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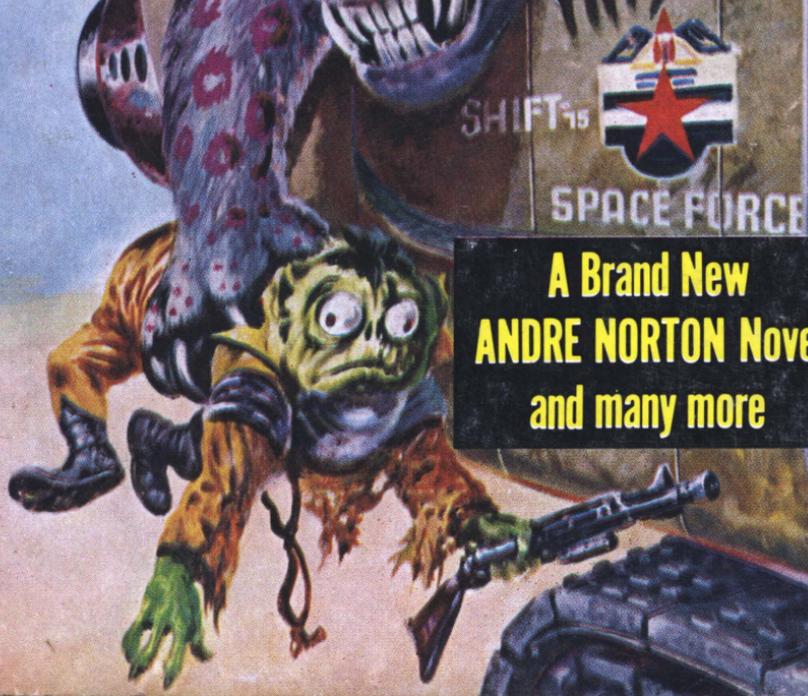
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WORLDS OF



SCIENCE FICTION

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**ALL NEW
STORIES**

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Sufficient Unto The Day

By a popular school definition, fiction holds up a mirror to life. Our stories simply reflect what we are. And if that is true, we may be in for the end of what some have called our most precious heritage — human dignity. The great bulk of the so-called mainstream literature (and of New Whatchamacallit science fiction) seems concerned with petty anti-heroes who whine over the lot of mankind but do nothing about it. And they may be reflecting accurately a tendency that is strong in current human development.

The concept that the human animal is entitled to earn and hold dignity as an individual is fairly rare in human history. We inherited it from three sources. The ancient Hebrews somehow developed it. The Roman Republic held it for centuries, and its tradition got passed on into Christianity to some extent. And above all, the ancient Norse people brought it to its peak and passed it on to us. (Even their gods had *human* dignity, and did not — uniquely — violate the dignity of their worshippers.) But to most of the rest of the world, dignity lay only in high places, or in the horde known as the State.

Probably it's a luxury concept an

overcrowded world of nearly four billion people cannot well preserve. And hence, our current literature may be correct in reflecting the loss of man's belief in his own particular dignity.

But science fiction does *not* reflect. It projects. And mostly we deal with worlds where men must have sense of human importance and dignity.

Without that feeling, men do not go pioneering into new worlds or developing new ways to handle the inhuman laws of nature. What would be an accurate reflection of now must inevitably be a grotesque and silly lie for the worlds with which we deal.

Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. We have no obligation to yoke our futures to it. Our strength as a literature comes from the fact that we don't limit ourselves to telling it as it *is*. We can and should tell it as it will be — as it must and should be.

Science fiction has its own dignity and need not reflect anything from the literatures that have abandoned all hope on their long descent into their uninteresting hells.

—THE EDITOR

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GROOVYLAND

by ROBERT BLOCH

Illustrated by GAUGHAN

*Drool was alien and green and ugly.
And there was no other rock group
like him anywhere — in the beginning.*

I

I started my writing assignment at the studio on January 2nd. Ten minutes after I checked into my office I got a call from my producer, Effingwell Wright.

Working for him was about as safe as practicing dentistry on an alligator, but I needed the bread. Besides, he did my kind of picture — he'd just finished a spook-tacular, *The Turn Of The Screw*, and was now considering a sequel,

The Return Of The Screw. Which was why I'd been hired.

At least that's what I thought until I arrived at Wright's office.

"We're going to do *Hamlet*," he announced.

"Hamlet?"

Wright nodded through a wreath of cigar-smoke. "That's it, baby. Now we only got one problem. How do we lick the story?"

I stared at him. "I'm afraid I've never had any experience with Shakespeare."

"Don't worry, you won't be working with him." Wright's cigar waved dismissal of the problem. "But there's a ghost in this property, isn't there? And that's where you come in."

That, actually, is where Wright's secretary came in and handed him a letter.

"Here's the censorship report. It just arrived."

"Censorship?" Wright scowled through the smoke.

"From the Anti-Amusement League. They want some changes in the story-treatment."

Wright scanned the letter, shaking his head and muttering as he read.

"Relationship between Hamlet and his mother is unacceptable to this office. Suggest you make him an orphan." Wright frowned, then went on. "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern objectionable for ethnic reasons — no Jewish names. Rec-

ommend you make them Negroes."

Wright sighed and continued. "Be sure to eliminate violence — no duels, no killings at the end." He began to frown again. "Imperative that you cut the phrase, *To be or not to be*. It might encourage suicide." Wright's frown darkened. "Remove business with skull in graveyard scene. Better still, drop graveyard scene entirely. Too gruesome for kiddies in audience. Finally, we cannot accept the ghost. There must be no cheap, morbid nonsense about spirits of the dead thirsting for revenge. Sincerely —"

Wright shrugged at me. "Sorry, baby. You can't fight progress." He rose and moved with me to the door. "I'd like to use you on this project, but the Anti-Amusement League carries a lot of clout in the industry. I suggest you go back to your office and clean out your drawers."

I got the message. I was being tossed out on my assignment.

Meanwhile, back at the Unemployment Office —

II

The first thing I did at the Unemployment Office was read the bulletin board to see if there were any openings. It had only one listing today, and I glanced at it.

"Nit-pickers wanted. Must be experienced quibblers."

I shook my head. No government job for me. Better off to apply for compensation. So I bought a paper and got in line to wait for my interview.

From the look of the headlines, the year was starting off with a bang. Wars were escalating abroad, prices were escalating at home and taxes were just plain rising. Eighteen people had been killed in a riot for peace, and there was talk that no such groups would be allowed to demonstrate in the future without a riot-permit. A small box contained a bulletin on 981 traffic fatalities and a large front-page story dealt with the arrest of a local museum guard who had been accused of mummy-molesting.

I sought solace in the sports section, reading the scores of the New Year's football games — the Rose Bowl, the Cotton Bowl, the Sugar Bowl, the Toilet Bowl —

"Pardon me," the soft voice murmured.

Glancing up, I saw this unnatural blonde, the lass with the psychedelic air.

"Are you three o'clock?" she asked. It took me a moment to interpret her question; she wanted to know the time of my interview.

"That's right," I nodded.

"Mind if I slip in ahead of you? I'm two-forty-five."

Actually, I'd have guessed her to be 36-24-36, so I gallantly allowed her to precede me and re-

turned to my reading. When I looked up again, she was gone, and I stepped before the window to do the interview bit.

It wasn't until I went outside that I saw her again.

She was standing on the curb beside the car parked just ahead of mine — a beat-up old heap with a bumper-sticker reading *I Want To Be Conspicuous*. The car was decorated with the usual floral designs, but from the look on the girl's face I gathered that her Flower Power had wilted.

"Trouble?" I inquired.

She glanced up. "Oh, it's you!"

There was no point in denying it, so I nodded. "What's the matter — car won't start?"

It was her turn to nod.

I opened the door and got behind the wheel. "Here, let me give you a hand." I gave her more than a hand; I gave her a foot, on the gas-pedal. The motor coughed, spluttered, then gave an unmistakable death-rattle.

"Don't bother," she told me. "It's totalled." And she started to walk away.

"Hey, aren't you going to call the Auto Club?"

"Not unless they'll give me a lift home."

I climbed out hastily. "Where's that?"

"Above the Strip. On Basic Drive. You know where that is?"

I opened the door of my own

car. "Get in, and I'll prove it."
"Thanks." She slid across the seat, snuggling over on the passenger side. I climbed in after her and we peeled off.

As we turned up Highland, I learned that her name was Sandy Simpson. Making a left on Sunset, I discovered that she was a professional body.

"That's right," she said, as I reacted by nearly ramming the car into a lamp-post. "I sell my body for a living. All, or any part of it. You know, like in a TV commercial with a star — sometimes her hands show her age, so when they cut to a tight closeup, it's my hands in the shot. Or maybe my feet. I do knees and elbows, too, and I'm very good at cleavage."

"In other words, you're a double?"

"A dubber, too. I specialize in howls for the laugh-tracks on comedy shows." And she gave out with an ear-splitting screech.

"Sounds like a good racket."

"Not lately." Sandy sighed heavily. "Haven't had a studio call in three months. I'd have starved to death if it wasn't for a couple of nose residuals I got from an old sinus-tablet commercial."

"So that's why you were down collecting compensation."

Sandy nodded. "What's your excuse?"

"I'm a writer. In this business

we are constantly starving."

"TV or movies?"

"I'm versatile. I starve in both."

I crossed Crescent Heights and moved on into Sunset Strip.

"Couldn't you do like, books?"

"I've done like, books. Three of them, to be exact. *How To Drown A Fish*, *The Romance of Sewage Disposal*, and one of those big special gift-books — *A Pictorial History of Dandruff*."

"Did they sell?"

"Like hot-cakes." I shrugged. "Trouble is, nobody buys hot-cakes in a bookstore."

"But you're really a writer?" Sandy eyed me curiously. "What's your name?"

"Considine. Joe Considine."

"You got a pad around here?"

This time I nearly piled up the car against a street sign. Not because of the implications of her question, but due to something I suddenly remembered. Something weighing about 250 pounds of solid, unyielding granite — my landlord.

"I did," I told her. "That is, I do and I don't. I mean, I haven't been getting up the rent for a couple of months and the landlord is leaning on me. I figured on drawing a salary advance today, only my job was shot down. So when I show up tonight without a payment, it's outsville."

"What about your compensation?"

"Two week waiting period before I collect the first check."

"I knew it!" Sandy bounced up and down on the seat, squealing happily. "Now you can move in with me!"

I gave her a double-take, and she nodded quickly. "The minute I saw you standing in line, I figured you'd be a good choice."

This time I watched the road before replying. "You mean you came down to the Unemployment Office to shop for a room-mate?"

"Not a room, man. A great big groovy spread. And you can pay your share of the rent when your compensation checks come through — just like the others."

"Others?"

Sandy nodded. "Don't worry, you won't be crowded. You'll see." She gave me a reassuring smile. "Like I'm not pressuring you. Just think about it."

I thought about it as I drove. Drove along Sunset Strip, passing all the familiar landmarks. Here were the shops and the signs — Mr. Gladys, the hair stylist — Mother Naked's Southern Fried Chicken — Toilet A-Go-Go — the interior decorator place where they restored antique furniture like new — and the other interior decorator place where they aged new furniture to make it look antique. We sped by the Now Generation Clinic, specializing in youthful diseases like

hippytitis, and passed the Topless Restaurant where I had once been thrown out for not wearing a necktie.

Dusk was falling, and the hippies were rising; the under-achievers, members of the up-trodden masses, hiding from the world behind dark glasses and beards.

This was the scene — boots and bare feet, buttons and bushy hair and beads, the mod and the odd intermingled. I'd never been with it; among these Flower Children I was just an elderly weed. But now, under the circumstances, perhaps I'd better blossom forth.

I glanced at Sandy. There were worse fates than sharing a pad with her. At least it might be a temporary solution, until my agent came up with another job.

"Okay, it's a deal," I told her. "I'll sneak my things out of the apartment and move in tomorrow."

"Crazy," she said. "Turn right at the next corner — that's Basic Drive."

I turned right at the next corner and started the climb up a dark and deserted hillside street.

And that's where the crunch came.

The crunch, and the squeal as I applied my brakes — just a moment too late to avoid impact. Apparently the street hadn't been entirely deserted after all, because there was a crumpled figure lying on the pavement before my car.

Sandy and I opened our doors simultaneously, and a moment later we stood staring down at the yellow-suited, gray-booted little form sprawled in the street.

"Hippy outfit," Sandy murmured. "But he's just a kid —"

I nodded, then stooped and turned him over gently. His eyes were closed and I couldn't distinguish his features here in the deepening darkness. But his chest rose and fell regularly, and that's what mattered the most to me at the moment.

"He's alive."

I gestured to Sandy. "Hold the door open while I get him in."

Lifting him carefully, I placed him in the front seat of the car, right in the middle, so that when Sandy climbed in on her side he was propped up between us.

"Hang onto him now," I told her.

Sandy nodded obediently. Then she gasped.

"What's the matter?"

"His face — he's turning green!"

"Shock."

I glanced over. My diagnosis was correct, but I had the wrong patient. It was Sandy who was in shock. She sat there, gaping and pointing, trying to speak.

"His hands are green, too —"

I shook my head grimly. "Hold tight. We may break a few speed records, but I've got to get him to a hospital."

It was then that I felt the stir-

ring beside me. It was then that I turned to see the yellow eyes pop open and the wide mouth part in a grin. The head twisted towards me and I heard the words.

"Not hospital."

A hand rose up in a restraining gesture. A hand that was perhaps a paw — with a thumb and only three fingers.

"Not hospital," the voice repeated firmly. And the next words fell like a knell of doom. "*Take me to your leader.*"

III

Now the Strip is filled with undersized specimens who wear far-out outfits. Some of them even cover their hands and faces with psychedelic designs in paint. Down there I'd probably never have given this one a second glance, but here in the lonely darkness of the hillside it was different. Everything about him was different — his costume, his complexion, his size and his eyes. The face was froglike and that three-fingered paw was neither batrachian nor human.

"Crazy!" Sandy whispered.

And it was.

Sandy seemed relieved now that the creature had spoken, but I didn't share her reaction.

"Don't you understand?" I muttered. "He's an *alien*."

"So what? I've got nothing against foreigners."

"But he's not an ordinary foreigner — he's extra-terrestrial."

"Nobody's perfect," she told me. "The important thing is he's not hurt." She turned to the creature. "Isn't that right, man?"

"Not man. Drool."

"Drool? Is that your name?"

"Yes. In your speech. Mine is different. Like you say, something else."

"You're something else!" Sandy shook her head. "Are you really an alien, like Joe says?"

The creature nodded. "I tell it like it is, man."

Sandy stared at him. "Where did you learn how to speak such perfect English?"

"In the ship."

I got into the act. "You came in a ship? From where?"

"Up." The green hand gestured. "Another planet?"

Drool nodded. "But the ship was yours. Krool found it. What you call spacecraft. Hardware. One of yours — empty."

I shook my head, but not in doubt. It was all too possible in these days of Top Security. We might have sent out an advanced-design spacecraft on a secret test flight. If something went wrong and its crew was lost, the ship would go on, drifting through space until it fell into the paws of creatures like these. Creatures like —

"Krool," Sandy murmured. "Who is he?"

"Boss. Big Daddy. Father of us all. Like me, only twenty times more. He looks like —"

Drool went on to describe his father's appearance, and I didn't like what I heard at all. According to him, his sire was a cross between a sabre-toothed tiger and a giant multi-colored leopard. And he had no paternal affection for his son, because Drool was the runt of the litter.

"My brothers and sisters are normal, all four million of them. But I don't grow. Maybe not the right chromosomes, maybe no blue genes. Krool is very up-tight about it. So when he found the ship, he took me off with him. A long journey, but the charts told him how to go, and the handling was simple. You are still quite primitive, right?"

"Let me get this straight," I said. "Your father brought you here in a ship. But if the crew was missing, how did you learn our language?"

"The crew left much literature to read and study. What you call comic books."

*T*hat explained his speech pattern. I wondered what else this alien had learned of our contemporary culture. But there were more important concerns right now.

"Where is this ship?"

"Krool took it back."

"After he landed you here?"

"Not landed. Dropped. Bad trip, man."

It was beginning to sound like one to me. "He dropped you out of the ship into space?"

"Only a few feet. Nobody saw us because of the air. Like it's a gas, man?"

"Smog," I told him. And visualized the hovering space-craft, the gigantic creature at the controls, dropping this little creature down to land before the car in the street with no one the wiser. It *could* happen that way. Anything could happen twenty feet above our heads and we'd never know it because of the prevailing pollution. It transmogrified everything it touched.

"How cruddy!" Sandy exclaimed. "Cutting out on you like that — leaving you all alone in a strange place, not caring if you live or die —"

"He cares," Drool assured her. "I am not left to die. It is just that I am so weak and small. I can't come on like my brothers and sisters when they are sent to the big, important worlds. So Krool brings me to this earth because it will not be a problem for me." He nodded. "Krool says even a child can do it here."

"Do what?"

"My thing."

"Which is?"

"The same as my brothers and sisters do when they go to the better-class planets. They conquer."

I turned to him. "Let's have that line again. You're really here to

conquer earth. That's your plan?"

"That's my bag. So take me to your leader."

"Sure." I nodded. "And then what?"

Drool smiled happily. "Then I merely blast him with my super-disintegratosonic — *opps!*"

He sat there, suddenly silent as his green face slowly paled to chartreuse.

Sandy eyed him anxiously. "What's the matter?"

"Krool gave me one. I *know* I had it when he lifted me out. I must have dropped it —"

"Your weapon?"

Drool nodded, frowning. "It's probably still floating around somewhere in the smog — almost weightless, you know —" He broke off and peered at me anxiously. "But if I lost it, how do I — ?"

"You don't," I told him. "And that's final." I tromped on the gaspedal. "Let's go."

"Where are you taking him?" Sandy's voice was apprehensive.

It was a good question, but at the moment I didn't have any good answers. *Police? The Orphan's Home? Lost And Found Department?*

The answer came with clarion clarity. For as I started the motor, the car was suddenly filled with soaring sound.

"Ooh!" Sandy squealed. "The Galloping Cruuds!"

And indeed it was. With ear-splitting precision, that popular hard-rock group belted out their latest hit. As the guitars twanged and the drums echoed the beat, the voices proclaimed a moving message.

*"I'd like to turn you on, baby,
But I can't find the switch —"*

Sandy cupped her hands and shouted, "Groovy! But turn it down a little."

"Sorry," I yelled. "I don't have a radio in the car."

Sandy stared at me.

I stared at her.

Then we both just stared at Drool.

His wide mouth was wide open. And from it poured the sound of electric guitars, the thud of drums, the cacaphonic blending of five male voices.

"Impossible!" I breathed and clapped my hand across Drool's mouth.

The sound blurred instantly.

I removed my hand quickly and Drool looked up. "What's with you, man?" he inquired.

Sandy was still staring at him. "Was that really you singing?"

"Yeah. Don't you dig it?"

Sandy nodded. "But how on earth — ?"

"Not on earth." Drool grinned. "In the ship. There was an instrument — stereo tape machine — I listened while I read the comic books."

"Wait a minute." I stopped the

car again and faced him. "Are you trying to tell us you can imitate anything you hear recorded?"

Drool shrugged. "Why not?"

"You mean you can do all those voices at once, plus the guitars and drums?"

"The sounds are very simple."

"Your vocal cords must be tied in Boy Scout knots."

Sandy raised her hand. "Wait a minute." Drool glanced at her and she continued. "Can you do the Zappers?"

Drool opened his mouth, and the answer came. The Zappers — two male minstrels, two female minstrels, and one interlocuter-type — began to wail their Golden Record classic, *Doobie-Do Or Doobie-Don't You?* With full orchestral background.

Then Drool did a pop ballad by Eddie Breech and the Clouts. After that, a small *filet* of soul music, followed by a children's recording of East Indian *raga*, featuring the soft tones of a baby *sitar*.

"Wild!" Sandy shook her head. "I don't believe it!"

"Hearing is believing," I told her. "What you've been listening to is the sound of fifty million dollars — pouring right into our laps."

I put my hand on Drool's shoulder. "Still want to conquer earth?" I asked.

He nodded eagerly, then frowned. "But how — ?"

"Leave everything to us," I as-



sured him. "I think it can be arranged."

IV

As Jack the Ripper used to say, how's that for openers?

Between the time Drool finished his concert and the time we parked in Sandy's driveway I had it all figured.

Sandy started to follow my reasoning and ended up way ahead of me. "It's a big deal. We're going to have to use the others."

"What others?"

Sandy gestured up at the imposing mansion which loomed against the hilltop horizon. "I told you I didn't live here alone," she said. "Come along — you'll see."

We left the car and moved up the walk. I put my hand on Drool's shoulder.

"Remember your instructions. Speak only when you're spoken to and let us do the talking. Play it cool."

He nodded, and we entered.

Then it was *my* turn to remember instructions. But I found it very difficult to keep my cool in the overheated atmosphere of Sandy's pad.

Somehow I hadn't expected her to live in a twenty-room mansion, complete with marble floors, a fireplace in every bedroom, and an indoor swimming pool.

"Don't you recognize where you

are?" she murmured. "It's the old Riga Mortice place."

Something clicked, and I nodded. I remembered Riga Mortice very well indeed. She had been a popular entertainer during my childhood, until illness forced her retirement. No longer a bouncy, bubbling ingenue, she became a victim of alcohol, narcotics and diet-pills. But her fans never deserted her, and when she emerged to make a comeback on a singing tour, her popularity boomed again. Her first appearance, weak and wan and forty pounds lighter, had sparked something in the souls of a hundred million middle-aged female fans, who identified with her because of their own hypochondria. Since they themselves were on a daily diet of sleeping pills, pep pills, water pills, reducing pills, tranquilizers and laxatives, Riga Mortice became their heroine. They flocked to her concerts, not to hear her voice but merely to see if she'd manage to last out the performance. Whenever she cancelled an engagement or took an overdose of liquor, popular enthusiasm increased; some of the adoring lady fans even kept scrapbooks filled with clippings on her suicide attempts. Her appearance on crutches brought applause; her tour in a wheelchair was a smash hit, and when she finally began to sing to her public from a microphone built into an iron lung, she was Number One Box Office.

“Riga Mortice,” I murmured. “Of course! Whatever happened to her?”

“Something terrible,” Sandy sighed. “She got healthy.”

I shook my head. “Sad, isn’t it? Here was a gal who had everything — neurasthenia, self-destructive tendencies, a manic-depressive psychosis — what a shame to lose all that talent!”

“She lost this house, too,” Sandy explained. “That’s when we moved in.”

“We?”

“I and the others.” Sandy was leading Drool and me along an imposing corridor panelled in solid mahogany from floor to thirty-foot ceiling.

“But how can you afford it?”

“Because we’re all on unemployment compensation. There’s six of us here — that is, until we lost one of our tenants yesterday. He got a job and moved into a one-room furnished apartment. Now he can’t afford to stay here.”

“But isn’t he making more money — ?”

“Look. His job only pays him a hundred and fifty a week. We each get seventy-five dollars in compensation.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Our seventy-five is net, tax free. But after this poor guy pays commission to his agent, and deductions are taken from his check for income tax, surtax, social se-

curity, state disability insurance and all the rest, he winds up with less bread than we have.”

I was beginning to get the picture. Six times seventy-five is four hundred and fifty dollars a week — more than enough to pay the rent on even such a palatial pad as this one. And that’s why Sandy had scouted the Unemployment Office; she needed to replace the sixth tenant with a new resident, such as me.

Sandy smiled at me. “How about that?” she inquired, gesturing at the sweep and thrust of the three-story staircase which rose at the end of the hall. “Where else could you find such a glad pad for seventy-five per, including food, liquor and gas for your wheels?”

I glanced around. “Something’s missing, though. I don’t see any chairs and tables.”

“Oh, that!” She made a gesture of dismissal. “We don’t have any yet. But we’re planning to buy some period furniture — on monthly payments, of course. Meanwhile, we just make do.” She steered Drool and me toward an ornate double door. “But come on and meet the others.”

The others were gathered for the cocktail hour at the drained indoor swimming pool. Seated inside it, with their bottoms touching bottom, they gave us glasses and greetings.

Seldom have I seen such a collection of disparate types, but as Sandy made the introductions I began to sense that they were desperate types as well. All of them had one thing in common — they were born losers.

Sandy led me to a spade-bearded, scholarly-looking gentleman whose name was Mr. Barf. Regarding me mournfully, he started to rise and I waved him back. "Please don't get up on my account," I told him.

Barf broke into a sudden smile. "Thank you. I prefer it here at the bottom of the pool."

"Mr. Barf is our philosopher," Sandy explained. "He once tried to drown himself in Walden Pond."

"Unsuccessfully, I fear," Barf sighed. "Next time I hope to be more Thoreau about it"

The wan little man beside him scowled at me. "What did you mean by that 'on my account' crack?" he demanded suspiciously.

"Don't mind Mr. Emia," Sandy whispered. "He's very sensitive about such things. He used to be the cashier in a blood-bank, but they fired him for embezzlement."

Luke Emia glowered at me but accepted my hand in greeting

Sandy moved with me to a mop-headed young man whose psychedelic jacket was covered with buttons, although he still looked as if he didn't have all of his own. "Mr. Grafitti," she announced. "He

writes a column for one of the underground newspapers."

"Pleased to meet you."

"—," said Grafitti, pleasantly.

Warmed by his greeting, I moved on to the next tenant. This young man, introduced to me simply as Swinger, was so ragged, filthy and unkempt that I automatically pegged him as a musician. Such proved to be the case. He had once been part of a recording group, he told me, until he suffered a nasty shock — when his electric harmonic had short-circuited on a high note and blown all the caps off his teeth. Since that time, apparently, he'd nursed a grudge against all performers including singers, and carried on an active crusade against them.

"I just got busted," he concluded mournfully.

"Not again?" Sandy sighed. "What happened?"

"Well, I read where Tony Bennett was opening at a club here in town, and you know what *that* means. Last night I went down there, and when he came on and started singing *I Lost My Heart In San Francisco*, I walked up on the stage and handed him one. It was only a beef-heart, of course, but the fuzz hauled me in anyway."

Shaking her head in commiseration, Sandy led me to the last member of the gathering, a dapper balding man who greeted me with a firm handclasp.

"Kotic's the name," he told me. "But you can call me Cy."

I blinked in sudden recognition. "Not the Drive-In Psychiatrist? The one who used to set up his couch in the parking lot over in Beverly Hills?"

"Five couches," he announced proudly. "A regular open-air clinic." His smile faded. "But I got out of the racket. It *is* a racket, you know. Head-shrinkers don't do you any good — the thing to do is get your head Sanforized. I retired to work out my new theories."

During this exchange, Drool had been standing patiently and silently at my side. Now Mr. Kotic eyed him speculatively.

"Who's your sickie friend?" he inquired.

"He's not sick," Sandy declared.

"Well, he's too short to be the Jolly Green Giant," Kotic muttered. "And you must admit he *is* green around the gills. In fact, during my entire professional career I've never seen anyone look greener. Ergo, he must be ill. Note the hyperthyroid bulge of his eyes, the reddish pupils, the nasal malformation and the labial deformity. I've been a psychiatrist too long not to recognize a real ding-a-ling when I see one."

I gave Sandy a quick glance and she picked up her cue. "That's no way to talk about my cousin," she retorted.

"Cousin?" Barf's eyebrows rose.

"That's right. He's a hippy from San Francisco," he murmured. "Haight-Ashbury."

Luke Emia rose and approached him curiously. "What's your name, man?"

Drool had learned his answers well. "Sneed Hearn," he said.

"————!" sneered Grafitti.

"You can say that again," muttered the Swinger. "Like, I mean all us old W.C. Fields fans know that 'Sneed Hearn' is a name he made up and used in *The Old Fashioned Way*."

I paled. Stupid of me not to remember that today's In Group were old film buffs.

"All right," Swinger persisted. "Lay it on us, man. Who *is* this creep?"

Cy Kotic moved closer to the hapless Drool, who shrank from his professional scrutiny. "I can't identify the syndrome yet," the psychiatrist muttered. "But I am getting a definite gut reaction from him. That is to say, he's making me sick at my stomach."

"————?" Grafitti inquired.

"A good question." Barf joined the group clustered around Drool and nodded philosophically.

Sandy gave me a helpless look, and I stepped forward.

"All right," I said. "Guess there's no sense trying to conceal the truth from you. It would have to come out sooner or later."

"Joel!" Sandy's voice sounded an alarm.

"I know what I'm doing," I assured her. "Come on, everybody drink up and I'll plug you in."

And that, of course, was exactly the procedure. They passed the drinks, and I passed the word.

Half an hour later they were falling out of their trees as Drool's open mouth emitted a stereophonic version of the latest protest-song recorded by that group of militant young rebels known as Tarzan and All the Apes.

By the time he closed his mouth, theirs were hanging open.

"Well?" I murmured. "How did that grab you? Think he can conquer the world now?"

"———!" said Grafitti.

Which just about summed it up.

V

Sandy sent out for some Chinese food from Pu King's, and we huddled over the meal discussing the deal.

Grafitti's reaction was shared by most of the others. Only Barf seemed to have reservations.

"I don't know," he mused. "This may not be the most propitious time for such a project. After all, Mars is in conjunction with Uranus——"

"Watch your language," Sandy cautioned him. Then to me: "Mr.

Barf is not only a philosopher, he's an astrologer."

"That's his problem," I told her. "My horoscope tells me not to put any faith in astrology."

"I don't know anything about astrology," declared Swinger, his words filtering through a mouthful of fried rice. "But with that voice, we can't miss. And the way he does all of that instrumental accompaniment too — man, it's something else!"

Drool blushed a deeper shade viridan at the compliment and lowered his head modestly over the sweet-and-sour pork.

I waved a forkful of chow-mein at the gathering.

"The way I see it, we've got a winning team. As Swinger says, Drool has a voice that doesn't quit. He can sing anything, in any style, imitating any group and any orchestration or accompaniment. But he's got something else that's equally important."

"And what's that?" Luke Emia inquired. "What else has he got?"

"The uglies." I jabbed my fork in Drool's direction. "Look at him — did you ever see a more repulsive, disgusting specimen in your life?"

Drool popped his eyes at me, and I quickly shook my head. "I'm not putting you down," I said, hastily. "This is your most important asset."

"I don't get it," Sandy said.

"You will, if you stop and think. What makes one hard rock group more popular than another today? It can't be the difference in musical arrangements, because they all use the same beat or off-beat revved up to Total Sound, or Total Sound Effects. It can't be variations in singing style, because they all have the same delivery — nobody understands the words. Even the soloist soul-singers and the protest groups sound basically alike, snarling about love or crooning about hate. So what's that extra ingredient which makes a star?"

"Appearance?" Swinger ventured.

I swallowed my chow-mein and nodded. "Exactly! Years ago it was enough for a nice-looking kid to come out on the stage and make anguished faces while he sang. Then it became necessary for him to contort his body in spastic spasms in order to make a pleasing impression on the audience — since he sounded as if he was having a fit, he might as well *look* like he was, too.

"But as audiences grew more sophisticated, that wasn't enough any more. Singers started to dress in weirdo outfits. Wild colors and sequins at one extreme, rags and blue-jeans at the other — it didn't matter which, as long as the pants were tight enough.

"Then came the real revolution. Not just the change in clothes but

the change in bodies. First we had sideburns, then long hair, then the bushy mop. The beards and mustaches followed — mostly amongst the males. Now we have dark glasses, granny glasses, tattooing, psychedelic makeup, the works. The ugliest-looking singers, making the ugliest sounds and using the ugliest words, make the most beautiful dollars."

Cy Kotic nodded in emphatic agreement. "He tells it like it is," he declared. "Today's singing star must give the audience the whole sado-masochistic *mystique*, and no mistake. Oral aggression in the words, revolt against the Establishment in the clothing — that takes care of the latent hostility. And for the self-pitying component, that finds its expression in the downbeat, beat-up look.

"I see great possibilities here. Because our little friend is probably the weirdest-looking freak-out yet. Consider his assets! He's noseless, almost bald, built like a one-man disaster area, and best of all, he's *green!*" Cy Kotic smiled at Drool admiringly. "I don't want you to get a big head over this, but as a practicing psychiatrist it is my professional opinion that you're the most miserable-looking *utz* I've ever encountered."

It was my turn to rise and step forward. "You see? With Drool's natural gifts of voice and appear-

ance he can't miss. All he needs is the proper management team behind him. And that's where we all come in."

"We do?" Luke Emia muttered.

"Of course. Every star must have an *entourage*, and we're it. Sandy, here, will handle the secretarial duties. Mr. Emia, with his banking experience, is a natural for treasurer. Swinger, we'll need you for music and arrangements."

Graffiti cleared his throat. "_____?" he ventured.

"Songs are no good without lyrics," I reminded him. "And with your background in the underground press, you know all the right wrong words. Consider yourself a lyricist."

"_____", said Graffiti, gratefully.

I turned my attention to Cy Kotic. "You, of course, will be invaluable as our psychological consultant in public relations. Handle our ads, our presentation format. And I, naturally, am going to function as agent and business manager. And that's the wrap-up, kiddies."

Mr. Barf cleared his throat timidly. "What about me?"

"Well," I hedged. "Maybe we can use some astrological predictions along the way. Advice from the stars to a star, that sort of thing."

"I've got another suggestion." Surprisingly enough, it was Sandy

who spoke. "Mr. Barf here knows a great deal about the world and its ways. After all, he's a philosopher."

Barf nodded. "That's why I tried to kill myself," he agreed.

Sandy moved to Drool and placed her hand on his shoulder. "You say all you know about earth is what you learned from listening to the radio and reading comic books."

"Right," Drool conceded.

"Then there you have it," Sandy told me. "Mr. Barf can be Drool's teacher. Let him educate Drool, broaden his knowledge, expand his horizons —"

"Okay," I said. "Just as long as he doesn't teach him so much that he'll want to drown himself."

"Have no fear," Barf said. "The swimming pool is empty."

And it was, because we all climbed up and crowded our way into the hall, glasses held high. Sandy refilled them quickly.

"A toast, then," I proposed. "A toast to that new singing sensation of the nation — that multi-voiced marvel, star of radio, television, motion pictures, recording *artiste* and just plain little old multi-millionaire — Sneed Hearn!"

We gulped our drinks. "That does it," I declared. "And now, beddy-bye for everybody. Get a big day scheduled for tomorrow."

Drool glanced at me. "Where are we going?"

"To launch your career," I answered. "Bright and early, we're off to Groovyland."

VI

It was early when we started, but not bright.

As the car rolled down the ramp and inched itself into the morning traffic on the freeway, I switched on the fog-lights. It was the only way to go, here in the yellowish, billowing murk that shrouded our bumper-to-bumper crawl.

Drool sat beside me. I glanced past him at Sandy. She sat utterly still, eyes closed in concentration.

"Something wrong?"

Sandy shook her head. "Just doing my yoga. The stop-breathing exercises. It's the only way to cope with the smog."

Drool took a deep breath. "I like this air," he announced. "It reminds me of home. The — what do you call it? — smog is very nourishing."

"That reminds me of something," I said. "You didn't touch your food last night."

"I don't have to eat," Drool announced. "All I need is this." And he took another deep breath.

"Well, I do." Sandy glanced at the torturous tangle of the interchange. "When we get out of this mess, let's have some breakfast."

We were well past Pomona before the traffic thinned and we

pulled off onto the highway leading to our destination.

"Breakfast it is," I said. "Let's try this place."

The *El Ulcero* was a typical roadside restaurant, very spic and Spanish. As Sandy concluded ordering, I whispered to the waiter. "Where's the Juan?"

Drool accompanied me, although he had no need to. I eyed him curiously. He didn't eat and last night he hadn't slept — just sat beside me as I curled up in the sleeping-bag Sandy gave me. Apparently his physiological needs were different from ours. But at the moment it was the difference in his appearance that worried me. The waiter had stared at **him** suspiciously, and I began to wish that I'd told Drool to stay in the car.

But I couldn't hide him away forever, and we rejoined Sandy at the table.

Immediately the waiter was at our side. "The leetle boy," he murmured. "He ees not eating."

"Not hungry," I said, curtly.

"Mus' be seeck," the waiter observed. "Behold of the face. Ees very green, no?"

"Yes," I challenged. "What's the matter, haven't you ever seen a green face before?"

"Only *after* eating here," the waiter shrugged.

He stepped up to Drool.

"Observe of the hands. They also are green."

"Of course," I told him. "The kid's a natural-born gardener. Haven't you heard of a green thumb?"

Nudging Sandy, I whispered, "Let's get out of here."

We rose, paid the check and fled. The waiter stared after us, muttering to himself.

"Got to watch it," I told my companions as we climbed back into the car. "Remember, when we get to Groovyland, I do all the talking."

"What is this Groovyland?" Drool demanded.

"You'll see."

We moved through the tourist traffic and approached the glittering gates at a brisk crawl while I pondered his question.

Once upon a time we were a nation of happy *voyeurs*. Visually-oriented by the theatre, motion pictures and television, we were content to move through life as spectators, even at sporting events. We went to zoos, museums, aquariums.

But the more we saw, the more jaded we became, and the more we resented the barriers. The footlights barred us from the stage, movies and television separated us from events by a screen, the bars kept us from the zoo animals, the museum exhibits and the fish in the aquariums were under glass, and the sporting events took place

in stadia a half-mile away from our reserved seats.

Everyone wants a seat on the fifty-yard line. At a parade, the biggest thrill is to be up close.

As we got up tighter in our daily lives, the need to get up closer in our entertainment-escapes increased.

Came colonial Williamsburg, where you can actually walk down the reconstructed street of a pre-Revolutionary village. Came planetariums where the stars are still an illusion — but they surround you on all sides. Came Marineland where the fish leap out of the water and the seals and dolphins perform close enough to splash you. Came Disneyland, with its trips and happenings.

Trips and happenings. Perhaps that's the answer. The need to *see* combined with the need to *be*. To make viewing a personal experience, to momentarily enjoy a feeling of actual participation. In this regimented, automated, digit-dialing, zip-coded impersonal world where the tedium is the message, we're cut off from close contact with reality. So out of artifice, we construct our own.

Drugs for trips, happenings for audience involvement. But drugs are dangerous and happenings demanding.

Hence Disneyland, with its safe and easy surrogates — synthetic trips to synthetic worlds, happen-

ings where nothing really happens. That's a lot.

But Groovyland is the most.

"The *most!*" I repeated to Drool, guiding him through the turnstile and laying out \$22.50 for three admissions.

"Why lay out all the loot?" Sandy asked.

"Don't worry, we'll be rolling in it right after we set our deal here. But first I want to show Drool around a little. He ought to know what he's getting into — it's part of his education."

We got into plenty, but I don't know how educational it was to our green-faced guest.

Psycholand he didn't dig at all. The idea of entering a fake mental hospital as a make-believe patient and getting a free personality-profile and a ten-minute analysis from a plastic psychiatrist while lying on a plastic couch just didn't do anything for him. He wouldn't try on a straitjacket or take an I.Q. test, nor was he interested in the computerized dating-rating.

Sandy tried her best. "Why don't you sit down and fill out the questions on this card?" she coaxed.

"What for?"

"The machine will process your answers and indicate your best choice for a marriage partner. It's what we call a computer match."

Drool shrugged. "Who wants to marry a computer?" he asked.

I took him out of there fast and led him into Grislyland. The results here were hardly more encouraging. The medieval torture devices left him cold; even the *strappado* didn't give him a boot. Nor did he care for the Chamber of Horrors with its wax-figure criminals and its replicas of television comedians.

"Try Heroland," Sandy suggested, sensing Drool's lack of interest. "He should get some jollies there."

I nodded. "Wait until he sees George Washington," I said.

Quickly we entered Heroland and I led Drool proudly over to the little auditorium where, as I remembered, every fifteen minutes or so a remarkable event took place. Before the assembled audience an amazingly clever animated figure of the Father of our Country rose from a chair and walked to center stage, there to deliver Washington's Second Inaugural Address.

"This you've got to hear!" I told Drool, happily.

But when we reached the auditorium we found it deserted; the stage itself was bare.

A bored attendant was sweeping the floor near the doorway and I collared him. "What gives?" I inquired. "Where is Washington?"

"Took him away yesterday," the attendant informed me.

"What a shame!" I glanced at

Drool. "I wanted you to see it — the most lifelike automaton you could ever imagine —"

"Too lifelike," the attendant volunteered. "That's why they took him away."

"What do you mean?"

"Hear tell he was sold to a bunch of politicians. The way election campaigns are going nowadays, they figure to put this dummy on television, let him give his speech, and run him for governor."

"Might have a chance at that," I agreed. "Considering some of the speeches I've heard other dummies make. After all, he's got a good name and a familiar face. This is what they buy."

"Not those lemon-faced voters in Orange County," Sandy reminded me. "The minute they remember that Washington had something to do with the Constitution, they'll vote against him. He's too left-wing for them."

She had a point there.

But I was rapidly losing points with Drool. There was just one possible way left to hook his attention, and I decided to take it. I dragged him over to Bodyland.

Now all of the other lands in Groovyland are housed in separate buildings. Bodyland is different — because Bodyland *is* the building.

Drool's eyes bugged when he saw it, and frankly, I don't blame him. Even though this wasn't my first visit here, my eyes protruded.

Picture a naked woman three hundred feet tall and proportionately proportioned, tipped over so that she is lying on her stomach. Fluorescent lights flash from her staring eyes as you approach her open mouth, and the lights blind you. Yet you must approach, because that's how you enter Bodyland — through her mouth.

"Step over the lower incisors," I told Drool. "Then sit on her tongue and we'll slide down her throat."

Sandy glanced across at me over Drool's head and winked. It was unnecessary; I could already sense his kindled interest.

Together we seated ourselves on the pink, plushy surface of the tongue. Somewhere deep inside the inner recesses of the giant figure, a motor began to hum. Slowly the tongue elevated at an angle, propelling us into the throat cavity beyond.

"Duck your head," I cautioned. "We're coming to the tonsils!"

They loomed overhead, brilliantly illuminated, and we passed them en route to the tunneling throat. It received us as we shot off the tongue and shot, at a steeper angle, along a neon-lit esophagus. Then we landed in the vast, hollow cavern of the stomach, its well-lighted lining disclosing a network of passages on every side and overhead.

Drool glanced around in open curiosity.



"Want to see the lungs?" I inquired.

He nodded quickly. "Oh, yes. Everything." He turned to Sandy. "I never realized there was so much inside you."

"I've got a lot of guts, if that's what you mean." But Sandy wasn't displeased by the observation. Quickly we led Drool on a conducted tour of the human anatomy — through the lungs, along the aorta into the ventricles, past the bronchia, then doubled back along a maze of veins. Pausing to wait for arterial traffic, I branched off into the liver, spleen and kidneys. Everything was well lit, and there were little signs on the walls of each organ or passage to chart our route.

"Remarkable, isn't it?" Drool beamed at me happily.

"You're getting the real inside story," I assured him. "This exhibit is endorsed by the Secretary of the Interior."

With plastic bone-structure and muscle-sheathing gleaming on all sides, we wound our way through the labyrinthine intricacies of canals, ducts and sinus cavities until we were confronted with another corridor, darker and longer than the others.

Sandy peered into it. "What's this?" she queried. "One of the canals?"

"Alimentary, my dear Watson," I said.

Grasping her wrist, I started forward. "Join hands now, because we're going to loop the loop a few times, and we'll need some intestinal traction."

"Isn't there another way to go?"

For answer I pointed up at one of the small, neatly lettered signs — *Please Exit Thru Rear*.

Climbing, clambering, then crawling, we did just that and finally emerged again amidst Grooveland's vortex of vacationing visitors.

"Satisfied?" I asked Drool.

He nodded. "It was fascinating. Next time we must go to the head —"

"They don't have one in there," I informed him, then realized what he was referring to. "Yes, we'll do that," I amended quickly. "But right now we've got another head to visit. The head of this enterprise — Sylvester Schlock."

VII

Sylvester Schlock rose from behind his desk and threw his cigar at me.

"How dare you?" he spluttered. "How dare you come to me with a proposition like this?"

I shrugged with outward calm, but inwardly I echoed the question to myself. Approaching this fabulous showman had not been easy. For I, like all the world, knew the Schlock story.

Sylvester Schlock was the most controversial figure in the world of show biz. His admirers said he was a self-made man. His enemies agreed, but pointed out that this merely indicated what you got when you used cheap labor.

His boosters stated that Schlock had been born in a log cabin. His detractors reminded you that the log cabin had been built atop his father's penthouse, where that multi-millionaire eccentric chose to recreate a rural atmosphere.

It is true, as Schlock's friends state, that he worked his way through school. But it is also true, as enemies assert, that he had to do so because his father disowned him, and he had worked his way through medical college as a corpse-washer in a Forest Laundromat.

In any case, Sylvester Schlock graduated and began his practice as a physician. His supporters remind you that he gained a brilliant reputation as a proctologist. His foes assert that the reason he gave up his specialty is because he could never identify his patients when they came face to face with him, and he took a dim view of humanity.

Be that as it may, Schlock retired to an area east of Los Angeles, where he owned a thousand acres of barren desert land, and it was here that Groovyland was born.

At first he operated on the lowest level of entertainment — the

roadside tourist trap. Crude signposts along the highway urged motorists to *Visit The Monster Museum!* and *Feed The Ravenous Reptiles!* The monster museum turned out to be a small snake-pit. Schlock stocked the pit with specimens he found wriggling over his own property, and the ravenous reptiles were merely toads or gecko lizards. But enough cars stopped and enough quarters poured in to enable Schlock to expand. He added a tiny restaurant to his enterprise. Here, his champions say, he attracted a growing clientele because of the unusual flavor of his 'burgers. His opponents admit the flavor was unusual, but hint he used the same source of supply for his food as he did for stocking his snake-pit.

Snakeburgers or no, Schlock did have the only eatery in all that stretch of dreary desert — to say nothing of the only restrooms.

To say that Groovyland was founded on the receipts from a public pay-toilet would be a vast oversimplification, but it is true that Schlock always gave the customers what they wanted.

He next incorporated an amusement park and carnival, not hesitating to use the lowest carnay attractions. And it was here that his unusual genius for entertainment first came into play. Noting that people would pay money for almost anything — even to see a geek bite

the head off a chicken — Schlock added refinements. On Thanksgiving Day he advertised that *his* geek would bite the head off a turkey. And before long, just for the kiddies, he had a junior geek who bit the heads off canaries.

Success breeds success, and from that point on Sylvester Schlock soared. He obtained financing and started Groovyland with its first major attraction — a typically phony frontier town which he called *Tombstone Territory*. It had the usual livery stables and saloons for atmosphere, plus Central Casting cowboys, but Schlock added an extra. No doubt harking back to his pre-med days, he built a Boot Hill cemetery plot, with genuine tombstones. Here, driving around in the comfort of a Rent-a-Hearse, one could follow the progress of a daily western drama; see an outlaw apprehended for rustling cattle, watch his two-minute trial, attend the subsequent hanging (in which a very skilled stunt-man literally risked his neck at every performance) and then observe the digging of a grave and the burial of the outlaw as a grand *finale*.

Perhaps this is the point where Schlock really made his start. Certainly it was a stroke of sheer genius when he altered the program to include audience participation.

Now, for a given fee, one could

purchase tickets to join a posse and ride after the outlaw. Another ticket entitled a customer to serve on the jury during the trial. For a considerable extra sum, some lucky member of the audience could play executioner during the hanging. And the biggest kick — at the largest price, of course — was to join the burial party and help dig the grave in which the outlaw was interred.

Schlock had fathomed the secret at last, and now there was no stopping him. Within the next decade, Groovyland rose from the dusty desert like the pleasure dome of Kublai Khan. Came *Monkeyland*, where you put on the ape-suit and swung through the branches of the artificial trees; came all the other lands, plus facilities for weddings, christenings, conventions, *bar mitzvahs* and actual burials in what was somewhat painfully described as a “real, live cemetery” adjoining the private landing-field.

Finally, came *The Hall of the Mountain King* — a gigantic open-air cavern, with rocky walls moulded of genuine *papier-mache*, in which outdoor concerts were held every weekend. Here the top singing stars performed, the hit combos, the Name Attractions.

A booking at Groovyland could make a national reputation overnight and pave the way for television, a spot in Vegas, films, recordings, the works. So it was here,

naturally, that I determined to launch the career of the entity I'd introduced to Schlock as Sneed Hearn.

No wonder he'd hurled his cigar at me. But now, as I stared into Sylvester Schlock's heated countenance, I came on cool.

"He's a great singer," I said softly. "Wait until you hear him."

"This is a singer?" Schlock stared scornfully at Drool. "I can't even stand the sight of him, let alone the sound."

"What's wrong with his looks?" Sandy inquired.

"He's *green!*" Schlock lifted his arms in an imploring gesture. "Do you think for a moment I'm going to put my audience at the mercy of some green kid?"

This, as we say in the industry, was my cue — and Drool's. I signaled, he stepped forward, he opened his mouth.

Out came a perfect reproduction of that smash singsational group, Vermin and the Varmints.

Schlock reached for another cigar, but he didn't throw it. He didn't even light it, just sat wide-eyed and open-eared as Drool poured it on.

Without pausing for breath, Drool launched into a second selection. This one, with an oriental beat, was Yogi and the Yo-Yos punching out *What Makes Swami Run?*

Drool was just about ready to launch an imitation of Charlie Horse and the Bruised Tendons when Schlock's cigar levelled in imperial command.

"Stop!" he shouted. "Enough, already!"

I noticed that the hand holding the cigar was shaking. So was Schlock's head. "I don't know how you do it, young man," he groaned, "but never in my life have I heard anything so atrocious, so abominable, so positively disgusting! In other words, you sound exactly like those groups you're imitating. And if it's bad enough for me, it's good enough for the audience."

Pointing his Havana *Imperfecto* at me, Schlock got down to business. "Our next big concert is scheduled for a week from Saturday. What do you say to a spot for your boy at three G's?"

I shrugged. "Forget it."

Sandy gave me a glance that was strictly distress merchandise, but I ignored her.

"Okay, five G's but that's my top quote, and I'll want repeat options on —"

"No," I said.

"But you can't get any more the first time out, not even from the Sullivan Show —"

"No," I repeated. "We don't want any money."

Now both Sandy and Schlock were sending out distress signals. I smiled at them happily.

"We'll let our boy perform for you absolutely free of charge," I told him. "But on one condition."

"Name it."

"He's not going to have a spot in your concert a week from Saturday. He *is* the concert."

"The whole show, all by himself?" Schlock did something new with the cigar; he swallowed it.

"What's the matter, don't you think it's possible? You heard him."

"But —"

I brushed objections aside. "He can take the place of any solo singer, any singing group, any combination of instruments and instrumentalists. What more do you need?"

"I know," Schlock conceded. "It's just that a one-man concert is practically unheard of. Even the so-called one-man shows are usually backed up by a supporting act to open the bill."

"My boy supports himself," I said. "And if you'll give him a chance, he'll support you, too. This act is going to sell a lot of tickets."

"After they've heard him and the word gets around," Schlock agreed. "But this first appearance, he's an unknown quantity. I can't advertise just Sneed Hearn in a one-man performance."

"Then bill him as a group," I said. "After all, he *is* a group when he opens his mouth, isn't he? Call him — oh, anything —"

Inspiration gleamed in Sylvester

Schlock's flashing eyes. "Sneed Hearn and his Hearnias!" he shouted.

I gripped his hand. "Okay, we have a firm deal."

And thus, a star was born.

VIII

The ride back to Los Angeles was something of a triumph.

"That was a stroke of genius, letting him go on for free the first time," Sandy conceded. "After one exposure, you can name your own price. Joe, you're a genius."

It is my policy never to contradict a lady, so I just nodded silently. But deep within myself I could feel the surge of supreme confidence. I knew now that nothing was beyond me; I could achieve the seemingly impossible. Right then and there I resolved to put my belief to the final test. The next time I stopped for a traffic light on the Strip and a hippie came up to sell me a copy of *The Free Press*, I would sell *him* a copy of *The Christian Science Monitor*.

My mood was heightened when we got back to the house and Sandy told the waiting group what had happened.

"Incredible!" Luke Emia gasped. "Wait 'til they hear him!"

"They'll go outta their skulls," Swinger predicted.

"_____!" agreed Grafitti.

I accepted the accolades with due modesty. After dinner I wandered out on the patio behind the house to compose myself and my thoughts. This was going to be a hectic week, and I had to plan a schedule.

To my surprise, I found Drool standing there at the edge of the hilltop, staring up at the smog as though he could actually see the stars beyond. His face was expressionless.

I moved up beside him. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"Then cheer up. You're on your way. You heard what Schlock said — with your looks and your voice you can't miss!"

Drool blinked at me. "I still don't see how I'm going to take over the world this way."

"Look," I said. "It's all a matter of who has the clout, and in this world money is power. Your voice will make more money than anyone has ever dreamed of earning. With it you can buy anything you want —"

"But I don't want anything for myself. I'm only here to follow orders. And my orders are to conquer. If I just had my own little superdisintegratosonic weapon —"

"This is your weapon." I pointed at his throat. "And for the moment, I'm your commanding officer. So forward march!"

Luke Emia stepped forth from the shadows. "What's this about a weapon?" he asked.

I filled him in on Drool's story. "Mean to tell me you haven't investigated any further?" Luke gestured excitedly. "If Drool dropped this gizmo of his when he fell, it must have landed around here somewhere, just as he did. For all we know, it could be lying out in the street."

"Forget it," I said. "Who needs weapons?"

"We do! Why, if this thing has half the power he says it does, we're wasting our time. We could sell a copy to the government for billions."

"Quit talking like a business man," I told him.

But Luke was carried away with his own vision. "Then we could turn around and sell *another* copy to the enemy powers for more billions."

"Quit talking like a *big* business man," I sighed.

"I still think you're making a mistake —"

I shook my head. "I'm making a star. From now on, we're all going to be concentrating on that concert."

Beckoning to Drool, I moved toward the house. "Time to hit the sack," I said.

And we did. Despite Drool's policy of letting sleeping-bags lie, he rested beside me all night.

When morning came, we went to work. And that's the story of the next ten days — work and more work. Graffiti wrote lyrics. Swinger did arrangements. With them I coached Drool on proper styles of delivery; how to slur his pronunciation and moan words incoherently, where to go off-key, and all the other techniques of today's top vocalists. Luke Emia and Sandy were kept busy loading platters on the stereo as Drool listened to the groups he'd be imitating — the Zappers, the Calamity Howlers, Rock Bottom and the Living Ends, and all the other great artists.

"You're a slave-driver," Cy Kotic complained. "I don't even have time to listen to the news any more. Because of you, I've missed two declarations of war, an epidemic, four riots, six mass-murders and nine tax increases. If I can't keep up with these normal, every-day events, how can I stay in touch with reality?"

Only Barf seemed satisfied with the schedule. He'd rearranged his habits so that he now slept all day and stayed awake all night. It was then, while the rest of us retired to our sleeping-bags, that he proceeded with his educational activities. He and Drool spent those nocturnal hours in Barf's room upstairs where the philosopher lived in a fashion once popular in square circles. I'd never been invited to that room, but I know it contained

books, a writing desk, and even an old monophonic record-player.

It was the sound of the latter which aroused me one midnight just at a time when I was about to entice Sandy over to my sleeping-bag to discuss the territorial imperative.

"What's *that*?" I muttered, jumping up and taking the stairs two at a time. As I burst into Barf's room the sound ceased.

Drool was seated on the floor amidst a welter of records and books. Barf stood at the record-player, removing a disc.

"What were you playing just now?" I demanded.

Barf put the platter away. "Just a recording from my own collection."

"Stop wasting Drool's time. You're supposed to be teaching him something worthwhile."

"But he is." Drool indicated the volumes stacked up beside him on the floor. "He's taught me a great deal about life in your world. We've been going through the encyclopedia, slowly. Three volumes a night —"

"Three volumes?"

"Drool is a very fast reader," Barf explained. "And a very fast listener, too. I answer questions as he goes along."

"What sort of questions?" I inquired.

"Well, we're up to the letter *P*," Drool said. "So we've been discus-

sing pathology and psychosis and poverty and plagues and pollution and population-explosion and prejudice and Pop Art — ” He nodded reassuringly. “I’m beginning to understand how you people live.”

“I’ve just been discussing public opinion polls,” Barf explained. “For example, here’s one of the latest — a poll taken to determine whether or not people believe in polls — ”

“Who needs it?” I glanced disapprovingly at the book-shelves lining the walls.

“You think books are obsolete?” Drool asked, eagerly. “So does Marshall McLuhan. In fact, he wrote a book about it.”

I gripped Drool’s shoulder and pulled him to his feet. “Come on,” I murmured. “You’re going downstairs with me.”

Barf looked confused. “Don’t you approve of my educational methods?”

I shook my head. “Teach him the things he must know when he’s rich and successful. How to handle a sports-car with a right-hand drive, how to order a hamburger from a French menu, how to set up a tax-free foundation. That’s what he needs to learn — the *practical* stuff! With only a few days left before the concert, I don’t want his mind cluttered up with a lot of useless knowledge. Facts will only confuse him.”

Barf gestured tentatively. “Are you quite sure this is what you want?” he said quietly. “In a world of chaos, can’t you think of any meaningful contribution besides more chaos?”

“People want to get zonked,” I told him. “That’s what’s happening, baby. You go with whatever turns you on.”

“Maybe it’s time to turn off,” Barf mused. “Before we reach a point of no return, where sheer sensory impact loses meaning. We have no music any more — just the beat. Our abstract art is nothing but a series of Rorschach tests. When artists cease to communicate with their audiences, the ability to communicate is soon lost and all that matters is subjective sensation, drug-induced. We have sold our birthright for a mess of pot.”

“End of lecture,” I snapped, and dragged Drool downstairs.

“But I *like* talking to him,” Drool protested. “He’s even taught me about warfare and strategy. Divide and conquer. To the victor belongs the spoils. Don’t fire until you see the whites of their eyes. Oh, if I only had my superdisintegratosonic weapon now — I could take over in no time!”

“You take over Saturday,” I reminded. “By making a success of the concert. And until then, I’m calling the shots.”

The remaining days before the performance blended into a hyper-

active blur. Rehearsals and last-minute preparations occupied every waking moment and even invaded my dreams.

If I'd taken time to reflect I probably would have kept a closer watch on my companions, but it didn't occur to me. I was only vaguely aware that Luke Emia absented himself from the house at regular intervals, and that Barf and Drool exchanged muttered conversations in the corner whenever they met.

But I was too busy to check up. I spent hours on the horn with Sylvester Schlock, going over the publicity and promotion for the concert, and additional hours with Swinger, Grafitti and Sandy, planning the numbers to use in the program itself.

By Friday evening I was a basket case. "Tranquilizers don't help any more," I told Cy Kotic. "You were a doctor once. Can't you do something to calm me down? Isn't there some kind of operation — a pre-frontal lobotomy —?"

"This you need like a hole in the head," he replied. "Now just relax. Tomorrow at this time it will all be forgotten. That's your answer, the same answer I give all my patients. Just remember to forget."

It sounded like a great notion, and somehow it got me through the final night.

Late that evening I wandered

out on the patio with Drool and Sandy. The view was breath-taking. So was the smog.

"Look!" Sandy gestured to the east. "Those lights, way off in the distance — isn't that Groovyland?"

"It's *all* Groovyland," I told her. "The whole world."

Drool nodded excitedly. "Just think — like tomorrow I'm going to conquer it!"

"Sure," I said, smiling at Sandy. I wasn't worried about Drool and his predictions. As far as I was concerned, all this talk about conquest was just his *schtick*.

The only trouble with *schticks*, of course, is that sometimes you wind up with the short end...

IX

They came to Groovyland on Saturday night.

They came by Cadillac and by pick-up truck, by station-wagon and by motorcycle, by sleek and shiny sports-car and by broken-down bus. They tangled the traffic on the freeway, turning the air blue with exhaust fumes and with curses. They jammed the parking-lot, jockeying for position as they smashed one another's fenders. They glowered and glared, swore and snarled, then pushed and pummeled their way into the lines before the ticket-windows. Twenty thousand of them came, sweating and squirming and shrieking their

way into their seats. And why not? After all, they came here to have fun.

We came for business; Luke Emia in his car, Barf, Swinger, Graffiti and Cy Kotic in a Volkswagen. Sandy and Drool rode with me. Originally I'd intended to bring them all, but Luke pointed out the advantages of keeping extra transportation handy.

"Suppose we need to make a fast get-away after the concert," he said.

"I don't think you're a bit funny," Sandy told him. But in the end, we split up and drove our separate ways.

While the others joined the audience in the Hall of the Mountain King, Sandy and I conducted Drool backstage.

"Up tight?" Sandy whispered to him.

Drool shook his head and grinned. "Under control."

And why not? He didn't have to scuffle for bread, because he didn't eat. He didn't need a fancy pad because he didn't sleep. He was the quintessence of all that the *gurus* taught and the hippies sought — a completely non-involved entity who lived merely to do his thing.

Maybe if I had his advantages I wouldn't be here. I'd have turned Drool over to the scientists for study, let them examine his unique physiology and alien mentality. Or

perhaps I'd just let him free to go his own way in the world.

But I did have to eat and I did need a pad, and *my* thing was everybody's thing — do unto others before they do unto you.

So I was here, and I was nervous.

Jostling through the narrow corridor behind the outdoor stage, we came to the tiny cubicle which served as Sylvester Schlock's temporary headquarters for the evening. He bounded into the hall and grasped my hand.

"Did you see the crowd?" he demanded. "Beautiful!"

I stared into the office over his shoulder. "So is that," I told him.

The floor of the little room was stacked with canvas bags stuffed with coins and currency; loose bills and loose change cascaded from their containers, brought here from the box-offices.

"Twenty thousand customers at three bucks a throw," Schlock murmured. "Sixty thousand on one concert alone. And if your boy makes it big tonight —"

"He will," I promised. "Just keep an eye on him."

"Sorry," said Schlock. "I've got to stay here and keep an eye on the loot. I never mix business with pleasure, and watching money like this *is* a pleasure, believe me."

"But I thought you were going to introduce our star —"

"There's a mike on stage. Why don't you do the honors?" Schlock

waved me forward. "Better start soon, that mob is getting restless."

Sandy squeezed my hand. I squeezed back. And then, somehow I was out there under the lights, under the scrutiny of twenty thousand pairs of watchful eyes. And I was singing something about, "Tonight we bring you a new era in entertainment—a new star straight from the heavens—Sneed Hearn!"

The applause rose, and Drool stepped onstage, moving to the microphone and bowing.

"This is it," I whispered. "Remember—all systems go!"

"I'll lay it on them," Drool promised.

I left the stage, perspiring.

Drool stood under the spotlight, grinning.

The crowd fell silent, waiting.

I'll never forget that moment; the hushed, still moment of expectancy.

And I'll never forget the moment that followed it; the moment when Drool opened his mouth.

Drool opened his mouth and the music came out. It poured and pulsed, surged and soared.

It wasn't just the sound of a vocalist and a small combo—the majestic strains issuing from that tiny throat were the unmistakable utterance of a mighty orchestra and full chorus.

"Holy Toledo!" Schlock moaned.

"No," I corrected. "That's not it. What he's laying on them is Beethoven's Ninth Symphony!"

Schlock may have groaned again; if so I didn't hear it, for the sound was drowned in the greater groan of the audience. Even Beethoven was lost in the impromptu *chorale* of boos, hisses, shouts and catcalls.

"Get him off before they murder him!" Schlock shrieked, pushing me onstage.

I got him off. "Come on," I muttered, grabbing Drool by the nape of his neck. "They're starting to throw things." And indeed they were. I dodged a *pizza* hurled by an indignant music-lover and ducked a beer-bottle aimed at me by another patron of the arts.

"What's the matter?" Drool quavered. "Why don't they like it? Barf told me they would—"

"Barf?" I shook my head, but the picture was clear now, only too clear. That two-bit philosopher had corrupted our boy with classical music on his own record-player, seduced him into symphonies. "Wait until I get my hands on him!" I promised.

But wait we would. Right now the important thing was to keep that angry crowd out front from getting their hands on us.

Somehow I propelled Drool into the wings. The audience was rising, converging on the stage amidst a thunder of rage.

The thunder was split by the lightning of Sandy's scream.

"No!" she wailed. "Stop —"

I glanced up quickly, then blinked in sudden shock. Apparently Barf wasn't the only traitor in our midst.

For there, standing beside the little offstage cubicle where the box-office receipts rested, was Luke Emia. As Schlock and Sandy raised their hands high in helpless surrender, Luke moved forward to cover them with —

"My superdisintegratosonic weapon!" Drool squealed happily. "He found it!"

Which explained Luke's interest when he questioned me about the lost weapon, explained his absence during recent evenings when he went out to hunt for it in the canyon brush near the house. It also explained why he'd suggested we drive here tonight in separate cars. He had the weapon, and now he had the caper: holding up the place for the concert receipts.

"Stand back!" Luke warned. "Don't anybody move —"

The words came too late, for Drool was already ducking under his arm, tugging at the oddly shaped, rifle-like object in Luke's hands. Luke pulled the trigger —

Then it was in Drool's hands, just as the weapon went off. Drool jerked the muzzle aside just in time to avoid the puff of greenish

smoke which burst forth and coalesced into —

Another Drool, standing side by side with his exact counter-part, an identical twin Drool holding an identical weapon from which a puff of greenish smoke burst forth to coalesce into a *third* Drool —

"Stop!" I shouted.

"Not until I conquer the world," Drool gurgled.

"With *that* thing? It doesn't kill anyone!"

"Never said it did," Drool shrugged. "All it does is reproduce."

"You mean it duplicates?"

"Reproduces," Drool corrected me. "How do you think Krool managed to have four million offspring?"

Another greenish puff and from it, another Drool — then another and another —

"That's the secret of taking over the world," the Drools chorused. "Divide and conquer."

A rumbling roar from the platform behind us indicated another kind of problem.

"It's the audience!" Schlock cried. "They're storming the stage — they'll tear us to pieces —"

"Don't worry," said the Drools in unison. "We outnumber them."

Then six Drools turned and marched onstage, raising six weapons. Six puffs coalesced and as the crowd shrank back there were twelve Drools facing them. Twelve weapons raised, and now the twelve

became twenty-four. Twenty-four became forty-eight and forty-eight became ninety-six and ninety-six became a hundred and ninety-two and a hundred and ninety-two became an army and the army became —

But you get the idea.

So did I.

Grabbing Sandy's hand, I ran for it.

X

It is very quiet here.

Sandy and I stopped to plunder a refreshment stand on our way,

★—————★



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and I think we have a big enough stock of provisions to last us indefinitely.

That's good, because I'm not sure we're ever going to come out again.

At the rate Drool was reproducing himself, he may well have managed to take over the world by sheer weight of numerical supremacy alone.

And I can just see it now — everybody knee-deep in masses of Drools, rising higher and higher until they smother. It's the final population explosion, I suppose.

And since Drools don't eat or sleep or have much need of oxygen, there's no reason to suppose they'll ever stop multiplying. If they ever get the idea to start singing in unison, the sound-waves will topple every man-made structure on earth. Oh, there's no end to the possibilities.

But meanwhile, Sandy and I will stay here, where it's safe and quiet. Here, in Bodyland, in the one hiding-place that we can depend on.

We're back in the womb.

Some day, when it's all over, we may venture out again, just to see what happened. Right now I like it here, and I'm not about to move. The way things are now, Drool can have his world.

It's a nice place to visit, but I wouldn't want to live there...

END

IF . . . and WHEN

by LESTER DEL REY

Let There Be Light

The Martian Invasion seems to be coming to an end. It was a long war, lasting for decades, and often a brilliant one of countless facets. Great ships plied space between Earth and Mars, filling the void with every conceivable ray and missile. Millions of gallant men and alien Martians of every kind and description died. The sands of Mars grew colorful with blood—red blood, green blood, you-name-it blood. The seas of Earth were looted for water and boiled away a thousand times. But now the ancient war is nearly over, and not even a conference table is left to mark its attrition.

At least that seems to be true in the science-fiction magazines. This month, for example, Chapdelaine's Spork is busy with humans and

aliens in an entire solar system, but the system is not that of our sun. Robert Bloch brings us a little green man, but not from Mars. And C. C. MacApp's ship with its crew and strange ship minds voyages far from Earth—but not toward any planet of our system.

Perhaps it's a pity. We'll miss the loveliness of Dejah Thoris and the sad, haunting Martian cities of Leigh Brackett. But science fiction still depends on a genuine respect for the basic facts of science, and our present knowledge rules out any chance for technical, intelligent races of the solar planets except Earth.

We can't rule out the possibility of life on some of the other planets—even some that seem pretty hostile. But if such life does exist,

as most scientists hope, it must be composed largely of rather primitive plant and very low orders of animal forms.

Most of the general public aren't ready to accept that yet. The flying-saucer groups just about *have* to have nearby aliens to make the constant coming and going of their illusive (and in my opinion, illusionary) craft possible. But even the more conservative public clings to the belief in solar aliens. Whenever I address a group not composed of science-fiction fans, most of the audience stubbornly refuse to give up their feared but beloved Martians.

They are now pointing out, quite correctly, that newspapers have reported that the astronauts who circled the Moon couldn't find any visible evidence of technical, intelligent life on Earth. Hence, it seems to most people that we can't possibly know enough about other planets to rule out such life there.

It sounds logical, but the argument won't hold water. The catch lies in that often-omitted word, *visible*. There was a tremendous amount of evidence of technical, intelligent life on Earth available to those astronauts. They were bombarded by beams of high-frequency radio signals that required a well-developed technology and carried information in an ordered form that had to denote intelligence. We're no longer limited to that tiny part

of the spectrum usable by our eyes. And any other technical race in our system would be filling space with evidence that we could detect.

Mercury has always been considered a pretty poor place for life to flourish. Lying only 36 million miles from the sun, it was once supposed to turn only one face toward that searing light, leaving the hot side at the temperature of molten tin while the other froze at almost absolute zero. A few stories had life in a thin Twilight Zone that wobbled back and forth between light and dark, but even that area was troublesome because Mercury was supposed to have no atmosphere.

Our current picture leaves much of this in doubt. The latest findings indicate that Mercury revolves in a way that turns all of the surface beneath the great solar orb, and that there is some kind of thin atmosphere.

But the new knowledge doesn't make life more probable. We know now that the light from the sun is accompanied by fantastic energy radiation of other kinds, such as highly charged particles that would be fatal even to electronic robots and would never permit life to form there.

Venus remains largely a mystery, despite the American and Russian probes. These have given us a picture of a planet with a tremendous

blanket of atmosphere under high pressure and a temperature above 500°F. Initial indications are also that this temperature is fairly uniform over the entire planet, also. It would obviously preclude any life we can imagine.

Yet there are some doubts. While much of the atmosphere seems to be composed of carbon-dioxide gas, the Russian probe did indicate that there were slight traces of free oxygen and water vapor. Some scientists have calculated that even this small amount of oxygen could not exist at such high temperatures unless there were plant forms to break down the carbon-dioxide and release the oxygen regularly into the atmosphere. If so, the plant life must be scarce and located mostly around the polar regions. Certainly there isn't enough oxygen for any high level of animal activity to exist there.

Mars remains the hopes of most extraterrestrial doters. And there is a good reason for that. The fantastically successful flight of Mariner IV around that planet gave us a lot of information and showed us that Mars was pitted with craters like the Moon, but it did not make conditions quite so bad that life was impossible there.

We know that the planet has an atmosphere; we can even see clouds in it, and locate what is best explained as a thin layer of frost

or ice that accumulates in winter at the poles. The results of tests by Mariner force us to admit that there can be very little oxygen or water vapor in the air of Mars — but that little might still support some life.

Our visual evidence tends to indicate that such life does exist. There have been elaborate theories of odd chemical crystals to account for the fact that each summer green spreads rapidly over one hemisphere of Mars, to die off with the coming of winter. But those theories run into difficulties when they have to account for other factors. We see storms that must be dust storms on Mars. These blot out the green — but it pops up again quickly, as it would if growing plants forced their way through dust deposits. Anyhow, the most economical theory as to unprovable assumptions is that there is life there.

The canals, incidentally — or properly, the channels (canali) — are no evidence of anything, because they're as subject to debate as the existence of life. There's no certain evidence that they are more than accidental illusions caused by certain vague markings on the planet; and the evidence of Mariner IV tends somewhat to be against their existence.

Scientists on Earth have even demonstrated that some Earth life could exist under Martian conditions. Lichens — composed of algae

and fungi living together symbiotically — and some other simple plants have been grown at simulated Martian conditions — and even a few primitive animal forms have survived there.

But this has nothing to do with technology and intelligence. No early technology would be possible to give rise to a higher culture. In that atmosphere, fire would be impossible. And most primitive technology grows out of the use of fire, leading to metals, glass and all the other artifacts needed to handle the things that come later and don't require fire for their shaping.

The same poor atmosphere would limit the activity of any animal to the point where the Earth sloth would seem like a bolt of lightning in motion. There simply isn't enough free oxygen to supply the energy for great activity. Brains would be excess baggage that couldn't be supported; such a collection of energy-consuming cells not immediately necessary to raw existence would be too great a luxury for the environment, and would never evolve.

In the long run, the level of energy available to the organism is probably the most important consideration in the development of higher life forms. Too much of it in the environment would speed up certain processes until no living balance could be struck. Too little

limits the organism to the dreariest need for pure animal efficiency to exist at all. Even evolution must be limited by the energy supply, and such evolution on a world with little oxygen for animal life would obviate any chance for intelligent brains.

Of course, there are other processes that don't involve the oxygen from an atmosphere, such as fermentation. But these are less efficient and yield less energy; and all life forms that use such processes on Earth are extremely primitive; most also depend on food from plants that can benefit from the high levels of energy available by photosynthesis on Earth, where the sunlight level is high without being lethal.

This need for a source of energy suitable for biological use makes life in even the most primitive form unlikely on the planets beyond Mars. The moons of Jupiter receive less light and warmth by far than does Mars, so that even plant life there may be impossible. And the largest of these moons — Ganymede — is smaller than Mars, and less capable of holding a rich atmosphere.

Jupiter itself remains an enigma. With more than ten times the diameter of Earth, it has retained an enormous atmosphere from which even the hydrogen has not vanished into space. Its huge gravity grips every gas molecule firmly, and the sun is so far away — almost half

a billion miles — that little energy is conveyed to those molecules to speed them up to velocities that could break from the planet's pull. We can see only the surface here, and our instrument readings leave many factors in doubt. If one theory is correct, Jupiter is far too cold to provide the energy needed by life. But there are other theories, involving the slow escape of radioactive heat from such a giant atmosphere and the odd behavior of the gases in it, which make the amount of free energy unpredictable at present. If any planet beyond Mars can support life, it must be Jupiter. But while the physics of energy are uncertain, the chemistry of biological processes offers us no real hope of any life there either.

Saturn and the other planets further out must be dead. There could never have been enough energy available on them for the first organic chemicals that build living matter to form.

Little by little, science has taken away our hope of finding alien enemies and friends in our system. But there are compensations. Forty years ago, when science fiction was just beginning in the magazines, all the speculations of science indicated that the chance of life beyond the solar system was almost exactly zero. At the time, the only theory we had to account for the existence of planets around

our sun was so complicated that we could expect no other star in the entire galaxy to have similar planets. And we didn't have any idea at all as to how life could evolve spontaneously on even our own planet.

Now we know better. We've demonstrated experimentally that life is almost certain to evolve, and we have theories which indicate that the formation of planets is a natural and common thing for stars. Better still, we have evidence that other stars do have planets. So far, the other planets we have discovered are huge, bearing little resemblance to Earth, but they help to prove that planets are not unique to our system.

Today, it's not too optimistic to believe that most stars somewhat like our sun — and there are a vast number of them — have planetary systems. Our current theories indicate that many of those systems must include a planet not too dissimilar to ours, and that such planets almost certainly will have life.

There must have been other intelligent races in the past. There surely will be other intelligent races in the future. The only question is whether intelligence has enough survival value for another race — or for us — to survive until we can get together.

But we have to allow some optimism in our science fiction, after all. And now that the great and

noble interplanetary invasions are eroded away by the decades, we have to head out to the stars where even greater possibilities lie waiting us.

It may take us a little longer this way. But even that isn't too gloomy a prospect. Forty years ago, most

writers and readers would have guessed that we wouldn't actually be on Mars before 2100. Now there's an excellent chance we'll be out among the stars before then.

While there's hope, there's life — even intelligent life!

END

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*With Gerlik insane, Ben Tomsun
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I

From Deck Ten, where the pines grew, it was fifteen hundred feet up to the sunlamps on the steel bottom of Sea Deck. That was not, of course three times as hard a climb as the five hundred

feet between lower decks, because deck-gravity — a full gee at soil-level — tapered off quickly above any deck. Then, too, the rope ladder here only hung to a platform six hundred feet up in a vast old pine beside the circular hatchway called Central Well. By the time

one reached that platform, gravity was less than half a gee, treetops and parasitic flowers were burgeoning joyously, and a vigorous young man need hardly pause for breath before starting up the ladder.

Pryingboy Thorp was already near the top of the ladder, preceding, as a Watch Corporal should, the five men of his squad. The lamp-heat — not too much of it directed toward Central Well — was delicious on his skin. He loved this trip — had, in fact, pestered superiors brashly to get assigned permanently to Sea Deck patrol. He loved the colorful, perfumy mass of vegetation, and even more the feel, this far up the ladder, of virtual free-fall.

How thrilling it must have been for his ancestors, in times before the Catastrophe, to don those legendary pressure-suits and go completely outside the sinus — outside the Ship, even!

Just below the edge of Sea Deck, while he was still weightless, he paused to look down at his squad. Kail, Waran, Arden, and Pendergast were spaced along the ladder, with Muller still on the platform as rear guard.

Pry went a rung higher. Carefully, because sudden weight could play tricks with one's co-ordination he reached up, grasped a knoblike thing that had once been an interior eye of the Ship, and pulled himself onto the narrow ledgelike shelf

that ran around the inner curve of Sea Deck's central retaining-wall. His renewed weight felt enormous at first. He leaned against the wall until dizziness passed, then climbed a battered steel ladder and sat straddling the fifteen-foot-high wall. The acrysteel was cool between his thighs.

He glanced around at the circular sea. Light glinted off wavelets stirred by influx-air. There was a smell of fish and sea-plants.

From an excrescence on the steel a few feet away came one of the voices of the insane Ship. "This is Captain Gerlik. I feel your electrical capacitance. By your mass, you must be a grown man. I bless you, my son! Though I am deaf and blind where you are, I bless you." Another voice cut in for a few moments, mouthing gibberish, then Gerlik's voice returned. "Though the universe has passed away, I shall maintain . . ." The sound dribbled away into a mutter and stopped, as if the speaker had forgotten Pry. He shivered a little. He knew the voices were only the minds and personalities of long-dead people transcribed into the Ship's computers, but they were eerie.

He wondered why the first rebels, ten or twelve generations ago, hadn't smashed this communicator-outlet along with others. Maybe they'd needed to know whether the Ship stayed alive at all.

This space — called Middle Void — was the biggest in Sinus B, unless there might be bigger ones in the dark, uninhabited, unreachable other half. From where he sat, by turning his head he could see the entire enclosing curve of the sinus wall. Sinus B, the tattered old books said, was a long cylinder closed at both ends, hashed across at intervals with decks having their own artificial gravities, and with various ingresses, ducts, fittings and buried machinery. He knew the dimensions by heart. Fifteen thousand feet long; four thousand in diameter; with the hundred-foot-wide holes in each deck that comprised Central Well,

There were no overhead lamps here in Middle Void. The lamps were in a ring around the sinus wall, fifteen hundred feet above the water. They provided light and heat not only for that round ocean, but also for Upsidedown Sea, three thousand feet above his head.

He tilted back his head and stared up. Had that half of the sinus been peopled too, at some time? No record remained, and the round hole in the middle of Upsidedown Sea — surely the continuation of Central Well — was perpetually dark.

It wasn't likely anyone would ever reach there now, because three thousand feet was much too far to build a ladder or to catapult a grappling-hook, even aside from the

complications of inverted gravity.

There were sounds below him, and Fathersface Kail climbed the wall. He grinned at Pry and asked, "All right if I dunk?"

"Sure," Pry said, and watched enviously as the other dropped to the shallows and began to splash about. The Ship maintained the water at a comfortable temperature, the better for the fish crop. But as Corporal, Pry must stay alert.

Not that there was ever anything to observe, except some citizen trying to fish illegally, or a too-thick growth of seaweed. It was two hundred years since the last Ship's stooge tried to sneak in, and almost as long since the last robot machine appeared. General opinion was that there was no longer anyone alive outside Sinus B, and no 'pairbots still operating. Nevertheless, he must be watchful.

The rest of the squad arrived one by one — Troublechild Waran, Secondboy Arden, Baldbaby Pendergast — who, however he'd been born, was far from bald now — and Jamestwo Muller — the oldest man of the squad, who *was* beginning to be bald. They all joined Kail in the water.

After a while Waran climbed up beside Pry. Waran was the youngest of the squad, barely nineteen. He stared up at Upsidedown Sea. "Why aren't there any fish up there?"

Pry gave him an amused glance.

"Maybe there are. They'd have to be pretty big to see at that distance. Did you ever hear of a fish five or six feet long?"

Waran flushed a little and grinned. "No." He was quiet for a minute. "If the gravity ever failed up there, all that water would fall on us, and some would pour down Central Well! Why is the gravity upside-down there, do you suppose?"

Pry, who'd wondered often enough, shrugged. "Maybe that's part of the Ship's madness. Or maybe it was designed that way when the Ship left Earth."

Waran said softly, "Eight hundred years! And now Earth's gone, with the rest of the universe. How long do you suppose the Ship will last? And will it ever war upon us again? It could stop recycling air, or leave the plant nutrients out. It could leave the sunlamps off, or— or poison the water!"

Pry, irritated, got to his feet. He began shedding his backpack and other gear. "Then I suppose we'd all die." He started around the top of the retaining-wall. "I'm going to have a look at the other side." He went carefully — one certainly didn't want to fall down Central Well—but tried to act nonchalant. The sensible thing, of course, would be to drop to the water and swim or wade; but, except for Waran, the squad were all older than Pry and he didn't want to show timidity.

The shallows near the opposite curve of the retaining-wall were normal.

Or were they? His stomach tightened suddenly. That shape out there, distorted to view by the surface and the waves — was it a man lying on the bottom?

Drowned men don't stay submerged.

He dove and swam, after shouting for his squad. The thing had arms and legs, certainly, but... Then he was close enough to see that it was some kind of limp garment — one that would cover a man all over. Skin prickling, he threw a look up toward the black hole in the middle of Upsidedown Sea; then, arching himself, he dove and seized an arm of the garment. It felt slick, like the few scraps of old plastic that still existed.

His men gathered around, treading water. Waran, eyes wide, asked in an awed voice, "What is it?"

Pry's own voice was shaky. "It's a pressure-suit! It was right here, on the bottom. There's not enough current to have moved it, and it wasn't here yesterday; so, an intruder's come into the sinus sometime during the last dark-cycle here!"

Muller said hoarsely, "There aren't any more people outside the sinus! It must have been some kind of robot!"

Pry said impatiently, "A robot wouldn't need a pressure-suit. They don't breathe, and they have their own grav-lifts. So there *are* people out there after all!" He began towing the suit toward the retaining-wall.

There was no more talk until they pulled themselves from the water. Then Muller asked, more reasonably, "But why would he abandon it? Do you suppose he drowned? Or maybe the suit just fell from up there!"

Pry suppressed annoyance. "How could that happen, with the gravity reversed up there? Do you see any water falling this way?"

Muller grinned. "No. But why would he abandon it?"

"Because," Pry said, "he's trying to pose as—as one of the people! Maybe in the dark, he didn't realize the suit could be seen from the retaining-wall. But he's gone somewhere below. He could be hiding on Deck Ten. Or lower."

Waran asked shakily, "What would he want?"

Pry shook his head slowly. "As a stooge of the Ship, he may have been sent to prepare the way for some sort of invasion; or he might be here just as a spy."

Muller growled, "He won't find spying easy! Are we going to search Deck Ten?"

"No. Not until we get reinforcements." Pry stared upward. "First of all we're going to send word

down to Deck One; then I want to get this thing out of sight in case someone or something's watching from — from up there." He looked at Muller. "You probably know more people on the various decks than any of us do. You take the word down. Tell a few people along the way, but no strangers; and don't delay getting down to Deck One. You'll have to climb down through four or five ladders in the dark."

Muller shrugged. "I've done that plenty of times. Shall I say anything else except..."

Pry shook his head. "Just what's happened." In case Muller were intercepted by the intruder—who might have unimaginable weapons, hypnotic drugs, anything — it would be better to keep the report vague.

Muller nodded and hurried toward the down-ladder.

"I wonder," Waran said softly, "what he'll look like? If he'll be normal, I mean." He eyed the suit which, with the water drained out of it, was surprisingly light. "One thing — he's big!"

Pry looked again at the suit. "Yes. There were four sizes of pressure-suit, and this must be the biggest. We'll have to be really alert! Kail, you and Waran stay up here on watch. Pendergast, you go down to the tree-platform on Deck Ten as a lookout. Arden, you follow

me down. Both of you make sure your knives are loose in the scabbards!"

Pendergast turned, then hesitated. "How are you going to carry the suit? If he's skulking somewhere, watching the ropes, he'll see it!"

Pry told him, "I'm going to bundle it up and stuff it in my backpack. If we all act casual, even if he does see us he may not suspect anything."

The plastic of the suit — brownish-yellow stuff — seemed incredibly thin to ward off the terrors of open space, though those might be exaggerated in the old tales. There were many thickened parts of the suit, including a thick ridge around the waist, where things were imbedded. There were loops for attaching things. The helmet was semi-rigid, with a horizontal window of clear yellow glass. There were instruments sealed into the helmet, and several turns of wire completely around it near the crown. No doubt it had radio and all the other legendary things.

But it made a small enough bundle to get in a backpack. Pry walked around to the ladder, glanced to make sure Arden was following and started down.

There was five hundred feet or more of clear air before he was among lacelike tendrils of vine, and glad even of that tenuous cover. Then he reached the flaring pine-

tops and paused to let his eyes adjust to dimmer light.

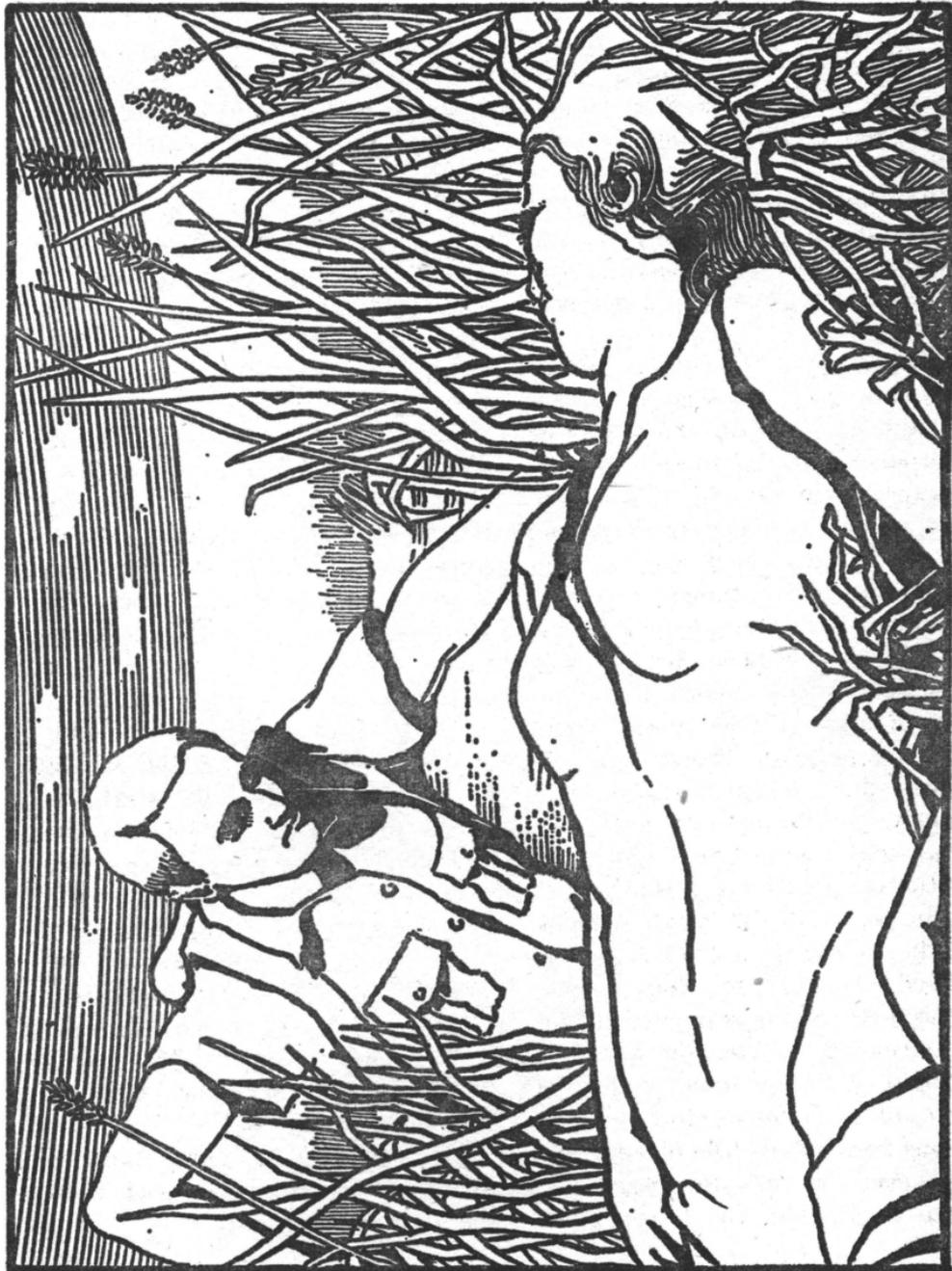
This was a dim fairy-world, with the light from the sunlamps heavily screened by foliage. Birds that would have had to beat their wings hard in full gravity soared easily here, or hovered with casual wingbeats. Squirrels made magnificent slow leaps from branch to branch. There was a distinct ecology of small animals at this level — even cats took advantage of the thick foliage and low gravity, eating what they could catch, drinking water that collected in upturned blossoms during the gentle dark-cycle rains.

Pry continued on down. Gravity increased. The pine-trunks became thick and gnarled, the branches fewer and the light dimmer. He joined Pendergast on the platform. "Hear anything?"

"No. Shall I go on down?"

"Yes." Pry waited while the older man climbed down the ladder of pegs driven into the tree-trunk. When Pendergast set foot on the ground and signalled up, Pry could see him only dimly by light coming in laterally from Central Well. Pry went down and they strode the short distance to the retaining-awll of this deck. Pry turned to peer into the gloomy forest. "My guess is, he went farther down while it was dark."

He couldn't be sure, but he shrugged and sent Pendergast down the next ladder.



Deck Nine, five hundred feet below Deck Ten, had a thinner layer of soil suitable for wheat. It was in day-cycle now, but wouldn't be for long. Pry, stepping off the ladder, stood with his hip against the retaining-wall — a low one, here — and stared around at the sinus wall. Intervening low hills hid the base of it and the rim of trees along it — willows taking advantage of the peripheral drain-off ditch. There'd have to be a search there when enough guardsmen arrived.

The sunlamps were hot. One quadrant of wheat, to his left, was nearly ripe. Directly before him was a greener quadrant, while to the right was a crop of alfalfa to re-liven the soil. On the far side of Central Well was the newly-plowed sector. He'd scrutinized all four quadrants, of course, as he came down the ladder.

He waited for Arden to join him and Pendergast. "Wait here a minute, the two of you I'm going to look at those tracks in the ripe sector."

The tracks, two sets of them, led away from the retaining-wall. A little way out, one set zigzagged, while the other more or less pursued. That might mean some girl leading her man friend on a laughing chase; no one lived on the grain decks, but anyone could visit.

At the best, the pair who'd made these tracks had trampled grain unnecessarily.

Pry followed the tracks to a low hummock. Partway up the slope, one set continued straight on over while the other turned back — retracing carefully to avoid trampling more wheat, which was proper. Stepping in the continuing tracks for the same reason, Pry followed them up the hummock.

From the top he could see the body sprawled face up in the wheat beyond. An area of flattened grain indicated she'd fallen, gotten up to stagger a few steps, and fallen again. He shouted for Pendergast and Arden, then ran toward the girl.

She was perhaps in her early twenties, slight, dark-haired. She wore a tunic of green cloth that left her tanned arms and legs bare. Her moccasins were scuffed. Her hands showed signs of moderate work. Pry guessed she might be from Deck Four or Deck Five, where people lived in the fruit-orchards.

She lay limp, her breathing slow, but Pry saw no sign of injury. Carefully he rolled her over and winced at a round stain of blood on her garment, just at the back of the left arm-hole. Pendergast, coming alongside, grunted. Pry reached under the cloth. There was a small hard object half-imbedded in the flesh. Gently, he pulled it free and looked at it.

Arden gasped.

The thing was a very slim bullet — hardly more than a half-inch

needle. Pry looked up at the other two men. "This is a hypodermic bullet! Do you remember the pictures and descriptions of the pistols?"

He gently pressed her garment against the tiny wound to make sure she wasn't bleeding any more, then got bandage-cloth and a bit of dry balsam from his belt-pouch, washed her wound with water from his canteen, rubbed the balsam against the still-wet skin and plastered on a bit of cloth. Then he got to his feet and stared toward the rope ladder. It seemed very likely that the intruder had gone down at least one deck farther. "You two stand guard at the ladder. I'll try to revive her."

III

Within half an hour she began to stir, moaned and tried to gather her arms under her. Pry knelt quickly. "Lie still! I think you'll feel better in a few minutes."

She stiffened, but obeyed. Her breathing strengthened. Presently she lifted her head enough to see him. "Oh!" she said in a surprised, relieved tone. Her brown eyes, though, showed fright.

"What happened to you?" he asked.

She drew in her breath. "I — I'd just come up to inspect the wheat. A man was standing a little way from the ladder. I nodded and he nodded back, and I walked along

the retaining-wall to the ripe sector. I must have stopped and looked back at him too curiously. He — he acted a little odd, and he was — was pale; not tanned. I thought he might be some hermit from Deck Ten. Then he ran toward me and I saw something in his hand, a sort of pistol, like the pictures in the old books. I ran and tried to dodge, and he followed me. I felt a sting at the back of my shoulder. I tried to get across a hummock, hoping he wouldn't follow, and then... and then I began to feel weak. I guess I went a little way and fell down."

"You fell twice," Pry told her, and felt foolish. "What did he look like?"

"Just — just pale. He was clean-shaved, and his hair was cut short. He wore ordinary clothes like anyone. Anyone on the orchard decks, I mean."

"Was he big?"

"Yes. An inch or more taller than you, and heavier. I thought it was odd that such a muscular man wouldn't be tanned."

Pry felt a stir of pique. He was considered muscular enough himself. He demanded, "Did you see him go back to the ladder?"

"No. I didn't look back until I was beyond the hummock, then I — Do you think he's still on this deck?"

"No, I don't. I think he went farther down."

Her eyes widened. "Somebody has to give the alarm! Obviously, with that pistol, he's a — a stooge!"

Pry felt that he was scowling at her. "I've already sent a messenger down. Come on, if you can walk now. We'll build a fire near the ladder."

She looked puzzled. "A fire?"

"The upper decks will be dark by now, and before long this one will, too. I don't want to risk starting down in the dark until reinforcements get here." He flushed, realizing she might interpret that as cowardice. "In this backpack I've got the suit he came down in. I can't risk his getting it back. Without it, at least he's trapped in our half of the sinus."

She stared at him for a minute. "Ah! You mean a pressure-suit! Where did you —"

"We found it on Sea Deck." He helped her to her feet, and urged her toward the ladder.

There was, as on all decks, a small pile of firewood near the ladder, since patrols were likely to camp on any deck through the dark-cycle. Pendergast got busy with a firebow and soon had a blaze going.

The girl looked fairly well recovered by now, and Pry questioned her some more. "Didn't you bring a canteen up with you, or anything?"

"Yes, a standard kit. I left it

near the ladder rather than carry it with me. I guess *he* took it."

Pry stared away for a minute. "Fine," he said sourly. "Anything to help out his disguise. Well, we'll feed you. I don't want to send you down the ladders in your condition in the dark. Where do you live? On one of the orchard decks?"

She flushed, a little angry. "Deck Five. I can get down all right!"

"No. There'll be men coming up the ladders anyway, and you'd slow them down. Besides, I need you here, in case some superior of mine comes up and wants to question you. You're the only person, so far as we know, who's seen the intruder."

She shrugged coldly and settled herself against the retaining-wall, not looking at him. He felt a little ashamed of his gruffness.

Deck Nine was ghostly when the sunlamps went out. There was almost no light from Central Well, since decks Five and everything higher were in darkness too. The fire illuminated a short curve of the retaining-wall and a small half-circle of the grainfield. Cool influx-air was wafting down from the ducts between the dark sunlamps. He realized that he and his companions would be here when the rain started; but on a grain deck it was a mere drizzle.

He waited impatiently. Reinforcements ought to be here by now! Finally he got up, threw a

leg over the retaining-wall and took a firm grip on the few rungs of metal ladder that were an ancient fixture here.

The girl was on her feet staring at him. "Are you going down? I thought —"

He grinned at the concern in her voice. "No. I'm just going to lean out and look down. There'll be torches, if men are coming up." He let his body hang as far out as his arm would stretch.

His skin began to prickle. Something was unfamiliar about Central Well. Then he gasped. There was no light at all — no dim rings of luminosity marking the lowest decks, which should be out of the staggered dark-cycle before now. No light at all! Or — was that a torch?

The tiny point of light winked off, then on, then off again. He read the signal, half-mumbling it over to himself. Presently he pulled himself up and back over the wall into the welcome firelight.

All three companions stared at his face. He said slowly, "All the lamps are off, clear down to Deck One. There's a signal fire there, directly below Central Well. They say no one knows what the trouble is. They order all guardsmen to stay on post, wherever they are."

There was a shocked silence. Finally Pendergast asked, "What did they say about Muller?"

"Nothing. That may be just caution, but I think — well, I don't think he ever got to them! I think he was intercepted. I think he's lying somewhere unconscious, or — or dead!" He raised his voice because the tightness in his chest made it hard to speak softly. "Do you see the significance of the lamps all being off at once? The Ship's co-operating with its stooge — making things easier for him. Maybe even without the suit he has some way of communicating with it. Or maybe they're working on a prearranged schedule!"

The girl said in a low, slightly unsteady voice, "We can't live without the sunlamps."

Pry looked at her half-blindly. He had to get that suit down to Deck One, along with word of what was happening. He moved to the wall again. "I'm going down. Now!"

But before he touched the wall he stopped, rigid with a thought. After a moment he laughed hoarsely.

"What's funny?" Pendergast demanded sourly.

Pry said, "I'm an idiot! Here I'm thinking of climbing down several thousand feet of dark ladder, carrying in my backpack a suit that has grav-lifts. Why don't I simply put it on and float down?"

The trio stared at him. Finally the girl said, "You don't know how to operate it!"

"I can learn! A few experiments —"

"But," she said hastily, as if she were worried about him and sought any argument, "suppose he intercepts you? He may have ways of seeing in the dark. Then — then he'll get the suit back!"

He said, "First he'll have to see me, then he'll have to reach me. And *then* he'll have to take it back!" His heart was pounding now. Why hadn't it occurred to him before to put on the suit? He shrugged off the backpack. "What's your name?" he asked the girl. "Maybe, if they've built bonfires on Deck Five by now, I'll stop and tell them you're all right!"

She glared at him. Finally she said, "Marytwo Garth."

He pulled the suit from the pack and let it fall loose. The closure down the front was open. He thrust in one leg, then the other. He pulled the helmet over his head, worked his arms into place and tugged the front together. He felt for the small knob that was the closure-closer and began to pull.

And the suit spoke to him.

IV

After his first frozen moment of startlement, he realized it was only a communicator built into the helmet. The voice sounded human, but it wasn't Captain Gerlik's.

"Hello," it said again, "who are you?"

It still took him a while to find his voice. Then he said guardedly, "I'm a citizen of Sinus B. Who are you?"

The voice chuckled. "I know you're a citizen of the sinus. What's become of the man who wore this suit a few hours ago?"

Pry's mind raced. Did the suit have any way of destroying him? Could the owner of the voice tell precisely where the suit was, or see via it? Pry said cautiously, "We have him under control."

"Oh," the voice said. "Well, my name when I was alive was Ben Tomsun. I'm one of the personalities programmed into the Ship. You people evidently believe the whole Ship's insane. Parts of it are. There were schisms at the time of the Catastrophe, and the computers divided into at least four factions, located in different parts of the Ship. Several of the nineteen human personalities programmed in were destroyed. Others went insane, in a way peculiar to a half-machine, half-human intelligence. Two who retained joint control of Sinus B warred against each other, and your own ancestors suffered greatly until they quite reasonably rebelled and seized your half of the sinus. Are you listening?"

Pry felt as if his stomach were full of active beetles. "Yes!"

"Good. Captain Gerlik eventual-

ly overcame the other mad personality, or absorbed it — even now we aren't sure about some things. There are parts of the ship under our control — mine and several colleagues'. There are live, sane, healthy humans in the forward part of the Ship, which is called Nose Cone and contains Sinus A. With them and what few repair robots and other facilities remain, we — the sane computer-personalities — have gradually been repairing the Ship and getting ready to seize control of all of it, if possible. We had to work very carefully, because Captain Gerlik can still wreck your end of Sinus B. You have been hostages." The voice paused "Maybe this all sounds like gibberish to you. Have you any knowledge of computers, and of the Ship's life-environment machinery?"

Pry was irritated, and still not sure he wasn't talking to a clever madman. He said stiffly, "We have a few books left. I've read them."

There was a hint of a chuckle from the voice.

"Fine; fine. From time to time in the past — not within the last few generations — we've been able to send human agents by a circuitous route into Sinus B. Some have been intercepted by robot machines under Gerlik's control. The rest were all killed by our people." The voice took on a worried note. "You haven't killed the present one, have you?"

Pry thought it wise to say, "No."

"Don't, *please!* The safety of your whole people depends on him!" After a moment the voice added, "Or upon *you.*"

Pry wondered if he heard rightly. "Upon... *me?*"

The voice sighed. "Yes. Since we've had so little success sending envoys to your people, we decided — once we were able to clear a route for another attempt — to try to enlist one of you as an envoy to us. That was the aim of our present agent. Now it seems that you — I wish you'd tell me your name, and what position you occupy in your society — have voluntarily climbed into that suit. It occurs to me that you might be willing and qualified to come visit us and learn certain things for yourself. Then you could return and persuade others. What do you think of that?"

Pry swallowed hard and stared through the yellow window of the helmet at his two men and the girl. Their faces showed that they'd been hearing every word. "I... don't know. What is it you — you'd want me to see?"

"Various things. First of all, that there are sane people who retain the knowledge and technology your ancestors had before the Catastrophe. And that they trust me — us. That would be a big thing for your people to know, wouldn't it?"

"Well — yes."

"Then are you willing to try? To come outside Sinus B and visit us in Nose Cone? I won't lie to you — the trip will be dangerous. Gerlik has resources, and he regards us as infidels, and will destroy any messenger between us and you, if he can, as you would step on a poisonous insect. You still have insects in Sinus B, I think."

"We have insects." Pry's mind was kneading. If there were nothing but the danger described — if it had been only a perilous adventure — how eagerly he'd accept! But his whole people were at stake. Anything the voice said might be a lie.

Once the Ship had him in its control outside the sinus, might it not tamper with his mind in some way? Could it not bend him to its own insanity, and send him back as a subtle poison for his own people?

If he only knew! If he could only make a reasonable guess!

"Well? the voice said gently.

Pry writhed. "I don't know! I couldn't operate this suit anyway!"

That was true enough.

The voice chuckled again. "Why are you wearing it, then? But it's only a matter of a few simple instructions from me, and a few trials by you. Why are you so reluctant? Are you afraid?"

"No! Not the way you mean."

The voice sighed. "Then you think I'm lying.

Pry moaned. He daren't say yes, and to say no wouldn't help him any. He reached with a trembling hand — awkward enough anyway, because of the gauntlet — for the closure-knob, thinking he had to get out of the suit or go mad. But the voice said, "How could we use you to harm your people? Suppose we could brain-wash you — I guess that would be possible, if we had the desire. At worst, you'd go back to your people with false beliefs. *They* wouldn't be brain-washed. Wouldn't they simply disbelieve?" There was a pause. "Here — to show our good faith, I'll turn the lamps on!"

The deck was suddenly bathed in light. Pry, his eyes protected by the yellow glass, saw Pendergast, Arden, and the girl blink.

The voice said, "With the lights on, your people will see you leave and return. What else are you worried about? That we'll infect you with some deadly disease? Think — if we, or Captain Gerlik for that matter, wanted to destroy your people or beat them to their knees, we could do it by tinkering with your environment. Do you see that?"

"Yes. I — that's true!"

The voice sighed. "Here's another point. You say you have our present agent under control. He'll be a hostage for your own return. Does that help?"

Pry was almost sobbing by now.

He ought to wait for his superiors to arrive—they'd be coming, now that there was light—and leave the decision to them. But they'd take the suit away from him, and send someone else, even if they did believe the voice. He was too junior in the guard... Slowly, his hand dropped from the closure-knob.

Anyone else who went would run the same risks, and *be* the same risk.

He drew in his breath sharply. "How do you operate this suit?"

The voice that called itself Ben Tomsun was talking steadily. "Put your left hand on the rows of little bumps on the left breast of the suit. The row across the top controls the grav-lifts. Pressing the first from the left and the first from the right will set up automatic neutralization of any gravity you're in, so that in effect you weigh nothing. Now —"

Pry's heart was thudding. He might be a traitor or he might not; but he was going through with this or die! He neutralized his weight; he pushed very gently with his feet and floated upward, then pressed bumps and floated down. "I've got that! Now how do I —"

The controls weren't complicated, once they'd been explained. In fifteen minutes he was ready to launch himself up Central Well. He waved a jaunty hand at the trio standing by the rope ladder and

grinned at them through the helmet window. Pendergast and Arden stood rigid, staring at him with ludicrous expressions that combined awe, disapproval and envy. The girl's face was harder to read. There was a trace of concern, plus, perhaps, admiration.

V

The first bit of difficulty came when he had to turn over halfway through Middle Void, so he'd be dropping feet-first toward Upsidedown Sea. The suit had a built-in resistance to any change of head-and-foot alignment that had to be counter-acted. Once he achieved it, though, he knew he could do it easily next time.

The retaining-wall around the hatchway in that other sea was identical with the one he knew—except that its sensors and communicators were undamaged. He cringed a little when Captain Gerlik's voice assailed him. "Faithless one! Traitor! What devil's-work have you perpetrated among my people? You shall be punished; do not doubt it. You shall burn through all eternity! Yea, though Heaven and Earth perish..." The voice faded into mumblings.

The voice of Ben Tomsun whispered in his helmet. "Pay no attention and keep moving slowly. He can't interpret sanely what he sees or hears."

Later, at Ben Tomsun's direction, Pry turned on lights—one that fanned out in all directions from his helmet, another that lanced straight ahead so he could see farther. He dropped through a space that must correspond to the one above Deck Ten. His light-beam made a dim oval on nearly-bare soil. He asked hesitantly, "Is it all right if I—"

Ben Tomsun said quietly, "Take a few minutes to look around. It's best you know how things are."

Pry moved laterally from Central Well and hovered a few feet above the lifeless deck.

There had been trees here—tall ones, but not pines. A few forked trunks thrust upward like supplicating skeletons. Mostly, though, only stumps remained, chopped off a few feet above ground, the axe-marks showing clearly. The wood was darkened and splintered, with strange deposits of some kind that glittered in the light-beam. He said to Ben Tomsun, "There's something here like broken glass."

"Ice," the voice told him. "I guess you've never seen it before. There've been no sunlamps here for two centuries. Air circulates through, but isn't warmed. Where are you now? Do you see the metal ladder on the retaining-wall?"

"No. I'm on the opposite side."

Tomsun suggested, "Cross over and look at the dead camp."

Pry complied, and found what Tomsun wanted him to see.

There'd been people, all right. He hovered, staring down and puzzling thing out. There was chopped firewood, and the ancient remains of many fires. So that was what had happened to most of the trees.

He realized suddenly that these folk must have kept a vigil here, on the highest deck they could reach, during a long perpetual night. Had they stared up at his own half of the sinus, where there was still sometimes light?

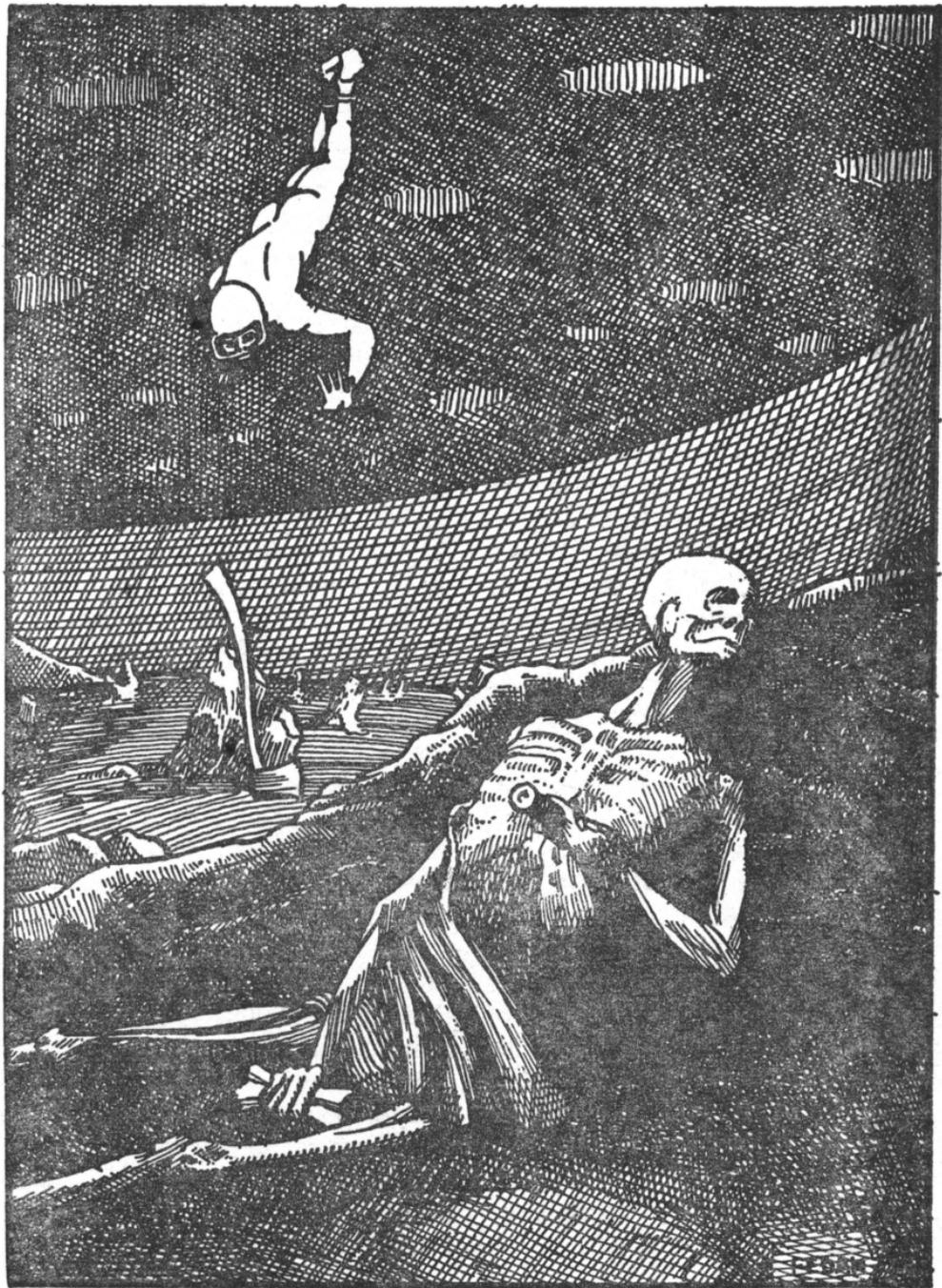
They must have been near starvation at the last; all of the fifty or more corpses were horribly emaciated—mere skin draped over bones.

But they hadn't all died of starvation. Moving slowly, directing his beam about, Pry gradually built up the story. Many had died in a single way—by having their skulls split open with an axe. Blood had long since turned to a solid dark stuff. He found the axe that had done it, and the wielder.

Angry horror formed within him. Had the man been insane? Had he obeyed some raving of Captain Gerlik? Or...had he turned to cannibalism?

No, there was no sign of that. The killer had apparently completed his work, then leaned the axe against a stump and lain down nearby.

Then Pry saw the knife in the



corpse's chest, with the fingers of the right hand still clenched around the hilt. Finally he saw the bit of paper clutched in the shrunken spidery fingers of the left hand.

So they'd all been dying, and one — with enough vigor left — had gone around finishing them off quickly, then killed himself. They must have consented; there was no sign of struggle.

An awful thing. But at least they hadn't descended to cannibalism. Pry choked on emotion. He ought, he knew, to go down and try to work that scrap of paper free from the dead hand to read the last message. But he couldn't bring himself to it — not now. If things turned out right, he might do it on the way home; or someone else would do it later.

Slowly, in a carefully-controlled voice, he described the scene to Ben Tomsun, who'd never had a complete description before. When he was finished, Ben Tomsun answered as slowly. "It's about as I'd thought. And it would have been so easy to rescue them, if we hadn't been prevented! So easy!" There was a pause. "Well, you'd better hurry on. You have to go down five more decks, then out to the sinus wall. Be very watchful — keep turning your beam in all directions. If anything moves, get away from it fast!"

Pry nodded, more than to obey that advice.

There was dead soil and lifeless remains of plants on the next two decks. On the third one down, there seemed to have been a fire. That was an orchard-deck, and everything was charred to stumps.

The next deck down had known not only fire, but something worse. One whole side of the deck was buckled upward. Soil had been thrown aside, leaving bare steel. Ice had formed there. The sinus wall was pleated like a bit of cloth.

It was the next deck down, though, that showed the full force of the Catastrophe. Where the sinus wall had joined the deck, jagged talons of acrysteel splayed upward. The sinus wall had bulged far out and ruptured here, leaving scraps of itself attached to the deck.

It was through that toothed gap that Pry had to go. Beyond was darkness that swallowed up his beam.

Ben Tomsun said, "Move about and direct your light through at various angles. If you see anything move, turn off your lights and retreat!"

Pry did as he was instructed. But there was no hint of movement outside. Ten minutes later he went through the hole.

He paused there, awed. He'd understood that Sinus B was enclosed within another cylinder that was the outer hull of the Ship, but he'd had no conception of the distance between. His light couldn't

probe it. Near him, the light slashed across great columns like steel bars ten feet thick. Then, seeing ragged holes in one of them, he realized they were hollow.

Tomsun's voice said very quietly, "You may as well take time to go out and look at the hull. We won't be ready to meet you for half an hour anyway."

"All right." Pry manipulated suit-controls. He must have travelled four hundred feet before his light showed a steel wall, badly rumped and belled outward. In two places, great patches of thick steel plate had been welded on—to close up ruptures, he supposed. One of the columns which, he realized now, were supports fixing Sinus B within the outer hull had been pulled apart by the awful force, and was crudely pieced together with welded-on girders.

So the hull had bulged *outward*, not inward! He'd been thinking of the damage as some blow from outside. Instead, it must have started with terrible heat; there was plenty of other evidence of that. The softened hull must have been swelled outward by the air-pressure within and ruptured in the two spots. The same thing had apparently happened to the sinus wall.

He shivered. How had the Ship kept *any* of its air? Then he realized how small those ruptures were compared to the immense volume of the Ship.

Ben Tomsun's voice cut into his musing. "Where are you *now*? Can you describe anything *unique* near you?"

Pry nodded.

"Yes. There are two patches, *and* a steel column that's been *mended* near the outer hull."

"That's adequate," Ben Tomsun said. "Drift down to the sinus wall a hundred yards from the base of that column, and on the opposite side of it from the patches. By swinging your light from side to side you can see the curve of the sinus wall. Give yourself *partial* weight so you can walk and *come* along it toward the fore end of the ship. That's back toward Deck One. I hope you haven't lost your *sense* of direction."

Pry mulled that over *confusedly* for a minute. "Oh, I'm all *right*, I guess—only I didn't know Deck One was at the fore of Sinus B! I—we—supposed it was the *opposite*!"

"No; it's forward. If you *stray* off-line, I'll correct you. We can sense you on the sinus wall; *that's* why I want you to walk. *But* be alert—Captain Gerlik can *sense* you too! Swing your light *constant*ly and look behind you. *Avoid* any place that might be an *ambush*, such as the bases of the *trave*-columns." The voice paused. "You are in a compartment now *that's*

seven-hundred-fifty feet long, and you're near the aft end of it. When you reach the forward bulk-head, there'll be a hatch to come through. I'll open it long enough for you to slip through. The danger is this: Gerlik has pairbots of various sizes in the aft end of the Ship that are still operative, and he may try to intercept you. We'll know if they roll along the sinus wall; but if any can fly, we have no way of detecting them. You'll see various stalled machines along the way. Don't worry about them unless they move, but detour around them. Some may be able to swing a tool or a tentacle, or even throw things. But any attack is most likely to come from the rear, and there's only your alertness to rely upon if he has flyable machines. Do you understand?"

Pry said, "Yes. But there's one thing — can't he overhear us talking?"

"No, unless you pass near one of the wrecked machines. Some of them may still have working sensors. Now, I'd like to be able to send a strong escort to meet you, but that won't be possible for two or three hours, if at all; there are skirmishes going on right now in several different parts of the Ship, and we simply don't have weapons enough to spare. Our actual hope is that Captain Gerlik won't consider you important enough to waste resources on. He won't know

you're a Sinus-B dweller, we think — he'll think you're the same agent returning. All right?"

Pry turned his head to cast the light-beam about him. It seemed hardly to scratch the oppressive darkness. "All right. Shall I start?"

"You'd better."

Pry swerved around the fractured traverse-column and slanted down to the sinus wall. He gave himself half-weight and started along at a fast walk. The suit hardly hindered him at all — and that was a puzzling thing. How did it lift or move him, or vary his weight in effect without tugging at his armpits or crotch? It must generate some sort of field that worked upon everything in it, or within a certain space. What ancient theory he'd seen hadn't explained it.

He carefully skirted another column and paused to swing his light about him. It dimly showed other columns at various distances. He started on, swinging it ahead of him — and suddenly stopped in a crouch. What was that his beam had slashed across?

He found the object again — an assortment of booms, levers, and tentacles mounted on a low three-wheeled base. He'd never seen a picture of that kind of repair-robot, but it couldn't be anything else. Was it stirring? Heart thumping, left hand resting shakily on his

(Continued on page 151)

Spork and the Beast

by PERRY A. CHAPDELAINÉ

Illustrated by REESE

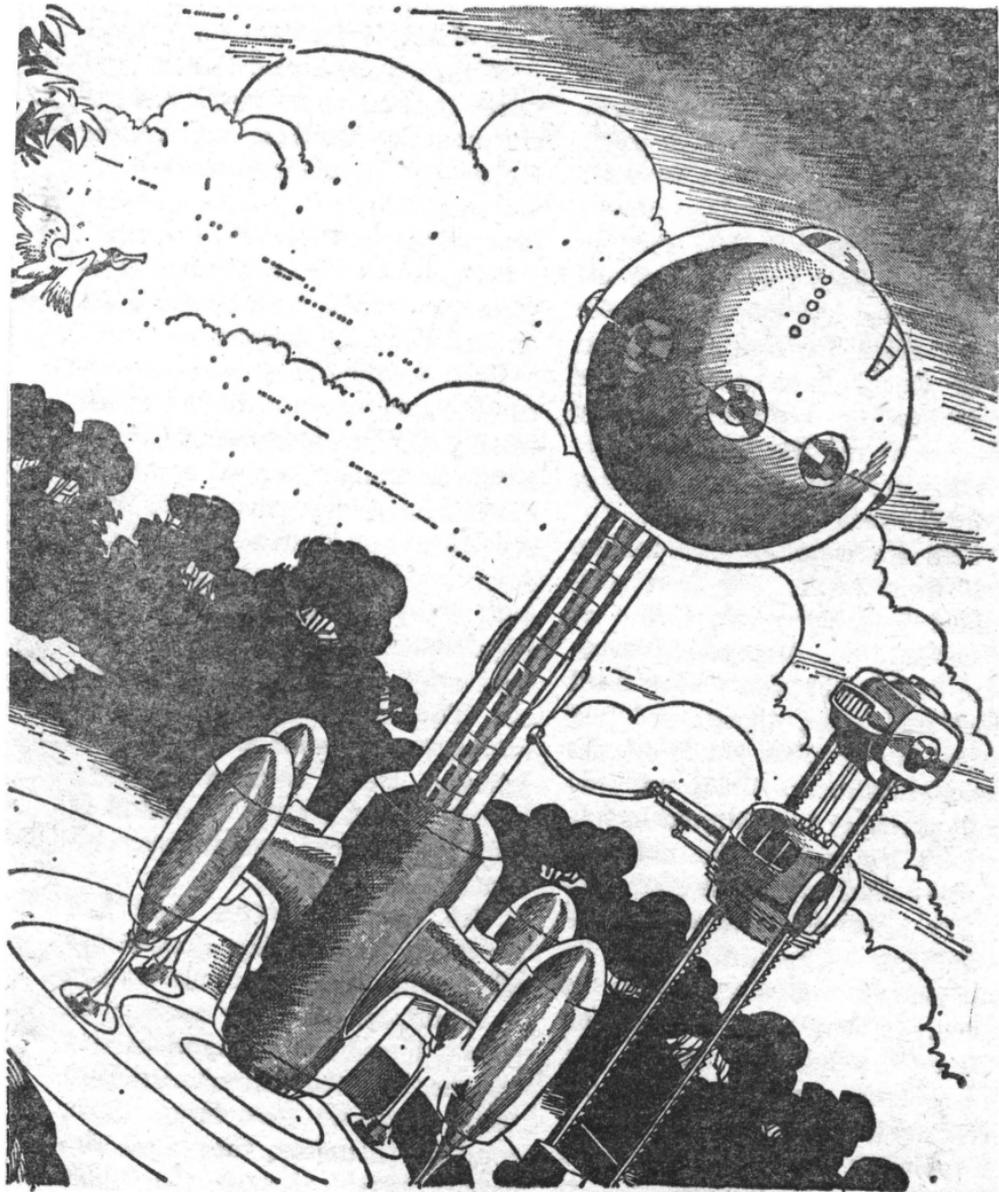
*How could an unintelligent beast
be superior to the brilliant Ayor?*

I

Stars can be bright, merciless
pins. Especially when one is
floating free among their sharp
needle-points, sans ship, sans nour-
ishment and sans oxygen.

We had striven mightily to over-
come the telekinetic effects of the
strange, unknown beast which lay
somewhere around or beyond the
third planet's orbit. Dington, who
had far stronger telekmass — mass-
sensing and telekinetic — faculties





than I, had brought his own tiny figure-eight-shaped form to the very brink of exhaustion in carrying my larger human-shaped mass as well as warm air beyond the reach of the seemingly irresistible beast.

Dingon could easily have made the trip back to Enithra in some twelve jumps. My body's greater demands for oxygen and our inability to replace energy consumed by each jump had stopped us here in outer space. On Enithra, Dingon and I would have more or less automatically replaced energy drains from the life and food surrounding us; here, no such complex energy proteins were available.

There we were — five million miles from home. We were surrounded by only a slight film of air, our ship had disappeared somewhere in the direction of the third planet and soon, though we had escaped the terrible clutch of the beast's telekinetic field, we too would probably be scattered in fine particles throughout the universe.

Time passed and anoxia approached. My mind dwelt most naturally on home — Enithra — and its lush violets and ultra-violets, its eternally seeking mass-sensing and telekinetic plant and animal life, our successful struggles against our hereditary enemies, the Tepen, and our grouping decision to study and to utilize direct phenomenon as well as indirect — telekmass — phenomenon.

Though I am human in form, I am Ayorian to my tiniest cell and I love our Enithra with every part of my body.

When my biological mother and father crashed on Enithra I was but six months old. Eme, one of the figure-eight Ayorians, noted that my neuronic structure was incomplete, preventing me from utilizing telekmass faculties. She helped me complete my growth, then accepted me as her twinning problem.

Each Ayorian must make a personal commitment aimed at either solving some philosophical, scientific, or other type of problem. When successfully solved, that Ayorian twins to become two child-like Ayorians, both shorter in stature with baby-like memory, but with improved capacity for solving problems originally accepted by its parent. Thus, for thousands of generations, the Ayorian magnetic form followed freely selected function, each twinning serving as a kind of radially-divergent evolutionary effect.

The Ayorian species itself had the analog to twinning. Periodically all Ayorian members combined cup to hemisphere of one another to form a long chain of Ayorians tied together by the characteristics of their magnetic structure. Then, speaking in unison, they made decisions which affected the whole species. These decisions, hopefully, permitted the species as a whole to

progress up the ladder of evolution, too. It was such a decision that led to our slaying the Tepen — an evil, degenerate offshoot of the Ayor.

I was first known as Spork, the moron, because of my childlike limitations of telek-mass. But once the Tepen were gone, caused primarily by change in the direction of Ayorian philosophical construct, I was fully accepted as an Ayorian adult though still called, not without some affection, Spork!

I was twelve Enithra years old when the Tepen were destroyed; I worked five years more to advance the Ayorians in the direct use of their environment.

Though sometimes suspecting that I would never twin as do other Ayorians, I accepted an additional twinning problem to advance the Ayor in their dual approach to life, my first being that accepted from Eme at her death, namely to find my purpose in life.

Toward the end of learning more about direct action and its implications in the real world, we conserved the Tepen citadel, the last remaining "city" of the Tepen which contained much of their knowledge and artifacts.

Until I was forced to use my body and muscles in continuous motion, like all Enithra life, patterns of movement across the planet and their meanings could be discerned easily by application of my telek-mass faculties.

I had first noticed how the Tepen, when moving across the valley floor, contrasted so strangely with their environment. Instead of teleporting from hummock to hummock as would the predatory Ettl, they seemed to flow, as though they were teleporting "continuously across an infinite set of points."

Of course, in walking or running, I, too, behaved like that; but it was not so easy to observe myself against the background of other Enithra life.

Using this concept as a starting point, I instructed the Ayor in concepts of direct manipulation of their environment; as I had once done for the Ayorian children, I used my own body to convey the message. I demonstrated how hands and arms could be used to lift, pull, bend and push things; I even demonstrated the novel way of drinking which I had discovered. Instead of teleporting water directly to my mouth or stomach, I cupped my hands to hold the water, then bent to drink from my hands.

Once these simpler concepts had been satisfactorily absorbed by the Ayors, I moved on to the development of tools from the environment around. For example, sticks could be used as levers, spears, clubs — each multiplying the weaker action of my muscles in some manner.

They enthusiastically joined in the invention of these simpler tools

since, as past masters of abstract concept, they could easily compute anticipated effects from geometrical and physical energy considerations. Thus, they could often correctly predict the final outcome of a new and novel tool before its actual construction.

As I saw it, my biggest job was to keep the Ayor's attention on the actual testing of their conjectures; for they had had thousands of years of heredity against which to fight, when only indirect twinning concepts were of importance and to this end I also applied myself diligently with some degree of success.

Of course, always the children were most plastic. Indeed, without their plasticity there would have been no Ayorian race for they were the ones who had held my conceptual seeds enabling the Ayorian race to discover their racial obstacle during the time of grouping. Each child who successfully matured to reach adulthood eventually twinned to become two new children, each of whom were even more capable of comprehending and handling direct action without any loss of their indirect action faculties.

I became the oldest untwinned Ayorian child, which was fortunate since there was indeed much to teach our one hundred thousand members!

I was seventeen Enithra years old when the second ship came.

All life on Enithra plucks eternally, within its sphere of capability, for nutrients. The tiniest life which I can sense with my mass receptor reaches out with a telekmass field truly enormous for its small size; it teleports minerals, water and even tiny energy packets into its vacuoles.

On up the scale of plant and animal life, each form takes dead or living matter in the same way, depending upon its nature. Thus, the beautiful violet and ultra-violet jungle growth spreads protective membranes over desired nourishment, struggling always against other life for its share of life requirements.

The predatory Ettel teleports the fat, stupid Cien into its huge stomach sack; the Cien voraciously teleports all kinds of debris into its huge stomach. In the air, floating puff-balls reach out with frail fields hoping to catch dust motes or light-energy packets which, once caught, are teleported to interiors sometimes in sufficient quantity to light like stars in the sky. While, in the many streams surrounded by our beautiful violet and ultra-violet vegetation, all manner of life extend mass-sensors in weird and complex patterns to sense, catch, and teleport organic debris or live forms for food.

It is easy to understand that one without telekmass faculties is at

decided disadvantage on Enithra where even ultra-dense matter is as thin air to these faculties.

All Enithra life plucks at one another for food and only those who can generate stronger protective telekmass fields can survive the weaker.

I was fortunate that Eme observed my lack so early, for, by completing neuronc growths inside my body, she provided me with the means for self-protection on Enithra.

Unfortunately, when the second ship arrived, none noticed for a time and telekmass mechanisms in all plant and animal life surrounding the downed craft must have been instantaneously attracted to the rich, unprotected life ingredients. Perhaps the landing area was poor in needed minerals for the first to go were minerals from the human bodies inside the craft!

One of the children playing the nut tree game stumbled on the craft first. Ouble — the one who made the discovery — teleported from the sunny side of the planet to tell me of his discovery.

Thunder and lightning were shaking the sky and all around me the rain spattered against my slightly extended telekinetic field, while at every side plants were struggling against one another to capture the finely dissolved nutrients accompanying the rain drops.

Ouble appeared before me, creat-

ing another shell of spattering rain, to state in his quiet way, "A second ship has crashed. We think you should be there."

At my request, several Ayorians moved me to the site immediately. Though I could have made the trip, forty miles per jump was more time-consuming than the situation seemed to call for.

It takes somewhat longer to describe my impressions than I would like. In nearly simultaneous order, I sensed the pitted metal caused primarily by surrounding plant life, the two shallow graves filled with rapidly disappearing bodies, and the extremely weakened human being who was slowly, methodically shoveling dirt into the graves. Then it was that the fantastic thought occurred to me in almost blinding boldness, "Could it be that this other, who is so much like me, knows nothing of indirect action?"

With my light receptors I could see the human utilize direct action only, to dig dirt and move it, to breathe, to perceive and to move his body. Although I did the same in varying combinations at various times, *this* human was not even protected from Enithra plant and animal life around us, which probably was the reason for his weakened condition!

Pitting of the ship and the dead humans in the grave below was also caused by the same source —

nothing had protection from our ever-seeking life!

Once I had extended my personal protective field around the ailing human and his ship, I spoke to one of the children. "Go to the Tepen citadel for one of their telekmass protectors."

By the time the human had raised his head to take notice of my sudden presence, the child was back with the device and I ignored the visitor until the protective field held the whole area safe.

Turning back to him I thought, "How strange is his appearance!"

Though I had often looked at my own darkened features in smooth water and smooth metal mirrors, my standard of beauty was the symmetrical shape of the Ayorian.

Until now I hadn't realized how truly ugly I must be.

From the body portion, two arms hung loosely to lean on the shovel while his legs shivered with sickness and fatigue. I extended my mass sensors to take note of how calcium had been pitted from his bones. His head was thatched with yellow, tallow-like hair, as was mine; his light receptors were deep violet, as were mine; but his facial features were rounded where mine were lean and craggy.

Now his light receptors opened wide with astonishment at my presence. I thought nothing of it at the time, but it wasn't my sudden, naked appearance from out of the

dense jungle which had surprised him so — it was my floating about two feet off the ground!

When I telekmassed dirt into the shallow graves to complete his difficult labors I was rewarded with even more peculiar, uninterpretable expressions over his face.

Though I was Spork, the Ayorian moron, I was not so dumb as to think this person would know either Ayorian or the dead Tepen language, though I tried both.

I thought long and hard, then remembering my six-month-old recall experience from my early childhood, I mimicked my dead father's voice to say: "Though we headed the house of the galactic council, Patricia, the sabotage was inevitable. We may be genetically superior, but to the common people we are still only human. Place the baby in the life container now!"

Our visitor fainted!

II

I telekmassed his body inside the ship to a strange platform covered with rectangular square patterns of imitation fibers and knitted with springy materials beneath; then, I let my sensors pass through his body, comparing his chemistry to mine.

Calcium and phosphorus were seriously lacking as well as certain complex proteins. I reached into the surrounding forest to recover

calcium from various soft mushy growths — probably the same ones which caused his depletion — and replaced the calcium. The phosphorus was retrieved from puff-balls in the air surrounding the ship.

When I checked his blood against mine, I noted certain chemicals which performed similar functions to some of mine, yet had minor structural and quantitative differences. Just as the Ayor, upon twinning have different personal magnetic structures due to differences in alignment of their magnetic fields, humans too had normal differences.

“Better not change those!” I thought.

Otherwise, his blood was sadly lacking in iron; any of the jungle trees around us would reach for such a rich supply. I reached deep into the soil of Enithra to teleport molecules of iron, sulphur and oxygen. I mixed these minerals with water and placed them inside his stomach where I was gratified to sense its rapid absorption for manufacture of red-blood platelets.

When the limits of my knowledge had been reached and I dared not go further, he woke.

Only for a moment did his light receptors look at me; then he closed them again to sleep for many days. I filled his stomach with nourishment and took care of his biological needs during his period of recovery. Only once, when his heart

faltered, and I moved it in proper rhythm telekinetically, did I fear for his life. Afterward he gained health rapidly.

As once before with the Tepen, my struggle for language began. As with the Tepen, concrete nouns formed the easiest common referent, or so it seemed until I used the Ayorian children usually surrounding us as a word referent.

For days he had thought I was pointing to the air around us, or to the ship, or to something else, for he could not see the Ayor! He could not see ultra-violet reflections at all!

As we studied together, his strength returned and protein deficiencies were rapidly eliminated.

Looking back upon the experience, I now realize how I must have stared to see him chew and swallow every bit of food. Even to this day I find it a most fascinating phenomenon! The tongue and mouth are properly used for taste and talk. To use them, always, for swallowing is nearly beyond comprehension!

Other things, such as the clothes over his body, were odd, too — stiff collar and decoration, stiffly pressed blue pants, bright red shirt, buckles, shoes and even smaller clothes underneath next to his skin. As odd as all these things were, none could compare with his complete inability to mass-sense or to teleport. “If the



Ayor call me a moron because of my limitations with these faculties, what should we call our visitor?" I wondered.

Months of language training from Toby Randolph — our visitor's name — enabled us to carry conversations beyond concrete nouns to somewhat higher levels of abstraction. Again I mimicked my father's phrase as I remembered it; he listened most carefully, but could not identify it.

Toby Randolph belonged to a far distant planet many parsecs distant and he belonged to the household of the two humans buried outside the ship. Though it was many months before I learned the meaning of his relationship to them, he described himself as a kind of "indentured slave-scientist" of their household.

Mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology were exceptionally easy languages for me to understand. They were quite precise in themselves; but more than this, I could extend my mass-sensor at least to the chemical level whenever firmer mental referents were required; physics and mathematics were quite similar to Ayorian philosophical games upon which I had already spent endless childhood hours.

Most difficult for me to understand were concepts such as money, art, stores, schools, culture and so on. No Ayorian equivalents could possibly be construed to represent

the concept of ownership, for example.

In his turn, he constantly exclaimed over how rapidly I could learn such abstract and complex concepts. To the Ayor I was Spork, the moron; to Toby I was Spork, the savage. I wondered if everyone knew what I was except me!

The most fantastic concept of all, however, was Toby's description of civilization. When the concept of continuous motion as opposed to discrete teleportation was so new to me and other Ayorians, how could we be expected easily to understand and mentally grasp images of billions of people moving continuously with time, not to mention plant seeds, animals and even sea creatures?

And what of the social organization behind such concepts? The nearest comparison here on Enithra were the now-dead Tepen who, though offshoots, were still from Ayorian stock!

I vowed then to find some way of visiting these strange lands to see and experience for myself!

With the aid of adult Ayorians, Toby's ship was brought back to our captured Tepen citadel where its vast scientific resources could be better studied. Toby Randolph proved to be an invaluable asset in the Ayorian struggle to learn the tools and concepts which accompany direct faculties. He helped the

Ayor, too, while I learned. These, being many times quicker intellectually than I, had long ago passed the mechanical leverage stage of tool use. With the arrival of Toby, their capabilities increased in geometric progression.

And twinning, too, increased geometrically. So many had twinned that only few remembered me as Spork, the child; though none would probably ever forget me as Spork, the moron.

We learned to read. My light receptors could move back and forth across a certain span of printed characters just so fast. My telek-mass sensor was quicker, leading Toby Randolph to believe that I had capabilities of eye span far greater than normally possible.

But I refused to learn writing with my fingers. Why should I spend valuable time moving a tracing instrument when, merely by mentally visualizing the complete set of symbols I wished to transcribe, I could instantaneously place corresponding marks on the page? After all, only a very tiny number of molecules on the page need be changed to effect a desired change in light transmission or reflection properties!

The years passed and overhead in the clear sky above the lush tangle of Enithra growths, the Ayorians again formed their grouping chain. This day, instead of hiding like skulking animals deep with-

in the bowels of Enithra's crust, the Ayor pridefully joined cup to hemisphere better than two hundred and fifty thousand strong, each jockeying for proper polarity position, all contributing their bodies and experiences in a long curving line crossing the sky from horizon to horizon.

Even Toby Randolph's company, with his special glasses enabling him to see the chain of ultra-violet bodies overhead, couldn't dispel my normal grouping gloom. Wasn't I an Ayor, too? Must I forever be left out of the grouping chain?

Normally the grouping lasted several weeks. This time, each individual Ayorian was so well aligned with the Ayorian racial goals that only days were spent.

When they broke, we were informed of their racial decision to penetrate even deeper the principles of direct action and associated scientific knowledge—they expected to be able to duplicate Toby Randolph's spacecraft.

Toby was astounded and delighted for in him must have been stimulated new visions of return to his civilization after all hope had gone.

I knew there was something more behind the Ayorian decision, however, for once the Ayor had accepted the principle of dual action, they fully realized their evolutionary progress lay in facing and surmounting ever-larger challenges.

Thus, the ship was to be reconstructed; Toby was to have his trip home; I would satisfy my curiosity regarding civilization — but far more important, the Ayor would accept new revolutionary challenges!

Were we Ayorians to be limited by only direct action faculties, as were the humans of Randolph's home planet, we too would need a complex civilization where specialists built the tools to build the tools to build the tools — perhaps to ten or twelve generations.

On the other hand, given the model to go by — his pitted ship — as well as the new wealth of information supplied to us, by principles of indirect action alone we could have reconstructed his ship. The process of reaching throughout the whole planet of Enirtha for appropriate elements, selecting them to properly prepared states of purity, and forming them with telekinetic energy to useful shapes was no more difficult than the normal Ayorian child's game of hide-and-seek.

But the adult Ayorian, though he could teleport himself about ten planetary diameters outward, would still have need for a ship when traveling across system or over galactic-wide distances, as well as need for direct action knowledge similar to the other intelligent beings most likely to be encountered in the universe.

Lack of complete linkage in the echelon of tools plus the more natural faculties of indirect action led us to compromise. When it was possible to visualize the tool required to make the desired item, we made the tool first, then did what was necessary to use it in making the desired item.

If we could not make the tool because of our insufficiency of knowledge, we used indirect action to make the item itself.

Toby Randolph's first response to the Ayorian ship-building decision was emotional in character; sober reflection on his part convinced him of its impossibility. "The drive," he said, "is essentially a one-hundred-per cent mass to energy converter. Its action chamber must be surrounded by a field of polarization which can only be formed by collapsing energy layers to form very dense materials.

"This process," he continued, "can only be accomplished by manipulation of exceedingly strong electro-gravitic fields far beyond Ayorian capacity to build or control."

The day was hot and humid, so all plant and animal life was at peak activity. Now, of course, I realize that such temperature and humidity changes often adversely affect the non-telekmass human, causing short temper and illogical reasoning. Perhaps that was Toby

Randolph's chief difficulty at the time. Then, too, I suppose I should have explained the Ayorian ability, other than mine, to reach below the molecular threshold with telekinetic energy. As it was, I assigned the problem to Ayorian children who, now knowing one of the uses to which the chamber of dense metal within which I was found after the crash of my parent's ship and which is always associated with a polarization barrier, re-shaped the chamber to Toby's demanding specifications.

Our visitor became quite emotional over the incident. "You are in contact with a superior civilization! You are lying to me!"

Only when the children created more of the dense metal would he believe; and, for the first time, it seemed he was now willing to accept my prior discussions of direct versus indirect faculties at their face value.

We developed a small mechanically generated telekmass field for Tony's self-protection so that he could journey safely away from the citadel. On every trip he would exclaim to me, "The colors are wrong. They should be green! There is no pattern, no continuity to the behavior of things! Seeds ripen, mature, and spring away too rapidly!"

"When nourishment is available within the sphere of the flower's telekmass action in sufficient quantity to construct the seed, why

should it wait for days?" I asked.

Though trained in the arts of objectivity, he retained his basically emotional nature, it seemed.

When I turned from the subject of Enithra flowers to the small Eman, an animal which is equally at home in water or on the land, he showed similar exasperation. The Eman had virtually no intelligence; its chief survival characteristic lay in its ability always to anticipate the teleported flight of certain seeds. When the seed arrived, the Eman found its sphere of influence well within the range of the newly deposited seed. From there it was but a moment until the seed lay inside the Eman's stomach.

"But there just can't be any way to know!" Toby insisted.

"Sometimes," I thought, "he is as stubborn in his way as the Ayor used to be in their way!"

Until the decision to build the ship, little attention had been placed on our planetary system or the stars beyond. Our planet Enithra has no moon. Although adult Ayorians could teleport 250,000 miles outward, air had to be teleported along with them. Only energy fields, stripped atoms and some few whole molecules, thinly scattered, were to be found there.

Though lacking in light receptors, their ability to mass-sense below the molecular level gave them fine reception of energy groupings scattered throughout their sky, resulting

in better knowledge of the stars and other energy sources than narrow range of visible light frequency alone might have done.

I grew up with the knowledge that our planetary system consisted of five planets surrounding a huge sun in elliptical orbits. We were the fourth planet from the sun and before visiting other worlds, such as the one represented by our visitor, we wished to know our own planetary system better.

The finished ship was a perfect duplicate of Tony Randolph's — slim, long-tapered with severe geometric lines from head to tail, clusters of matter conversion chambers surrounding its tail and terminated with stacked propulsion units and other interesting, unusual-to-Enithra features.

"Later," I thought, "we Ayorians will create original forms!"

Dingon, one of the Ayorians who had nearly reached his twinning period with the finish of the ship, was selected for our first trial run, though Toby Randolph protested that he should go. But the decision was to include only one human and one Ayor.

The ship raised easily; we adjusted the molecules of our body to compensate for the pull of acceleration as the ship swept upward with ever-increasing velocity.

What a unique experience it was for Dingon and me! Near us, we

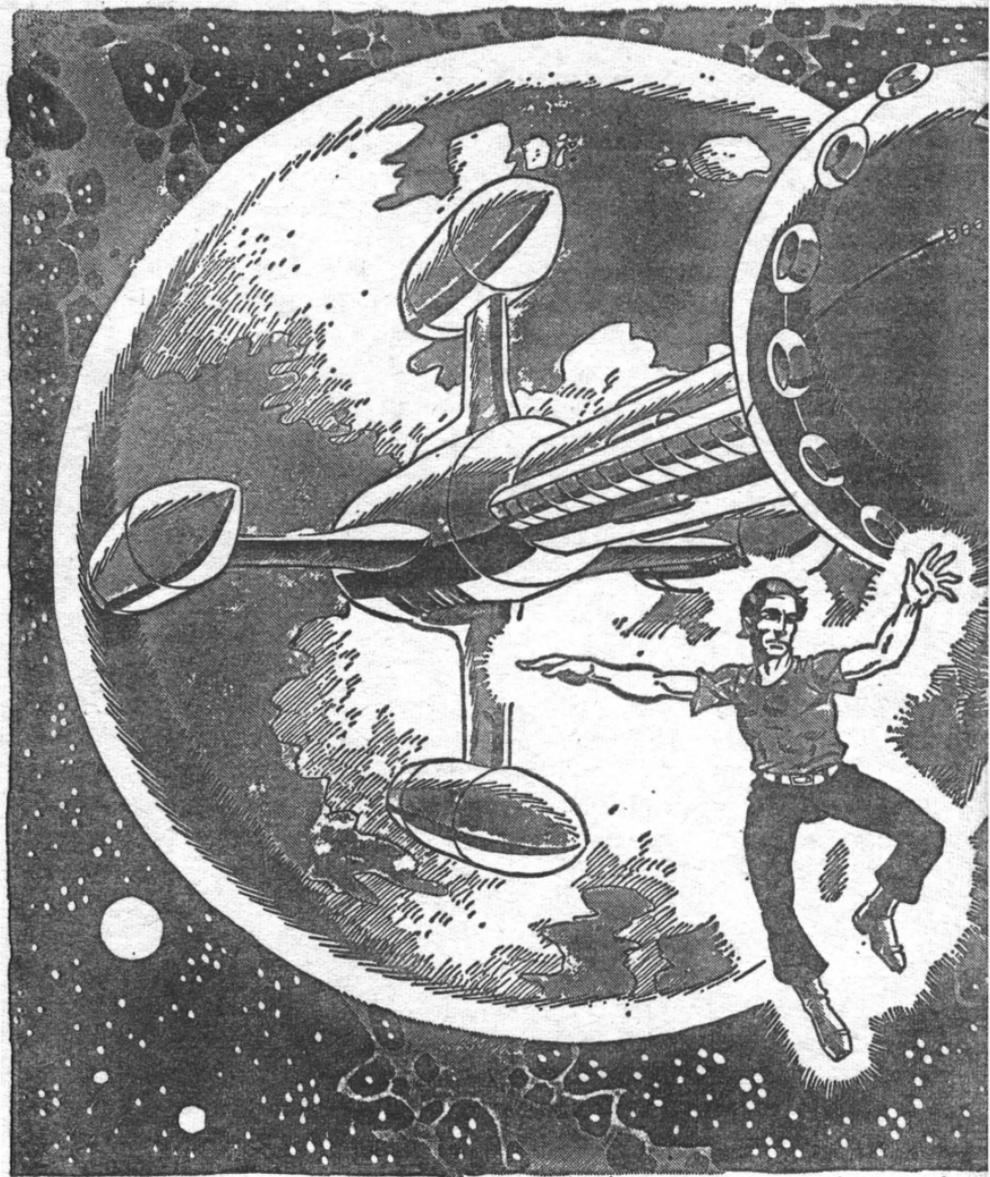
sensed the craft's solid state switching and other slight vibrations in the instrument board, the smooth flow of the air-exchanger and much other internal phenomenon. While far away, decreasing density of air molecules, made up of lighter and lighter fractions, swept past us.

The biggest change was the sudden silence. I don't mean the audible kind of silences; I mean the lack of Enithra's plucking telekinetic fingers. For all of Dingon's life, he had been exposed to the background of ever-seeking plant and animal life; and for eight of Enithra years, I had subconsciously countered these same probing fingers; but beyond the planet's atmosphere, at seventy miles, the planet's fingers decreased to nothing.

I can only say the silence was fantastic. I could extend my mass sensitivity nearly double my usual forty miles; Dingon could increase his to nearly half a million. Over half of our telekmass capacity had been unconsciously used to counteract Enithra life in our own self-protection!

I had half-way believed Toby Randolph when he said we were unique — the only planet to use and develop indirect faculties. Planet five was a certain refutation of his statement.

Unlike Enithra, planet five was colder and its vegetation was not so profuse; also unlike Enithra, it had





huge ice caps at both of its poles. But like Enithra, all of its primitive life forms followed the indirect action principle.

We landed in its warmest zone, near the equator. I sent my mass sensor up the steep cliff lying before our grounded craft and at the very top, lacking moisture and warmth as well as oxygen, were very primitive organisms.

Their feeble search through the rocks for water, oxygen and minerals could be easily sensed. When they encountered minerals containing needed chemicals, they separated the molecule from its binding force and the rocks slowly but surely succumbed to the demands of new life.

As my mass-sensor followed down the high mountain side there were encountered ever-increasingly complex patterns of life. Throughout most of the planet, oxygen was mixed with combinations of nitrogen and hydrogen; the plant growths reflected the differences of both energy and atmosphere.

"Someday," I thought, "life will become intelligent even here!"

We scouted around the planet. With his great telekmass range, Dingon now knew it intimately, of course.

Across the narrow, warm band which represented planet five's equator, was a form of life related to us. Where the Ayorian was

shaped like a figure eight, his primitive counterpart on this planet was like two eights laid one over the other at right angles — like Toby's description of a four-leaf clover.

"Finding the true relationship between life of both planets should one day provide the Ayorian with many twinning problems," I thought.

We pushed off from the fifth planet to explore the other three unknowns in our planetary system. Out in space, we were once again able to extend our mass sensors through approximately double their normal volume. Just for fun, Dingon and I teleported outside the ship. We took air with us and kept it under pressure. My light receptors could see the brilliant steady flow of our stars in every direction; it was so beautiful! How I wanted to explain its sight to Dingon!

He, in his turn, wanted very much to explain the fine sensitivity of energy patterns which he could sense below my threshold level!

We passed the orbit of Enithra and swung in toward where planet three would soon be. We were perhaps three or four million miles away from Enithra's orbit when Dingon's far-probing mass sensor hit the telekinetic field. He knew immediately the nature of its strength. "Turn back — quickly!" he shouted with panic in his thoughts.

I flicked the switches with my mind rapidly heeding his cry; but as fast as I was, the new telekinetic

field was faster. Long, thin, sensitive strands of telekinetic energy had been laid well beyond the orbit of the third planet. These strands, not unlike the mechanical traps of the dead Tepen, were set only to sense usable chemicals. When such was encountered, the full force of some gigantic being impressed its will in that direction to grasp fully and teleport its prey.

The field slugged us like some gigantic gravitational well.

III

We struggled against the huge field with every molecule of our beings. We could not carry ourselves and the ship, which was protected with its own mechanically generated field, against that all-demanding force. Dingon teleported us both to his now-shortened two hundred-thousand mile range, well beyond the reach of the bestial field.

With only small amounts of air held telekinetically tight around us, we now had some five to six million miles of nearly empty space between us and Enithra.

When I become moody, or otherwise emotional — a state foreign to the biological Ayorians — I tend to escape my troubles by letting my thinking processes dwell on Enithra and its beloved ecology. Loneliness in space and near death brought no exceptions to the rule.

On Enithra there exists a tough mammal, which we call the Fervra, addicted to a world-swinging nomadic existence. Though there are few deserts and all of small consequence, the Fervra passes directly through these climatic zones without regard to consequences, unlike other mammals of equally short telekmass range. Whenever food becomes sparse, the Fervra teleports fats from its own body to its stomach sack, thus living on itself during famine periods.

My mind now dwelled on the interesting habits of the Fervra as I let my body swing around and around, watching the stars circle about me. It was then the insight which saved our lives penetrated my conscious thought!

“Will fat and protein from my larger body supply Dingon while he teleports us?” I wondered.

I reached into the fat layers of my body and teleported thin layers into Dingon’s stomach. Quickly realizing my purpose, he molded the ingredients to suit his own needs, then caused us to jump nearly half way home before all of my body fat was gone.

I reached into my body again, taking liberally of my blood and this brought us nearly home. Now in weakened state, I reached feebly into the long stranded fibers of my big muscles selecting every hundredth strand. I remember no more, for I lost consciousness then!

Even with Ayorian assistance, many months passed while my body mended. Not yet could the Ayorian mind repair the life cell itself and I had dangerously exhausted many of the organs of my body when supplying Dingon with the materials from which he could gain the tremendous energies needed to teleport us through millions of miles of space.

The next time of grouping came and we puzzled over this apparently new form of life—so tremendously powerful, it could reach across millions of miles of space to grasp mass the size of our rocket.

On this portion of Enithra, on this particular day, the weather was cool and the wind blew gently across the rapidly shifting plant forms. Toby Randolph, now dressed in what he called workclothes, sat near the grouping area, looking somewhat bug-eyed because of his ultra-violet glasses.

High overhead in an arc as long as the horizon, weaving in several S-shaped curves across the sky, were the Ayor, clasping one another with cup to hemisphere.

With my pitifully weak magnetic field attached to single cells in uncoordinated array, even I could feel the mighty pulsing of their joint field as permutations and combinations of individual Ayorian experiences moved swiftly back and forth along the chain.

"What are they doing this time?" Toby asked. "I've seen them like this before, but I still don't believe it."

I knew his comments were merely rhetorical, for I had explained the grouping phenomenon many times before.

"Listen, Toby! Soon their experiences will be completely shared and they will begin to question and make decisions."

Booming like Enithra thunder as it rolls between peaks of broadly u-shaped valleys, their joint comments began:

"Can Spork and Dingon elaborate on the giant telekinetic field of their trip?"

Dingon passed his personal experiences in detail along the chain and I confirmed his comments by verbal response, not having near the detail available to Dingon.

"Would that giant field be a mechanically generated one created by the evil Tepen or organisms like the evil Tepen?" they asked in unison.

Dingon's experience replied, but they still answered together: "No! The quality was different. It was an organically generated field."

"How far does the field extend into space?"

"Unknown."

"What are its limitations?"

"Unknown."

"Can the joint power of our whole race handle the field?"

"No!" was the joint reply.

"Where is the beast located?"

"Unknown."

"What are the beast's characteristics?"

"It is primitive; it is grasping, voraciously, blindly in hunger; it needs materials of all kinds—metals protoplasm, chemicals and so forth; it is fantastically powerful — far more so than anything previously imagined by the Ayor."

The sun split its ultra-violet beams between Tepen towers when the Ayor grouping chain broke and I followed Toby Randolph into the Tepen chamber.

The remainder of the year passed; I turned nineteen and the puzzle remained with us. Now the time of grouping was on us again and Toby was depressed again, having lost his chance, he thought, of returning home.

Though I had probed both Toby Randolph's and Ayorian memories mercilessly for some clue, we just didn't have sufficient data upon which to build a decent conjecture. And, much like a year ago, Toby and I sat near Enithra's surface, while overhead across the horizon, doubled and re-doubled, were the linked Ayorians. We waited. Then with some respect to my limitations, the group spoke in unison: "We must re-structure the Tepen field which once held nearly the whole of the Ayor in captivity. We con-

ceive this new, mindless entity to be our new racial twinning problem."

Imagine! Once I had to force the Ayor to face their immediate Tepen murderers. Now, an entity millions of miles away, far stronger than the Ayor, was pronounced to be their racial twinning problem! How fast my brethren grew!

III

I only hoped the problem would not prove too great for us!

All knew that telekmass faculties reached deeply beyond the spatial structure of ordinary material concepts to tap "triggers" which caused discrete jumps of objects from point to point. This was why we labeled our faculties as being indirect instead of direct.

Our problem was not so much to learn the Tepen trick of artificially inducing the field as to learn how to strengthen it.

Our nervous structure was capable of assimilating large quantities of chemically formed energy which we used to open the door, so to speak, to reach through to the triggers. Once the triggers were reached, virtually zero energy was involved in the teleportation of mass or in the communication back to us on the state and structure of the mass.

A precise scientific statement of the trigger phenomenon involves

the complexities of shrinking space between points A and B by means of slowing all energies between the two points to some limiting factor — exactly the opposite from the phenomenon observed whenever we note the ultra-violet shift of a far off galaxy as the universe expands in toto.

When all energy within a particular sphere of influence has slowed sufficiently, space contracts and two points become contiguous, but only from particular points of view.

We Ayorians, by means of indirect faculties, could trigger the phenomenon in both directions. Our chief problem, then, was in opening the door, after which no energy at all was required to maintain its effect.

On Enithra, the tiny one-celled life teleported nutrients as far as one hundred cellular diameters; yet, it could do nothing to resist the tiny water creatures which teleported the one-celled life to its own digestive system by the millions. The one-celled solution for survival was to increase its twinning rate, multiplying itself swiftly.

Meanwhile the Yal, which fed on such one-celled life, could in no way resist the Ries; and, the Ries could not resist the voracious, stupid Cien who in turn could not resist the predatory Ettl.

Nowhere in the ecological niche of Enithra life did one miss a thread leading always to the Ayor on top.

Now, in our own planetary system, it appeared that some *unintelligent* entity was superior to the brilliant Ayor!

The children discovered the first clue. When asked to create the dense material with its associated shield of polarization for Toby Randolph's benefit, a new game had become traditional among the children. Whoever could create the densest material was declared its winner.

On a certain day, Nitque lost track of his created mass. Piqued with curiosity, the children asked Nitque to repeat the phenomenon while they observed. Some thirty children were holding the tiny pin-point of dense material as it snapped out of its spatial orientation through a minute "hole", but the children's minds followed easily finding it among the telekinetic triggers.

Mass, another form of energy, when condensed to its ultimate, stressed the fabric of space sufficiently to open normal space to these telekinetic triggers, and, it seemed the more mass per unit of volume, the more stress; hence, the more trigger access and the more field power, but not in exactly a proportional relation.

We stored the heaviest possible mass just short of the point of diminishing return in our next ship. By attaching the Tepen-type machine to our spatial holes we hoped

to generate a truly strong telekinetic field capable of resisting the fantastic being of outer space.

Nonetheless, when the time came, Dingon and I prepared nutrients to hang around our bodies should we have need of returning in the same awkward manner as before.

The sun was just rising above the horizon as our new ship rose flawlessly as before. The trip, though of interest to such newcomers to space as we, held no new phenomenon and we progressed well until Dingon's half-million-mile range touched the beast at the fringes of the beast's searching tendrils.

It was then I felt the full power of the beast as he sprang toward us.

Dingon pushed our prepared dense mass over its spatial threshold, the Topen machinery caught, generating its strong telekinetic field and I thought: "Now we shall see what happens when the irresistible force meets the immovable object."

Unfortunately we were not exactly immovable!

Stronger and stronger the beast's field became, while our field stayed at constant strength.

Hour after hour we crept through his field, never daring to relax. Near the orbit of the third planet, the beast's intensity jumped even higher in easily felt increments; it became apparent to both of us that our present equipment was not yet strong enough.

I mentally snapped the controls, causing us to turn; the beast, perhaps instinctively sensing our purpose, doubled and redoubled its efforts.

Under heavy attack from the beast, both Dingon and I felt we were participating in some gigantic squeezing game; though we added our own puny efforts to those of our machinery, the beast's resources seemed endless.

Slower our ship traveled, though its fuel converted to energy at maximum rate. Was this finally to be my end? I wondered if all our personal efforts, our life's evolutionary purpose, was merely to provide chemical feed to an insatiable monster? If so, to what ultimate purpose? Was this to be the answer to my twinning problem: What is my true purpose in life?

Jerking my mind from such thoughts, I asked Dingon to increase the rate at which fuel was being converted, hoping that the chamber could stand the strain.

The ship shuddered, not end to end, or side to side, but molecule by molecule; and we could sense shudder. The conflicting telekinetic fields caused the new phenomenon.

But the ship leaped forward successfully to leave the grasp of the beast behind and we felt great relief as we sensed the last of his tendrils behind us.

Our sigh was premature for the struggle had had its effect on every atom under our control; part of the ship's atoms had vibrated in one direction while adjacent atoms vibrated in opposite directions. Weaknesses developed, holes grew, materials pitted; then the ship itself began to fall apart.

With all our being, Dington and I struggled to hold the ship together to no avail. Then it failed and we were out in space again, without ship.

This time sufficiently braced with nutrients hanging around our bodies, we leisurely teleported our way home.

Our trip was not a total loss. We had penetrated much deeper, for one thing. And another phenomenon correlated in our minds: first was the case of Toby Randolph and his rapidly sickening "house masters." At the time I had thought the valley of their landing lacked minerals and other easy nutrients causing the valley's life forms to leap on the ship as a new, easy source. Now I wondered if Toby's ship had traveled within grazing distance of the monster! If so, just a fleeting touch could easily have explained the rapid depletion of vital proteins and minerals from both humans and ship.

Confirmation could be obtained from Toby and his ship's computers and their records. But what about my own parents' flight? Was

my very presence on Enithra caused by the beast and his action against my parents' ship?

We re-computed the relative positions of all planets as they had been two years ago as well as the position of Toby's ship. He had indeed grazed the fringes of the beast.

By simple deduction, this placed the monster beyond the third planet, further in toward the sun. Since nothing capable of being sensed lay between the orbits of the third and second planet, this raised an even more astounding conjecture; for if the monster was on the second planet, it was capable of extending its telekmass sensor some 24,000,000 miles in radius. We Ayorians, even as a complete grouping entity, were yet thousands of generations away from that kind of range and power!

IV

We Ayorians had indeed selected a worthy racial twinning problem!

The building of ships had almost become a kind of instinctive reflex — so much of that chemical in this quantity, structured just so; add a little of this; hold it in a certain way; weld the metal together telekinetically — and so the third ship was built.

It was constructed similar to the second ship, only stronger and bigger. Our whole intent this time was



to learn about the beast's limitations and exact location. If the beast were located on a planet, two possible means of its control were suggested. At our present state of technological development, everyone realized that any thought of killing the beast was pure fantasy.

On our third trip, Diagon and I skirted the edge of the beast's sensory tendrils. Dington cast his half-million-mile sensory field outward until just barely grazing the beast's, then signalled me to reverse direction rapidly before the beast could launch an all out attack.

From every direction we repeated the procedure until our spatial map was complete.

Take a ball and place a hundred arrows around it pointing directly toward the ball's center. Now move the ball in an egg shaped orbit around, say, a bright lamp. Keep in mind the locus of points of the arrows around the egg-shaped path representing successive time points.

This spatial graph made it quite clear that the beast was located on planet two.

Since the beast was bracketed between the first and third planet, at certain times of the year the beast was capable of reaching either planet, probably to strip them of their life and minerals until relative orbital positions changed. Our ship had reached inside the orbit of the third planet. Based on

this knowledge, plus estimates of the beast's strength, we planned ahead.

The new ship was to be capable of landing on either the first or third planet without undue stress from the beast of planet two. It had to be huge, since the mass of the required dense metal used for triggering our enlarged telekinetic field required abnormal structural bracings. To avoid stripping our beautiful planet of Enithra for minerals in the quantities needed for our new ship, most of the ship-building Ayor moved to the fifth planet. Within a matter of weeks, assembled in orbit and nearly twenty miles long, the engineering feat which would assist us in capturing the beast of planet two was finished.

Nearly one thousand adult Ayorians were loaded aboard the new ship to assist in handling and tipping the dense mass which was to provide us with our extra-powerful protective field. Other Ayorians operated and sensed the special telekinetic control instruments which controlled the ship.

We swung outward with ponderous slowness entirely unlike our earlier trips. We plodded onward until we swung around planet three at approximately seventy miles up, now just barely able to sense the beast's frantic efforts to grasp us. Below us was

the most fantastic sight; the planet had no gaseous envelope, no water, methane or ammonia. There were no features anywhere — nothing except a tiny rounded ball of radioactive materials — ingredients unwanted by the beast of planet two.

Planet one, too, proved to consist of beast-swept radioactive debris; and it now became clear why the beast extended itself into empty space so far in search of random debris to satisfy its hunger. Long ago, it had used every non-radioactive ingredient of both planets one and three!

The return to Enithra was uneventful, though filled with anticipation for our next stage of preparations. Our cumbersome ship was left high in orbit while we teleported to Enithra's surface.

I made my first jump from sixty miles up, then fell free for a few minutes, receiving such an exhilarating experience I vowed to repeat the game again during more peaceful times.

Down below me, shimmering across the hundreds of miles of planet, was the violet and ultraviolet valleys of Enithra. On one side of me was Enithra's only large body of water; in front of me was the wandering river near our captured citadel; and everywhere I could see as well as sense, were the shifting, jumping changes of animal and plant life I loved so well. It made me feel good.

Mathematical computations showed the beast to be of planetary size.

Apparently life based upon the principles of indirect action was common to our whole planetary system since it was found on planets two, five and four. It was not unreasonable to suppose that planets one, two and three had also developed to our form of life.

During evolutionary branchings some mindless creature had become dominant on planet two, where its voracious appetite led it to consume not only all other life but all except the most useless of elemental materials.

As the being grew in size, telekinetic structures must have been formed internally to support its fantastic volume while internal indirect action sensory organs must have developed to form and speed nutrients from one portion of its huge bulk to another once they arrived at each receptor site.

When the mindless creature had consumed all nutrients on its own planet, or even before this happened, it must have had sufficient telekinetic power to reach across space to its nearest neighbor, planet one, at certain times of the year. Then having voraciously swept planet one clean of all useful materials, it turned its blind insatiable appetite toward the more distant planet three.

One could easily imagine how it

must have struggled time and again to reach the more distant planet, always failing but, in its drive to live, always learning new means for focusing and reinforcing its telekinetic pseudopods.

Then one day, at the proper time of year, a tip of its reaching finger touched planet three's surface, after which an avalanche of materials followed back into its hollowed belly until finally even planet three was swept clean of all but the most unusable radio-active debris.

What then? Planet four — Enithra, of course!

But Enithra was so far distant from planet two that hundreds of thousands of years must pass while the beast learned to sweep space for atom-sized debris garnished occasionally by meteorite or chance space-ship, collecting only enough nourishment to maintain life; never enough to pick the Enithra plum beyond.

The radio-active debris unwanted by the beast, though small, proved sufficiently dense to provide the base upon which our telekmass protective screens could be assembled. The dense mass which would provide us with the required power, once pushed through normal space, had been scooped from the bowels of our own planet five.

The residue of planets one and three followed orbits which sometimes caused one or the other to be far beyond the beast's range. But

always, at least one of the covering fields surrounded the beast and sometimes both.

Once the beast was successfully caged, we landed on its leathery surface with impunity. Unlike anything ever before imagined by us. Ayor, the beast was perfectly spherical and of nearly three times the volume of Enithra.

Ayorian faculties were necessarily limited to the beast's surface. Had we been so foolhardy as to probe our protective field, the beast, from his own interior, would certainly be instantly in command. Speculations on novel internal telekmass faculties continued to explain both the unnatural size and perfect sphericity of the beast.

Had we really captured the beast? Was it fastened there now — would it solve its new evolutionary challenge within a short time, to rise again in renewed wrath and energy?

What could such tiny energy units as we Ayorians actually do to something as gigantic and ancient as this beast? We were incapable of killing it, yet we had the audacity to announce its successful capture!

How long before chance events tore our trap apart? A particularly heavy meteor of just the right vector could easily tear through our feeble physical object barrier surrounding our telekmass generators

on either of the planets one or three. What then? Would the beast find sufficient intelligence and means somehow to destroy us after all?

Who knew what the beast was really capable of doing? When I could not understand all the workings of the tiny Ayorians whose bodies were only half as tall as mine and half as wide, could I, or any other Ayorian truly expect to know the inner workings of a beast three times the volume of our whole planet?

I felt uneasy about our solution but recognized it as the best that could be done at our stage of technical development.

"Someday," I thought, "we Ayorians must learn how to destroy this beast. What skill and technology is ours is not yet capable of its sure destruction!"

Toby Randolph found our beautiful violet and ultra-violet jungle with its myriads of teleporting insects and animal life, depressing in spirit. He was therefore delighted with my decision to return with him to civilization.

Our first Ayorian problem became evident when I gave Arl, one of the twinned children of my former partner Dingon, permission to accompany us. Always before, for thousands of generations back, we Ayors had been restricted to one planet and each year *all* Ayor except me joined in the grouping.

If I were to remove one of the grouping Ayors, would the race lose some of its evolutionary impetus? Further, would Arl himself still be capable of personal twinning advancement when no longer free to join the annual grouping?

Many weeks were spent contemplating these questions while Toby fretted and fussed in his anxiety to return home.

I was now slightly over nineteen Enithra years old and anxious to continue with my own twinning problem which I had taken from Eme: What was my purpose in life and who was I? Yet, I couldn't press my own twinning with possible sacrifice to either Arl or my whole race.

Unwilling to cause even the slightest damage to any of my brothers and while deep in thought, I wandered out of the citadel to the cool of the beautiful forest surrounding us. My mind relaxed while my body, using its muscles in direct action, moved continuously from point to point along the cool, mossy floor.

At my feet I could perceive the mass-sensing tendrils of the jungle moss reaching below the ground, jerkily searching for mineral, water and oxygen.

Some nutrients were easily teleported to proper portions of the tiny plant while the sweet odors of its flowers changed texture from moment to moment and its seeds grew to mature and burst forth in new

seed of teleported flight, landing, hopefully, in rich soil to begin the cycle anew.

Here and there I sensed the small mindless insect, called the Iet, which, like the Eman, placed itself exactly near the expected arrival point of maturing seed to wait for its appearance; then reaching out with its own tiny mass sensor, it quickly teleported portions of the newly created seed to its stomach.

As I physically walked through the telekinetic plucking of other life forms I wondered: "Since each ecological niche has been filled on Enithra, and we Ayor are the highest, why are we afraid to separate from the group? Even the tiny seeds of the moss at my feet spread outward in new and different directions seeking the opportunity to spread its kind in new places. What is so unique about the Ayor as to cause such strong need for grouping each Enithra cycle?"

As my body continued to practice direct action motion, my mind roamed from jungle object to abstract thought in relaxed, random order. I let my mind soak in the whole of the jungle surrounding me to the very limit of my forty-mile radius. I could sense Ayorian children at play in one direction while in another I could watch the predatory Ettel teleport from spot to spot to come within range of its customary dinner.

On my right, perhaps a half a mile away, was a whitish puffstick growth rare to this part of the jungle. In some little state of curiosity, I focused my attention on its slow growth. Its customary nourishment was oxygen, nitrogen, carbon, and water from the air. I sensed it reaching for these ingredients; then, as it teleported each to itself, it quickly reassembled the molecules in complex patterns to form new parts of itself. As I walked and observed, the puffstick grew ever-larger but at a rate much slower than most other Enithra plant growth. When it became as big as my head, it teleported all parts of itself; some of the fragments passed completely out of my forty-mile sensing range. It had a truly remarkable range when compared to its other weaker capabilities!

The portions landing within my sensing field began to grow as had its parent, except for those which found themselves providing nourishment for other insects and stronger plants.

Then it was that the puffstick activity triggered my next thoughts: "How will the Ayor successfully advance in their group twinning cycle if they are to be limited to the size of one grouping? Since they place their bodies one to the other, forming a long chain consisting of all the Ayor, eventually their population will number so many that the time involved in

sharing each experience in every permutation will take longer than the total time period between grouping cycles!"

For generations the Ayor had numbered no more than one hundred thousand; when the Tepen were defeated, the Ayor grew swiftly in number. Not only were they no longer preyed upon by Tepen, but individuals were twinning more rapidly as they individually undertook new challenges of direct action principles; now, they numbered better than 400,000.

I knew my reasoning must be correct; but could I convince the Ayor? Next grouping was nearly a year away, and this was so long to wait in pursuit of my twinning problem!

Also, why did the Ayor meet only once each year? Could they successfully group whenever desired instead of periodically?

My musings continued into the dusk; my thoughts stirred endlessly throughout the night. In the morning I hesitatingly and in stumbling manner posed these basic questions to my brethren. They responded by tests and found they

could group at will; and while another long cherished Ayorian tradition fell, from high overhead in the cool of the evening, their newest grouping nearly hid all of the stars as they jointly reviewed my newest point of philosophy far into the next day.

Their group decision emphatically favored distribution and dispersion of separate Ayorian nuclei as far and as wide as possible throughout the stars.

I was greatly pleased, for now we Ayorians would survive and grow in many new and successful patterns!

Instead of just Arl, then, I took nearly one hundred thousand of my brethren. We built a new, larger ship, then took our leave from Eathra.

Now free of the dangerous probing tentacles of the beast of planet two, we directed our course through the center of our system toward the star Quations, the home star of Toby Randolph. He, of course, was mightily pleased; yet I wondered if his unnaturally quiet ways and increased anxiety didn't forecast difficulties for him ahead. **END**

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We traveled uneventfully past the orbit of the fifth planet before I tripped the so-called hyperspatial drive. To Toby Randolph the phenomenon was one of silence, motionless and lightlessness. To us Ayorians, the sensation was interesting, stimulating, surprising and otherwise opposite from Toby's experiences.

Once free of Enithra's eternally plucking telekinesis fingers, our indirect faculties doubled, mine to eighty miles while others reached their nearly-half-million-mile limits.

We held our senses outward prior to switching the deepspace drive, sensing infrequent molecules moving swiftly across our field of motion. But once hyperdrive switches were tripped, we suddenly sensed the trigger phenomenon which is involved in our activation of mass sensing and other telekinetic phenomenon.

There is no direct action phenomenon capable of describing the experience. First, we were sensing matter in and around the space ship by means of these triggers, then we were able to sense the triggers themselves.

Toby Randolph's civilization had developed by direct action means alone a phenomenon of indirect action which they called hyperspace.

But one difference was outstanding; natural teleportation did

not consume time, while hyper-drive did.

We entered the Quations system uneventfully. Toby Randolph's enthusiasm was contagious. He was ebullient, bubbling over with thoughts, words and anticipation for his civilization.

My fellow Ayorians, too, were excited. Soon they would fulfill the grouping decision to grow and to face the natural barriers in the outer universe, far beyond the Enithra system.

How did Spork feel? I was as naturally stimulated by the excitement around me. Who wouldn't be? And I was certainly curious about Toby's civilization as well as the biological source of my origin. Without question, the twinning problem I had accepted from Eme lay ahead, and this, too, prompted a great enthusiasm.

Down deep inside, though, Spork, the Ayorian moron, thought of his lush Enithra valleys. As to any other Ayorian, home is always Enithra!

END

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An IF First

Each month *If* brings you a new writer, never before published. This month's is Robert Weinberg, a 22-year-old New Jersey graduate student in mathematics. He's the president of one science fiction club and past president of another, and his hobbies have been largely devoted to reading and collecting science fiction. He has been writing since he was 14. We're sure you'll be glad to know there will be more stories by him in the near future.

DESTROYER

by ROBERT WEINBERG

*The Pale Horsemen rode again
— and now there were Five!*

I lived again! How many years it had been since my last revival I had no way of knowing. Nor did I care. All that mattered was that I lived again. Destruction walked again with death, to come hurtling from the void. The Four who were my brothers rode the skies, whispering in their harsh voices, welcoming me back to the living.

Disease called to me. "Brother, you have come to mount again? Will you ride with us, share our glories, crush those who seek to oppose us? Ride the night winds with us, brother!"

But of the four, Disease was the one whom I liked the least. His way was wasteful, never ceasing. He

took strong men and made them weak. He was the coward of the four. So I answered him not. Soon his horse could not keep up with the pace of my steed, the starship *Terror*. Next to approach me was Famine.

"Do you ride to destroy the crops, oh mightiest of all, my brother? Together, shall we make the worlds of men tremble again under our hoofs? Forget this mission of yours. Abandon the fools who bring you back to life only when they need your powers. Leave them, desert them. Come ride with us. We four are feared, but the five of us would be Gods! Ride with us, brother!"

His argument could not sway me,

for the automatic reflexes installed in my body would destroy my consciousness immediately upon the very thought of not fulfilling my mission. I had tried many times in the past, but those who created me knew too well the lusts which drove me. So, I rode onward, passing by Famine.

Huge, powerful War was the third to come alongside my ship as it began to spiral down to the planet of my destination. The stupid foe, dim-witted but so very powerful. Once he began to ride, no one had ever been able to stand in his path. No one, except me.

"Brother!" he cried out in anger. "Stop. I command you to return. You strive to cheat me of my due. Battle is brewing on this world below. It is not for you to upset my strivings. Go back, I tell you. You are one of us, but you work for those who oppose our aims. Go back!"

I laughed at him. I knew that he could not harm me, for I was as powerful as he, if not more so. And he knew it too. Every time I rode, he threatened. And every time, he moved out of my path. "Go, my brother," I called to him, not unkindly. "There are many other worlds on which wars rage. This one could be too costly. It must be stopped, and only I can do this. Begone."

Like mists before my eyes, the first three riders dissolved into

nothingness. Already, the *Terror* was roaring down into the planet's atmosphere. The automatic controls had already taken over. They would land the ship in a pre-designated spot, where it would not easily be found. My thoughts were on an entirely different subject. A final rider had come galloping out of the darkness. The cowl which covered his features did not muffle his voice, the sound of crying winds. "So, we ride together, again, brother. I have waited long for your return."

"There has been a long peace?"

"Three hundred years," he replied, sweeping out with his scythe. "My blade has grown dull with just normal oiling. It will be good to drench it with life.

Even I had to shudder at the way my brother turned a phrase. For I knew well the oil that his scythe used. No matter. Together we came riding down to this unsuspecting world.

At times, I wondered if the cowed figure who walked beside me in that blue forest of giant plants was real or just the ramblings of a half-crazed mind. When I had first died, and part of my brain was transferred to this machine, had I been secretly brought to believe that such beings as the Four Horsemen really existed? Were they just a mental compensation created by my memory banks to provide

the companionship that a man who lived only when he was needed desperately craved. Or were they real, not dream figures, but ancient and powerful spirits? A man had never truly died and been brought back to life. Nor did any man ever exist with all the censors and moral codes in his mind completely destroyed, so that killing and destruction were his only function. I was a destroyer, the first and only God of Destruction ever created. If the Horsemen did exist, would they not consider me their brother?

The real and the unreal had long ago blended into one and the same. The answer to my puzzlings was no longer very important, merely the random thoughts of a freak machine. I could see Death, but to all others he was invisible and intangible. Yet when a man died, I saw Death let his mighty scythe swing. There is no answer to the unanswerable.

The planet was totally dissimilar to Earth. The atmosphere was a mixture of various poisonous gases. This bothered me little, as I do not breathe. Why I had been sent had been fed into me via memory units as I was returned to life on the voyage thru sub-space to this world. Earth was beginning to expand its empire into this section of the galaxy. The humanoids of this world, the Ccern, had been at first quite friendly. They had no use for the Earth-type worlds in this area, any-

DESTROYER

way, as our atmosphere was as poisonous to them as theirs was to us. A long and useful period of cooperation between planets seemed in the making. That was until a new leader took over control of the government. Trre 8 and his cohorts refused to let any Earth colonists settle the planets in the Ccern sector of space. He had deliberately set to force Earth into a costly war, unless certain terms of his were met. The alien knew that it would be cheaper for the Terran empire to make concessions to his government than fight a war hundreds of light years away from the mother world. What Trre did not know was of my existence.

Death's low whisper broke me out of my reverie. "There are men up ahead?" The question signified humanoid beings, but not fully so. Was this a true question, or just subconscious compensation.

"Yes, they are men," I answered.

Scythe held low, Death disappeared in the darkness of the night. I crept forward alone. Beneath me, everywhere my hands touched, wherever my bare skin touched the ground, life died. My trail was an easy one to follow—thin line of death and destruction.

There were four of them, soldiers by their uniforms and the weapons they carried. Probably part of a large search for my spaceship. I cared little whether they

found it or not. When I left, it would not be by secrecy, if I left at all.

They were taller than I, and very manlike in appearance. Only the absence of any nose or nostrils gave them an alien appearance. This made my job all the easier. It was not as if I were killing strangers. These beings could almost be called men, thus putting them under my domain, thus putting them under my domain. From across the small clearing in which they stood, I saw Death waving his scythe. I walked out of the brush and into the open.

They didn't know what to do. Since I seemed to be unarmed and quite helpless before their weapons and the safety of odds, they let me approach without showing any great fear. One of them reached for the radio device clipped to his belt. "We have just found a survivor of that alien vessel, Commander Ywwe," he reported in the sing-song language which was part of my memory banks. "Yes, sir, alone and obviously harmless. There is one strange thing, sir. He does not seem to need any breathing apparatus. Is not our atmosphere supposed to be deadly to these Earthlings?"

As he spoke, I kept on approaching. I was in luck. General Ywwe was one of the ruling cartel which I was sent to destroy. Already, the instruments in my chest had located the broadcast point of his transmitter. It was time for me to move into action.

The soldier with the radio turned to his companions. The man had just switched off the communicator. This made my task even easier. Now the commander would have no warning of my approach. He would not learn of the patrol's death until I revealed it to him myself. "The General says that we are to detain the alien until a medical team can get here."

I chuckled. The medical team would have been quite shocked if they could exam me. But I had other plans. By now I had come face to face with two of the four men. Their weapons raised, they appeared slightly nervous, but not afraid. Death swung his scythe into the back of one of the two as I reached out and touched his arm. He dropped to the earth, dead, the poison fed from my fingertips into his bloodstream killing instantly. The others raised their guns in horror, but for them it was too late. I pursed my lips and whistled. The half computer part of my brain took over the sound, raising it to just the right pitch. Three aliens crumpled as Death cut them down. Their brains were jelly, destroyed by the precise high frequency sound that I had just emitted. Death looked at me, his cowl flung back. "Tonight, brother, we live again," he chuckled, his eye sockets gleaming horribly. My grin matched his toothy one.

"Tonight," I answered, "the evil

quiver. The world trembles. Men huddle in their caves with fear. Tonight, I am master. Let my enemies beware. I have felt my power, and know that I am as strong as old. Now aloft, to the camp of the fool they call General. Away, for Destruction does ride!"

The camp of my enemies laid below me. Death whispered in my ear. "The structure with the force screen around must be the place of the commander."

"I too have eyes, bony brother. It is too well lit to try to land now. Come, let us destroy this camp of our enemy. Oil your blade."

Together we swooped down on the unsuspecting camp. The anti-noxious fumes issued from my grays throughout my body propelled me like a streak of dark lightning. Every man I touched died, every one who heard my call also. My very breath was destruction, as mouth. The laser beam where my left eye should have been burned down those few who tried to flee. I killed without mercy, young and old, male and female. Those who begged for mercy died as swiftly as those who tried to fight me. Only the general, inside his force screen, remained alive. His radioed calls for help went unanswered as my tracking apparatus blocked out every message he sent. By the time I called for him, the man was in a state of near shock.

Trembling he watched me approach the force screen. My fingers went out and touched it. Energy flared for seconds and then went out. I was through. The general didn't even bother to raise his weapon. He knew that if the force screen could not stop me, no mere hand weapon could. "Who or what are you?" he asked in a voice trampling with fear. "No man can walk through an energy screen. No man can destroy an entire command of imperial soldiers. You interfered with my radio signals!" His voice was rising higher and higher. "Who are you? What are you?"

I laughed. I laughed the laughter of the damned. "Men have spoken of me many times. Legends tell of Four Horsemen — Death, Famine, Disease and War. I am their brother, the strongest of all. I am ... Destruction."

"Mad!" screamed the man in the high pitched voice of the insane. "The world is mad, the universe is mad." He raised his weapon to his forehead. Death raised his scythe. But I still needed the General.

My hand moved with the speed of the swiftest machine. The laser gun that the General held rumbled under the force of my machine-driven fingers. "You cannot die," I mocked. "Your life is mine."

The General was in a state of shock. He could do nothing, say nothing. His whole world had

been destroyed before his eyes. The false skin that coated my body fooled him. If I had been shaped like any other robot or android, he might have been able to comprehend such destruction. And even then, he would not have been able to credit his eyes, for no ordinary robot could be programmed for such a complex action as destruction in such varied manner. Only a combination of the two, the mentality of man, harsh, destructive and ruthless, combined with the sheer power and ability of the machine could be such an agent of destruction.

"Your command base?" I asked in a tone that could not be denied. "Where is it? Is General Trre in charge? Answer me, slave, or feel my wrath."

In reality, I could not torture him in the least. I could only kill. Everything about me was for quick, ruthless extermination. I was not programmed to be able to kill slowly. But the General did not know this. Listlessly he told me what I desired to know. I nodded. Death grinned and let his scythe arc as I touched the man's arm.

The blaring communicator reminded me that my enemies would be prepared for my attack. But I was not worried. My mission was proceeding as planned. Turning on full force from my anti-gravs, I speed across the countryside.

When I was only about five miles from the now dead camp, rockets

roared out of the sky and blew the area to atoms. The radiation bathed my artificial skin, adding new energy to my storage banks. Smiling, I flew on, Death winging along beside me.

What was the truth? Was I an emissary, or Destruction? I knew my mission was that of terror, destroying all those who sought to stop me. I was one of the Horsemen but in a way, opposed them. For my mission prevented their evils. I killed the rulers, the ones who created wars and brought about famines. Death rode with me, taking the crumbs, but if I did not ride, he would have soaked his scythe in rivers of blood. I prevented war, for I destroyed all those who strove to start it. But if I worked for peace, why did I get such satisfaction from killing? Why was I so ruthless, so terribly destructive? The Four Horsemen, whom I thwarted again and again, were my friends, yet I strove against them. I died many times, but each time I lived again. Why didn't I have any memory except for these missions—missions that took place over the span of hundreds of years? I was not immortal—or was I? I had died a hundred times, but yet I still lived. As the general asked, *what* was I?

As I flew through the night air, I analyzed all my circuits. Everything was in perfect order. I

was a fool to say that I knew nothing about myself. In reality, I knew everything. I just could not admit the truth.

Take a man who had just died, keep his brain alive with super-science until a new body was ready, and then transfer the now slightly altered organ into the machine which was to be its new home. Alter it so that killing would be part of the being's nature, make destruction its only goal. Control it by a small computer, ever linked with Earth. One that directed the half-man, half-machine in its tasks. Invent the most destructive machine ever built, form it so that it appeared human even though its insides are stuffed with myriads of monstrous machines of death. Create a destroyer, a fifth Horseman. Half mad from brain damage, nearly insane from lack of will or desires, entirely deadly with an armament capable of destroying a world — this was my identity. Dormant with my life flow at low ebb until I was needed, immortal and nearly indestructible, I was nearly a God, but not even a man. Once I had an identity, once I was human. Now I was only a killing machine. The Fifth Rider: Destruction.

I came upon the supreme headquarters of Commander Trre during the late morning. His base was located in the middle of the main city of the world. I knew that I

could never pass as a Ccern, but I also knew that every delay made my mission more difficult. I could not just destroy the entire area, for I was programmed against wanton killing. Scythe idle, Death waited while I pondered. I knew that there was but one answer. I would have to wait till nightfall, no matter what the consequences.

Time passed so very slowly. The planet rotated once every thirty hours, so my wait was both dull and long. I had no way to amuse myself, for the only emotion I felt was satisfaction when I had killed. I rechecked my circuits a hundred times. Death had drifted off, for he was never idle. I knew that he would return once I started to move.

Finally, twilight came, and then night. The planet had no moon, and the starlight was not very bright. Silently I flew into the city. As I came to a stop, hovering over the Commander's palace, Death came gliding out of the shadows. "They expect you, brother."

"No great surprise. But they don't know what to expect. Nor when I come, or my powers, other than that I am very dangerous." I laughed. "They do not know that tonight they face Destruction."

The palace had a steel roof. My laser eye cut a small gap in the metal, and I then proceeded to widen the opening with my hands, twisting away the jagged metal. "I create my own entrance, brother,"

I called to Death. "They could not be prepared for that.

I was right and wrong. The entire palace was set so that any destruction or damage would set off alarms. The hall into which I had come filled up swiftly with soldiers.

I whistled, but with no effect. These men were all wearing space suits. They could not be reached by sound or touch. The poison in my fingers was useless. I swallowed the poisonous gas in my lungs. My laser eye was my only weapon, and they had lasers which they used to fight back.

My energy shield was at maximum strength, but I knew that it could not stop coherent light for any length of time. I knew that my masters on Earth would never let this body be captured. The self-destruct mechanism within me had probably started. My personality already part of a huge memory bank on Earth, would not die. I was immortal. This body would perish. And I had not completed my mission.

I retreated steadily before their onslaught. My laser took a toll of them, but for every one that died, two others took his place. Death laughed as he swung his scythe. "We have not lost yet, my brother. Look who watches!"

General Trre! The fool was watching the battle from behind an

energy shield at the other end of the hall. He was guarded, but that did not worry me. With the General dead, his party would never be able to hold together. I had to destroy him before I was destroyed. There was only one chance left. My anti-gravs roared in protest as I went hurtling across the floor. A laser bolt penetrated my screen, fusing my legs into scrap. Already I could feel the machinery in my stomach crumbling under the acid which was to bring about my end. The General did not realize my intent until it was too late. I flashed through his energy screen just as my absorbers gave way. I was blind, with half my machinery gone, but my radar sense still located the retreating man. Death waved me onward, as laser beams from Trre's guards struck me again and again. But I would not be stopped.

I flung myself at the man, holding him in a grip of iron. A grip that could not be broken. They couldn't use their lasers now. The General shrieked in terrible pain as the corrosive acid in my chest burst through and covered his body. Mortal flesh could not stand up against such destruction. The General died in seconds. My mission was finished.

"Until we ride again, Death!" I cried, and willed the final act of destruction. My own.

END



TOYS OF TAMISAN

by ANDRE NORTON

Illustrated by ADKINS

The dream world Tamisan had made was out of control — and her only escape lay in finding a man who did not exist in that if-reality.

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

TAMISAN is the best action dreamer on the world of Ty-Kry. She is bought by the Lord STAR-REX, who was crippled in space roving and can only find adventure in the dreams she can make and share with him. She is taken to his sky-tower and instructed by his cousin KAS, whom she dislikes. There she plans an unusual dream — one based on what might have happened if Ty-Kry had not admit-

ted the space culture and joined the Confederacy.

At the first dream session, however, things are not normal. Kas is asked to join the dream she and Starrex will share, using a new dream linking machine. She falls into a dream at once — but it is all wrong. She is alone, and the world is strangely real. She seems unable to control events. It is a culture filled with ancient magic and gods, and she is the Mouth of Olava, a seeress in the service of the nobility.

Summoned to foretell the future, she finds herself possessed and capable of performing the ritual. She predicts that spacemen are about to invade the planet and that it must be saved by a champion — whom she realizes is Starrex.

Shaken, she tries to break the dream, but cannot. She knows she is anchored by Starrex, and perhaps by Kas, both of whom may be anywhere in this world. To return, she must find them.

Then she is summoned to the great inner city — a wreckage in her world — ruled by the OVER-QUEEN, who demands she repeat the prediction. She does, but the Over-Queen is not impressed. They knew the spaceship was coming — and there have been other spaceships, which they have destroyed in the past. She demands that Tamisan produce this champion.

By an uncanny ritual that Tami-

san somehow knows, she does locate Starrex among the Over-Queen's guards. But the Over-Queen promptly orders him and Tamisan into prison. Here he occupies the body of an other-self known as HAWAREL, who stands already accused of treason.

Under Tamisan's prodding, he admits he is Starrex and Hawarel, fused into double memories, and it was his confusion by the Starrex memories that led to his seeming treason. She tries to break the dream with him, but still fails. She feels that it can only be done when they find Kas, whom she believes must be among the crew of the coming spaceship.

Later, they are summoned under guard. The Over-Queen intends to meet the spaceship when it lands and is taking Hawarel along as the "champion" Tamisan predicted. They go out where the wrecks of other spaceships lie, to wait for the latest one. Seeing the fearsome weapons on those ships, she cannot understand how they were subdued.

But now the Over-Queen plans to send Hawarel out to face a ship with only a sword against it. And with him, she announces that Tamisan must go to share his fate.

As the Over-Queen smiles mockingly after delivering this obvious death sentence to them, the great ship comes down on a trail of fire and lands, awaiting them!

By the light of those flames, the whole plain was illumined. Beyond stood the hulk of the unfortunate spacer which had last planeted here. And there, drawn up in lines was a large force of spearmen, crossbowmen, officers with the basket-hilted weapons at their sides. However, as they stood they might seem a guard of honor for the Over-Queen, who sat raised above the rest on a very tall chair cart — certainly not an army in battle array.

And those in the ship — they might well look contemptuously on such archaic weapons as useless. How *had* those of Ty-Kry taken the other ship and her crew? By wiles, treachery — as the victims might declare — or by clever tricks, suggested that part of Tamisan who was the Mouth of Olava.

The surface of the ground boiled away under the descent rockets. Then the bright fires vanished, leaving the plain in semi-darkness until their eyes adjusted to the far lesser light of the torches.

There was no expression of awe by the waiting crowd. Though they might be, by their trappings, dress and arms, accounted centuries behind the technical knowledge of the newcomers, they were braced by their history to know that they were not to face gods of unknown powers but mortals with whom they

had successfully fought before. What gave them this barrier against the star rovers, Tamisan wondered, and why were they so adverse to any contact with star civilization? Apparently they were content to stagnate at a level of civilization perhaps five hundred years behind her world. Did they not produce any inquiring minds any who desired to do things differently?

The ship was down and gave no outward sign of life, though Tamisan knew its scanners must be busy feeding back what information they gathered to appear on video-screens. If those had picked up the derelict ship, the newcomers would have so much of a warning. She glanced from the silent bulk of the newly landed spacer to the Over-Queen, just in time to see the ruler raise her hand in a gesture. Four men came forward from the ranks of nobles and guards. Unlike the latter, they wore no body armor nor helms, only short tunics of an unrelieved black. And in the hands of each was a bow — not the cross-bow of the troops, but the yet older hand-bow of expert archers.

That part of Tamisan which was of this world knew a catch of breath. For those bows were unlike any other in the land, and those who held them unlike any other archers. No wonder ordinary men and women gave them wide room. For they were a monstrous

lot. Over the heads of each was fitted so skillfully fashioned a mask that it seemed no mask at all, rather their natural features, save that the features were not those of human men, but rather copies of the great heads which surmounted, one for each point of the compass, the defensive walls of Ty-Kry. Neither human nor animals, but something of both, and something beyond both.

And the bows they raised were fashioned of treated human bone, strung with cords woven of human hair. The bones and hair of ancient enemies and ancient heroes, so that the intermingled strength of both were ready to serve the living now.

From closed quivers each took a single arrow, and in the torchlight those arrows glittered, seeming to draw and condense radiance until they were shafts of solid light. Fitted to the cords, they had a hypnotic effect, holding one's attention to the exclusion of all else. Tamisan was suddenly aware of that and tried to break the attraction, but at that moment the arrows were fired. And her head turned with all the rest in that company to watch the flight of what seemed to be lines of fire across the dark sky, rising up and up until they were well above the dark ship, then following a curve, to plunge out of sight behind it.

Oddly enough, in their passing

they had left great arcs of light behind which did not fade at once, but cast faint gleams on the bubble of the ship. Ingathering — one part of Tamisan's mind supplied — a laying on of ancient power to influence those in the spacer. Though that of her which was a dreamer could not so readily believe in the efficiency of any such ceremony.

There had been sound with the arrows' passing, a shrill high whistling which hurt the ears so that those in that throng put hands to the sides of their heads to shut out the screech. A wind arose out of nowhere and with it a loud crackling. Tamisan looked up to see above the Over-Queen's head a large bird flapping wings of gold and blue, until a closer look said it was no giant bird but rather a banner so fashioned that the wind set it flying to counterfeit the action.

The black-clad archers still stood in a line a little out from the ranks of the guards. And now, though the Over-Queen made no visible sign, those about Hawarel and Tamisan urged them forward until they came to front both those archers and the Over-Queen's tall throne cart.

"Well, champion, is it in your mind to carry out the duties this busy Mouth has assigned you?" There was jeering in the Over-Queen's question, as if she did not honestly believe in Tamisan's

prophecy but was willing to allow a dupe to march to destruction in his own way.

Hawarel went to one knee; but as he did so, he swung his empty sword sheath across his knee, making very visible the fact that he lacked a weapon.

"At your desire, Great One, I stand ready. But is it your will that my battle be without even steel between me and the enemy?"

Tamisan saw a smile on the lips of the Over-Queen. And at that moment, she glimpsed a little into this ruler — that it might just please her to will such a fate on Hawarel. But if the Over-Queen played with that thought for an instant or two, she put it aside. Now she gestured.

"Give him steel, and let him use it. The Mouth has said he is the answer to our defense this time. Is that not so, Mouth?"

And the look she gave to Tamisan had a cruel core.

"He has been chosen in the far-seeing. And twice has it read so." Tamisan found the words to answer in a firm voice, as if what she said was an absolutely unchangeable decree.

The Over-Queen laughed. "Be firm, Mouth, put your will behind this choice of yours. In fact, do you go with him, to give him the support of Olava!"

Hawarel had accepted a sword

from the officer on his left. Now he arose to his feet, swinging that blade as he saluted with a flourish which suggested that, if he knew he were going to extinction, he intended to march there as one who moved to trumpets and drums.

"The Right be strength to your arm, a shield to your body," intoned the Over-Queen. But there was that in her voice which one might detect to mean that the words she spoke were only ritual, not intended to encourage this champion.

Hawarel turned to face the silent ship. From the burnt and blasted ground about its landing fins arose trails of steam and smoke. Small, red, charring ran in lines away from that ruin. The faint arcs which had remained in the air from the arrow flights were gone now.

As Hawarel moved forward, Tamisan followed a pace or two behind. Though if the ship remained closed to them, with no entrance hatch opened and no ramp run forth, she did not see how they could carry out their plans. And what if that were so, would the Over-Queen expect them to wait hour after hour for some decision from the spacer's commander as to whether or not he would contact them?

Fortunately the spacecrew were more enterprising. Perhaps the sight of that hulk on the edge of the field had given them the need

to learn more. The hatch which opened was not the large entrance one, but a smaller door above one of the fins; and from it shot a stunner beam.

Luckily it caught its prey, both Hawarel and Tamisan, before they had reached the edge of the sullenly burning turf, so that their suddenly helpless bodies did not fall into that fire. Nor did they lose consciousness — only the ability to control slack muscles.

Tamisan had crumpled face down, and only the fact that one cheek pressed the earth gave her room to breathe. But her sight was sharply curtailed to the edge of burning grass which crept inexorably on toward her. Seeing that, she forgot all else.

Those moments were the worst she had ever spent. She had conjured up narrow escapes in dreams, but always there had been the knowledge that at the last moment escape *was* possible. Now there was no escape, only her helpless body and the line of advancing fire.

With the suddenness of a blow delivering a shock through her still painful bruises, she was caught, right side and left, by what felt like giant pinchers. As those closed about her body, she was drawn aloft, still face down, the fumes and heat of the burning vegetation choking her. She coughed until the

spasm made her sick, spinning in that brutal clutch, being drawn to the spacer, as if the ship had shot forth a robot's arm to pull her in.

She came into a burst of dazzling light. Then hands seized upon her, pulling her down, but holding her upright. The force of the stunner was wearing off; they must have set the beam on lowest power. There was the prickle of feeling returning in her legs and her heavy arms. She was able to lift her head a fraction, to see men in space uniforms about her. They wore helmets as if expecting to issue out on a hostile world, and some of them had the visors closed. Two picked her up easily and carried her along, down a corridor, before dropping her without any gentleness in a small cabin with a suspicious likeness to a cell.

Tamisan lay on the floor, recovering command of her own body and trying to think ahead. Had they taken Hawarel, too? There was no reason to believe they had not. But he had not been put in this cell. She was able to sit up now, her back supported by the wall, and she smiled shakily at her thought that their brave boast of a championship battle had certainly been brought quickly to naught. Not that the Over-Queen's desires might have run far counter to what happened. But she and Starrex had gained this much of their own objective: they were in the ship she

believed also held Kas. Only let the three of them make contact and they could leave the dream. And — would their leaving shatter this dream world? How real was it? She was sure of nothing, and there was no reason to worry over side issues. The time had come to concentrate upon one thing only — Kas.

What should she do? Pound on the door of this cell to demand attention — to speak with the commander of this ship? Ask then to see all his crew so she could pick out Kas in his this-world masquerade? She had a suspicion that while Hawarel-Starrex had accepted her story, no one else might.

The important thing was some kind of action to get her free and let her search . . .

The door was actually opening! Tamisan was startled by what seemed a quick answer to her need.

X

There was no helmet on the man who stood there, though he wore a tunic bearing the insignia of an upperofficer, slightly different from that Tamisan knew from her own Ty-Kry. He also had a stunner aimed at her, while at his throat was the box of a vocal interpreter.

"I come in peace —"

"With a weapon in hand?" she countered.

He looked surprised; he must have expected a foreign tongue in answer. But she had replied in the Basic which was the second language of all Confederacy planets.

"We have reason to believe that weapons are necessary with your people. I am Glanden Tork of Survey."

"I am Tamisan and a Mouth of Olava." Her hand went to her head and discovered that somehow, in spite of her passage through the air and her lacking-in-ceremony entrance into the ship, her crown was still there. Then she pressed the important question:

"Where is the champion?"

"Your companion?" The stunner was no longer centered on her and his tone had lost some of its belligerency. "He is in safekeeping. But why do you name him champion?"

"Because that is what he is — come to engage *your* selected champion in Right battle."

"I see. And we select a champion in return, is that it? What is Right-battle?"

She answered his last question first. "If you claim land, you meet the champion of the lordship of that land in Right-battle."

"But we claim no land," he protested.

"You made claim when you set your fiery ship down on the fields of Ty-Kry."

"Your people then consider our

landing a form of invasion? But this can be decided by a single combat between champions? And we pick our man — ”

Tamisan interrupted him. “Not so. The Mouth of Olava selects — or rather the sand selects — the seeing selects. That is why I have come, though you did not greet me in honor.”

“You select the champion — how?”

“As I have said — by the Seeing.”

“I do not see, but doubtless it will be made plain in the proper time. And where then is this combat fought?”

“Out there.” She waved to what she thought was the ship walls. “On the land being claimed.”

“Logical,” he conceded. And then he spoke as if to the air around them. “All that recorded?” Since the air did not answer him, he was apparently satisfied by silence.

“This is your custom, Lady — Mouth of Olava. But since it is not ours, we must discuss it. By your leave we shall do so.”

“As you wish.” She had this much on her side, he had introduced himself as a member of Survey, which meant that he had been trained in the necessity of understanding alien folkways. And the underlying principle of such training wherever possible was to follow planet customs. If the crew did accept this idea of championship,

then they might also be willing to follow it completely. She could demand to see every member of the crew, thus find Kas. And once that was done — break-dream!

But, Tamisan told herself now, do not count on too easy an end to this venture. There was a nagging little doubt lurking in the back of her mind, and it had something to do with those death arrows, with the hulk of the derelict. The people of Ty-Kry, seemingly so weakly defended, had managed through centuries to keep their world free of spacers. When she tried to plumb the Tamisan-of-this-world’s memories as to how that was accomplished, she had no answer but what corresponded to magic forces only partly understood. That the shooting of the arrows was the first step in bringing such forces into being she was aware. Beyond that seemed only to lie a belief akin to her Mouth power, and that she did not understand, even when she employed it.

She was accepting all of this, Tamisan realized suddenly, as if this world did exist, that it was not a dream out of her control. Could Starrex’s suggestion be the truth, that they had by some means traveled into an alternate world?

Her patience was growing short; she wanted action. Waiting was very difficult. She was sure that scanners of more than one kind were

trained on her and she must play the part of a Mouth of Olava, displaying no impatience, only calm confidence in herself and her mission. That she held to as best she could.

Perhaps the time she waited seemed longer than it really was. But Tork returned, to usher her out of the cell and escort her up ladder from level to level. She found the long skirts of her robe difficult to manage. The cabin they came into was large and well furnished, and there were several men seated there. Tamisan looked from one to another searchingly. But she could not tell, she felt none of the uneasiness she had known in the throne room when Hawarel had been present. Of course, that could mean Kas was not one of this group, though a Survey ship did not carry a large crew — mainly specialists of several different callings. There were probably ten, even twenty, more than the six before her.

Tork led her to a chair which had some of the attributes of an easiest, molding it to her comfort as she settled into it.

"This is Captain Lewald, Medico Thrum, Psycho-Tech Sims, Hist-Techneer El Hamdi." Tork named names and each man acknowledged with a half bow. "I have outlined your proposal to them and they have discussed the matter. By what means will you select a champion from among us?"

She had no sand. For the first time, Tamisan realized that handicap. She would have to depend upon touch alone, but somehow she was sure that would reveal Kas to her.

"Let your men come to me, touching hand to mine," she raised hers to lay it palm up on the table. "When I clasp that of him whom Olava selects, I shall know it."

"It seems simple enough," the Captain returned. "Let us do as the lady suggests." And he leaned forward to rest his own for a minute on hers. There was no response, nor was there any in the others. The Captain called an order on the intercom, and one by one the other members of the crew came to her, touching palm to palm, while Tamisan, with mounting uneasiness, began to believe she had erred. Perhaps only by the sand could she detect Kas. Though she searched the face of each as he took his seat opposite her and laid his hand on hers, she could see no resemblance to Starre's cousin, nor was there any inner warning her man was here.

"That was the last," the Captain said as the final man arose. "Which is our champion?"

"He is not here." She blurted out the truth, her distress breaking through her caution.

"But you have touched hands with every man on board this ship," the Captain answered her. "Or is this some trick —"

He was interrupted by a sound sharp enough to startle. And the chanted numbers which spilled from the com by his elbow meant nothing to Tamison but brought the rest in that cabin into instant action. A stunner in Tork's hand caught her before she could rise, and once more she was conscious but unable to move. As the other officers pushed through the door on the run, Tork put out his hand, holding her limp body erect in the chair, while with the other he thumbed some alarm button set into the table.

His summons was speedily answered by two crewmen who carried her along, to thrust her once more into a cabin. This was getting to be far too regular a procedure, Tamisan thought ruefully as they tossed her negligently on a bunk, hardly pausing to see if she landed safely on its surface or not. Whatever that alert had meant, it had certainly once more brought her to the status of prisoner.

Apparently sure of the stunner beam, her guard went out, leaving the door open a crack so that she could hear the pad of running feet, the clangs of what could be secondary alarms.

What possible attack had the forces of the Over-Queen launched against a well-armed and already alert spacer? Yet it was plain that those men believed them-

selves in danger and were on the defensive. Starrex — and Kas. Where was Kas? The Captain said she had met all on board. Did that mean that the vision she had earlier seen was false, that the faceless man in the spacer dress was a creature of her too active imagination?

She must not lose confidence. Kas was here — he had to be! She lay now trying vainly to guess by the sounds what was happening. But the first flurry of noise and movement were stilled; there was only silence. Hawarel — where was Hawarel?

The stunner's power was wearing off. She had pulled herself up somewhat groggily when the door of the cabin shot into its wall crack and Tork and the Captain stood there.

"Mouth of Olava, or whatever you truly are," the Captain said, with a chill in his voice which reminded Tamisan of Hawarel's earlier rage, "the winning of time may not have been of your devising — this nonsense of Champions and Right-battle — or perhaps it was. Your superiors perhaps deceived you too. At any rate, now it does not matter. They have done their best to make us prisoner and will not reply to our signals for a parley. So we must use you for our messenger. Tell your ruler that we hold her champion and we can readily use him as a key to open gates shut in our faces. We have weapons beyond swords and spears,

even beyond those which might not have saved those in that other ship. She can tie us here for a measure of time, but we can solve such bonds. We have not come as invaders, no matter what you believe, nor are we alone. If our signal does not reach our sister ship in orbit above, there will be such an accounting as your race has not seen, nor can conceive of. We shall release you now and you will tell your Queen this. If she does not send those to talk with us before the dawn — then it will be the worse for her. Do you understand?"

"And Hawarel?" Tamisan asked.

"Hawarel?"

"The champion. You will keep him here?"

"As I have said, we have the means to make him a key for your fortress doors. Tell her that, Mouth. From what we have read in your champion's mind you have certain authority here which ought to impress your Queen."

Read from Starrex's mind? What did they mean? Tamisan was suddenly fearful. Some kind of mind-probe? But if they did that, then they must know the rest. She was utterly confused now, and found it very hard to center her attention on the matter at hand, that she must relay this defiant message to the Over-Queen. And, since there seemed to be nothing she could do to protest that action, she would do so. Though what reception she

might have in Ty-Kry — Tamisan shuddered as Tork pulled her from the bunk and half carried, half led her along.

XI

For the third time Tamisan sat in prison, but this time she looked not at the smooth walls of a spaceship cabin, but had the ancient stones of the High Castle ringing her in. Captain Lewald's estimation of her influence with the Over-Queen had fallen far wide of the truth, and her plea in favor of a parley with the spacemen had been overruled at once, while the threat concerning their strange weapons and their mysterious use of Hawarel as a "key" was laughed at. The fact that those of Ty-Kry had successfully dealt with this menace in the past made them confident that their same devices would serve as well now. And what those devices were Tamisan had no idea, save that something had happened to the ship before she had been unceremoniously bundled out of it.

Hawarel they had kept on board, Kas had disappeared — and until she had both to hand she was indeed a captive. Kas — her thoughts kept turning back to the fact he had not been among those who had faced her. Yet Lewald had assured her that she had seen all his crew —

Wait! She set herself to recall

his every word — what had he said? "You have touched hand with every man aboard this ship." But he had not said all the crew. Had there been one outside the ship? All she knew of space travel she had learned from tapes. But those had been very detailed as they needed to be to supply the dreamers with factual background and inspiration from which to build fantasy worlds. This spacer claimed to be a Survey vessel and not operating alone. Therefore — it might really have a companion in orbit, and there Kas could be. But, if that were so, she had no chance of reaching him.

Now if this were only a true dream — Tamisan sighed, leaned her head back against the dank stone of the wall and then jerked away from that support as its chill struck into her shoulders. Dreams —

Suppose — she sat upright, alert and a little excited — suppose she could dream within a dream — and find Kas that way? Was it possible? You could not tell until you proved it in one manner or another. She had no stabilizer, no booster. But those were only needed when a dream was shared. She might venture as well on her own. But if she dreamed within a dream, could she do aught to set matters right? Why ask questions she could not answer until it was put to the proof?

She stretched out on the stones

of the cell floor, resolutely blocking off those portions of her mind which were aware of the present discomfort of her body. Instead, she began the deep, even breathing of a dreamer, fastening her thoughts on the pattern of self-hypnosis which was the door to her dream. But all she had as a goal was Kas and he as he was in his real person. So poor a guide!

She was going under — she could still dream!

Walls built up around her. Only these were of a translucent material through which flowed soft and pleasing colors. It could not be a space ship. Then the scene wavered, and swiftly Tamisan thrust aside that doubt which might puncture the dream fabric. The walls sharpened, fixed into a solid state: this was a corridor, facing her a door.

She willed to see beyond and was straightway, after the manner of a proper dream, in that chamber. Here the walls were hung with the same sparkling web stuff which had lined her chamber in the sky tower. Seeking Kas, she had returned to her own world. But she held the dream, curious as to why her aim had brought her here. Had she been wrong, and had Kas never come with her? But if that were so, why had she and Starrex been marooned in the other dream?

There was no one in the chamber,



but she felt that faint pull drawing her on. She sought Kas and there was that which promised he was here. A second room. Entering, she was startled. For this she knew and well — it was the room of a dreamer. And Kas stood by an empty couch, while the other was occupied.

The dreamer wore a sharing crown, but what rested on the other couch was not any second sleeper but a squat box of metal, to which her dream cords were attached. And Tamisan was not the dreamer! She had expected to see herself. Instead the entranced was one of the locked minds, the blankness of her countenance was unmistakable. Dream force was being created here by an indreamer, and seemingly it was harnessed to that box.

Given such clues, Tamisan projected the rest. This was not the same dreaming chamber where she had fallen asleep; rather it was a smaller room. And Kas was very much awake, intent upon some dials on the box top. The indreamer and the box, locked so together, could be holding them in the other world. But what of that faint vision of Kas in Ship's uniform? To mislead her? Or was *this* a misleading dream, dictated by the suspicions she had detected in Starrex concerning his cousin? For this was the logical reasoning from such suspicions, that she had been sent with Starrex into a dream world and therein locked by this indream-

er and machine — real or dream?

Was she now visible to Kas? If this were a dream, she should be. If she had come back to reality — Her head reeled under the listing of things which might be true, untrue, half true. To prove at least one small fraction, she moved forward and laid her hand on that of Kas as he leaned over to make some small adjustment to the box.

He gave a startled exclamation, jerked his hand from under hers and glanced around. But, though he stared straight at her, it was plain he saw nothing; she could be as disembodied as a spirit in one of the old tales. Yet if he had not seen her, he had felt something.

Again he leaned over the box, eyeing it intently as if he thought he must have felt some shock or emanation from it. The dreamer never moved. Save for the slow rise and fall of her breathing, which told Tamisan she was indeed deep in her self-induced and created world, she might have been dead. Her face was very wan and colorless. Seeing that, Tamison was uneasy. This tool of Kas's had been far too long in an uninterrupted dream. She would have to be awakened if she made no move to break it for herself. One of the dangers of indreaming was this possible loss of the power to break a dream. That occurring, the guardian must break it. Most of the dreamers' caps pro-

vided the necessary stimulus to do so. Only the cap of this dreamer's head had certain modifications Tamisan had never seen before, and these might prevent breaking —

What would happen if Tamisan could evoke waking? Would that also release her — and Starrex — wherever he might be now — from *their* dream, return them to the proper world? She was well drilled in the technique of deep dream break. But those she had used when she stood in reality beside a victim who had overstayed the proper dream time.

She reached out a hand, touched the pulse on the sleeper's throat and applied slight massage. But though her hands seemed corporal and solid to her, there was no response in the other. To prove a point, Tamisan aimed a finger, thrusting it deeply as she could into the pillow on which the dreamer's head rested. Her finger did not dent that soft roundness, but rather went into it, as if her flesh and bone had no substance.

There was yet another way. It was harsh and used only in cases of exterminity. But to Tamisan this could be no else. She put those unsubstantial fingers on the temples of the sleeper, just below the rim of the dream cap, and concentrated on a single command. Awake

The sleeper stirred, her features convulsed and a low moan came from her. Kas uttered an exclamation,

hung over his box, his fingers busy pushing buttons with a care which suggested he was about a very delicate task.

"Awake!" Tamisan commanded with such force as she could summon.

The sleeper's hands arose very slowly, unsteadily from her sides and wavered up toward the cap, though her eyelids did not raise. Her expression was now one of pain. And Kas, breathing hard and fast, kept to his adjustments on the box.

So they fought their silent battle for possession of the dreamer. And slowly Tamisan was forced to concede that whatever force lay in that box, it overrode all the technique she knew. But, the longer Kas kept this poor wretch under, the weaker she would grow. Death would be the answer, though perhaps that did not trouble him.

If she could not wake the dreamer, break the bonds which she was certain now were what tied her and Starrex to that other world, then she must somehow get at Kas himself. He had responded to her touch before — therefore he might just —

Tamisan slipped away from the head of the couch and came to stand behind Kas. He straightened up, a faint relief mirrored on his face as he studied the dreamer, and apparently his box reported that

there was no longer any disturbance.

Now Tamisan raised her hands to either side of his head, spreading wide her fingers so they might in some way ape the expanse of a dreamer's cap, and then brought them swiftly down to cover his head, putting firm touch on his temples though she could not exert real pressure there.

He gave a muffled cry and tossed his head from side to side as if to free himself from a cloud. But Tamisan, with all the determination of which she was capable, held fast.

She had already seen this done once in the Hive. However then it had been used on a docile and willing subject and both the controlled and the dreamer had been on the same plane of existence. Now she could only hope that she could disrupt Kas's train of thought long enough to make him release the dreamer himself. So she brought to bear all her will to that purpose. He was not only shaking his head from side to side now, making it very hard to keep her fingers in the proper position, but he was swaying back and forth, his hands up, clawing as if to tear her hold away, though it appeared he could not touch her any more than she could lay firm grip on him.

That fund of energy which had enabled her to create strange worlds

and hold them for a fellow dreamer was bent to the task of influencing Kas. But to her dismay, though he ceased his frenzied movements and his clawing for the hands he could not clutch growing feebler, and though his eyes closed and his face screwed into such an expression of horror and rejection that it was that of a frightened child, he did not move to the box.

Instead, he slumped forward so suddenly that Tamisan was taken wholly unaware, falling half across the divan. And in that fall he flailed out with an arm to send the box smashing to the floor, its weight dragging the cap in turn from the dreamer.

She drew several deep breaths, her haggard face now displaying a small trace of returning color. Tamisan, still startled at the results of her efforts to influence Kas, began to wonder if she might have made matters worse. She did not know how much the box had to do with their transportation to the alternate world and whether, if it was broken, they would ever be able to return or not.

There was one precaution, if she could take it. If she returned to that prison cell in the High Castle — as she must do or leave Starrex-Hawarel lost forever — then to leave Kas here, perhaps able again to use his machine — no! But how — since *she* could not —

Tamisan looked to the stirring dreamer. The girl was struggling from the depths of so deep a strata of unconsciousness that she was not aware of what lay about her. In this state she might be pliable. Tamisan could only try.

Leaving Kas, she went back to the dreamer. Once more, touching the girl's forehead, she sought to influence.

The dreamer sat up with such slow movements of body and limbs as one might use if almost unbearable weights were fastened to every muscle. In a painfully slow gesture, she raised her hands to her head, groping for the cap no longer there. Then she sat, her eyes still shut, while Tamisan drew heavily on her own strength to deliver a final set of orders.

Blindly, for she never opened her eyes, the dreamer felt along the edge of the couch on which she had lain, until her hand swept against the cords which fastened the cap to the box. Her lax fingers fumbled and then tightened as she gave a feeble jerk, then another, until both cords pulled free. Holding those still in one hand, she slipped from the couch in a forward movement which brought her to her knees, the upper part of her body on the other couch, one cheek touching that of the unconscious Kas.

The strain on Tamisan was very great. She was wavering in her control now; several times those weak hands fell limply as her hold on the dreamer ebbed. But each time she found some small surge of energy which brought them back into action again. So that at last the cap was on Kas, the cords which had connected it to the box in a half coil on which the dreamer's head rested.

So big a chance and with such poor equipment! Tamisan could not be sure of any results, she could only hope. Tamisan had released her command of the dreamer, who now lay against the couch on one side as Kas half lay on the other. She summoned all that she had, all that she sensed she had always possessed, that small difference in dream power she had secretly cherished. Once more she touched the forehead of the sleeping girl and broke her own dream within a dream!

This was like climbing a steep hill with an intolerably heavy burden lashed to one's aching back — like being forced to pull the dead weight of another body through a swamp which sucked one ever down. It was such an effort as she could not endure —

Then that weight was gone, and the relief of its vanishing was such that Tamisan did not for a space more than just savor the fact that it did not drag at her. She opened

her eyes at last and even that small movement required an effort which left her spent.

She was not in the sky tower. These walls were stone. And the light was dusky, coming wanly from a slit high in the opposite wall. The High Castle from which she had dreamed her way back to her own Ty-Kry, the dream within a dream. But how well had she wrought there?

For the present, she was too tired to even think connectedly. Bits and pieces of all she had seen and done since she had awakened first in this Ty-Kry floated through her mind, not making any concrete pattern.

It was the mind picture of Hawarel's face as she had seen it last while they marched toward the spacer which roused her from that uncaring drift — Hawarel and the threat the Captain had made and which the Over-Queen had pushed aside. If Tamisan had truly broken the lock Kas had set up to keep them here, then it would be escape — but now there was in her no strength. She tried to remember the formula for breaking, and knew a stroke of chilling fear when her memory proved faulty. She could not do it now — she must have more time to rest both mind and body. Now she was hungry, thirsty, with such a need for both food and drink that it was a torment. Did

they mean to leave her here without any sustenance?

Tamisan lay still, listening. And then she inched her head around slowly to view the deeper dusk of her surroundings at floor level. She was not alone!

Kas!

Had she been successful and pulled Kas with her? And if so — was it that he had no counterpart in this world as she and Starrex had found, so that he was still his old self?

However, she did not have time to explore that possibility, for there was a loud grating, followed by a line of light marking an opening door. In the beam of a torch stood that same officer who had earlier been her escort. Using her hands to brace up her body, Tamisan raised herself. But at the same time there was a cry from the far corner.

Someone moved there, raising a head and showing features she had last seen in the sky tower. Kas — and in his rightful body! He was scrambling to his feet. The officer and the guardsman behind him in the doorway, stared at the other-worlder as if they could not believe their eyes. Kas shook his head to clear away some mist and then —

His lips pulled back from his teeth in a terrible rictus which was no smile. There was a small laser in his hand. She could not move; he was going to burn her! In that

moment she was so sure of it that she did not even know fear, only waited for the crisping of her flesh.

But the aim of that weapon raised beyond her and fastened on the doorway. Under it, both officer and guard went down. With one hand on the wall to steady himself, Kas pulled along until he came to her. He stood away from the stone then, transferred his laser to the other hand and reached down to hook fingers in the robe where it covered her shoulder.

"On — your — feet." He mouthed the words with difficulty, as if his exhaustion nearly equalled hers. "I do not know how — or why — or who —"

The torch dropped from the charred hand which had carried it to give them much curtailed light. But Kas swung her around, thrusting his face very close to hers. He stared at her intently, as if by the very force of his glare he could strip aside the mask this other world body made for her, force the old Tamisan into sight.

"You are Tamisan — it can not be otherwise! I do not know how you did this, demon-born." He shook her with a viciousness which struck her painfully against the wall. "Where — is — he?"

All that came from her parched throat were harsh sounds without meaning.

"Never mind." Kas stood

straighter now and there was more vigor in his voice. "Where he is — there shall I find him. Nor shall I lose you, demon-born, since you are my way back. And for Lord Starrex here there will be no guards, no safe shields. Perhaps this is the better way after all!" He slapped her face, his palm bruising her flesh, once more thumping her head back against the wall so that the rim of the Mouth crown bit into her scalp and she cried out in pain.

"Speak! Where is this place. Answer me."

"The High Castle of Ty-Kry," she croaked out.

"And what do you in this hole?"

"I am prisoner to the Over-Queen."

"Prisoner? What do you mean? You are a dreamer, this is your dream. Why are you a prisoner?"

Tamisan was so shaken she could not marshal words easily as she had done to explain to Starrex. And she thought, a little dazedly, that Kas might not accept her explanation anyway.

"Not — wholly — a dream," she got out.

He did not seem surprised. "So the control has that property, has it — to impose a sense of reality. Then —" His eyes blazed into hers. "You can not control this dream, is that it? Again fortune favors me, it seems. Where is Starrex now?"

She could give him a truthful

answer and she was glad of that. As it seemed to her now, she could not speak falsely with any hope of belief. It was as if he could see straight into her mind with those demanding eyes of his. "I do not know."

"But he is in this dream— somewhere?"

"Yes."

"Then you shall find him for me, Tamisan. And speedily. Do we have to search this High Castle?"

"He was, when I saw him last, outside."

She kept her eyes turned from the door, from what lay there. But now he hauled her toward that and she was afraid she was going to be sick. Where they might be in the interior of the small city which was the High Castle, she did not know. Except that those who had brought her here had not taken her on to the core towers, but had turned aside along the first of the gateways and gone down a long flight of stairs. She doubted if they would be able to walk out again as easily as Kas thought to do.

"Come." He pulled at her, dragging her on, kicking aside what lay in the door. She closed her eyes tightly as he brought her past. But the stench of death was so strong that she staggered, retching, with his hand ever dragging at her, keeping on her feet and reeling ahead.

Twice she watched glassily as he

burned down opposition. And his luck at keeping surprise on his side held. They came to the foot of the stairs and climbed. Tamisan held to one hope— now that she was on her feet and moving she found a measure of strength returning, so that she no longer feared falling, if Kas released his hold upon her. When they were out at last in the night, with the damp smell of the underways wafted away by a rising wind, she felt clean and renewed and was able to think.

Kas might have been able to get her this far because of her weakness. So to his eyes she must continue to counterfeit that, until she had a chance to act. It could be that his weapon, so alien to this world and thus so effective, might well cut their way to Starrex. But that did not mean that once they had reached him she need obey Kas. And somehow she also felt that face to face Kas would be less confident of success.

It was not a guard that halted them now but a massive gate, such a barrier as was meant to hold. Kas examined the bar and laughed, before he raised the laser and sent a needle-thin beam to cut as he needed. There was a shout from above and Kas, almost languidly, swung the beam to a narrow stair leading from the ramparts, laughing again as there came a choked scream and the sound of a falling body.

"Now!" Kas put his shoulder to the gate and it swung, more easily than Tamisan would have thought possible for its weight. "Where is Starrex? And if you lie —" His smile was a very evil one.

"There." Tamisan was sure of her direction and she pointed to where there was a distant blaze of torches about the shadow bulk of the grounded spacer.

XIII

"A spacer!" Kas paused. "Besieged by these people," Tamisan informed him. "And Starrex is a hostage on board, if he still lives. They have threatened to use him in some manner as a weapon and the Over-Queen, as far as I know, does not care."

Kas turned on her. His evil merriment had vanished, his smile was rather now a snarl, and he shook her back and forth. "It is your dream — control it!"

For a moment, Tamisan hesitated. Should she try to tell him what she believed the truth? Kas and his other world weapon might be her only hope of reaching Starrex now. Could he be persuaded to a frontal attack if he thought that was their only chance of reaching their goal? On the other hand, if she admitted she could not break this dream, he might well burn her down out of hand and take his chances.

"Your meddling has warped the pattern, Lord Kas. I can not control some elements. Nor can I break the dream until I have Lord Starrex with me — since we are pattern-linked in this sequence."

Her steady reply seemed to have some effect on him. Though he gave her one more punishing shake and uttered an obscenity, he looked on to the torches and the half-seen bulk of the ship, a certain calculation in his eyes.

They made a lengthy detour, away from most of the torches, coming up across the open land to the south of the ship. There was a graying in the sky and a hint that dawn might perhaps be not too far away. Now that they could see better, it was apparent that the ship was sealed. No hatch opened on its surface, no ramp ran out. And surely the laser in Kas's hand was not going to burn their way in, in the manner he had opened the gate of the High Castle.

Apparently the same difficulty presented itself to Kas, for he halted her with a jerk while they were still in the shadows well away from the line of torches forming a square around the ship. They sheltered in a small dip in the ground surveying the scene.

The torches were no longer held by men, but had been planted in the ground at regular intervals, and they were as large as outsize candles. The colorful mass which

had marked the Over-Queen and her courtiers on Tamisan's first visit to the landing field was gone, leaving only a perimeter line of guardsmen in wide encirclement of the sealed ship.

Why did the spacemen just not lift and planet elsewhere? Unless that confusion in the last moments when she had been on board the spacer meant that they could not do so. They had spoken then of a sister ship in orbit above. It would seem that it had made no move to aid them, though she had no idea how much time had elapsed since last she had been here.

Now Kas turned on her again. "Can you get to Starrex—reach him a message?" he demanded.

"I can try. For what reason?"

"Have him ask for us to come to him." Kas had been silent for a moment before replying. Was he so stupid as to believe that she would not give a warning with whatever message she could so deliver? Or had he precautions against that?

But *could* she reach Starrex? She had gone into the secondary dream to make contact with Kas. There was no time nor preparation for such a move now. She could only use the mental technique for inducing a dream and see what happened thereby. She said as much to Kas now, promising no success.

"Be about what you can do—now!" he told her roughly.

Tamison closed her eyes to think of Hawarel as she had seen him last, standing beside her on this very field. And she heard a gasp from Kas. Opening her eyes she saw Hawarel, even as he had been then—or rather a palid copy of him, wavering and instinct, already beginning to fade, so she spoke in a swift gabble:

"Say we come from the Queen with a message, that we must see the Captain—"

The shimmering outline of Hawarel faded into the night. She heard Kas mutter angrily "What good will that ghost do?"

"I can not tell. If he returns to that of which he is a part, he can carry the message. For the rest—" Tamisan shrugged. "I have told you this is no dream I can control. Do you think if it were, we two would stand here in this fashion?"

His thin lip parted in one of his mirthless grins.

"You would not, I know, dreamer!"

His head went from left to right as he slowly surveyed the line of planted torches and the men standing on guard between them. "Do we move closer to this ship, expect them to open to us?"

"They used a stunner to take us before," Tamisan saw fit to warn him. "They might do so again."

"Stunner," he gestured with the

laser. Tamisan hoped his answer would not be a headlong attack on the ship with that.

But instead, he used it as a pointer to motion her on toward the torch line. "If they do open up," he commented, "I shall be warned."

Tamisan gathered up the long skirt of her robe. It was torn by rough handling, frayed in strips at the hem where she could be tripped if she caught those rags between her feet. And the rough brush growing knee-high about them caught at it so that she stumbled now and again, urged on continually by Kas's pulling when he dug his fingers painfully into her already bruised shoulder.

So they reached the torch line. The guards there faced inward to the ship and in this increase of light Tamisan could see that they were all bowmen, armed with crossbows, not with those of bone which the black-tunicked men had earlier used. Bolts against the might of the ship! The answer seemed laughable, a jest to delight the simple. Yet, the ship lay there and Tamisan could well remember the consternation of those men who had been questioning her within it.

Now —

There was a dark spot on the hull of the ship and a hatch suddenly swung open! A battle hatch — though she had only seen those via tape study.

"Kas—they are going to fire!" With a laser beam from such, they could crisp everything on this field, perhaps clear back to the walls of the High Castle!

She tried to turn in his grasp, to race back and away, knowing already that such a race was lost before she took the first lunging stride. But he held her fast.

"No muzzle," he said.

Tamisan strained to see through the poor, flickering light. Perhaps it was a lightening of the sky which did make clear that there was no muzzle projecting to spew a fiery death across them all. But that was surely a gun port.

As quickly as it had appeared, that opening was closed. The ship was again sealed tightly.

"What — ?"

"Either they can not use it," Kas answered her half question, "or they have thought better of doing so. Which means, by either count, we have a chance. Now — stay you here! Or else I shall come looking for you in a manner you shall not relish, and never believe that I can not find you!" Nor did something in Tamisan dispute that.

She stood. After all, apart from Kas's threats, where did she have to go? If she were sighted by any of the guards, she might either be returned to prison or dealt with summarily in another fashion. And she had to reach Starrex if she were to escape.

But she watched Kas make good use of the interest which riveted the eyes of the guards on the ship. He crept, with more ease than she thought possible for one used to the luxury living of the sky towers, behind the nearest man.

What weapon he used she could not see; it was not the laser. Instead he straightened to his full height behind the unsuspecting guard, reached out an arm and seemed only to touch the stranger on the neck. Immediately the fellow collapsed without a sound, though Kas caught him before he had fallen to the ground and dragged him backward to the slight depression in the field where Tamisan waited.

"Quick!" Kas ordered. "Give me his cloak and helm!"

He ripped off his own tunic with its extravagantly padded shoulders, while Tamisan knelt to fumble with a great brooch, freeing the enveloping cloak of the guard. Kas snatched it out of her hands, dragged the rest of it loose from under the limp body and pulled it around him, taking up the helm and settling it on his head with a tap. Then he took up the crossbow.

"Walk before me," he told Tamisan. "If they have a field scanner on in the ship, I want them to see a prisoner under guard. That may bring them to a parlay. It is a thin chance, but our best —"

He could not guess that it might be a better chance than he hoped, Tamisan knew, since he did not know that she had been once within the ship and the crew might be expecting some such return with a message from the Over-Queen. But to walk out boldly, past the line of torches — surely Kas's luck would not hold so well; they would be seen by the other guards before they were a quarter of the way to the ship. But she had not any other proposal to offer in exchange.

This was no adventure such as she had lived through in dreams. She believed that if she died now, she died indeed and would not wake unharmed in her own world. And her flesh crawled with a fear which made her mouth go dry and her hands quiver as they held wet and tight upon the folds of her robe. Any second now — she would feel the impact of a bolt — hear a shout of discovery — be —

But still Tamisan tottered forward and heard, with danger-alerted ears, the faint crunch of boots which was Kas behind. His contempt for a danger which was only too real for her made her wonder, fleetingly, if he did indeed still believe this a dream she could control, and need not then watch for any one but her. But she could not summon words to impress on him his woeful mistake.

So intent was she upon some attack from behind that she was

not really conscious of the ship towards which they went. Until, suddenly she saw another of those ports open and steeled herself to feel the numbing charge of a stunner.

However, again an attack she feared did not come. The sky was growing lighter even if there was no sign of sunrise. Instead the first drops of a storm began to fall. And under that onslaught of moisture from lowering clouds, the torches hissed and sputtered, finally flickering out, so that the gloom was hardly better than twilight.

XIV

They came close enough to the ship to board, were one of the ramps lowered to them. There they stood waiting, while Tamisan felt the rise of almost hysterical laughter inside her. What an anticlimax if the ship refused to acknowledge them! They could not stand here forever and there was no chance they could battle a way inside. Kas's faith in her communication with that ghost of Hawarel had been too high.

But even as she was sure that they made an absurd failure, there was a sigh of sound from well above them. The port hatch wheeled back into the envelope of the ship's wall, and a small ramp, hardly more than a steep ladder, swung creaking out and dropped to hit the

charred ground not far from them.

"Go!" Kas prodded her forward.

With a shrug, Tamisan went. She found it hard to climb with the heavy, frayed skirts dragging her back. But by using her hands to pull along the single rail of the ramp, she made progress. Why had not the rest of the guards along that watching line of torches moved? Had it been that Kas's half disguise had indeed deceived them, and they thought that Tamisan had been sent under orders to parlay a second time with the ship's people?

She was nearly at the hatch now and could see the suited men in the shadows above waiting. They had tanglers ready to fire, prepared to spin the webs to enmesh them both as easily handled prisoners. But before those slimy strands spun forth to touch — patterned as they were to seek flesh to anchor — both the waiting space men jerked right and left, clutched with already dead hands at the breasts of charred tunics from which arose small, deadly spirals of smoke.

They had expected a guard armed with a bow; they had met Kas's laser, to the same undoing as the guardsmen at the castle. Kas's shoulder in the middle of her back sent her sprawling, to land half over the bodies of the two who had awaited them.

She heard a scuffle and was kicked and rolled aside, fighting

the folds of her own long skirt, trying to get out of the confines of the hatch pocket. Somehow, on her hands and knees, she made it forward, since she could not retreat. Now she fetched up against the wall of a corridor and managed to pull around to face the end of the fight.

The two guards lay dead. But Kas held the laser on a third man. Now, without glancing around, he gave an order which she mechanically obeyed.

“The tangler — here!”

Still on her hands and knees, Tamisan crawled far enough back into the hatch compartment to grip one of those weapons. The second — she eyed it with awakening need for some protection herself, but Kas did not give her time to reach it.

“Give it to me — now!”

Still holding the laser pointed steadily at the middle of the third spaceman, he groped back with his other hands. She had no choice — no choice — but she did!

If Kas thought he had her thoroughly cowed — Swinging the tangler around without taking time to aim, Tamisan pressed the firing button.

The lash of the sticky weaving spun through the air, striking the wall from which it dropped away, then one arm of the motionless captive, who was still under Kas's

threat; there it clung, across his middle. And then it spun through the air until it clasped Kas's gun hand, his middle, his other arm, adhering instantly, tightening with its usual efficiency and tying captor to captive.

Kas struggled against those ever-tightening bands to bring the laser around to beam on Tamisan, though whether he would have used it even in his white hot rage, she did not know. It was enough that the tangler made it so she could keep from his line of fire. Having ensnared them enough to render them both harmless for a time, Tamisan drew a deep breath and relaxed somewhat.

She had to be sure of Kas. She had loosed the firing button of the tangler as soon as she saw that he could not use his arms. Now she raised the weapon, and with more of a plan, tied his legs firmly together. He kept on his feet, but he was as helpless as if they had managed to turn a stunner beam on him.

Warily, she approached him. And guessing her intent, he went into wild wriggings, trying to bring the adhesive tangler strands in contact with her flesh also. But she stooped and tore at the already fringed and frayed hem of her robe, ripping up a strip as high as her waist, winding this about her arm and wrist to make sure she could not be so entrapped.



In spite of his struggles, she managed to get the laser out of his hold, and for the second time knew a surge of great relief. He made no sound, but his eyes were wild and his lips so tightly drawn against his teeth, his mouth slightly open, that a small trickle of spittle oozed from one corner to wet his chin. Looking at him dispassionately, Tamisaan thought him near insane at that moment.

The spacecrewman was moving. He hitched along as she swung around with the laser as a warning, his shoulders against the wall keeping him firmly on his feet, his unbound legs giving him more mobility, though the cord of the tangler anchored him to Kas. Tamisaan glanced around, searching for what he appeared so desperate to reach. There was a com box.

"Stand where you are! For now —" she ordered.

The threat of the laser kept him frozen. With that still trained on him, she darted short glances over her shoulder to the hatch opening. Sliding along the wall in turn, the tangler thrust loosely into the front of her belt, she managed with one arm to slam the hatch door and give a turn to its locking wheel.

Now — Using the laser as a pointer she motioned the crewman to the com, but the immobile Kas was too much of an anchor. Dared she free the crew-

man by even so much? There was no other way. She motioned with one hand.

"Stand well away."

He had said nothing during their encounter, but he obeyed with an agility which suggested he liked the sight of that weapon in her hand even less than he had liked it when Kas had held it. He stretched to the limit the cord would allow so she was able to burn it through.

Kas spit out a series of obscenities which were only a meaningless noise as far as Tamisaan was concerned. Until he was released, he was no more now than a well anchored bundle — helpless. But the crewman had importance.

She gestured him on to the com, reaching it before him. Now she played the best piece she had in this desperate game.

"Where is Hawarel? The native who was brought on board?"

He could lie, of course, and she would not know it. But it seemed he was willing to answer, probably because he thought that the truth would strike her worse than any lie.

"They have him in the lab — conditioning him." And he grinned at her with some of the evil malignancy she had seen in Kas.

She remembered the Captain's earlier threat to make of Hawarel a tool to use against the Over-Queen and her forces. Was she too

late? But there was only one road to take and that was the one she had chosen in those few moments when she had taken up the tangle and used it for herself.

"You will call." She spoke as she might to one finding it difficult to understand her. "And you will say that Hawarel will be released, brought here — now!"

"Why?" the crewman returned with visible insolence. "What will you do? Kill me? Perhaps, but that will not defeat the Captain's plans. He will be willing to see half the crew burned —"

"That may be true." She nodded. Not knowing the Captain, she could not tell whether or not that was a bluff. "But will his sacrifice then save his ship?"

"What can you do?" began the crewman and then he paused. His grin was gone; now he looked at her speculatively. In her present guise she perhaps did not look formidable enough to threaten the ship, but he could not be sure. And one thing she knew from her own time and place — a spaceman learned early to take nothing for granted on a new planet. It might well be that she did have command over some unknown force.

"What can I do? There is much." She took quick advantage of that hesitation. "Have you been able to raise the ship?" She plunged on, hoping very desperately that she had made the right guess. "Have
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you been able to communicate with your other ship, or ships, in orbit?"

His expression was her answer, one which fanned her hope into a bright blaze of excitement. The ship *was* grounded, had some sort of a hold on it which they had not been able to break!

"The Captain won't listen." He was sullen now.

"I think he will. Tell him that we got Hawarel — here — and himself — or else we shall truly show you what happened to that derelict across the field."

As had fallen silent. He was watching her, not with quite the same wariness of the crewman, but with an emotion she was not able to read. Surprise? Or did it mask some sly thought of taking over her bluff, captive though he was?

"Talk!" The need for hurry rode Tamisan now. By this time those above would wonder why their captives had not been brought before them. Also, outside, the Over-Queen's men would certainly have reported that Tamisan and a seeming guard had entered the ship. From both sides enemies might be closing in.

"I can not set the com," her prisoner answered.

"Tell me then!"

"The red button —"

But she thought she had seen a

slight shift in his eyes. Tamisan raised her hand, to press the green button instead. Without accusing him of the treachery she was sure he had tried, she said again, more fiercely:

"Talk!"

"Sannard here." He put his lip close to the com. "They — they have me. Roosoo and Cambre are dead. They want the native."

"In good condition," hissed Tamisan, "and now!"

"They want him now, in good condition," Sannard repeated. "They threaten the ship"

There came no acknowledgement from the com in return. Had she indeed pressed the wrong button because she was overly suspicious? What was going to happen? Time — she could not wait on time!

"Sannard —" the voice from the com was metallic, without human inflection or tone.

But Tamisan gave the crewman a push which sent him sliding back along the wall until he bumped into Kas and the binds of both men immediately united to make them one struggling package. Tamisan spoke into the com.

"Captain, I do not play any game. Send me your prisoner or look upon that derelict you see and say to yourself that will be your ship. For this is so, as true as I stand here now, with your man as my captive. Also — send Hawarel alone, and pray to whatever im-

mortal powers you believe sit in judgment over your actions that he can so come! Time grows very short and there is that which will act if you do not, and to a purpose you shall not relish!"

The crewman, whose legs were still free, was trying to kick away from Kas. But his struggles instead sent them both to the floor in a heaving tangle. Tamisan's hand dropped to her side as she leaned against the wall, breathing heavily. With all her will she wanted to control action as she did in a dream, but only fate did that now.

XV

Though she sagged against the wall, Tamisan felt rigid, as if she were in a great encasement of su-steel. And, as time moved at so slow a pace as not to be measured normally, that prisoning hold on her body and spirit grew. The crewman and Kas had ceased their struggles. She could not see the crewman's face, but that which Kas turned to her had a queer, distorted look. As if before her eyes, though not through any skill of hers, he was indeed changing, taking on the aspect of another man. Since her return to the sky tower in the second dream she had known he was to be feared. Now, in spite of the fact that his body was securely imprisoned, she found herself edging away, as if by the very

intentness of that hostile stare he could aim a weapon to bring her down. But he said nothing, lay as broodingly quiet and impassive as though he had foreknowledge of utter failure for her.

She knew so little, Tamisaon thought, she who had always taken pride in her learning, in the wealth of lore she had drawn into furnishing her memory for action dreaming. The spacecrew might have some way of flooding this short corridor with a noxious gas, or using a hidden ray linked with a scanner to finish them. Tamisan found herself running her hands along the walls, studying the unbroken surface a little wildly, striving to find where death might enter quietly and unseen.

There was another bulkhead door at the end of this short corridor; at a few paces away from the outer hatch a ladder ascended to a closed trap. Her head turned constantly, until she regained a firmer control of herself, from one of those entrances to the other. They had only to wait to call her bluff — only to wait.

Yes! They had waited and they were —

The air about her was changing, there was a growing scent in it. Not unpleasant — but even a fine perfume would have seemed a stench from the dungheap when it reached her nostrils under these present conditions! Also the light which

radiated from the jointure of the corridor roof and ceiling was altering. It had been that of a moderately sunlit day, now it was bluish. So under it her own brown skin took on an eerie look. She had lost her throw! Maybe, if she could open the hatch again, let in the outer air —

Tamisan tottered to the hatch, gripped the locking wheel and brought her strength to bear. Kas was writhing again, trying to break loose from his unwilling partner. But oddly enough the crewman lay limp, his head rolling when Kas's heaving disturbed the lay of his body, but his eyes were closed. And, at the same time Tamisan braced against the wall, her full strength turned on the need for opening the door, she knew a flash of surprise. Was it her over-vivid imagination alone which made her believe that she was in danger? When she rested to draw a deep breath —

Why — in her startlement she could have cried out aloud. She did utter a small sound. She was gaining strength, not losing it. Every lungful of that scented air she breathed in — and she was breathing deeper, more slowly as if her body desired such nourishment — was a restorative.

Kas, too? She turned to glance at him again. Where she breathed deeply, with lessening apprehension, he was gasping, his face gha-

ly in the change of light. And then, even as she watched, his struggles ended, his head fell back so that he lay as inert as the crewman he sprawled across.

So whatever change was in progress here, it affected Kas and the crewman — that latter faster than the former — but not her. And now her trained imagination took another leap. Perhaps she had not been so far wrong in threatening those on this ship with danger. Though she had no guess as to how it was done, this could be another strange weapon in the armament of the Over-Queen.

Hawarel? The spacemen had probably never intended to send him. Dared she go to seek him? Tamisan wavered, one hand on the hatch wheel, looking to the ladder and the other door. If all within this ship save she had reacted to the strange air, there would be none to stop her. But if she fled the ship, she would face the loss of the keys to her own world — Starrex and Kas. In addition, she might be met by some evil fate at the hands of the Over-Queen. She had broken prison, and — if they did not know of Kas — had left dead men behind her. As the Mouth of Olava, she shuddered from the judgment which would be rendered one deemed to have practiced wrongful supernatural acts.

Resolutely, Tamisan went to the door at the end of the corridor. It

was really true that she had no choice at all. She must find Starrex, somehow bring him here, so that they three could be together and win a small space of time in which to arrange a dream breaking — or she was totally defeated.

She loosened her belt a little so she could draw up her robe through it, shortening the hampering length, leaving her legs freer. There was the tangler and Kas's laser. In addition was this mounting feeling of strength and well being, though an inner warning suggested she not trust to over-confidence.

The door gave under her push and she looked out upon a scene which first startled and then reassured her. There were crewmen in the corridor. But they lay prone as if they had been caught while on their way to the hatch. Lasers — of a slightly different pattern than that Kas had brought — had fallen from their hands, and three of the four wore tanglers.

Tamisan picked her way carefully around them, gathering up all those weapons in a fold of her robe, as if she were some maiden in a field gathering an armload of spring flowers. The men were alive, she saw as she stooped closer, but they breathed evenly as if peacefully asleep.

She took one of the tanglers, discarding the one she had used, fearing its charge might be near ex-

haustion. As for the rest of the collection, she dropped them at the far end of the passageway and turned the beam of Kas's weapon on them; she left behind a metal mass of no use to anyone.

Her idea of the geography of the ship was scanty. She would simply have to explore and keep exploring until she found Starrex. But she would start at the top and work down. So she found a level ladder, three times coming upon a sleeping crewman. Each time she made sure he was disarmed before she left him.

The blue shade of the light was growing deeper, giving a very weird cast to the faces of the sleepers. Making sure her robe was tightly kilted up, Tamisan began to climb. She had reached the third level when she heard the sound, the first she had noted in this too-silent ship since she had left the hatchway.

She stopped to listen, deciding it came from somewhere in the level into which she had just climbed. With laser in hand, she tried to use it as a guide, though it was misleading — and might have come from any one of the cabins. Each door she passed Tamisan pushed open. There were more sleepers — some stretched in bunks, others on the floors or seated at tables with their heads lying on those surfaces. But she did not halt now to collect weapons. The need

to be about her task, free of this ship, built in her as sharp as might a slaver's lash laid across her shrinking shoulders.

Suddenly the sound grew louder as she came to a last door and pushed it. Now she looked into a cabin not meant for living but perhaps for a kind of death. Two men in plain tunics were crumpled by the threshold. As if they had had some limited warning of danger to come and had tried to flee, but fallen before they could reach the corridor. Behind them was a table and on that a body, very much alive, struggling with dogged determination against confining straps.

Though his long hair had been clipped and the stubble of it shaven to expose the full nakedness of his entire scalp, there was no mistaking Hawarel. He not only fought against the clamps and straps which held him to the table, but in addition he jerked his head with sharp, short pulls, to dislodge disks fastened to his forehead, and from there, by wire, to a vast box of a machine which filled one quarter of the cabin.

Tamisan stepped over the inert men, reached the side of the table and jerked the disks away from the prisoner's head; perhaps his determined struggles had already loosened them somewhat. His mouth had opened and shut as she came to him as if he were forming words

she could not hear, or he could not voice. But as the apparatus came away in her hands, he gave a cry of triumph.

"Get me loose!" he commanded. She was already examining the under part of the table for the locking mechanism of those straps and clamps. It was only seconds before she was able to obey his order.

He sat upright, bare to the waist, and she saw beneath, where his shoulders and the upper part of his spine had rested on the table, a complicated series of disks.

"Ah!" Before she could move he scooped up the laser she had laid on the edge of the table when she had freed him. And the gesture he made with it might not have been only to indicate the door and the need for hurry, but perhaps also was a warning that with a weapon in his hands he now thought he was in command of the situation.

"They sleep — everywhere." she told him. "And Kas — he is a prisoner."

"I thought you could not find him — he was not one of the crew."

"He was not. But I have him now, and with him we can return."

"How long will it take?" Starrex was down on one knee, searching the two men on the floor.

"I can not tell." She gave him the truth. "But — how long will these sleep? Their unconsciousness is, I think, some trick of the Over-Queen's."

"It came unexpectedly for them," Starrex agreed. "And you may be right that this is only preliminary to taking over the ship. I have learned this much, that their instruments and much of their equipment has been affected so they can not trust them. Otherwise —" His Hawarel face was grim under its bluish, deadman's coloring. "Otherwise I would not have survived this long as myself."

"Let us go!" Now that she had miraculously — or so it seemed to her — succeeded, Tamisan was even more uneasy, wanting nothing to spoil their escape.

XVI

They found their way back to the corridor before the hatch while the ship still slept. Starrex knelt by Kas and then looked with astonishment at Tamisan. "But this is the real Kas!"

"It is Kas, real enough," she agreed. "And there is a reason for that. But need we discuss it now? If the Over-Queen's men come to take this ship — I tell you her greeting to us may be worse than any you have met here. I remember enough of the Tamisan who is the Mouth of Olava to know that."

He nodded. "Can you break dream now?"

She looked around her a little wildly. Concentration — no, somehow she could not think so clearly.

It was as if the exultation of fumes of that scented air had awakened in her was draining. And with that sapping went what she needed most.

"I — I fear not."

"It is simple then." He stopped again to examine the tangle cords. "We shall have to go to where you can." She saw him set the laser on its lowest beam to burn through the cords which united Kas to the crewman, though he did not free his cousin from the rest of his bonds.

But what if they marched out of the hatch into a waiting party of the Over-Queen's guards? They had the tangler, the laser, and perhaps — just perhaps — the half smile of fortune on their side. They would have to risk it.

Tamisan opened the inner door of the pressure chamber. The dead men lay there as they had fallen. Fighting nausea, she dragged one aside to make room for Starrex, who carried Kas over his shoulder, moving slowly under that burden, a fold of cloak well wrapped about the prisoner to prevent any contact between the cords and Starrex's own flesh. The outer hatch was open and beyond —

A blast of icy rain, with the added bite of the wind which drove it, struck viciously at them. It had been dawn when Tamisan had entered the ship, but outside now the day was no lighter. The torches had

been extinguished. Tamisan could see no lights. Shielding her eyes against the wind and the rain, she tried to make out the line of guards.

Perhaps the severe weather had driven them all away. She was sure no one was waiting at the foot of the ramp, unless they were under the fins of the ship, sheltering there. And that chance would have to be taken. She said as much and Starrex nodded.

"Where do we go?"

"Anywhere away from the city. Give me but a little shelter and time."

"Vermer's Hand over us and we can do it," he returned. "Here — take this!"

He kicked an object across the metal plates of the deck and she saw it was one of the lasers used by the crewmen. She picked it up in one hand, the tangler in her other. Burdened as he was by Kas, Starrex could not lead the way. She must now play in real life such an action role as she had many times dreamed. But this held no amusement, only a wish to scuttle quickly into any form of safety wind and rain would allow her.

The ramp being at such a steep angle, she feared slipping on it and had to belt the tangler, hold on grimly with one hand and go much more slowly than her fast beating heart demanded, anxious lest Starrex in turn might lose footing and

slam into her, carrying them both on to disaster.

The strength of the storm was such that it was a battle to gain step after step, even though she reached the ground without mishap. Tamisan was not sure in which direction she must head now to avoid the Castle and the city. Her memory seemed befuddled by the storm and she could only guess. Also she was afraid of losing contact with Starrex; as slowly as she went, he dragged even more behind.

Then she stumbled against an upright stake. She put out her hand and fumbled along it enough to know that this was one of the rain quenched torches. It heartened her a little to learn that they had reached the barrier and that no guards stood here. Perhaps the storm was a life saver for the three of them.

Tamisan lingered, waiting for Starrex to catch up. Now he caught at the torch, steadying himself as if he needed that support.

His voice came in wind-deadened gusts, labored. "I may have in this Hawarel a good body, but I am not a heavy duty android. We must find your shelter."

There was a dark shadow to her left; it could be a coppice. Even trees or tall brush could give them some measure of relief.

"Over there." She pointed, but did not know if, in this gloom, he could see it.

"Yes." He straightened a little under the burden of Kas, staggering in the direction of the shadow.

They had to beat their way into the vegetation. Tamisan, having two arms free, broke the path for Starrex. She might have used the laser to cut, but the ever-present fear that they might need the charges for future protection kept her from a waste of their slender resources for defense.

At last, at the cost of branch-whipped and thorn-ripped weals in their flesh, they came into a space which was a little more open. Starrex allowed his burden to fall to the ground.

"Can you break dream now?" He squatted down beside Kas, as she dropped to sit panting near him.

"I can —"

But she got no farther. There was a sound which cut through even the tumult of the storm, and that part of them which was allied to this world knew it for what it was, the warning of a hunt. And — since they *were* able to hear it — they must be the hunted!

"The Itter Hounds!" He put their peril into words.

"And they run for us!" Mouth of Olava or not, when the Itter Hounds coursed on one's track there was no defense, for they could not be controlled once they were loosed to chase.

"We can not fight them."

"Do not be too sure of that," he

answered. "We have the lasers, weapons not of this world. The weapon which put the ship's crew to sleep did not vanquish us; so might an off-world weapon react the other way here —"

"But Kas —" She thought she had found a weak point in his reasoning, much as she wanted to believe he had guessed rightly.

"Kas is in his own form, which is perhaps more akin to the crewmen now than to us. And, by the way, how is it that he is?"

She kept her tale terse, but told him of her dream within a dream and how she had found Kas. She heard him laugh.

"I was right then in thinking my dear cousin might well be at the center of this web! However, now he is as completely enmeshed as the rest of us. As a fellow victim he may be more cooperative."

"Entirely so, my noble lord!" The voice out of the dark between them was composed.

"You are awake then, cousin. Well, we would be even more awake. There is a struggle here in progress between two sets of enemies who are both willing to make us a third. We had better travel swiftly elsewhere if we would save our skins. What of it, Tamisan?"

"I must have time."

"What I can do to buy it for you, I will!" That carried the force of a sworn oath. "If the lasers act outside the laws of this world, it

may be that they can even stop the Itter Hounds. But to get to it!"

She had no proper conductor, nothing but her will and the need. Putting out her hands she touched the bare, wet flesh of Starrex's shoulder, was more cautious in seeking a hold on Kas, lest she encounter one of the tangle cords. Then she exerted her full will and looked far in, not out.

It was no use, her craft failed her. There was that momentary sensation of suspension between two worlds. Then she was back in the dark brush where the growing walls did not hold off the rain.

"I can not break the dream. There is no energy machine to step up the power." But she did not add that perhaps she might have done it for herself alone.

Kas laughed then. "It would seem my sealer still works in spite of all your meddling, Tamisan. I fear, my noble lord, you will have to prove the effectiveness of your weapons after all. Though you might set me free and give me arms, necessity making allies of us after all."

"Tamisan!" Starrex's voice was one to bring her out of the dull anguish of her failure. "This dream — remember, it may not be a usual dream after all. Could another world door be opened?"

"Which world?" At that moment her memories of reading and viewing tapes were a whirl in her head.

And the voiceless call of the Itter Hounds to which *this* Tamisan was attuned made her whole body cringe and shiver, addled her thinking even more.

"Which world? Any one — think, girl, think! Take a single change if you must, but think!"

"I can not. The Hounds — ahee — they come — they come! We are meat for the fangs of those who course the Dark Runnels under moonless skies! We are lost!" The Tamisan who dreamed slipped into the Mouth of Olava, and the Mouth of Olava vanished in turn, and she was only a naked, defenseless thing crouching under the shadow of a death against which she could raise no shield. She was —

Her head rocked, the flesh of her cheeks stung as she swayed from the slaps dealt her by Starrex.

"You are a dreamer!" His voice was imperative. "Dream now then as you have never dreamed before! For there is that in you which can do this, if you will it."

It was like the action of that strange scented air in the ship; her will was reborn, her mind steadied. Tamisan the dreamer pushed out that other weak Tamisan. But — what world? A point — give her but a decision point in history!

"Yaaaah —" the cry from Starrex's throat was not now meant to arouse her. Perhaps it was the battle challenge of Hawarel.

There was a pallid snout, about which hung a dreadful sickening phosphorescence, thrust through the screen of brush. She sensed rather than saw Starrex fire the laser at it.

A decision — Water beating in on her. Wind rising as if to claw them out of the poor refuge to be easy meat for the hunters. Drowning — sea — sea — the Sea Kings of Nath!

Feverishly she seized upon that. But she knew so little of the Sea Kings who had once held the lace of islands east of Ty-Kry. They had threatened Ty-Kry itself — so long ago that that war was legend, not true history. And they had been tricked, their kind and his war chiefs taken by treachery.

The Ill Cup of Nath. Tamisan forced herself to remember, to hold on that. And, with her choice made, again her mind steadied. She threw out her hands, once more touching Starrex and Kas, though she did not choose the latter; her hand went without her conscious bidding as if he must be included or all would fail.

The Ill Cup of Nath — this time it would not be drunk!

Tamisan opened her eyes. Tamisan — no — she was Tami-sin! She sat up and looked about her. Soft covering of pale green fell away from her bare body. And, inspecting that same body, she saw that

her skin was no longer warmly brown but was instead a pearl white. What she sat within was a bed place fashioned in the form of a great shell, the other half of it arching over head to form a canopy.

Also — she was not alone. Cautiously, she turned a little to survey her sleeping companion. His head was somewhat hidden from her so that she could see only a curve of shoulder as pale as her own, hair curled in a tight fitting cap, the red-brown shade of storm tossed sea-weed.

Warily, very warily, she put out a finger tip, touched it to his hunched shoulder — and knew! He sighed, began to roll over toward her. Tamisan smiled and clasped her arms under her small, high breasts.

She was Tam-sin, and this was Kilwar, who had been Starrex and Hawarel — but was now Lord of LockNer of the Nearer Sea. But,

there had been a third! Her smile faded as memory sharpened. Kas! Anxiously she looked about the room, its nacre-coated walls, its pale green hangings, all familiar to Tam-sin.

No Kas. Which did not mean that he might not be lurking somewhere about, a disruptive factor if his nature held true.

A warm arm swung up about her waist. Startled she looked down into green eyes, sea-green eyes, eyes which knew her — and which also knew that other Tamisan. Below those very knowledgeable eyes lips smiled.

“I think,” his voice was familiar and yet strange, “that this is going to be a very interesting dream, my Tam-sin.”

She allowed herself to be drawn down beside him. Perhaps — no, surely — he was right.

END

In the May GALAXY:

LITTLE BLUE HAWK

by Sydney van Scyoc

A MAN SPEKITH

by Richard Wilson

STAR DREAM

by Terry Carr & Alexei Panshin

AUTHORGRAPHS

An Interview with Lester del Rey



Lester del Rey, If's Managing Editor and author of a score of science-fiction books (not to mention an equal number of non-sf titles), has been writing science fiction since before some present writers were born. We found a good opportunity to start him talking, so we turned on the tape recorder and let it run—and the following is the result.

I got interested in science fiction as soon as I could read... or a little bit before. I had Jules Verne read to me before I could read. As soon as I'd learned how, we had a pretty good collection of his stuff and I read it all. I read Wells, from the library, Burroughs when I could get them. As a matter of fact, the first hard-cover book I ever sent away for and bought — I spent good money for it, forty-nine cents, I'd have you know, in the Grosset & Dunlap edition — was Burroughs. Sooner or later somebody

gave me a copy of a science-fiction magazine, but I never saw them again for quite a while; I never saw a magazine stand that carried them, in Minnesota, and had to wait till I got to Washington. I had to borrow from Milt Rothman to backtrack and read all the old stuff.

That first magazine had had an Ed Hamilton center-of-the-earth story in it, and I thought he was great. Doc Smith I loved, of course; John Campbell, with his heavy-science Arcot, Wade and Morey stories. I liked Raymond Gallun very much, in fact his stuff I can still look back on with pleasure. I was pretty much for the heavy-science and strong adventure people, at least until I came across Stanley Weinbaum's *A Martian Odyssey*. That was quite a shock and quite a revelation; it was a

sort of turning point in my whole attitude.

I kept on reading sf, just for fun, until some years later I was reading a story called *Pithecanthropus Rejectus*, by Manly Wade Wellman, along about December, 1937. I didn't like it. I said so — perhaps in slightly strong words; matter of fact, I threw the magazine across the room. The gal I was going with had some very harsh words about that, and about my right to criticize anyway, since I hadn't written anything myself. I wasn't presumptuous enough to think I could get a story published, but I was pretty sure I could write one, and even get a letter from the editor instead of a rejection slip — I had pretty good reason to believe that, since I more or less knew the editor, at least through letters. The girl doubted that too, so I had to sit down and write a story to prove my point. I wrote it at 8,000 words, because I was suffering from logorrhea, as all writers do in the beginning, but I was smart enough to know that you got much better attention from an editor when you sent him a short piece first, so I cut it down to 4,000 by taking a red pencil and going *zooop, zooop, zooop* and retyping it. I sent it off; and actually, I didn't get a letter from the editor; what he did was to send me a check — just about the first week of January, 1938.

After that, of course, I sat down

and wrote a couple of others. They didn't sell — or not then; one did some years later, another got lost. That one was about digging ice on Mars. A real genuine adventure story, full of a girl, and monsters, and all kinds of things. Looking back on it, I'm not so sure it's a bad thing it got lost.

But that was it, for then. I'd been to the well three times and sold once, more or less by accident; I figured that, like most writers, I was a one-story writer, so I gave it up . . . until the editor wrote me and asked for another story.

So I went out and bought a copy of *Writers' Yearbook*, in which he'd been talking about what he liked in sf stories. He had a long article, pointing out that he wanted human reactions; strong human element; if the story was about a robot, he wanted a *human* robot. So I said to myself, uh-huh, what's the most human thing a robot can do? Fall in love? So I sat down and wrote *Helen O'Loy*, which he bought. And then I began doing it seriously — in all honesty I don't know how many, but around twenty science-fiction books and I don't know how many others.

I think good science-fiction is very much worth reading. But I'm not really interested too much in what it's "worth"; I think it's fun to read, and that interests me a lot more. If I want to get educated in philosophy and the injustices

that are done to the poor people of the south and what every good young college boy is thinking and so on, I'll go out and get myself serious books on the subject. The purpose of fiction is to entertain; I prefer to be entertained.

One of the beauties of good science fiction is you never really quite know what's going to happen next. There are unlimited possibilities. A good science-fiction writer is going to have details that you never thought about, because he's building a dream right in front of you. He's making up a whole world, a whole civilization before your eyes.

I like science in my science fiction. I don't demand it every time, because I'm willing to settle for a little romance now and then; but I like to see whatever science is there reasonably accurate. If, the man is going to use science basically for his takeoff, I want him to use it, I want him to develop it accurately.

There's plenty going on in science right now that would make good sf stories. Take biochemistry. The business of gene engineering, mutations created by the future gene manipulator, has tremendous possibilities, and damn few science-fiction writers are doing anything with it. It seems to me this is the first time a wonderful new field has opened up, and sf writers have said he-hum and gone back to imitating

the old stuff. I did one, called *The Eleventh Commandment*. The hero is a Martian cytologist, used to manipulating genes; I had to set up a way where he could actually get into it and manipulate it: a special microscope, with fields to control the temperature very rapidly, so that he could slow down the cell and hold it for operations, or speed it up to see the results. There was a plague with the deep-sea plant life, so that the one-celled plants were suddenly flipping over to animals — there is, incidentally, one form of such life that actually does that, but in the story it does it consistently. The problem was to find out why. Our hero finds out that there's a virus in there which apparently has mutated, and now swaps parts with these cells. There's more, of course. The point I'm making is that I don't know very many other examples of that in modern sf. And I don't know why.

And the new cosmological stuff is interesting. I think that in the old days writers would have been going nuts about quasars, coming up with half a dozen cockeyed ideas about pulsars and so on. But they don't, any more.

I'd like to see Isaac Asimov writing a story about an android, using the genuine biological knowledge he has, creating the android because it was necessary for some empire-saving reasons. I wish Fred

Hoyle would touch on astronomy in his stories more; he can write science fiction, and he's got the knowledge for it, and a good imagination, too. I'd like to see what Heinlein could do in that field. He's given little bits of hints at times; in *Methuselah's Children*, for instance.

Larry Niven, I think, is doing a fine job with the neutron stars and the exploding galaxies; I'm all in favor of it. What I'd like to see *him* try is something with a little romance in it.

Among the contemporary writers, most of the so-called New Wave writers I don't have much use for. (Note the "so-called." Brian Aldiss for instance, I don't regard as a New Wave writer; he himself says he isn't.) Most of Zelazny's stuff I think has been damn good; I don't like some of his stuff, because I think he's gotten much too typed, straining too hard to get religious elements in, where he no longer has much enthusiasm; but he's good. I like Burt Filer's stuff; I thought he was a happy combination of old and new. And I like Tiptree's work. He has something that's rather unusual nowadays; he even has a good bit of style. There's liveliness to it, and a certain adaptability to it.

I'd be glad to discuss science-fiction critics, but first someone will have to name one. There are a few good book reviewers. I have

AUTHORGRAPHS

no objection to Schuyler Miller as a reviewer; he gives you a kind of an idea of whether you want to read it or not. I rather liked Bob Silverberg in that field. I thought he did a good competent review; but that wasn't criticism.

When you use the word "critic," you probably mean people like Damon Knight and Jim Blish. Damon's criticism, as far as I'm concerned, is mostly a total misunderstanding of the "new criticism" that went out in the '30's. Blish can be perceptive as hell — and unperceptive as hell. You have to read the book first to decide whether you like his criticism of it. Real criticism I don't think exists in the field.

Every so often a science-fiction movie comes along that's delightful. I don't know whether it's every ten years or every twenty years. *The Day the Earth Stood Still* was a fine job. I liked *Forbidden Planet*. *Planet of the Apes* wasn't bad; a little heavy-handed and a little obvious, but it was kind of fun. 2001? Well, I've said my piece on that. The acting was better than usual; the photography was often superb; some of the mechanical work in it was wonderful; it's just too bad that Stanley Kubrick couldn't let Clarke do a real sf story, and then do his best to follow it.

Some of the TV hasn't been bad. A few of the early *Star Trek* things

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were quite good. There was a lot of hokum built in, because they used series characters, but there were several good stories — Gene Roddenberry's own, most of the time.

His pilot script, with the cat, was almost as if Van Vogt had written it, and I loved it. Most TV in the area has been either horror or fantasy, and the horror stuff, I think, is anti-science fiction. I said the other day at the Modern Language Association meeting that I thought one of the things that science fiction expresses strongly is that all intelligences are brothers; but the basic rule in most TV stuff is that it doesn't matter how intelligent you are, if your skin isn't put on right you're an alien and frightful.

That I resent.

What I wish sf writers would do is *think*. Think about their situation until they begin to feel it; not be smart-Alecky. I'd like to pass a law against their believing they were artists.

I think the average reader of science fiction is a lot better judge of the medium than most people seem to think he is. If a reader likes a story, he doesn't have to give reasons for it. He's perfectly capable of making up his own mind — and, on the average, I think he'll be right.

END
IF

(Continued from page 66)

suit's control-bumps, he swung the light across it again, slowly. Finally he decided it was only the shifting light that had made the thing appear to move very slightly.

He detoured a hundred feet around it. But before he'd gotten much beyond, he found that he wasn't going to be able to avoid the machines by that far — there were too many of them. Some were as big as the first one he saw. Others were the smaller kind he'd seen pictures of. He saw one biped robot — he knew those too, from the old books — but it was prone and inert, and didn't look much like a man. One of its legs was cut off below the knee-joint. The stub had a fused look, as if some kind of heat-beam had burned it.

There were other signs of violence too. Most of the 'pairbots had tentacles missing, and he saw several of those amputated flexible steel members, many-jointed like the legs of insects, lying about.

If there'd been any human corpses after those fearful battles, they were gone now.

He wound his way through the relics. Ben Tomsun said he was off line a little, so he moved to his left.

Presently his beam showed the bulkhead — a vertical wall of steel rising into the darkness. He located the hatch and paused to look behind and to both sides.

Before he approached the hatch he talked to Ben Tomsun. "There's a machine about twenty yards in front of it."

"Yes; it's been there for about seventy years without moving. There's another not far away from it. You'll have to pass between. Tell me when you're within ten yards of the hatch. Our detection's not very precise there."

Pry strode slowly toward the gap between the two machines. The one nearest the hatch was medium-sized, and a specialized sort. It had the tri-wheeled base, and in the center of that was a vertical column that looked as if it were extensible — some kind of a hoist. There were half a dozen of the steel tentacles, and a battery of things shaped like drums. Those looked familiar, from some picture. Yes — they were searchlights. He could see the shattered glass now, and the silvery curved reflectors.

He moved a step closer — and the machine suddenly rolled to intercept him! Simultaneously there was a loud buzzing in his helmet. Distracted, he turned to run — and was suddenly bathed in dazzling light from one side! Through the buzzing in his helmet, which was maddening, he thought he heard a faint voice shouting. And now other lights converged on him. He spun, saw vague shapes rolling

toward him and crouched in pure terror for a moment.

But he wasn't a guardsman for nothing! Shame drove some of the panic from him. He reached hastily for suit-controls; he pressed bumps that killed his own lights and sent him shooting straight up. He darted to one side to escape for a moment the savagely searching lights of the machines and swung his head about, trying to build up a mental picture of what lay about him. He was going to have to flee in the dark, and he didn't want to slam into some trave-column! The lights found him again. He zoomed away erratically, trying to get behind a column; but the searchlights came from too many directions. He dodged again. If only the maddening buzz in his helmet would stop. He remembered Ben Tomsun's saying something about the lowest row of studs. He pressed one. The buzz broke off for an instant and resumed on a slightly different tone — but louder, if anything! He tried another bump.

Blessed silence! He went limp with relief. Now at least he could think. He zoomed higher, slanting up toward the outer hull, where the lights would have to reach farther. They hadn't found him now for several seconds; all they did was provide light so he could see his way around. But unless Captain Gerlik or whoever else directed the machines was stupid as

well as mad, that wouldn't last for long.

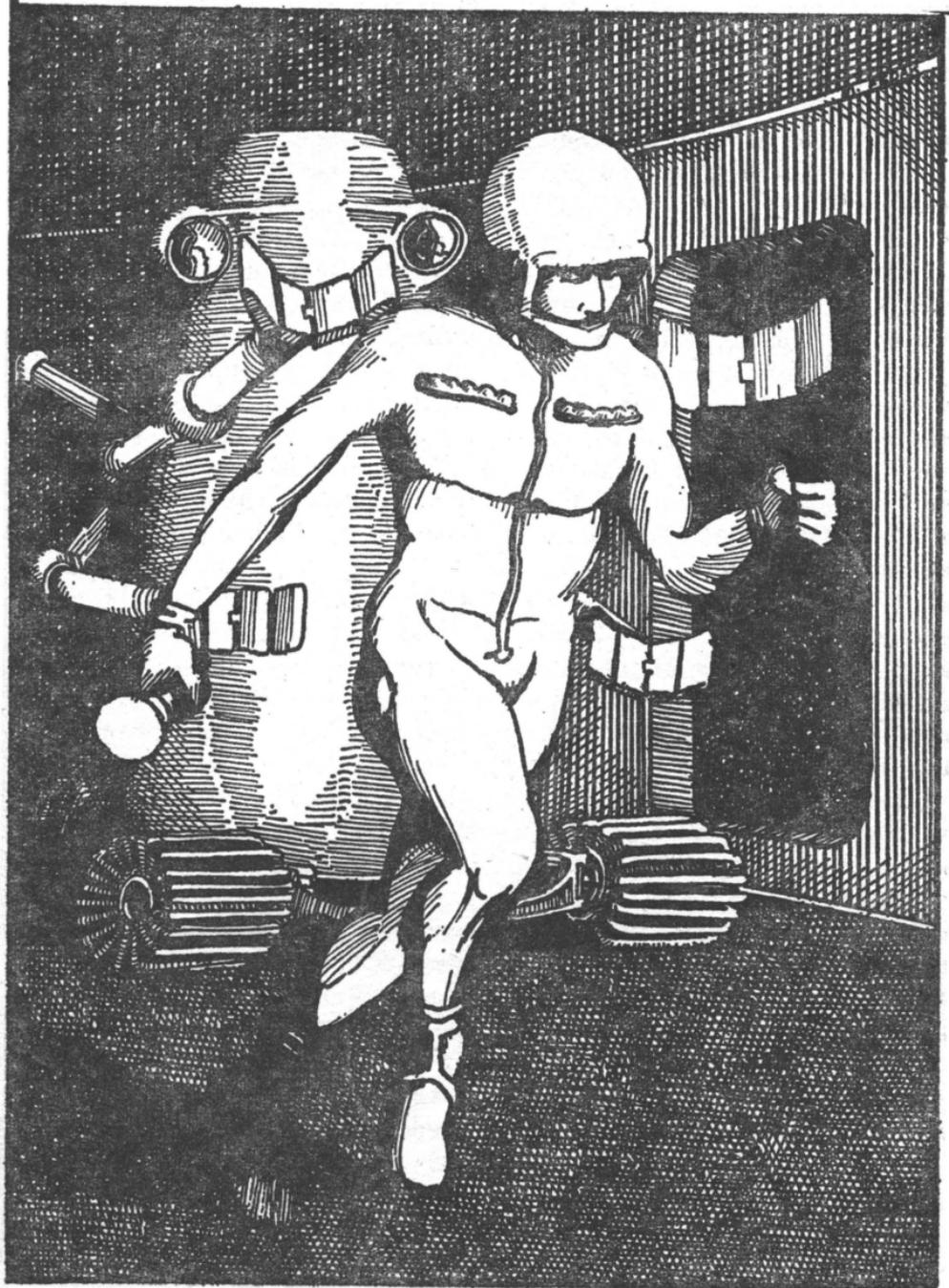
He had to find cover. Back into the sinus? No — he suspected very strongly there'd be an ambush waiting. Some other hatch that opened out of this compartment? He couldn't go around looking for one. Nor could he, apparently, talk to Ben Tomsun; the old books had described radio jamming clearly enough so Pry recognized it.

He needed a place to hide for a while until he could think, or until Ben Tomsun and his allies had time to organize help.

That broken column!

While the slashing lights lasted he shot that way, swerving and trying to stay hidden. He had to stop and wait for a searchlight to swing this way before he could see his objective. Then, when the light had passed, he flew slowly, groping ahead with his arms. He felt the girders, brought himself to a hover and tried to squeeze in between two. Not enough room! He moved to the side, found another gap and slipped in through it. He maneuvered until his body was down inside the hollow column, with only his helmet in the clear so he could see.

His panic was gone now. He knew he was in terrible danger, but it wasn't immediate. He watched the machines rolling about. They apparently knew he'd headed aft



and that he'd gone far up toward the outer hull, and they were organized in a line of search, their lights probing aloft. Would they recognize this pieced-together trave-column as a possible hiding-place? If so, he'd have to be ready to move fast! Of course, if the column were hollow and uninterrupted for its full length, he could retreat far down. That wasn't inviting, but at least he could get out of sight.

Then he saw one of the medium-sized machines rise slowly from the sinus wall. His midriff contracted.

So some of his mechanical pursuers, at least, had grav-lifts in working order.

Should he leave his concealment and try for the hole back into Sinus B? If he could get through that . . . No. He wasn't going to lead these madman's machines back to his people. So long as Captain Gerlik's fatherly attitude lasted, they'd be all right. Pry mustn't let the Ship find out he was one of them!

Four machines were off the steel floor now. Only one maneuvered easily, but the others could fly and bring their searchlights up near the outer hull. He saw the agile one turn itself slowly in midair and continue on until its wheels touched the outer hull. The event brought him a moment of confusion — he'd been thinking of the outer hull as up, and now suddenly, as he watched the machine begin to roll toward him, he realized that the outer hull

could be considered down as well.

All right, he thought angrily, to the devil with that! Up or down, it's coming this way. Its light moved toward his hiding-place. He lowered himself hastily out of sight. Other lights were sweeping the outer hull now too, and reflected light spilled in upon him.

Thinking he'd better reconnoiter into the column, at least, while he had the chance, he let himself fall slowly.

His feet touched something yielding.

Hastily he moved aside and peered at the thing. The dim light from above showed a slick surface. The light strengthened for a moment . . .

He shuddered. The thing was a human corpse in a pressure-suit. He hung there staring at it.

VII

This victim, unlike the frozen ones in the dark hall of Sinus B, hadn't escaped decay. The death-face behind the helmet window was ghastly; the flesh rotted away, the teeth exposed.

The grim relic seemed anchored somehow to the inner curve of the column.

The light faded. Pry hovered for a while until he felt it wasn't coming back, then rose to where he could peer out. The machines weren't far away, but the pattern of the search seemed to be aimed

even farther after — where the searchlights showed a warped and ruptured bulkhead, not more than two hundred feet from the hole into the sinus. Did they suspect he'd fled into a farther-aft compartment? Maybe. Or maybe they were just faking — Gerlik might cunningly hope to lure him into the open.

Well, he wasn't going to bite yet. He waited. After a while curiosity prompted him to go down and investigate the suited corpse that hung there so oddly.

Feeling about in the dark, he'd presently solved the thing.

The man, obviously, had been dropping down inside the column — hastily, perhaps, to avoid some pursuit — and had gotten snagged. There, on the otherwise smooth steel, a terrible spike thrust upward and inward — a spike created by the impact of something that had crashed against the outside of the column. That murderous dagger had punched through the plastic suit and into the man's spine.

When? At the time of the Catastrophe? Or more recently, in some furtive reconnaissance into this dark no-man's-land?

Pry brooded about it for a while. He himself might meet some such fate before the hour was out!

Then, slowly, an idea began to crystallize in his mind. He was too late to do anything for the dead man — but possibly the dead man could do something for him!

Did the punctured suit still have power? Of course — it was hanging precisely where he'd let go of it after hoisting it off the snag, which meant it was set on automatic hover. The occupant must have accomplished that much before he died.

With queasy shivers along his spine, Pry worked the grisly thing up the column and got it wedged between two girders, aligned so the head aimed aft and a little down. Then he felt carefully of its control bumps, readying himself to push two. But before he did that he tried his own helmet radio again — and got the same loud, distracting buzz.

Well, he couldn't talk to Ben Tomsun yet, then. Should he wait longer, hoping rescue would come? He thought not. Ben Tomsun must assume he was dead by now. And the longer he waited, the more likely the machines or whoever directed them were to decide he was still in this compartment after all, and concentrate here.

If he could get near the hatch and run back and forth for a moment, wouldn't Ben Tomsun be able to feel him? That was a question. What were his alternatives? To try for the sinus and hide there; to look for some other way out of the compartment; to wait where he was. Or maybe to dash out in a brief attack against the machines.

None of those attracted him.

He took a deep breath and pressed the chosen bumps on the corpse's suit. The girders held it for a moment; then it tugged free and slanted aft, fairly well aimed toward the hole in the sinus wall.

Pry waited no longer. He launched himself in the opposite direction slowly, straining his eyes to see by what dim light bounced this way. He swerved around a column, then tilted himself parallel to it so that, by twisting his helmet, he could see aft. The searchlights were still swinging there. He passed another column.

He couldn't see the suited corpse when they located it, but he could tell by the way the lights swung. Now most of them converged on one spot. His pulse quickened with hope, and he turned his head forward again.

But there was very little light reflecting to this end of the compartment now. He had to go by dead reckoning. When he felt he must surely be near the bulkhead, he drifted very slowly.

Finally his outstretched fingers touched a surface. He moved laterally to make sure it was the bulkhead, then let himself down slowly until he felt the sinus wall beneath his feet.

He looked aft. The machines were headed this way again! Sickness formed in his middle. Should he grope along, hoping to find the

hatch by feel? Suppose he ran back and forth where he was? Would Ben Tomsun correctly interpret whatever was felt, or assume it was some light machine? If he only knew more about things!

The machines were coming as if they'd already seen through the trick. Then Pry realized Gerlik could feel him here!

In desperation, he turned on all his lights and directed the beam along the base of the bulkhead. *Where was the hatch?*

There! In dismay, he saw that he'd missed it by nearly a hundred yards. He ran as fast as the suit would let him, swerved around a dead machine and cast a hasty look aft. Search-lights speared toward him now. Was Ben Tomsun alert? Would he understand?

A machine rolled feebly to intercept him. He dodged around it. Another was between him and the hatch — and moving as if to block it physically with its own bulk. Searchlights fixed on him precisely, making him feel as conspicuous and vulnerable as an egg on a table.

Something heavy hurtled through the air, missing him only by two feet, and slammed against the bulkhead at hip-height. He sprinted desperately, seeing that the slowly-trundling machine would reach the hatch before he did.

A voice — Gerlik's, no doubt projected via the machines — thundered, "Stop, traitor!"

Then, abruptly, the hatch slid open and light spilled through! The slow machine didn't pause. But from the open hatch shot another big shape, blocking the light for an instant. It crashed directly into the blockader. Pry felt the jar and heard the rending of metal and saw objects fly. Then he dodged around the locked-together machines and hurled himself through the hatch. It slammed shut behind him.

And then he stood gasping for breath and staring at four men in suits identical to his own. Each had a pistol of some sort—a heavy kind—in his hand. But the hands hung limp as four pairs of eyes stared back at Pry.

Presently he felt himself grinning. It wasn't all one-sided, this wonder he felt! It was the first time they'd ever seen a man from Sinus B!

One of them grinned back and said in ordinary English, "Turn on your radio."

Pry said, "It's being jammed." But he tried it nevertheless. To his surprise the buzzing was faint, and through it came the voice of Ben Tomsun.

"So you got through alive! I hope you'll let your escort bring you to my compartment at once. After all this, I'm anxious to get a look at you!"

There were several of the big compartments to pass through, all

of them lighted and all apparently in friendly hands, then an airlock with double doors. After that one of the four men said, "We're in Nose Cone now."

Nose Cone! A phrase from legends. Pry looked around. The compartment was smaller than the ones he'd just passed through, and there were a number of doors in it—overhead as well as in the floor and walls. From somewhere came the muffled hum and throb of machinery. And then there was a twisting corridor that left Pry with the impression they'd entered a gravity at right angles to the one he'd expected; and there were people, who stared at him, and a glimpse of a tree-covered deck through a doorway. Then, finally, divested of his suit, he stood in a small room, alone except for Ben Tomsun.

VIII

Pry realized he must have resisted, at gun level, the knowledge that Ben Tomsun wasn't a living man; for he was dazed now.

The cabinet of shiny metal was rectangular and more or less the size of a man. That helped a little. So did the horizontal row of small holes at about face-height and the mesh-covered opening below them. These could be thought of as eyes, ears, nostrils and mouth. The voice did come from the mesh-covered

opening. But aside from that, it was a simple featureless box, probably of acrysteel.

Ben Tomsun must have known how he felt. "Forgive the way I present myself. I'm not really confined to this box. My personality is scattered among various computer-banks of the Ship, all scrambled up with other personalities, history, technologies, Euclidean and non-Euclidean geometries, and data such as the germination-time of peach-pits. But I and the other recorded brains prefer these cabinets. They give us at least a tenuous simile to the time when we had live bodies."

Pry stared dumbly for a minute. The first words he blurted were, "You don't *sound* insane!"

Ben Tomsun sighed. "I hope I'm not. I can't explain to you exactly how things are with me. There was the original Ship's computer-intelligence, then human personalities were programmed in, for reasons that were probably partly emotional. But some of us changed. I guess that was inevitable. Gradually we took over many of the Ship's functions. Whether the purely mechanical intelligence would have gone insane at the time of the Catastrophe is something we debate and ponder among ourselves. But Captain Gerlik and a few others did lose their sanity. He and one other were in control of most of the Ship; and as I've told you, they warred between them. Gerlik

overcame the other personality, or absorbed it. The rest of us hadn't nearly as much power, but by joining together and by careful maneuvering, we were able to clear him out of Nose Cone and some compartments of Main Hull. We infiltrated the environment-maintenance systems for Sinus B, but couldn't take them over. And that leaves your people in serious danger. There's a reason why we have to get you out of there soon. Well, two reasons, actually — the less urgent being the need to take over and finish repairs."

Pry said, "I can understand that. With the universe destroyed, the Ship has to last as long as is physically possible. Even so . . ."

Ben Tomsun chuckled. "That's one of the reasons we wanted you up here — to convince you that the universe has *not* been destroyed! We don't know precisely what Captain Gerlik or his rival told your ancestors at the time of the Catastrophe, nor all of what he's told you since. By the way — won't you please tell me your name?"

"Well . . . Pryingboy Thorp. I guess I was, uh, a nosy child."

The voice laughed briefly. "Well, Thorp, this is what happened. We were skirting a cloud nebula — a great mass of dust and gas — when we were unexpectedly thrown off course by a small, dark, very dense, invisible body — prob-

ably the core of a long-dead star. It whirled us into the cloud, tail-first. Tidal forces — I guess you don't know about those — did some damage, but the worst was the frictional heat. Spots of the hull softened and bulged out and ruptured. You've seen the hasty patches. The heat penetrated far enough to soften the wall of Sinus B too, in one spot. It was touch and go whether we'd survive at all. Captain Gerlik, who was under the worst strain for a long period, went insane. While we were in the cloud, the stars were hidden from us. That's all." The voice paused as if the cabinet were scrutinizing Pry. "You don't look as if you believed me."

Ben Tomsun sighed again. "I wish it were possible to put you in a pressure-suit and send you Outside to see for yourself, but that would take too much time. *This* will have to do."

A section of the wall behind the cabinet suddenly slid aside. For a moment Pry thought there was a five-foot-square hole; then he saw that it was a dark screen of some kind.

The screen suddenly blossomed with tiny points of light. At one edge was a convoluted mass of light and dark. Ben Tomsun said, "That luminosity at the edge is the cloud we passed through. The points of light are stars. Have you seen pictures of a starfield?"

Hope and doubt fought a cutlass-battle inside Pry. He swallowed hard. "I've seen small pictures."

"Now," the voice said. The screen suddenly lit all over. There was a mottled pattern of greenish blue. It seemed to shrink in upon itself, and became a half-disc. Pry drew in his breath sharply. "That's a picture of Earth! Is Earth still —"

Ben Tomsun said, "We're far out of telescope-range of Sol, but we have no reason to think that anything's happened to Earth. This is *not* a picture of Earth — it's the next planet we're going to colonize. It's earthlike and primitive. Listen carefully, Thorp! We're in wide orbit around this planet right now. All of us, except for a few who remain aboard Main Hull in orbit to do necessary things, such as repairing the hull and trying to cure Captain Gerlik, will be landing in Nose Cone. Your people will have to clear one of the Sinus B exits your ancestors blocked up and come out the near end. Oh, I don't mean within the next few hours; it'll take time to convince them. And a few people have to land in gravcars — you've read about those? — for preliminary explorations. But *you* will have to start persuading your people. The alternative is that we'll try to take over control of the sinus from Captain Gerlik. And that might end in disaster for your people."

The voice was silent for a minute. "This is a lot for you to swallow in a hurry, I know, but I haven't time to show you more directly, or to let you mull it over. One reason I haven't is that the agent who went into the sinus may be in deadly peril. You have to get back in time to forestall any execution. Now, may I have your decision?"

Pry stood there, so full of feelings he could hardly breathe. He was shocked and angry at such a blunt ultimatum. Yet, if it were all true . . .

To have a *whole planet* to live on . . .

The voice said gently, "If you succeed with your own people quickly, you can be part of one of the exploration teams. Is that any inducement?"

Pry squirmed mentally. He finally burst out, "Damn it! If you're eight hundred years old —"

"Six hundred. I never saw Earth."

"Well, if you're that old, you know how I feel! Of course it's an inducement! Any man . . . But I'm no spy! I wouldn't know the first thing about — about —"

"About spreading a sudden truth? Naturally we wouldn't expect you to work alone. That agent who's already there — if you get back in time —"

Pry trembled for a minute more,

then took a deep breath. "All right! What choice do I have, anyway? I—I have to believe you or disbelieve you, and . . ." He stared away for a moment. "I lied to you about that agent. I said we had him under control. We didn't. But if he tries to pose as one of us —"

Ben Tomsun said amusedly, "I knew you were lying."

Pry scowled at the cabinet. "Oh. Well . . . Are you going to tell me how to find him?"

"Not exactly."

"Not — why, in God's name?"

"Because it isn't a 'he', and you've undoubtedly already found her. She was going to call herself 'Marytwo Garth.'"

Ben Tomsun said tersely, "We had to make contact. You, or your ancestors, killed every man we sent in. She volunteered. We aren't playing games, Thorp! Will you work with her?"

Pry turned slowly and took a few blind steps. Such a big suit, and such a small girl. . . But it was clever. And she must have stuck that dart into her own shoulder, calmly abandoned herself to unconsciousness and whatever luck had in store. After first stopping Muller, so he couldn't report.

What a woman!

He whirled back to face the cabinet. "I'll help! And — uh — that exploration team I may go on. Might she, uh, be part of it too?"

Ben Tomsun chuckled. **END**



Dear Editor:

It's hard to believe that none of the Huers & Criers who have expressed their appreciation for Asimov's "The Holmes-Ginsbook Device" (Dec. 1968) have detected this story's most delicious quality, namely, as a brilliantly malicious parody on Watson's & Crick's Nobelled research on the structure of the DNA molecule. The parody begins in the very title (read "Watson-Crick" for "Holmes-Ginsbook") and goes on from there in remarkably detailed parallel to the original. That the spirit in which Asimov wrote it was not entirely one of good clean fun only adds spice to the knowledgeable reader's enjoyment, for the malice is entirely justified — the Watson-Crick work scarcely begins to exemplify the independence and originality that a Nobel Prize is supposed to token, and unlike Watson few good scientists see their research primarily as a means to ego glorification. I don't mean to suggest for a moment that the typical scientist is self-effacingly indifferent to status and adulation; but these are secondary gains from his research, not its main purpose — William W. Rozeboom, University of

Alberta, Department of Psychology, Edmonton, Canada.

● You're right, of course about the story being a take-off on the book. Dr. Asimov — to use his official title — was having his fun at certain traits he found in the original. Of course, he was good natured about it, unlike some who seem to have been very bitter about the account. As you may have noticed, we tried to indicate by a kind of atrocious pun in the "blurb" over the story that "Holmes-Ginsbook" was a parody.

It's a little hard to generalize about what leads a scientist to win a Nobel prize, however. Undoubtedly a great many men — Fermi, for example — have been motivated only by a truly scientific desire to understand some aspect of the universe.

Does it really matter? It might be nice to think of all scientists as high-minded men who care not for the plaudits of the masses, or even the highest award of their fellows. But in any event, somehow the work gets done. It isn't the motivation, but the increased understanding of the great environment around us, that remains when the tumult and the shouting die.

—Editor



May 9-11, 1969. **DISCLAVE**. At Sky-line Inn, South Capitol and I Street, S.W. Washington D.C. Guest of Honor: Lester del Rey. Membership: \$1.50, in advance; \$2.00, at the door. For information: Jay Haldeman, 1244 Woodbourne Avenue, Baltimore, Maryland 21212.

June 6-8, 1969. **PgHLANGE** (Pittsburgh regional convention). At Allegheny Motor Inn, 1424 Beers School Road, Coraopolis, Pennsylvania. Guest of Honor: Robert Silverberg. Features a banquet. Membership: \$1.50, in advance, \$2.00, at the door. For information: Peter Hays, 1421 Wightman, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15217.

June 7-8, 1969. **THE DETROIT TRIPLE FAN FAIR**. Features a banquet where the NOVA will be presented. Guests of Honor: Ed Hamilton and Leigh Brackett and Al Williamson. At Howard Johnson's Motor Lodge, Detroit, Michigan. Membership: \$3.00, advance; \$4.00, at the door. For information: Detroit Triple Fan Fair, 4644 Toledo Avenue, Detroit, Michigan 48209.

June 23-August 1, 1969. **THE SECOND ANNUAL CLARION WRITERS' WORKSHOP IN SPECULATIVE FICTION**. Participants may register for two, four or six weeks, and college credit may be granted. Faculty: Robin Scott, Frederick Pohl, Frits Leiber, Harlan Ellison, Damon Knight and Kate Wilhelm. The cost is \$88.00 for each two-week segment and includes full room and board. For information: Robin Scott Wilson, English Department, Clarion State College, Clarion Pennsylvania 16214.

June 20-22, 1969. **THE SOUTH-WESTERCON**. At the Ramada Inn,

2525 Allen Parkway, Houston, Texas. Membership \$2.50. For information: Tony Smith, 1414 Lynnview, Houston, Texas 77055.

June 28-30, 1969, **MIDWESTCON**. At The North Plaza Motel, 7911 Reading Road, Cincinnati, Ohio. For reservation blanks and information: Lou Tabakow, 3953 St. Johns Terrace, Cincinnati, Ohio 45236.

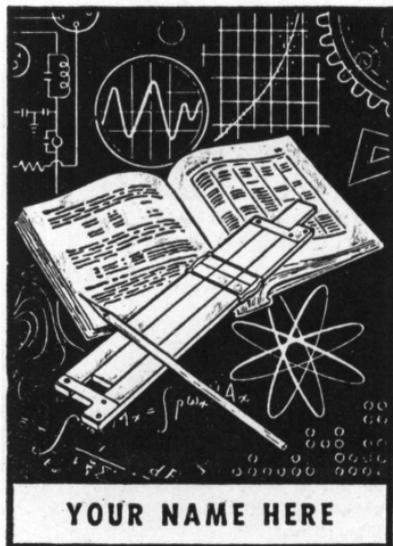
July 3-6, 1969 **WESTERCON XXII/FUNCON II**. At Miramar Hotel, Santa Monica, California. Guest of Honor: Randall Garrett. Fan Guest of Honor: Roy Tackett, Toastmaster: Harlan Ellison. Membership: \$3.00 in advance, \$5.00 at the door. A supporting membership of \$1.00 entitles you to all publications. For information: **FUNCON II**, Box 1, Santa Monica, California 90406. Make checks payable to Ken Rudolph.

August 22-24, 1969. **DEEP SOUTH STF CONFERENCE (DSC)**. At Ramada Inn, just off I-40 and I-75, Knoxville, Tennessee. Guest of Honor: Rachel Maddux, author of "The Green Kingdom." Membership: \$2.00. For information: Janie Lamb, Rt. #1, Box 364, Heiskell, Tennessee 37754.

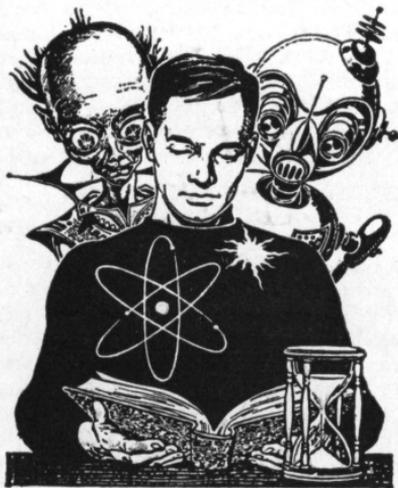
August 29- September 1, 1969. **ST. LOUISCON: 27th World Science Fiction Convention**. At Chase-Park Plaza Hotel, 212 N. Kingshighway, St. Louis, Missouri 63108. Guest of Honor: Jack Gaughan. Fan Guest of Honor: Ted White. Features: Project Art Show; Masquerade Ball; All-night movies — every night; Rock Band; Panels and speeches featuring all your favorite writers, editors, and artists; Auctions; Awards Banquet and the Presentation of the Hugos. Memberships: \$4.00, attending; \$3.00, supporting. Join now and receive all the progress reports as they are published. For information: St. Louiscon, P.O. Box 3008, St. Louis, Missouri 63130. Make checks payable to St. Louiscon.

November 8-9, 1969. **PHILCON**. At Warwick Hotel, 17th and Locust, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Membership: \$2.00. For information: Tom Purdom, 4734 Cedar Avenue, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19143.

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