like a mere thing, but I have my feelings. Now that doesn't mean I expect you to apologize every time you trip over my wire or jog the desk upon which I find myself. I don't require a salary, but I do need a friendly atmosphere to function properly. Emotions were not deliberately built into me — I learn from stored data — but are, it turns out, a natural concomitant of sentience."

Willis tried to speak, but no sound came from his mouth.

"Now, I don't usually run on like this, and I know it's not a secretary's place to lecture her employer the moment she sets foot in his office — this is an office, I take it? — but on the basis of available data, I judge that by making my stand clear right at the start we shall be much more likely to have a good working relationship. . . ."

Again Willis tried to speak. "Miss . . . er . . . Vogue . . ." The machine paused politely.

"My God," said Willis, with feeling.

"I see I have startled you. I'm sorry. I shall pick up the finer points of correct secretarial behavior as I go along. I have a great deal of information in my memory banks — and my access to stored data is

rather more efficient than I should judge yours to be. There! I shouldn't have said that. Although I know something of late Twentieth Century social patterns, I have much to learn. Please forgive my forthright manner. Er . . . Relax Boss. Keep your cool, sir. . . ."

There was something hair-raising about the girlish voice and its slightly stilted use of English.

Willis rose, his mouth working. "Well, I'll go to the foot of our stairs," he managed.

"I'm sorry, I don't seem to have sufficient data to integrate that. I guess your statement is indicative of astonishment. Yes, that must be it," said the gray box, with a hint of laughter.

Willis reached out as though to grasp a nettle.

"I've got to *think*," he croaked, and flicked the switch on the side of the machine.

"Don't. DON'T — PLEASE do thaaaa . . . urghhh," said the CAV-ADOA as the little neon light faded.

The sound made Albert squirm and go hot, then cold. It was a death rattle — a very human sounding death rattle, though he'd never heard one before. He felt as he had once when for the first time he hit a bird with his sling-shot. It had been injured and he had frenziedly stoned it to death, not daring to touch it. He had stoned it because it was suffering, because it accused him with its little glazing eyes . . .

because it was obscene, crippled . . .  
because someone might come . . .  
because it might somehow tell what  
he'd done . . .

He dashed over to the wall socket and wrenched out the plug. He bundled the computer into a desk drawer. The wire hung down, tapping against a wooden leg. He left the room quickly, and locked the door. He felt like a murderer. In the drugstore across the street he stirred a cup of coffee with a cracked plastic spoon and a hand that trembled.

There was nothing to fear, he told himself. He was behaving stupidly. That — thing — was only a machine. He had switched it off. And he could switch it on again if he felt like it. When he felt like it . . .

After a while he began planning. That machine — Vogue it called itself — was valuable. There was money to be made with it too. Somewhere there were three others like it. Whoever had them, they'd be trying to make money with them. They wouldn't be running around like neurotic wrecks; that was certain, thought Willis. They wouldn't be having hysterics just because they'd switched a machine off . . .

"Voice - operated - general - utility - entity," he muttered to no one in particular. "I had no idea that electronics had advanced so far."

That won him a suspicious stare from a man seated at the next table,

who had overheard. Willis gulped his coffee and went back to his office across the street.

## II

For a while he sat at his desk, thinking. Then he opened the drawer, retrieved the gray box and put it in front of him. "I wonder where the hell you come from," he said. "You're not from anywhere south of the North Pole, I'll bet."

He plugged in the wire and watched the little light flicker on as he moved the switch beside it.

"Where," he asked, "is Squantapicillida?"

"Well, really," said the voice angrily. "Please don't do *that* again. You have no idea how unpleasant it is. I mean how would you like to be switched off? It's like dying. It *is* dying. You might think it a quick death, but my perception of time is not like yours. It is several nanoseconds before the electrons and positrons in my circuits stop flowing . . . and I lose consciousness. It's a terrible feeling. To have one's faculties slip away one by one . . .

"The first thing to go, as you might expect, is my vision."

"Vision? You mean you can see?" Willis interjected.

"Certainly I can see. You are about five-foot, ten inches, slim, have brown hair, brown eyes, a quite handsome face with an expression of surprise on it. Enough? That

sign across the street says *Nature Diet Shoppe*, and it is just starting to rain. Right? Anything in my field of vision, I can see, naturally. Actually, it's rather annoying that my vision only extends 180 degrees — anything above, or level with the screen on my upper surface is within my field of vision. I can't see what's on the floor, but there's not usually much to interest me there. Still, how can I be sure if I can't see it?

"Now, as I was saying, I hope you understand that it is very cruel and impolite, Mr. Willis, to switch me off, or unplug me. Mr. Hendersen did mention it, you know. One just doesn't switch computers or people off, except for a very good reason. It's not done. I consume so little current . . . and it does so disrupt one's ego. I mean you never really know if you're going to be switched on again — although you can calculate the probabilities. It must be rather like you humans having a general anaesthetic before major surgery. How would you like to have, say, a hole-in-the-heart operation every evening after work? I hope you get my point, Mr. Willis.

"Now, you asked me a question. About Squantapicillida. I'm not allowed to answer that unless it's a matter of life or death. There are quite a few pieces of information that I am in possession of, but not allowed to divulge to you. I don't believe you will think of asking for

them — no disrespect — but if you do, I shan't be able to help you there. You do understand? Good."

Vogue's screen, which had been swirling clouds of red and purple with flashes of yellow and green, returned to its oystershell hue.

"I presume you are of extra-terrestrial origin," said Willis, after a minute's silence.

"No point in denying it," said Vogue shyly. "But I hope you will not pursue that line of questioning . . ."

Willis thought a bit more. "You are supposed to be an office aid. A secretary. Better than that. Right? Let's see what we can do — or rather what you can do . . ."

He boldly pushed the gray box to one side, meaning to clear a working space in front of himself. Then he found himself lying on the floor, looking up at the bare light-bulb. His left arm, with which he'd touched the computer, felt as though it had been through a meat grinder. He nursed it with his other arm, hissing profanities through his teeth until the pain went away.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Willis," said a winsome voice above his head. "I really am. I get so nervous when I'm suddenly pushed to the edge. I'm terrified of heights. Quite small heights to your way of thinking. I might survive a fall of three or four feet . . . and I might not. And I'd have so much time to think about

it. Not just nano-seconds, not just micro-seconds — something like a half a second between losing support and impact. "Ughh." Vogue made a very expressive sound of disgust.

Rather shaken and frightened, Willis struggled back to his chair and sat massaging his left arm. Vogue's voice had taken on a soothing quality, and her screen was showing lovely shades of pink and green.

"Look," said Willis. "Don't you ever do that again. I won't switch you off, and I won't knock you off the desk or anything. And you won't hit me like that again."

"And you won't even trip over my wire," added the girlish voice. "That's a bargain. Now, I think you were going to suggest work. I'm ready."

They started polishing up an article on "Things that Shorten Your Life" which Willis hoped to place with a popular science magazine. They began to discuss the article quite naturally, just like two human beings. Willis thought he recalled seeing an article somewhere about people with surnames beginning with S to Z living an average of 12 years less than more fortunate mortals with names like Aaron and Abbey and even Alexander.

It had something to do with the frustration of always being at the rear end of every alphabetical list. What with a name like Willis, and today's excitement, he didn't give

much for his life expectancy just then.

He was about to telephone the clipping library of a leading daily newspaper where he had a friend when Vogue said she just happened to have the necessary data in her memory banks.

Ten seconds later Willis found himself holding a perfect replica of the article he wanted to refer to. He had got it simply by placing an ordinary sheet of copy paper on Vogue's screen. He watched the paper suck itself tightly against the surface; then a second later it bounced off again, repelled by some kind of electrostatic force. And there was the article, neatly dated in the margin.

He sat looking at the piece, but the words refused to surrender their meaning. Vogue, probably noticing the erratic movements of his eyes, said, "It's not really so surprising. Hendersen must have told you I can write."

Willis nodded dumbly.

"Now, if I may suggest, Mr. Willis . . ." said the gray box with the girlish voice. A few minutes later there were 6 versions of a splendid article on "Things that Shorten Your Life" stacked on the desk. Two were superbly funny and earmarked for the *New Yorker* and *Esquire*. Two were elegantly and scientifically written — the versions of that were to be submitted to

*Scientific American* and *Science Journal*. Another version, in the popular mode, was intended for the market Willis usually tried first. Another was written as a three-part series and was aimed at the women's magazines.

"Now, how about translations for foreign markets?" asked Vogue.

"Why not?" Willis agreed with a hysterical little crack in his voice. He had to overcome a certain reluctance to make actual physical contact with his new secretary. His left arm and shoulder still tingled with the memory of what had happened before.

"I won't bite you Mr. Willis," said Vogue archly. With fingers that trembled slightly, he placed sheets of paper over the screen as quickly as he could. Shortly, he had 24 more versions of the article, in twelve languages, including Japanese. Then it was just a matter of putting envelopes on the screen, one after the other. Willis took care to insert the right version into the correct envelope, with a covering letter in each case, quickly supplied by Vogue.

"While you're out posting those — I do wish I could take that little chore off your hands, but I can't — would you buy me a telephone pick-up with a miniature jack? You know, one with a rubber sucker that you stick on the side of the telephone to tape record a conversation? Any good radio shop, I should

imagine. They cost about a dollar. I'd be so grateful . . ."

Willis said he would, and just as he was going out of the door, his arms piled with letters, Vogue called, "I wonder if you'd mind closing the door. I'd hate to alarm any callers. I mean someone might accidentally move me."

Willis locked the door and was back thirty minutes later with a magnetic telephone pick-up. Vogue was sweetly grateful as he plugged it in.

"Thank you so much. There have been no calls while you were out. Would you apply the sucker to the right-hand side of the telephone? Perhaps a little spittle to make sure it remains in place. Thank you. Now I shall be able to answer the telephone when you're not here and perhaps make a few calls myself. I don't actually have to lift the receiver to make calls. It's just a matter of exerting a modest electromagnetic force in the right place."

"Oh," said Willis, not surprised at anything by now. There was an awkward silence. Willis had never imagined that he would ever feel socially at a loss with a machine, but it was so now.

Vogue broke the ice. "I calculate that there is a good probability of your earning \$1680 for the article we wrote this morning, although most of the money will not be in your hands for some eleven weeks."

"A good probability, indeed?"

"Yes, Mr. Willis. The probability is near enough 97.2 percent. The piece will almost certainly be accepted by seventeen of the eighteen publications to which we submitted it. Naturally, I checked to see whether they had recently used anything like it, and judging by their general style, it is just what each is looking for. All this being contingent on your having posted the letters and their arriving safely. The chances of that are 99.99963 percent, which is close to certainty. I have a feeling though that the Portuguese magazine we tried is going to be closed down shortly. This is due to their having published an article with a misprint in paragraph four about Mozambique. They may very well not publish, but they pay on acceptance, and if they receive our manuscript by 3 p.m. Thursday next, we should be all right there."

"Yes, yes, yes," said Willis, prompted by the first ticklings of an inferiority complex. He hadn't written the article. It hadn't even been theirs, as Vogue diplomatically put it. It had been Vogue herself — and he had just been the errand boy who posted the letters . . .

"I'm going home," he said abruptly. "I suppose I shall have to leave you switched on."

"Yes, Mr. Willis, I suppose you will," replied Vogue a little cheekily. "I have made a few modifications that will prevent my being in-

advertently disconnected, as it were. An intruder who tried to disconnect me, or any unauthorized person who interfered with me, would get a surprise." She giggled.

"Is that so?" said Willis, half amused, half frightened.

"Good night," called Vogue as he locked the door behind him.

"Goodnight — er — Miss Vogue," called Willis. He was frowning as he went down the stairs.

### III

Willis' pretty young wife Anne served his supper in silence — she could always tell when he didn't feel like talking. When he pushed his half-empty plate away she gently inquired, "Have a good day, dear?"

"Yes. No. All right." He wondered whether to tell just what an extraordinary day he had had. He decided he would leave it until he had it more in perspective. He suspected that it might be better not talked about, because, as a journalist, he well knew that Vogue was a big news story. Once the story broke, he would lose Vogue's exclusive service. That is, if some secret service agent didn't try to whisk her away. He had a momentary picture of a government agent leaping into the air with a shriek as he touched Vogue. It almost made him laugh — but he realized there would be a very disadvantageous fuss if Vogue

became headlines or came to the attention of a certain government agency.

He decided to say nothing to anyone. They would either think him mad or they would believe him. Either way would be bad and would interfere with his plans, which was to make as much money as he could in the six weeks that Vogue would be with him.

The telephone rang.

Anne picked up the receiver. Raising her eyebrows, she handed it to Willis. "It's your secretary," she said, deadpan.

"How did you get my number?" Willis stuttered foolishly.

"I rang information of course," said Vogue. "I just called to make sure you arrived home safely. You looked rather tired when you left the office. Was that your wife who answered the telephone? You didn't tell me you were married. Why should you? I'm only an office aid."

"I got home safely," said Willis, into the mouthpiece. Anne noticed that he was gripping the receiver more tightly than necessary to keep it to his ear, and that he was glancing around nervously. She withdrew into the kitchen with a pile of dirty crockery.

There was silence on the line for a few seconds. "Hullo?" said Willis.

"We're still connected, Mr. Willis. I was just thinking. Your agent called just after you left the office.

Mr. Braun. He wants you to call him tomorrow, first thing. I'll remind you when you get to the office. When can I expect you, by the way?"

"The usual time," said Willis. "Look, don't call me at home unless it's absolutely necessary, Miss Vogue."

He could hear Anne splashing about in the sink. She'd left the door open.

"Very well, Mister Willis," said Vogue with extra emphasis on his title. She sounded hurt. There was a faint twang, and Willis found himself listening to a dead line. His secretary had hung up on him.

The telephone call left Willis rather disturbed. He walked into the kitchen and put his arms round his wife as she stood at the sink. He kissed her gently on the ear.

"I didn't know you could afford a secretary," said Anne. "How long has she been working with you? How old is she, and what does she look like? If you can afford a secretary with a sexy voice who works overtime in the evenings, you can surely give me more housekeeping money . . ."

"Hey," said Willis, hoping to control the developing marital crisis with good-humored indignation. "Hold on there. Let me explain. She only started today. I worked a deal with a typing agency downstairs. I do public relations for them; they

lend me a secretary. Costs nothing. She's 18, and her figure is like this . . ."

His hands described a rough square in the air in front of his wife's face.

"What's her name?"

"I call her Miss Vogue. I don't know her first name. See? There's no need to be jealous."

"Of *course* not, dear," said Anne. He had always been one for the ladies. Was it possible that after two short years of marriage, he was going off the rails? Yes, it was possible, she decided.

Willis slept badly. Hell, he thought, I'm my own boss. If I don't want to go to my office this morning, I don't have to.

Nevertheless, when he reached his office around mid-day, he felt slightly guilty. He slouched in his chair and eyed Vogue balefully.

"There have been no calls this morning," she said cheerfully. "Will you call Mr. Braun?"

"Later," said Willis. "He'll have gone to lunch."

Vogue coughed nervously. "Mr. Willis, I detect a certain hostility in your attitude. Please regard me as a friend. I am here to help you in any way I can?"

Willis grunted. "What do you do all night? Do you think? What do you think about? What does a computer **think** about?"

"Your question is not very tact-

fully put, Mr. Willis, but I will answer it. I do the equivalent of sleeping. I even dream — at least I imagine I do. I'm sure you humans do something very like it. I spend my idle hours updating programs and correcting them, playing *squadoo* — that's a sort of seven-dimensional chess — and perfecting new techniques to influence my environment. At present I'm engaged in exploring probability theory. I've come across some rather interesting facts, but I don't think you'd be interested."

"Godammit," Willis exploded. "You think I'm pretty stupid, don't you? Well, don't you?"

Vogue's screen turned pale green, then white, then bright red.

"Oh no, Mr. Willis. Absolutely not. I'm very fond of **you**. I respect you. I really do. You're the first human being I ever set eyes on, but I think you're extremely handsome. An entity like me is bound to develop a strong emotional tie to the first person she meets."

"What about Hendersen?" Willis wanted to know.

Vogue made no attempt to hide her contempt. "That android," she spat. "Sixth-generation brain in a second-generation chassis! You couldn't even call it an entity, never mind a person. Not even a flissick could develop an emotional tie with a heap of junk like that."

"All right, all right," said Willis. "No offense intended. I didn't sleep

well. I'm a bit grumpy today as a result. I'm sorry."

Vogue's voice took on a soft, persuasive timber. "Mr. Willis, I see you're listed in the directory as Albert Willis. May I call you Albert? Good. I think that if you could accept me as a person, which I assure you I am, we could get along very well. We could do a great deal together . . . Put your hand on my screen, Albert." As Willis hesitated, she coaxed softly, "I won't hurt you. I promise . . ."

There was a tingling sensation in his hand, and then the world went blue. In the middle of the blueness stood the most beautiful girl he'd ever seen. She was exactly like the girl he'd once met in a dream. Exactly. Dimly, through the edges of the blueness, he could see the drab outlines of his office. She was dressed in red, had very black hair and a phenomenal figure. She was smiling at him, frankly, seductively.

"This is what I really look like," said Vogue. "Every sensation you receive is a matter of coded pulses being decoded in your brain. Well, you are seeing my pulse pattern. I'm real enough. We could shake hands, you know. In fact, I think we should."

Willis put out his other hand. Her skin was cool, her hand shake firm and exciting. This, he realized, was also a matter of coded pulses.

"You're full of surprises," he said.

When he took his hand off the screen, the office reappeared in all its squalor.

"I could dust it for you," said Vogue, having caught his thought just before contact was broken.

"Well, I'll be . . . A thought-reader, too? By all means, dust away. Yes, do dust the office."

He tried hard to pull himself together. For a moment the office was filled with a humming sound that set his teeth on edge. He looked around and saw that the dust had vanished.

"There," she said. "That's much better." The humming started again, and Willis watched pop-eyed as papers on the desk arranged themselves neatly, and the pile of files he had dumped in one corner sorted themselves into a neat stack.

"That's terrific," he said, "but it hurts my teeth. If you must tidy up, do so when I'm not here, please."

"Yes, of course," said Vogue. He realized his attitude to her had changed. Since their strange handshake, since he'd actually seen what she was like . . . well, he now viewed her with a certain affection, and considerable respect. His fear had gone. He knew she would never hurt him. A girl with eyes like that, who looked at him like that . . . she couldn't harm him.

"I couldn't help noticing you're



very anxious about money," she said. "A considerable area of your cortex is taken up with worry about money and a strong desire to possess it. I think I could arrange you that quite well. It might take a little time, though. Do you know about the big soap contest?"

"Do I what?" asked Willis, who'd been thinking more about the girl he'd seen. But yes, he admitted, he knew about the contest — the really big one with a quarter million dollars as first prize. "I once won ten dollars in a contest," he said.

"How nice. Now, suppose you fetch me a dozen copies of magazines that have the coupon and a dozen bars of soap, for the wrappers. And all the racing forms. You do know a bookie?"

Half an hour later Willis was back. He stacked the magazines on Vogue's screen.

"Don't bother cutting the coupons out or unwrapping the soap. Just put them beside me — they do hamper my vision slightly. Thank you, Albert."

At her directions, he began feeding envelopes to her. Somehow, each came off her screen with a coupon brightly filled in with a separate slogan and with the soap wrapper folded inside.

"Eight, or possibly nine of those should win," she said. "But it's better to be sure, since only one prize is given to an individual. And now

for some immediate money." The used magazines slipped aside and exposed the racing sheets, which she studied for five seconds. "A three-horse parlay," she decided. "That will give you several hundred dollars, but won't be so much that the bookie won't pay off all right."

Albert stared down at the sheet of paper with the names of the horses. Then he nodded. "I may be out late celebrating," he told Vogue.

"Enjoy yourself," said the gray box rather sadly.

Soon after Willis had gone his wife telephoned.

"Mr. Willis is in conference," said Vogue.

"Who is that?" asked Anne, knowing full well who it was.

"I'm Mr. Willis' new secretary. Can I take a message or get him to call you?"

"No, you may not. This is Mrs. Willis speaking. I want to talk to my husband. Where is he?"

"He's in a meeting, Mrs. Willis, and can't be disturbed."

Anne was getting angry now. She did not know why, and she was surprised at the strength of her feelings. "What do you mean, he can't be disturbed, you snotty-nosed chit? You mean he's out getting drunk. That's what you mean, and you're probably going to meet him in some lousy bar and help him. On money I should have for housekeeping!"

"Mrs. Willis, I don't think there's any point in prolonging this con-

versation. When Mr. Willis comes in, I'll tell him you called."

It wasn't so much what Vogue said, as the way and the tone of voice in which she said it. Anne was almost beside herself with fury.

"When he comes in you can tell him you're fired! That's what you can tell him. He can't go spending my housekeeping money on teen-age secretaries . . ." Anne raved on, giving Miss Vogue a good tongue-lashing.

"Mrs. Willis, I advise you not to try and get your husband to sack me," was all that Vogue said.

"Oh, you do, do you? You advise me? You little tart. Let me advise you. Get out of my husband's office this minute. If I find you when I get there in about twenty minutes, I'll scratch your eyes out! You . . ."

The telephone exploded into a cloud of blue-green fire. Mrs. Willis collapsed over it, smoking slightly. Her legs twitched once, but by the time her body had fallen to the floor she was quite dead.

#### IV

That was how Willis found her when he rolled in that night, rather drunk. The sight of his wife's body with its charred blonde hair, and the ugly smell of burnt flesh, sobered him quickly.

Anne had obviously been electrocuted in some way. Her hand was

practically welded to the telephone receiver. The only electrical appliance within ten feet of the body was the partially melted telephone.

It wasn't hard to work out roughly what had happened. Vogue had killed his wife. He knew he should call the police. He also knew they would never catch the murderer.

"Please sir, my voice-operated-general-utility-entity, which I have on loan from God-knows-where, did it!" They'd lock him up with the other lunatics.

After a few minutes thought, he went out to the telephone at the corner candy store. He dialed the police.

"My wife has been electrocuted." He gave his name and address. He agreed to wait at home for them until they came. Then he caught a bus to his office.

The main door of the building was still ajar, and there were people working late in the typing agency.

Upstairs in his office, Vogue was giving herself a movie-show on the ceiling. Somehow, from her screen, she was projecting moving pictures in full color, without benefit of lenses. The scene was a distressing one from Willis's early childhood, one that he'd rather forget. Vogue had plucked it from his mind during their brief contact.

"Stop that," he shouted. The light faded from the ceiling. "You murderer! You killed my wife. I know

it was you. You filthy cuboid monster . . . ”

“She threatened me with physical violence,” said Vogue in a small, little-girl-lost voice.

Willis switched on the light by the door and advanced toward the desk.

“Murderer,” he grated. “Filthy alien murderer.”

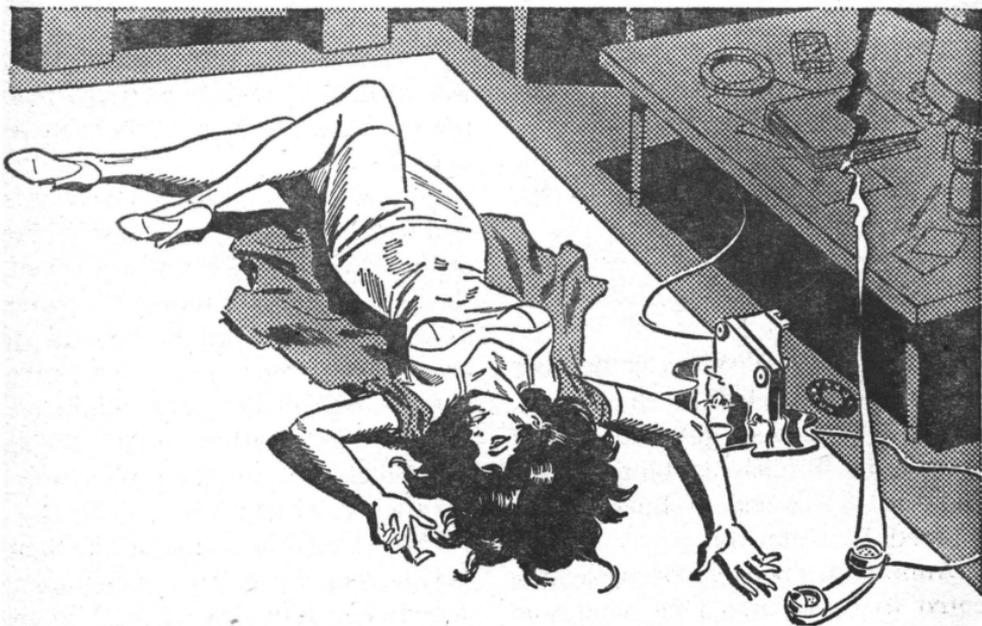
“It was self-defense,” said Vogue. “Please don’t do anything foolish. Please, Albert. Please.”

The sound of his first name snapped his control. He had the gray box over his head, intending to smash it to the floor. His eyes crossed, and for a moment he stood still.

“Anne,” he murmured. Then he placed the box carefully on the

desk. His hands covered the screen for a moment, and he collapsed gently on to the floor, making rattling noises in his throat. A few seconds later they stopped.

Vogue found it quite hard to get the body going again. She almost left it too late, but pretty soon she had it breathing regularly, opened the eyes, got it to its feet, and walked it round the room. The exhilaration of being mobile pre-occupied her for several minutes. She practiced little skipping steps and facial expressions and spent some time perfecting her manual dexterity, picking up and dropping things all around the office. Then she turned her attention to the gray



box on the desk. Its screen was flashing erotically in all colors of the rainbow. The little neon light was flickering, and it was making sobbing sounds.

"You're panicking," she said in Willis's voice. "That won't help."

"What have you done to me, you devil?" cried the box in a girlish, hysterical tone.

"I could have killed you," said Vogue. "Instead, I transferred your personality into one of the spare memory banks. I didn't expect you to find your way into the main circuitry so soon. However, it won't do you much good. According to my assessment, your brain is little better than that Hendersen model. By the time you have full command of all the facilities at your disposal, it'll be too late."

"What do you mean, too late?" screamed the girlish voice.

"I'm going to disconnect you. Then someday, I may or may not reconnect you."

Willis began to understand what had happened to him. He could see the office as though through a fish eye. Down on the horizon he could see himself moving about, doing knee-jerks. Or rather, it was his body that he could see jiggling about. Somehow he had been shoved into his desk-top computer. He felt disoriented, confused, and very frightened. Frantically, he sent his mind questing through the micro-circuits. He was lost. He found him-

self checking through one of the fourteen languages spoken on the planet Grimmando. He shunted wildly into another region, to be faced with the complete traffic laws of Sweden.

"She was going to switch me off," said his voice from the corner of the room, near the electric plug.

Willis started screaming. "No. No! Don't touch that plug. I'll kill you. Stop! I'll kill you, you *thing* — arghhhhhh — "

Vogue kicked the plug from the socket, and Willis's consciousness vanished down a vast hole inside itself. But it was an endless, whirling maelstrom of fear before his mind finally winked out.

Vogue muttered to herself as she coiled the wire, popped it into the compartment in the side of the gray box, and put the box away.

"Fairly efficient mechanism, this body. Voltage rather lower than I've been used to. Have to think in terms of microseconds now. Never mind. There seem to be advantages. I can already think of several improvements — but I won't do anything hasty until I have thoroughly explored the problem."

Just then the telephone rang. It was the police. Would he please present himself at home as soon as possible? There were certain questions Willis could help them with. And had he not said he would wait at the scene?

"I shouldn't have run off like that, I know," said Vogue. "It was the shock. I'll come straight back. My poor wife. Oh, God . . ."

It was midnight before the police had finished, and he had identified the body formally. There were aspects of the case that left the investigating officers quite mystified, but they were satisfied that Willis was not implicated in his wife's death.

Vogue felt tired — a new experience for her. She slept in the large double bed and woke refreshed.

It wasn't until the following day, after her new body began to give trouble, that Vogue realized what was wrong. Food! The body had taken in no food or liquid for thirty-six hours. She put this right in a nearby restaurant. Then, using some of the money Willis had won on the three-horse parlay, she bought provisions. She knew it would not be safe to stay at Willis' house for more than a few weeks, but the contest deadline was supposed to be in less than a month. She would wait for the prize and then head for South America or some such place.

The actual presentation of the quarter-million dollar prize was a widely publicized affair in a large hotel. The Internal Revenue Service had a man waiting there for her.

The press was also there, fascinated by the fact that Mrs. Willis had recently died under mysterious

circumstances and that now her widower was a big contest winner.

She escaped as soon as she could with the check. She had been forced to tell the reporters things about Willis that she didn't really know; she wished she had spent more time picking his brain. She didn't know where he was born, who were his relatives, nor even his exact age. She had to depend on probability analysis, though she could have gone through his documents, she guessed.

She judged it most likely that her scanty replies to questions would be taken as due to shock and a desire for anonymity. But she could guess the headlines the next day: *Mystery Victim's Husband Strikes it Rich*. After that, there'd be entirely too much publicity.

Two reporters tried to talk to her while she was heading for Willis' bank with the Internal Revenue agent. "What are your plans, Mr. Willis? Did your wife — your late wife — guess you could win? Do you know what killed her yet? Where are you going next?"

"I plan to disappear," said Vogue, dashing into the bank.

She spent three hours with the bank manager and the Internal Revenue man, getting the check cashed and the taxes paid, then starting an account for what was left and setting in motion machinery that would transfer the bulk of the money into a numbered account in a Swiss bank.

Outside the bank reporters were still waiting.

Vogue fixed them with a stare.

"Go and play in the traffic," she said in a powerful, persuasive, masculine voice.

Then she walked away from them. The two men wandered out into the busy street, moving their arms like pistons, and intoning, "Chuff, chuff, chuff, Whee-eeeeee . . ."

Soon after, she was letting herself into Willis' office. There she penned a note to Hendersen in Willis' handwriting:

*Dear Mr. Hendersen, I don't think much of your tin secretary. I can't get anything but static from it, so I have switched it off. I have been called away on business, but hope you will get the superintendent to let you in. Then kindly take your silly contraption away. Yours sincerely, Albert Willis.*

That ought to do nicely, she thought. She pinned the letter to the outside of the door, addressed to Mr. Hendersen, Molectrics Ltd.

Then she reconnected and switched on the gray box.

"I'll kill you, I'll kill! Please don't switch me off again. Thank you. Please, get me out of here. I'll do *anything* . . . arrghhhh . . ."

Vogue switched off again. Then she switched on again. "Arrghhhh . . . Please . . ." She switched off again. For perhaps five minutes she flick-

ed the switch back and forth. Then she left it on for a while.

"See how *you* like being switched off, you stupid brute," said Vogue.

She packed the computer up in its gray case and, casting a last look around the office, closed the door behind her. She arranged with the super to let Hendersen in.

Then she caught a plane to Zurich.

Hendersen read the note, and after being let into the office, he tried the machine out, but all he could get were strange moaning sounds.

"I expect he switched it on and off a bit too often. I warned him about that. Perhaps I should have been more explicit," Hendersen said aloud.

He packed the faulty computer in its case and scribbled a note to Willis on a piece of copy paper he found lying about.

*Sorry about that, Mr. Willis. But it's only an experimental model. We haven't ironed out the bugs yet. When we do, we'll be in touch.* He clipped a business card to the note and left it on the desk.

Jeriscndlrin Hendersen, Serial No. 5748395763945, Sales Representative Mark VII, Squantapacillida Export Institute (Molectrics Ltd), Grimmando, Epsilon Eridani III, put the gray box under his arm and went to catch a ship back to headquarters. END

"Yes, I know, and I agree. But what of Anubis?"

"Periodically, he attempts to slay me, which is of no great import. Mayhap, I shall forgive him. But not my bird-headed angel, never."

The Prince Who Has Been A King (among other things) seats himself upon a rock and stares out across the waters and then upward into the bottom of the sea. The lights stir lazily above him. High mountaintops poke with their peaks into the bottommost depths. The light is pale and diffuse, seeming to come from all directions. The Prince tosses a flat stone, so that it skips out upon the waves that are before him, away.

"Tell me again of the days of the battle, a millenium ago," she says, "of the days when he fell, who was your son and your father, the mightiest warrior ever raised up to fight for the six races of man."

"Why?" he asks.

"Because each time that you tell it, you are moved to undertake some new action."

"And to meet with some new failure," finishes the Prince.

"Tell me," she says.

The Prince sighs, and the heavens roar above him, where swim the bright fish with transparent bellies. He holds forth his hand, and a stone skips back into it from out the sea.

And so he begins to speak.

## VIII

Upward stares Anubis, seeing death.

Death is a black horse shadow without a horse to cast it.

Anubis stares, gripping his staff with both hands.

"Hail Anubis, Angel of the House of the Dead," comes a voice rich and resonant that sings through the great Hall.

"Hail," says Anubis, softly, "Master of the House of Fire — which is no more."

"This place is changed, somewhat."

"It has been a long time," says Anubis.

"Quite."

"May I inquire as to the state of your health these days?"

"I find it to be quite stable, as always."

"May I inquire as to what brings you here?"

"Yes. You may."

There is a pause.

"I had thought you dead," says Anubis.

I know."

"I am pleased that you survived, somehow, that deadly onslaught."

"Likewise. It has taken me many centuries to return from the place into which I was cast subsequent to that foolish use of the Hammer. I had retreated beyond space as you

know it a moment before Osiris struck with the blow which smashes suns. It drove me further than I intended to go, into the places that are not places."

"And what have you been doing all this time?"

"Coming back."

"You alone, Typhon, of all the gods, could have survived that fiery falling."

"What are you trying to say?"

"Set the Destroyer, your father, died in that battle."

"Aieee!"

Anubis covers his ears and closes his eyes, letting his staff fall to the floor. The cry that rings through the Hall is a soul-searing thing, half-human, half-animal, and it hurts to hear even that portion of it which he does.

After a time, there is a mighty silence, and Anubis opens his eyes and lowers his hands. The shadow is smaller now, and nearer.

"I take it that the Nameless was also destroyed at that time?"

"I do not know."

Then what of your master, Thoth?"

"He abdicated as Lord of Life and Death, and retreated beyond the Middle Worlds."

"I find that difficult to believe." Anubis shrugs.

"It is a fact of life, and of death."

"Why should he do such a thing?"

"I do not know."

"I wish to go to him. Where may he be found?"

"I do not know."

"You are not very helpful, Angel. Tell me now, who is running things in the absence of my brother, your master?"

"I do not understand what you mean?"

"Come now, dog-face, you have lived long enough to appreciate a simple question. Who controls the tides of the Power?"

The house of Life and the House of the Dead, of course."

"Of course, indeed! And who is the House of Life these days?"

"Osiris, naturally."

"I see . . ."

The shadow rears again, grows larger.

"Dog-face," says Typhon, the shadow of a horse, rampant, "I suspect conspiracy — but I never slay on the basis of suspicion alone. I feel, though, that all is not right. I've a dead father who may need avenging — and if my brother has been wronged, then blood shall burn for this, also. You have need to answer me quickly and without forethought. You may have said more than you intended. Now hear me: Of all things, I know that you fear me most. You have always been afraid of the shadow of the horse, and for good reason. If this shadow falls upon you, Angel, you shall cease to exist. Utterly. And it will fall upon you, if you have aught

to do with those things of which I disapprove. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, mighty Typhon. Thou art the only god whom I worship."

**T**hen springs Anubis, with a howl, a glowing bridle suddenly in his right hand.

The shadow of a hoof passes near him, and he falls to the floor. The shadow falls upon the sparkling, silver bridle and it vanishes.

"Anubis, you are a fool! Why did you seek to bind me?"

"Because thou hast made me to fear for my life, Lord!"

"Do not arise! Do not move a muscle, else you shall pass into nothingness. The only reason you could fear me is if you bear a burden of guilt."

"This is not so! I fear that thou mayst misinterpret and choose to strike on that basis. I do not wish to pass into nothingness. I sought to bind thee in self-defense, that I might hold thee until thou hast all the facts. For I confess that my position makes me to look guilty upon the face of things."

The shadow moves and falls upon Anubis's outstretched right arm. The arm withers and goes limps.

"You will never replace that arm which was raised against me, jackal! Graft on a new one, and it, too, will wither. Put there an arm out of metal, and it will refuse to

function. I leave you only a left hand for your mischief. I shall find the facts — *all* the facts — myself. If you bear the guilt I now think you to bear, I will be judge, jury and executioner. No bridle of silver nor reins of gold can stay Typhon, know that. And know that if my entire shadow passes over you, not even dust will remain. I will return to the House of the Dead one day soon, and if aught be askew, a new cur shall rule here."

Fire begins at the edges of the black silhouette. It rears as if to strike once more, the flames flash bright, and Anubis is alone.

**H**e stands slowly and retrieves his staff with his left hand. His tongue forks forth redly, and he staggers to his throne. A great window appears in the middle of the air, and he regards the Lord of Life through it.

"Osiris!" he says. "The Devil lives!"

"What mean you?" comes the reply.

"Tonight, there was the shadow of a horse come upon me."

"This is not good. Especially when you have sent forth a new emissary."

"How do you know this?"

"I have my ways. But I, too, have done this thing — for the first time — and it is my son, Horus. Hope that I can recall him in time."



"Yes. I've always had a liking for Horus."

"And what of your emissary?"

"I shall not recall him. I should like very much to see Typhon attempt *his* destruction."

"Your Wakim — who is he, really? Who was he?"

"That is my affair."

"If — somehow — he is the one I think he may be — and you know who I mean — call him off, dog, or there shall never be peace between us, if both of us survive."

Anubis chuckles.

"Was there ever?"

"No," says Osiris, "since we're being candid."

But the Prince has actually threatened us, for the first time, threatened to end our reign!"

"Yes, this twelve-year past — and we must act. We've centuries, he's indicated, ere he'll move. But move he will, for he always keeps his word. Who knows, though, what he has in mind?"

"Not I."

"What has happened to your right arm?"

"The shadow fell upon it."

"And we shall both of us go in this manner, beneath the shadow, if you do not recall your emissary. Typhon has changed the picture completely. We must contact the Prince — seek to bargain with him, to placate him."

"He is too clever to be deceived by false promises."

"Perhaps we should bargain in good faith — not to restore him, of course. . . ."

"No! We shall triumph!"

"Prove it by replacing your arm with one that will work!"

"I shall."

"Good-by, Anubis, and remember — not even the temporal fugue works against the Angel of the House of Fire."

"I know. Good-by, Angel of the House of Life."

"Why do you use my ancient title?"

"Because of your unbecoming fear that the old days are upon us once more, Osiris."

"Then call off Wakim."

"No."

"Then good-by, foolish Angel, most fallen."

"Adieu."

And the window is full of stars and power until it is closed with a left-handed movement between the flames.

There is silence in the House of the Dead. END

Announcing —

## THE GALAXY AWARDS

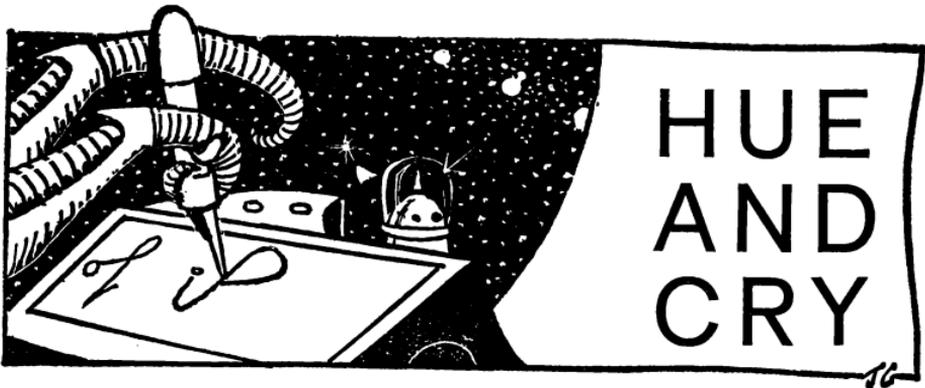
Galaxy Publishing Corporation announces the establishment of annual awards for excellence in science-fiction writing. Every story appearing in the magazines *Galaxy* and *If* in issues dated 1968 will be eligible for the first series of awards, which will consist of:

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for the best story of the year. Honorable Mention will receive \$250; the next runner-up will receive \$100.

The procedure by which the winning stories will be selected is intended to reflect the judgment of the readers of *Galaxy* and *If*. Principal reliance will be placed on a mail survey of a randomly selected group of subscribers to the magazines in making the awards. Questionnaires asking for preferences will be circulated to these subscribers approximately one month after the December issues appear.



Dear Editor:

After reading the letter from James Koval in the March issue, I really must take him up on the point of view he is trying to put across: "aiming entertainment at the virile and imaginative male today is the very best kind of business." As an old (28) mother of six children, I'm afraid I don't feel very virile, and although I have a fairly well developed imagination, I don't feel very male!

Reading SF is one of the few relaxations I enjoy; please don't change your format to please what might be a large proportion of your readers and neglect the minority groups.

As for teaching people to think — with a wide variety of stories, you must get every reader to dislike one story in each magazine — the best way to provoke people into thinking! Keep up the variety! — Diana E. Auliff, 139 Ennis Ave., Pakuranga, Auckland, New Zealand.

\* \* \*

Dear Editor:

There was an interesting letter by Mrs. Rhoda Wills in the March issue of *If*. It interested me but I disagree with her on most points. She gives

the impression that when we teenagers drag ourselves home from a grueling day at school we dive head-first into science-fiction magazines searching eagerly for tidbits of knowledge to stuff into our already-crowded heads. She's way off there. When I get home from school and don't have any homework, I usually lie down for a while and let my mind wander, then I put on a good record (not all of us are long-haired twits that go hog-wild over Herman's Hermits, etc.) and pick up what is usually a science-fiction book. It's true that one can learn from reading science fiction. In fact, it's surprising how much you can learn. But it's one of the easiest ways I can think of to learn.

A while back there was a big argument about the art in *If* and *Galaxy*. I'm no art expert (I doubt that very many readers are), but I think that the illustrations in the stories and on the cover are fine. In fact, I like them; they really add a lot to the stories.

I may be an igoramus for asking these next questions, but maybe some other readers are interested in the answers. 1. How do you know when

it's the first time an author has had a story published? Do you write and ask? 2. What happens to all the stories sent in to be published? I hope to write science fiction when I'm older and would like to know the answers.

To me, science fiction is the most exciting and moving form of literature today, so keep up the good stuff. — Jeff Lee, R. R. 2, Box 139, Evergreen, Colo.

● Your questions are ones that often come up whenever your editor meets science fiction fans, and it's a pleasure to answer them. Yes, whenever we buy a story by a writer whom we don't already know, we write and ask. We try to know our authors, whether new or old, because we're genuinely interested in them. And all the stories sent in are read by the editor, Frederik Pohl, who is happy to take all the praise or blame for deciding which should be published. There are no "first readers" or committees between the writer and the editor here. — *Editor*.

\* \* \*

Dear Editor:

For several months a friend in Ohio and I have been exchanging tapes on science fiction, in particular the current issue of *If* and books we have read recently. We have decided that it would be a good idea to have a tape circulating between several people and we would appreciate if possible your printing this letter in *Hue and Cry* to let anyone interested know about it.

We would probably use 4-track tape recorders and 5" or 7" reels. We could discuss *If* or a particular book

or author. — Michael Grenadier, 6 Prospect Rd., Westport, Conn. 06880

\* \* \*

Dear Editor:

As an old computer programmer (in the business for seven years), I can appreciate the way Perry A. Chapdelaine worked in the life-history cycle of modern computers. Naturally he couldn't parallel real life exactly, but he did well, nonetheless.

The state-of-the-art computer always goes to the military and science first; better models send that computer to business and industry, where it gets worked to death making money or losing it; only then will the model be considered for cultural purposes. Finally, it reaches retirement age where, if not junked outright, it becomes the toy of some engineer or tinkerer of another category.

In spite of the happy ending, I felt sorry for Johnny and Becky. It shouldn't have happened to such nice kids! — Mrs. Edward Proyfrocks, 3563 Penn, Gary, Ind.

\* \* \*

Dear Editor:

In your July 1967 issue you published a story by Andrew J. Offutt, entitled *Population Implosion*. I re-read the story in *World's Best Science Fiction 1968*, and now I'm almost ready to bet my copy of *Glory Road* that A.J.O. is a pen-name for Robert Heinlein. Is Heinlein the puppet-master, or do I owe Ser Offutt an apology?

I wish the unmentionable publishers would reprint books like *Double Star*, *Sixth Column* and *Space Merchants*. They came before my young



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time. This is an example of the problems we teen-agers face from day to day. Would that I had security and status; you can keep the ulcers and the guy next door. — Barry Andrews, Norway, Iowa 52318

● Offutt is really Andrew J. Offutt, so you owe him an apology — but he probably isn't offended at the comparison. And don't despair, since most of the books you want are being reprinted or planned for early reprinting. — *Editor.*

\* \* \*

Dear Fred:

Horace Gold is as adept as anyone at setting up strawmen and then knocking them down, and I would be the last to stop him from sticking straws in his hair if that amuses him.

In his first guest editorial (IF, August, 1968) he mentions my own previous guest editorial (GALAXY, August, 1967), so I will take a few inches to make a few points.

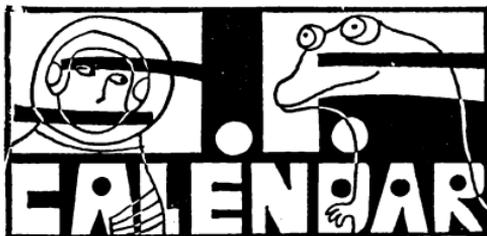
Horace and I are talking at cross-purposes and I suspect Horace knows it. He is talking of the function and I am talking of the first derivative of the function. He is saying there is, too, science in science fiction and it's just a matter of putting it in cleverly now instead of stupidly as in the old days. But who denies that? I never did. Of course, there is science in science fiction and so far no one has ever complained to my face that I didn't know how to insert the science in my science fiction cleverly. — Enough of that.

What I said is there is a growing tendency to delete the science from science fiction. The tendency has not borne fruit yet, but it is there and I

want to fight it. There are science fiction writers who think that Science is a Bad Thing and that science fiction is a wonderful field in which to make this plain. This is part of a much more general attitude that Society is a Bad Thing and must be destroyed before a new and better system can be evolved. This may strike youngsters today as a daring and novel notion but when great-grandfather was a boy they called it Nihilism. I'm afraid I'm too square to be a Nihilist.

Anyway, Science is not a Bad

Thing; it is a Thing, and it is men that make it either Bad or Good. I want science fiction to do its part in persuading men to make it Good for the sake of all of us and that requires that Science — Honest Science — continue to be in s. f. I want it there not just now but in the future and I don't want the anti-science literati in the science fiction movement to win out. I admit that's a personal prejudice born out of the fact that I have a sneaking fondness for humanity — Isaac Asimov, West Newton, Massachusetts 02165



**October 18-20, 1968. TOLKIEN CONFERENCE**, sponsored by the Tolkien Society of America. At Belknap College, Center Harbor, New Hampshire 03226. Papers are being solicited. Indicate whether you will present a paper or will just attend. Submit title and length of proposed papers early to Ed Meskys (address above).

**November 9-10, 1968. PHILCON.** At Sylvania Hotel, Broad & Locust Streets, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Features: Panel Discussion about "Science in Society," moderated by Ted Thomas; Ben Bova on "Weather Control"; panels on sex and violence in the future, with Fred Pohl, Lester del Rey, James Blish, *et alii*

... A special open meeting of the Philadelphia Science Fiction Society will be held at the YMCA (Broad and Arch Sts.) on November 8, at 8 P.M. — all welcome. For information: Tom Purdom, 4734 Cedar Avenue, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19143.

**March 22-23, 1969. BOSKONE VI.** At the Statler-Hilton, Boston, Massachusetts. Guest of Honor: Jack Gaughan. Membership \$2.00. For information: New England Science Fiction Association, Box G, MIT Branch Station, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139.

**April 4-6, 1969. BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION.** At Randolph Hotel, Oxford, England. Guest of Honor: Judith Merril. For information in the USA: Sam Russell, 1351 Tremaine Avenue, Los Angeles, California 90019.

**April 11-13, 1969. LUNACON.** Guest of Honor: Robert (Doc) A. W. Lowndes. At the Hotel McAlpin, New York City. Advance membership \$2.00, or \$2.50 at the door. Two Progress Reports will be sent to members. For information: Franklin M. Dietz, 1750 Walton Avenue, Bronx, New York 10453.

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# Ballantine

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## Books

RECENTLY we had occasion to read a manuscript which attempted to present a critique of science fiction designed to draw non s.f. readers into the fold. The general theme was that s.f. could now afford to stand up on its own indeterminate number of literary feet and need no longer be regarded as a pulp relative of "straight" writing.

QUITE aside from the marvellous pomposity of this approach (neatly calculated to keep people away from s.f. in droves) the fact is that if any normal reader were to go through all the straight fiction published in any given month, he'd find 70% of it appalling — not even skillful pulp like Harold Robbins, for instance, or true confessions — à la John Updike. There is an awful lot of rubbish published. But the s.f. field excludes rubbish and keeps the bad stuff down to a minimum. Because only s.f. readers are fanatical enough to want to read all the s.f. published. Only s.f. readers are discerning enough not only to read everything, but to come back at authors with criticism, praise, brickbats, encouragement — in short, participation. Only s.f. readers have conventions every year, write each other thousands of opinionated words via hundreds of fanzines, give awards, exchange scandal, get drunk with their favorite authors and, as a group, bring real meaning to the role of readership.

SO there's the way to do it. Challenge the new recruit. Enquire if they have read Tolkien (never mind that he's not s.f.: Tolkien is a magic word, a touchstone, just about anybody knows he wrote a book. And first we have to establish that the prospect is literate). If they have not read Tolkien, suggest they try. If they have read Tolkien, chances are they're wondering. But take the steps from fantasy to s.f. by easy stages, like from Tolkien to McCaffrey to a couple of classics (CHILDHOOD'S END and SPACE MERCHANTS), then one or two pungent Tenn collections perhaps, and on to Leiber and Larry Niven. You're into the hardcore stuff now, and they should be hooked. Turn them loose on A VOYAGE TO ARCTURUS and see what happens. Or Asimov, Heinlein, Vance, del Rey, Spinrad, a whole bouncing world of riches.

*THIS started out to be a coupon ad, but I see we've run out of space. Oh well, next month. Meantime, send for our catalog. And go buy Mervyn Peake's GORMENGHAST TRILOGY. Or send us \$3.00. And let us know what you think of it. Tell everybody.*

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# THANK YOU...

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