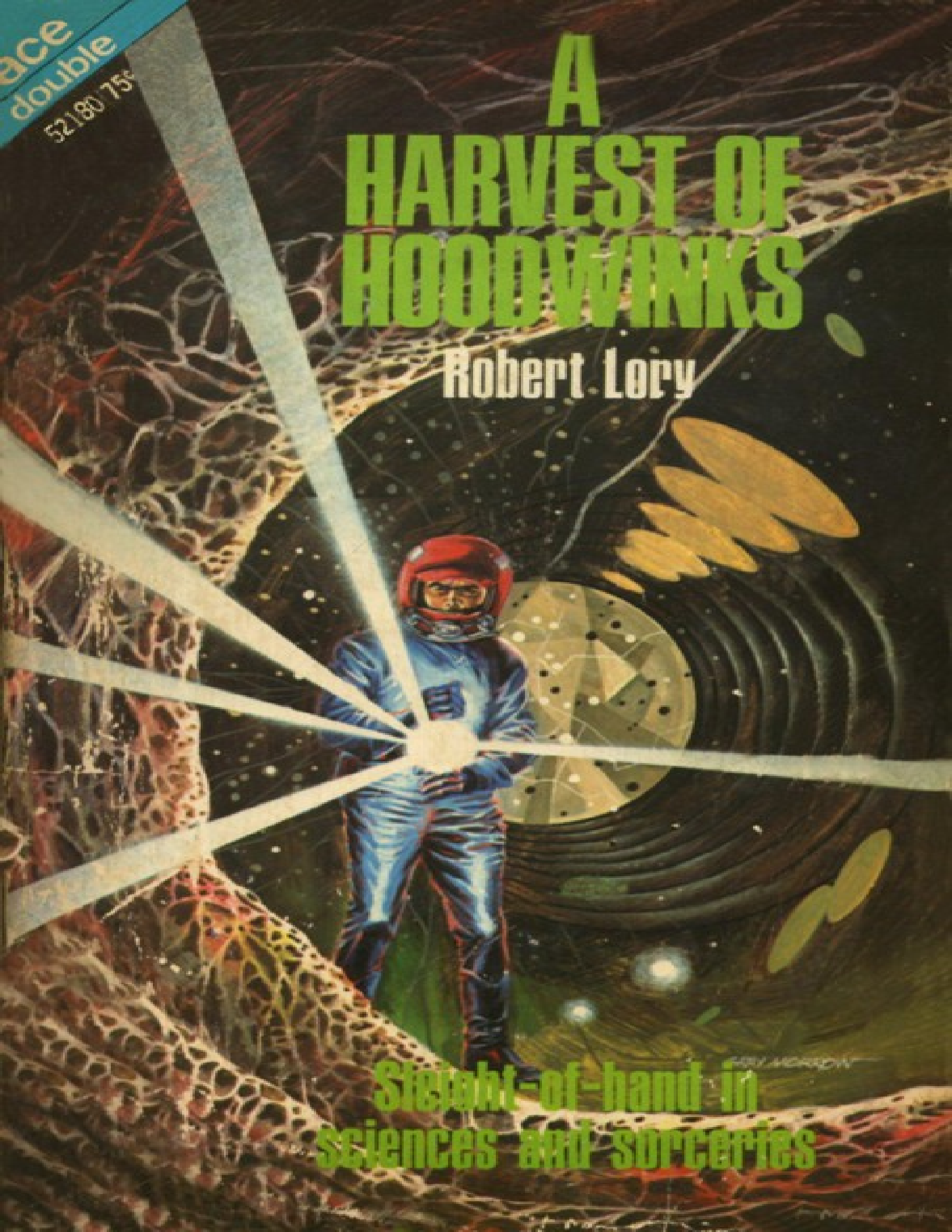


ace
double
52180 75¢

A HARVEST OF HOODWINKS

Robert Lory

Sleight-of-hand in
sciences and sorceries



Scanned by Highroller.

Proofed by .

Made prettier by use of EBook Design Group Stylesheet.

A Harvest of Hoodwinks by Robert Lory

FOREWORD

Call it huckstering, conning, flimflamming, hanky-panky or whatever, hoodwinkery is a story theme popular to a wide variety of intellectual levels and cultures extending from the present to as far back as human history is recorded. The Harvard prof in his study chuckles softly at Brer Rabbit's tar baby just as, in the remote past, the African hunter at his campfire split his sides roaring over the same tale told of Ananda the spider.

Not all tales of hoodwinkery are funny, of course. The reader or listener smiles or scowls in relation to the trickster's intent, his victim's innocence, the seriousness of the trick and the final result. Reaction also depends to a high degree on the makeup of the listener, it being true that humor as well as evil often lies with the beholder—or belistener. A toddling child whose grandmother titters over the Big Bad Wolf's response to Red Riding Hood's query about teeth might well think the old girl has gone dotty. But that, after all, is the occupational hazard of the story teller.

One word of caution: The fact that several of the characters you are about to meet revolve around the world of advertising and public relations stems only from the prior fact that for some time so did I. Therefore the characters result simply from my writing about the kinds of people and settings familiar to me and should not—repeat not—lead to the reader's thinking these sorts are more prone to deceit than members of any other profession.

Of course, the sly reader might ask whether or not that same prior fact of the writer's having worked in these particular fields contributed, perhaps even subconsciously, to his rather consistent use of the hood-winkery theme in fiction. He might well ask that.

Tripoli, Libya

Let's say I've never seen a pistol, that a firearm of any kind is totally outside of my experience. You come along and place a small Colt revolver in my hand and instruct me in how it's used. You might easily convince me

that the device is fired properly by my grasping the barrel and, making certain that the hole is kept snug against my chest, pushing the trigger forward. You might easily do so—if you had a motive for such trickery.

The plot has been repeated over and again in remote areas of our world when the white trader-comes calling. But things have a way of evening out. One day that white trader or one of his kind may find himself under an unfamiliar sky. It may even be orange.

ARCHIMEDES' LEVER

Archie Pholper was reflecting on the sad lot of thirty-five-year-old advertising account executives when the sensation in his inner ear began.

Exactly one-sixteenth of a second later the tingle had increased in volume and pitch to a point where Archie became aware of it. When an eighth of a second had passed, Archie began to frown over his afternoon coffee. After another eighth of a second Archie screamed.

At the scream's beginning Archie Pholper had been sitting on a hard chair in the coffee room in the ground floor of the Madison Avenue building where he worked. When the scream ended—abruptly—he was still sitting on the same hard chair, but the sound of the scream and the sound in his ear which had caused the scream had been replaced by the pounding of surf.

Archie and the chair were on a white, sandy beach. Odd, Archie thought. Not so much the beach, nor the sharp up-jutting rocks upon which the foamy water crashed about a hundred yards away... What was odd was the sky. It was bright orange.

"Excellent! You managed to bring the chair with you."

The chair tipped quietly over in the sand as Archie jumped at the raspy voice. The man who had been standing behind him replaced the chair upright and looked evenly at Archie. "You must have been concentrating on the chair," he said, his voice sounding as if he were just recovering from a severe bout with laryngitis.

"No, I wasn't concentrating on—" Archie stopped, his thoughts suddenly focusing on his immediate surroundings and the strange man before him. Taller than Archie by two hands, he wore a white togalike robe, in contrast to which his skin looked dark red, almost purple. He was old, too, in a well-preserved, antique sort of way. At least eighty, Archie judged.

"Almost three hundred of your years," the old man supplied. "I am Turnal, Courteous of Ghoor." He smiled, not unpleasantly, as he answered Archie's unvoiced question.

"Yes," he went on, "I have the ability to read what you call your thoughts. And although you hear the sound of my voice, my meaning is being translated for you telepathically. As for the thought now beginning to take shape within you, let me assure you that you are not dead but very much alive."

Archie said uncertainly, "My idea of Hell would be something like this. Alone on a desolate beach, with nothing to break the continuing boredom. With maybe just a chair..."

"This is not the Hell of your mythology, Mr. Pholper, though your idea of its content I find most interesting. This is in fact the sphere and domain of Ghoor, upon which I hold the office of Courteous."

"Another planet? I'm not on Earth?" Archie asked, disbelieving. Yet the orange sky made it hard to disbelieve.

"On Ghoor, Earth is not very well known. Its -very existence is known to few within the entire Wahr Federation. You are the first Earthman—indeed the first Outsider—to penetrate the Impervious Veil for more than five hundred of your years. And on your first try you brought a chair with you!" Turnal seemed pleased at that.

Archie looked at the chair and then at the orange sky. "But how? I mean, how did I bring the chair—and .me—to here?"

"Long ago in your civilization a man with your name said that if he had the place to stand he could move your entire planet with a lever. This is the principle you used—with my help. The lever in this instance is not what you might conceptualize as physical, although the psychic and the physical are not as mutually exclusive as you suppose. Actually, it's a simple matter of coordinating—"

Turnal's raspy voice halted. He was looking skyward, listening intently. Above the sea's horizon Archie saw a flash, a silvery reflection. Turnal saw it, too. "You must go back now, quickly! Sit in the chair and concentrate!"

Archie sat unsurely. "Concentrate... on what?"

"Where you were, on Earth! Quickly—I'll help."

Archie did as directed. Into his mind came the coffee room, his table, the copy of the Wall Street Journal he'd glanced through when he'd first sat down, the cup of hot, welcome coffee after an early afternoon's heated discussion with a displeased client, the sugar he'd taken —two spoonsful, even though he knew he should be counting calories and shouldn't have—

And then the spoon and the sugar took on unnatural lines... or natural, perhaps. The white sugar was coming apart, breaking into blues and reds and yellows which in turn were separating into, greens and oranges and purples, all in forms of grains or spots or lines. Lines. That's what they were, really, the sugar was really nothing more than... and all were converging and—

There was a sound, a tingle in Archie's inner ear. It was getting higher and higher and louder and—a scream formed in Archie's mouth. It came out as he crashed onto the tile floor of the coffee room.

"Sir, is something wrong?"

Archie's eyes opened and peered into the anxious face of the waitress standing by the side of his table.

He looked down as his hands felt the area 01 the floor around his aching buttocks.

"I forgot," he said simply. "I forgot to bring the blasted chair back with me."

"You've done very well, Archimedes," Turnal said with admiration. "I didn't think your first solo flight would come off half so well."

Archie kicked a pile of white sand into the air. "I did it, sure. But I don't understand it. I don't even know for sure what a coordinate is. And I don't much care for the Archimedes name, even though I was born with it."

"Very well, Archie," Turnal rasped. "As for knowing what coordinates are in essence, it's not really necessary that you do understand it all. The important thing is that you can see them, concentrate upon them and utilize them to move things. After all, you don't have to know the electronics of your Earth television in order to switch on a receiver."

True, Archie reflected. And it was also true that he could see and use the multicolored shapes that Turnal called coordinates. He'd proved that during the past four days, during which Turnal had assisted him in moving to and from the sandy beach on Ghoor one desk from his apartment, a Pontiac from a used car lot, the arch at Washington Square, and even a group of humans: a psychedelic seminar of Villagers who upon return reported the wildest acid trip ever taken.

He'd been uneasy about soloing, but things had gone well. He could now control the tingling sensation in his ears, so the pain element of "shifting"—Turnal's name for the process—was gone. He'd visualized (or men-talized or whatever) the on-Ghoor coordinates so many times with Turnal's help that they came easy, even when concentrating on the large solo target he'd chosen.

He had supposed that moving the 400,000 square foot New York Public Library, even at night when only the guards were inside, would be difficult. It wasn't, although the shift back had to be made twice. The first time, the northeast corner of the building was misplaced, extending slightly onto Forty-second Street and almost causing an early morning traffic accident. Luckily, the driver and the eleven other people who witnessed the happening were natives of the city. Since the event had nothing to do with them personally they did not attempt to investigate further.

Archie could do it, all right. That wasn't what was bothering him. Something else was.

"You want to know why," Turnal said matter-of-factly.

Archie nodded. "I suppose that's it. I mean, it's been a lot of fun and all, the most fun I've had in years, but—"

"Developing your skill, Mr. Pholper," Turnal said sternly, "*is not* a matter of recreation for me, nor for you. The purpose behind your training is deadly serious. You were chosen among all Earthlings to do an all-important job. And now you are ready."

"What... job?" Archie asked warily.

The Courteous of Ghoor spoke less sternly. "You remember how your namesake—the Greek, I believe he was—framed his important concept? He said that if he had the proper leverage he could move your entire planet. That is precisely the job you must do."

"The planet? *Earth*?" Archie was astounded. "But why? And how? And why me?"

"The how is simple. You can do it, just as you shifted the place of many books. A little more effort, perhaps, may be needed, but you have the tools. As for the why, the reason *is* to save your planet. It must be moved from your solar system, and soon. Your sun is about to blow. A nova, in your understanding, is what will re-suit. While one star more or less exploding in the universe is an unimportant event in the scheme of things, to you and your fellow Earth people it is of the utmost seriousness."

Archie agreed, his mouth wide open.

"The only solution is to move Earth out of your system. We've chosen coordinates around a sun similafr to yours within the Federated Systems. You'll have to learn the coordinates prior to the shift."

"But..." Archie began, still not fully comprehending. "To move the whole world. Won't that shake everybody up some?"

"Of course. Psychologically," Turnal said. "But the shake-up won't compare with the one they'll get when your sun explodes. It is, after all, for their own good you're doing this.^{5*}

Archie thought for a moment. "But why me? You or one of your people could do it—or couldn't you?"

"Yes, we—" Turnal's eyes shot skyward. "Quick. To the rocks," he rasped. "*Run!*"

Following Turnal, who seemed spry for a man his age, Archie had just about reached the up-jutting rocks on the beach when he spotted the reason for their running. A silver-blue glint in the sky flashed high over the calm sea. A space vehicle of some kind, it appeared to be getting larger, therefore nearer.

"Wahr patrol ship," Turnal puffed when they had gained the shadowy concealment of a horizontal rough outcrop of the rock. "They mustn't spot you, or they'll know later that Ghoor helped move you."

"You mean you shouldn't be helping?" Archie asked.

"Absolutely not," Turnal whispered. "You asked if I or my people could move your planet into its new coordinates. Yes, I could, as could many on Ghoor. We could do it in the ability sense, but not in a moral sense.

The Wahr Federation of Spheres would consider such an act by us as illegal."

A humming sound had grown while Turnal had been speaking. Now the old man put one finger to his lips, while pointing upward with his other hand. The patrol ship must be directly over their place of concealment, Archie concluded.

Moments later the humming sound had been reduced to silence. As Turnal led Archie from the rocks he explained, "They've sensed your breaking through the Impervious Veil, put there centuries ago to keep out space explorers from other systems. Luckily, they haven't yet been able to localize you, but we must act swiftly."

Something was still bothering Archie, he didn't know precisely what. "You say that your moving us would be immoral. But surely it can't be immoral for your people to try and save ours."

"Morals and the law and their relationships are involved subjects, their intricacies not always similar among different peoples. What's important is that we *cannot* move you. Within the Federation, illegalities are punished severely."

"You would be punished?"

"Not just me," Turnal said fatherly. "I am by appointment Courteous of all Ghoor. I act in my dealings with you not as an individual but in my official capacity by direction of our Council. All Ghoor would be punished."

"What about Earth, then?" Archie asked. "Will my people be punished for breaking Federation law? If we enter the Veil—"

Turnal grinned, his teeth sparkling in the sunlight. "Ah, but you are not members of the Federation, and thus not subject to its law. But time moves swiftly. I must give you your new coordinates."

Archie drummed nervous fingers on the top of his desk.

It was mid-morning, a Tuesday, the day and approaching the time Turnal had given him for the shift. There was a problem, however. Archie was getting cold feet.

The whole world.

Plus the atmosphere, of course. If only he could leave the smog behind, he thought, almost jokingly. But it was no time to joke.

The whole world.

Could he do it? Sure, he had the coordinates and the skill. Turnal said he'd been chosen specifically among Earthmen because of his peculiar mix of imagination, stick-to-itiveness and confidence in himself. But...

Earth weighed so much. To lift all that, think of it! But he couldn't have *lifted* the New York-Public Library either. That had gone smoothly enough. And Turnal was so confident. But suppose something went wrong. Sure, he had the coordinates, but...

Suppose one of those was just a *little* off?

Archie stopped drumming. Just a little off, he thought, like when he returned the library the first time. Coordinates were just colors to him, but colors have shades. A slight error in visualization—if that, again, was the right word—and... *the whole world.*

No, he couldn't do it. Not without making sure first.

But how to do that? He couldn't go himself in advance and check up on it. If there was just space out there he'd have no place to stand while checking. He couldn't even breathe. And he certainly couldn't get a space capsule for the purpose. They don't give those things to advertising people who might like a morning jaunt in space.

No, couldn't go, not physically. But mentally?

If.

He'd moved a building. He had not had to move the *entire* foundation and landscape with it. He'd moved a desk and a chair. It hadn't mattered that they were *in* buildings at the time. His mind—or his viewer-something, the

thing that was part of his mind that framed the coordinates—if he could concentrate on shifting just that and not the rest of him...

The whole world!

He folded his hands in his lap and inhaled slowly. His pulse pounded in his head, refusing to be quieted. Colors blended, changed, elongated, separated and crystallized until—

They were right. Now—

No, too much. *Not all this, but—*

That?

No. *No!* There, right there—

THAT!

Archie saw. Not with eyes, but with... he didn't know what. His eyes never could have pierced the distances from the landing coordinates that his "sight" took him. But he saw nonetheless, and seeing, switched back to the coordinates of his office. He felt, rather than saw, his hands trembling when he opened his eyes.

The ships! God, there must have been a thousand dark red space ships surrounding the coordinates where Earth was due to be shifted.

The Federation had found out. Archie had to reach Turnal.

They were waiting for him on the beach under the orange sky. Twenty to thirty men of clear green skin dressed in brilliant blue uniforms. They were human types, physically strong, Archie concluded from the grips of the two who held him.

"Stay, Outsider!" an authoritative voice commanded. "Do not shift back. You will not be harmed."

The two men holding Archie immediately released him, and he turned to face a young man whose uniform style separated him above the others. "You are to be congratulated on your mastery of movement," the leader said. "I am Sparik, Commander Fourth Class in the Wahr Federation Arm of Enforcement. There are things I must know from you."

Archie's face reddened. "Here's your first bit of knowledge. Your ships will have a long wait. I'm wise to your stake-out. I'm not about to bring my planet inside your precious Veil so you can burn it to a crisp with your weapons. Well take our chances with our sun!"

The muscles of Sparik's face tightened. "You were going to bring your planet inside Federation territory? At the suggestion of the Courteous of Ghoor, I suppose."

Archie said nothing. They had promised not to harm *him*, but Turnal was another matter.

"We know Turnal has been meeting an Outsider on this beach. Now we know who, and I've a good idea as to why. Let me ask you this. You say you saw ships near the place you were to move your planet to. How you were able to see these is beyond my comprehension, but were those ships red in color?"

"You know they were!"

Sparik nodded. "Correction: I *thought* they were. Outsider, I would inform you that all official Federation ships are blue. Of the twelve planets within our System, only one identifies its military ships with red. That planet is Ghoor."

Archie's mouth shot open. "That's—impossible!"

"Only too possible, I'm afraid," Sparik said. "Ghoor has a history of warfare. The Federation, a thousand years and more ago, was first formed as a league of protection against the planet on which you now stand."

Ghoor was defeated and its people accepted the ultimatum that they would confine their warlike activity to their own planet or—if attacked—to those outside the System. Some five hundred years ago, Ghoor discovered a legal technicality. They shifted a planet from, outside the Veil to a point inside their own field of domain. They then destroyed it as a trespasser in an orgy of flame."

"That's what they were going to do—to us?" Archie asked quietly.

"Precisely."

Archie sputtered. "But why—why have me do it? Why didn't *they*—"

"They were prohibited to shift any other planet inside the Veil. However, they obviously discovered another technicality. If *you*, a member of the outside planet, did the shifting..."

"But couldn't you—the Federation—protect us?"

"You are not members of the Federation," Sparik said.

"That was the reason Turnal gave me for an Earth-man making the shift," Archie said. "As nonmembers, he said, we would not be subject to its laws."

"Nor its protection," Sparik added soberly. "We shall, however, amend the laws to prohibit in the future what you've experienced. You may return to your home now."

Archie's face paled. "My home, Earth. Turnal said our sun—"

Sparik smiled. "Whatever Turnal said may safely be discounted. His office in the Ghoor Council should have indicated that."

"You mean his office as Courteous?"

"Of course. A Courteous is what you might call the ...official liar of the council. Of Federation spheres, only Ghoor has one."

"I wish," Archie said, "I wish there were some way I could get even."

Sparik smiled again. "Yes. The Federation would be better without Ghoor. I, too, wish you might find -the way."

The way. Archie thought about that moments later as he sat in his Madison Avenue office. Sparik's choice of words had been strange. He did not say he wished Archie would find *a* way. He said *the* way. Which meant that Sparik knew of a way and hoped that Archie would find it.

But why couldn't Sparik simply have told...

Of course. Sparik was of the Federation. He could not suggest the way. But Archie was not subject to Federation law. He could do—what?

And then Archie knew. He laughed out loud at the simplicity of the method. Then he folded his hands and closed his eyes.

Concentrating on the two sets of coordinates, he shifted the entire planet Ghoor to the place where the big guns of the dark red ships waited.

The primary hoodwinker of this tale (not discounting the very neat con job pulled off by the warden and superintendent) has, it's said, a "para-genius intelligence" and "complete lack of conscience"—labels that would apply with equal justice to the Courteous of Ghoor. Again, like Turnal, Engas has Earth-type humans to ply his wits upon. Unlike Turnal, Engas's humans are dismally short on smarts, which logically should have given him a decided edge.

Logically.

MAR-TI-AN

In the office of the Superintendent of Prisons, the warden saluted smartly. "Engas has gone, sir. The escape went off as planned," he reported.

The white-haired man seated at the desk nodded. "He found the ship?"

"Yes sir."

"The fuel level. Was it—"

"Yes sir, just enough to reach Earth. He's sure to realize that."

The older man looked thoughtfully at the warden for a moment. "You don't approve of this, do you?"

"It's not exactly that, sir. I understand your reasoning, and I agree that a mass murderer like Engas deserves death, even though our new laws prohibit capital punishment. But suppose—"

"Suppose we're wrong and Engas isn't killed; is that it?"

"I'm bothered first by Engas's para-genius intelligence, coupled with his megalomania and complete lack of conscience. Secondly, Earthmen have long suspected life on other planets. They might well now be hospitable to a non-Terran visitor. Is it *fair* to them—"

The superintendent smiled, bleakly. "Reflect a moment on your reading of Terran history and anthropology. We have little to worry about them. Engas and Earth deserve one another."

"Hey, Paw! Look whut I got ye, all tied up like a weddin' present." Lafe slammed the door, causing Paw's chair to slide down the wall.

Paw woke abruptly with the subsequent crash. "Boy, how many times do I—whut's that there?"

"Found him up by the still."

"That's some kind of uniform... By the *still*? He a revenooer, maybe?"

Lafe shrugged. "He come down in one of them aüyo-planes."

Paw's eyebrows lifted. "A airyoplane?"

"Yup, but this one didn't have no wings. That's probably why it came down in such a big heap. Wings fell off."

"I *have* heard of revenooers flying in airyoplanes before," Paw said, slowly. "Lookin' for smoke."

"Should we shoot him?"

Paw uncorked a jug. "Not just yit. Put him square in your shotgun sights, though, and take that kerchief out'n his mouth."

Lafe pushed his bound captive against the shack's wall with the nose of his shotgun. He yanked the dirty red bandanna free.

Paw took a swig of moon. "You a revenooer, stranger?"

"I don't understand the term *revenooer*. It wasn't taught to us in English classes," Engas said.

Lafe cocked the shotgun. "He's lyin', Paw. Ever'-body knows about revenooers."

"Hold on, boy. Where you from, mister?"

Engas's mind was calculating. He'd known from the moment the boy picked him up that he was in trouble. Stupidity always meant a certain amount of trouble. The boy was bad enough, but the father had, in the mensuration of Engas's world, an Intelligence Quotient of about 3. A creature this low on the scale would have to be impressed by something he

didn't understand, something beyond his experience. A little truth might be justified— at first

"I've come from Mars," he said.

"Mars," Paw repeated, thoughtfully. "*Where—Lafe!* You set that jug right back on the table. You're too young for corn."

"Aw, Paw, I'll be twenty-nine next plantin' season."

"Too young. Your Maw never would've allowed it. You know where this Mars place is at, boy?"

"Dunno. Over in Clebo County, maybe?"

The synapses in Engas's brain shuddered, but they jumped back on the offensive. *Impress them. Impressive, but not too unusual. Play up urgency. 3 I.Q., dammit! Fear—start with known, expand to unknown.*

"No, you don't understand. I'm from the *planet* Mars. I'm a Martian."

"A what, you say?" asked Paw.

"Martian. *Martian.*"

"A Mar-ti-an?" Paw repeated.

Engas said violently, "Yes, and I've got to get to Washington immediately. I was heading there when—"

"Washington, Paw! He's talkin' about Washington City—where the revenooers come from."

"Look, I know nothing about your *revenooers*, but I simply *must* get to Washington!"

Paw looked hard at Lafe, who backed away from the jug on the table. Then he returned his gaze to the stranger. "If you're no revenooer, how

come you's in such a hurry to get to Washington City?"

Because, unspeakable fool, that's where I was headed when the fuel ran out. Because that's where I'll be welcomed and where I'll start my take-over. First this country; next, the planet, and finally the whole solar system.

"Because," he said urgently, "I've been sent to warn your government—and through it, all this planet's governments—of a deadly menace. Out in space right now and coming toward Earth is a gigantic cloud, carrying a gas that will kill all life here. I can show your engineers how to build defenses against it, but they must be warned *quickly*."

"*He's fibbin'*, Paw. Clouds don't tote *gas*, they tote *water*. I learned that up at the schoolhouse. And I never heard nothin' about them engineer things, neither."

Paw thought a bit. "It's true, boy, that you've got the only fourth grade schoolin' in the family, but I figure you better run up to Gran'pap's and ask *him* what to do. He knows a lot of things, bein' longlived and havin' gone twice to the county seat. Ask him what we should do with this Mar-ti-an."

"Heck, Paw. Gran'pap's is an awful long walk from here. Can't we fust shoot the crittur now?"

"Git movin', boy!" Paw said, taking the shotgun and the jug of corn from Lafe. "Swig?" he asked Engas. There was no point in *cruelty*....

From *where*?"

"Mars, Gran'pap. Figger, over round Clebo County, maybe."

"Well, I don't know about all this here cloud business. Clouds are up in the *air*, can't hurt nobody down *here*. What's the name of this tale-teller?"

"Calls himself a... Mar-ti-an."

The old man kicked over his table in jumping up. "A *whatr*

"Mar-ti-an. That's what he says, anyway."

"What in tarnation's the matter with you and your Paw? Why ain't you blasted him to kingdom come?"

"I *wanted* to, but Paw said—"

"Never mind. I sure didn't figure there'd be none of 'em left. It was when I was your age, boy. A real war, we had us. Thought we'd got 'em all. They was right good fighters, but we finally had 'em licked. Lost one more man than they did, if I remember rightly. I still got a score-talley round here someplace."

The old man opened a cupboard door and began rummaging through pots and pans, dried herbs, broken dishes, old almanacs and shotgun shells. A slurping noise made him wheel around.

"Boy, set that jug back down. You're too young for corn. Now git yourself home and give that feller both barrels. Can't let him git away, or there'll be no tellin' *whut* he'll be up to—no good, that's for sure. Now, git!"

Lafe had been gone twenty minutes when the old man found a piece of black slate with markings on it. In another ten minutes he had located a small piece of dirty chalk. About the same time as Lafe and Paw were marveling over Engas's green blood, Gran'pap was mumbling with pleasure at the score the slate now recorded:

MARTINS COYS

XXXXXX XXXXXX

XXXXXX XXXXXX

"Took a long time," he cackled, "but we's finally even!"

The conman himself is the easiest to con. So goes the adage. And an astrologer who cries huckster is open to the charge of pot-calling-kettle-

blackguard-ness. Of course, Isvara was not your run of the mill astrologer, but then Vicki was not really run of the mill either.

THE STAR PARTY

I feel bad about the killing, especially since it wouldn't have happened if I'd listened to Vicki. We should stay away from Hadley's party, she said. She had reasons. None of them the right ones... But she had reasons.

"These things are always such bores," she complained as she put up her long blonde hair.

"I can't stand your Madison Avenue beetle-brains playing their character roles," was her reason as I started the car.

"And Hadley's a lush," she snapped when the elevator arrived at the ninth floor.

I was pressing Hadley's buzzer when Vicki sounded her last, pouting argument. "His breath is repulsive, too."

I nodded agreement, just as I had nodded agreement with everything else she had said. I pointed out in rebuttal that to get established on the Avenue such things were necessary: the parties, the mashers, and Hadley's bad breath. I didn't say anything about Isvara. Though Vicki didn't know him, Isvara was why we were showing at this particular party.

The door opened and sounds of loud good-fellowship flooded the hallway. A fat and drooling Hadley blocked the view of the goings-on inside.

"George, old man! And lovely, lovely, *love*y Vicki!" We stepped in and Hadley stumbled his way to the closet, dropping Vicki's coat before making it. He was loaded already.

"My, and how beautiful you certainly do look," he said, returning to Vicki's side. The slob was right, of course. He had one lone talent, but it was enough to make him a high-salaried art director. He could fudge

beauty. And Vicki—tall, blonde and shapely in her silver gown—was female beauty itself tonight.

"Hey, kids, look who's here: it's Georgie Bond. Ho there, wonder boy!" These words bubbled forth from the most loud-mouthed account executive in New Ybrk. How Breen ever got along with clients was beyond my understanding. He did have a way with words, though, so I grimaced, waiting for the sequel to the "wonder boy" he'd just tagged me with.

It came, with a sickening guffaw: "Yes sir, we all *wonder, boy*, how you ever got yourself a woman like that. Haw ha ha."

We haw-ha-ha'ed our way through Hadley's living room and dining room, receiving greetings ranging from half-hearted smiles to stinging slaps on the back. Every woman in the place seemed bent on seeing how close to me they could thrust their breasts.

I don't know what most men think, but it's my opinion that breasts are great... in their place. Which is *not* trussed up so far that they look like deformed shoulders. The whole human race disgusts me sometimes. Vicki gets disgusted too, especially at parties.

"Enjoying yourself?" she asked sourly.

I was preparing a flip answer when an ugly copywriter named Pitcorn grabbed my arm and shoved a potato chip into my face. "Try one, George? The dip is excellent. Marcia made it."

The dip he referred to was a vile shade of cream. I swallowed hard and managed a smile. "No thanks, Pit. Diet, you know." I told him and gave his back a hearty thump. It was as hearty as I could make it. Pit-corn coughed up at least three potato chips. Marcia's excellent dip was in evidence too.

My sadistic joy was interrupted by a tug on the sleeve from Vicki. When we were out of Pitcorn's hearing, she said, I'm glad you did that. I think he had designs on me.

"Never fear," I said. "You'd be the death of him and he knows it. Let's get something to drink."

As we headed for the mahogany bar in Hadley's large living room, my eyes wandered across the giggling and frothing faces that were jabbering, singing and leering round us. The party had reached the stage where men's jackets were off, ties were loose, and the women's gowns were showing effects of that unmentionable subject, perspiration.

My mind took all this in matter-of-factly while I tried to spot the person whose presence at this orgy was the only reason for mine.

• "Who is it?" Vicki said as I poured her a martini. "The one you're looking for. Who is it?"

I smiled. It was a smile of pride. How superior Vicki was to the clownish creatures here. What other woman in the place could know, instinctively, exactly what her man was thinking? "Who?" she repeated.

"Him," I said, relieved that I'd found the tall, lean man who was now coming through the frosted glass door separating the room from a balcony outside. "The one in the turban. Name is Isvara."

"Interesting name. Is it really his?"

Someone who has studied deeply in man's religious beliefs would recognize—as Vicki did—Isvara as one of the titles of the Hindu boss god. Whether our Isvara was born with that name or had substituted it for Ali Baba or Sam O'Rourke I didn't know, and I told Vicki that.

We watched as a plump redhead I didn't recognize offered Isvara a drink of some kind. He declined with the slightest nod of his head and, leaving the redhead staring in indignation, he squatted on the backs of his heels in an isolated corner of the room.

"He plays the mystic very well," Vicki observed. "Where did Hadley latch onto him?"

"The agency. Isvara is posing for some cigarette ads. He's also probably here to entertain us tonight. He reads people's characters."

Vicki sipped her martini. "A crystal bailer, or does he use tea leaves?" she asked wryly.

"Neither. Stars—a kind of astrology. Pitcorn told me about it. Isvara watches somebody's actions closely and from these he determines the person's ruling planet or the stars that influenced his birth. The rest of his deductions are supposed to follow logically."

"And you believe it?"

"Pitcorn does. Isvara told him that his problem in life was never adjusting to his stepmother's death, and that if he ever marries it better be to an elderly librarian."

Vicki laughed at the image of Pitcorn's future bride, but her face abruptly became serious. "Did you see that? He was looking in our direction. At me."

A heavy clap on the shoulder stopped whatever comment I might have made. "Have fun, Georgie—hey!" Hadley roared and lunged for Vicki. She side-stepped his poised-for-pinch talons and our host staggered off to the divan where he flopped into the lap of a blue-haired matron who had been wildly defending her personal theory of great literature.

"I think I'm afraid of that man," Vicki said.

"He's harmless. Just fancies himself a great lover, that's all."

"I'm not talking about Hadley. *Him*." She was looking at Isvara. "He makes me feel creepy. I'm certain he's been watching me."

"Sure," I said, mocking her anxious tone. "He's probably quite smitten with you. After all, he has a great affinity towards stars, and to any discerning man you're the star of this party."

Vicki murmured something about not liking it just the same, when I realized to my horror that my glass was empty. I learned at my first agency party that the only way to get through them with your sanity was to get completely smashed. "Nuther?" I asked Vicki.

She said no, so I had to wade alone through the weaving bodies that danced—if you could call it that—to the rhythms of some bad *jazz*.

As the bar I traded my regulation-size martini glass for an eight-ounce water tumbler. Gin and vermouth tumbled around the ice and had reached the top of the glass when I noticed that an agency artist named God-dard had cornered Vicki near a potted palm.

Goddard the Dullard, I called him. A dunce. Whenever I reflected that the reason for my wanting to work in advertising was to be near people like Goddard, Pit-corn and the rest, I had to question my intelligence. Intelligence was at the heart of the matter. Artists and writers—creative men—I figured would be more intelligent than other men, would be closer to understanding the meaning of life. I was wrong.

Yet, there was Isvara, now standing in a corner of the room. Maybe he... I decided to put him to the test.

He answered my hello with, "Your wife is a most charming person."

I agreed, thinking that I could discuss my wife's attributes with anybody at any time and that right now I wanted to talk astrology with somebody who claimed to know something about it.

"Most charming," he repeated, "but odd."

My conscious mind swam through the gin and vermouth and snapped to attention. "Odd?"

"Yes," he said. "You know of my abilities, Mr.—?"

"Bond; George Bond."

"Mr. Bond, you have heard, I think, of my ability to analyze people's characters from their actions. You have, have you not, been waiting all evening for an opportunity to discuss this subject with me?

"The deduction was not hard, Mr. Bond, based on mere surface observations. It's your wife I've been concentrating on, as she has told you already."

Vicld was right, then. He had been watching tier. Til be interested in your analysis," I said.

Isvara shook his head. "There is no analysis. Your wife is... unfathomable, and I do not say that lightly. Because, Mr. Bond, when my talents cannot take me inside a person's very soul, that person is— unfathomable. Do you understand?"

"No, I don't," I admitted.

"I do." The voice was Vicld's. She evidently had managed to brush Goddard aside. "I understand perfectly. Mr... Isvara? Mr. Isvara is telling you, George, that when his infallible system fails, it cannot be that the failure lies with his system or with himself. The fault, obviously, must lie with the subject." Vicki winked at me and smiled. "In other words, I'm a very naughty girl."

If I was the sort who blushes easily, I would have then. Isvara—the one person in the place I was beginning to have some respect for—and Vicld was acting her nastiest. I started to apologize, but I was cut off short.

"Mrs. Bond is quite right, even though she spoke in jest. The fault does indeed lie with her." He said it calmly, like a teacher explaining to a grade school class that hydrogen and oxygen combine to make water. I laughed. It served Vicki right. I would have laughed more, but Isvara continued.

"It's true. Whether or not you realize it, Mr. Bond, your wife is trying very hard to be something she's not. She's putting on a very special act."

"Act?" I stared at Vicki.

"Act," he said. "A variety of characteristics tell me she is a Capricorn. Her charm, her type of sensual attraction, certain marks left by experience, they all point to that sign ruled by Saturn. But she lacks the dignity and reservation found in Capricorns. She smiles too eagerly, and even an amateur psychologist can spot a... a phony smile. Notice, Mr. Bond, that she is not smiling now."

He couldn't have been more correct there. Vicki's face was placid, but inside she was a volcano about two seconds before eruption time. I was her husband and I could tell.. And so could Isvara.

She had followed my thoughts, I knew. I'll handle this, her eyes said. She began to try.

"Mr. Isvara, perhaps you have me dead to rights. Maybe I do put on some kind of front to be sociable at these gatherings which I cannot stand. So what? Many people put on the same kind of front. You say I'm a Capricorn, under the influence of... Saturn, was it? Well, why not let it go at that?"

Isvara smiled. It wasn't a pleasant smile. "Because you defy analysis under Saturn's sign. You dress like a Taurus, behave publicly like an Aries, and think like a Libra. While I have nothing but contempt for popular astrology, any practitioner will tell you that both Aries and Libra are incompatible with Capricorn."

"Which means?" Vicki said icily.

"Which means that either you have a multiple-personality neurosis—which you do not—or you are consciously living a very large lie."

"*I beg your pardon!*" I said, making an effort to sound gruff. The effort failed miserably, but I had to try.

"That was *not* meant as an insult, Mr. Bond." Isvara now was looking square into my eyes. "What I say is fact. The stars are fact. Their positions, although capable of a variety of influences, are nonetheless fact. And these influences are observable to those who know how to read them."

"And he sure can read them," a new voice chimed in. Of all the times when Pitcorn's face seemed repulsive, it was now. "Is he doing you, George?"

I smiled weakly. "Not me. Vicki."

Pitcorn said, "Oh" and pointed to the glass in my hand. "About ready for a refill? I'll stroll over with you."

"Yes, George—do go," Vicki said, handing me her glass. "And go easy on the vermouth." Her laugh sounded sincere, but it wasn't.

"Relax, man," Pitcorn told me as we crossed to the bar. "You look as jumpy as a—a pole-vaulter." He chuckled at his joke.

"Too much to drink," I grumbled and latched onto a full gin bottle.

I downed a glass of the stuff straight before filling our glasses with semirespectable martinis. When I looked across the room to where I'd left Vicki and Isvara, my pulse quickened.

They were gone.

"Hey, where you going?" Pitcorn asked as I brushed by him in panic. In the kitchen and dining room, several low-cut gowns winked at me, but no Vicki. Back in the living room, I spotted her. She was closing the frosted glass door to the balcony.

"Quick, Isvara's outside," she whispered. Her panic was greater than mine.

I followed her to where Isvara stood, cold as stone, near the edge of the balcony. His eyes were blank, his heart was still. He was dead. Vicki had iced him.

"Did he know?" I asked.

"He was beginning to guess." She looked in nervously at the party. "We've got to hurry."

I made Isvara's body limp and lifted it up on the balcony ledge. "Get ready to scream," I told Vicki.

Nine floors above concrete, I pushed the body into the air. Vicki screamed.

"He said that... that he was trying to defy gravity." Vicki sobbed when Hadley and the others questioned us. We repeated the story when the police arrived.

"He just stepped off and... and—" Vicki cried hysterically.

"He was kind of a nut, and I guess he was loaded like the rest of us," I added.

Everybody accepted our explanations. A character like Isvara—a mystic screwball, the police sergeant called him—would be very likely to test his powers by walking off a balcony. "We see a lot of this kind of Vhing," the sergeant assured Vicki, who shuddered convincingly. Nobody suspected us. We had no motive.

Of course, nobody knew what Isvara had told Vicki before she suggested they get a breath of fresh air. "But," he'd said, "The stars would be in different patterns if... they were viewed from... from somewhere else."

He was on to us—or he would have been soon. War is war, but I still feel bad about his death. The man's intelligence, and the fact that he was so

right about Vicki! She *is* a Capricorn; at least, Saturn is her ruling planet.

It'll be everybody's, after our troops arrive.

Publicology—the merged art-science of public relations, advertising and applied motivational psycho-sociophysics—will, you can bet on it, not escape the charges of hoodwinkery now and then leveled at its present-day predecessors. Yet waving aside the bleak pictures painted in *1984* and such works, some current observers argue that Madison-Ave-type manipulation is on the way out as more and more people begin to think objectively. A factor in their favor is that more machines will be doing the thinking and, as everybody knows, machines think nothing but objective stuff.

It's in the cards. Firms like Drummer, Kleig and Horowitz, Inc. will have tough sledding. But that's why their fees will be high.

FUTILITY IS ZUCK

Swing-Around Slab-Lifting Plate-Slicer latched onto Dwight Zuck, swung him around, lifted him up and sliced him into thirty-two neatly edged pieces, ready for the metallic feelers of Binding Crate Packer.

"Swing-Around Slab-Lifting Plate-Slicer shouldn't have done that," commented Dial Control Foreman through his voice box. Dial Control Foreman—a Majesto Electric Model 36-A—was outmoded enough to be retired to the scrap heap, but he had too much seniority. Besides, he was also the plant union steward. "No," he said again, "Swing-Around Slab-Lifting Plate-Slicer shouldn't have done that."

"Swing-Around Slab-Lifting Plate-Slicer sure enough shouldn't have done that," agreed Bones, the plant operating superintendent, with a wheeze. Bones was a human, but he too was outmoded and should have been retired. But he too had seniority; moreover, management had got him cheap, and he had absolutely no scrap value. "He sure enough shouldn't have," Bones repeated.

Dial Control Foreman wheeled on his wheels. "What do you mean Swing-Around Slab-Lifting Plate-Slicer shouldn't have done that? Who are you to be saying what Swing-Around Slab-Lifting Plate-Slicer should do or shouldn't do?"

"But you said—" Bones began.

"What I say is of no concern. I am outmoded and should have been retired to scrap."

Bones shouted, "But you're the union steward!"

"You got a grievance?" Dial Control Foreman inquir-ingly raised the mercury vapor swivel light over the oil exhaust valve on his forehead.

"A *grievance*? Didn't you see it? Swing-Around Slab-Lifting Plate-Slicer just murdered that man!"

"Grievances are handled by the labor negotiating committee which meets on Thursdays. Today is Monday. I don't see how I can be of any help in this matter today. It would be futile to discuss it further."

Bones looked uncomprehendingly as Dial Control Foreman wheeled around. "Now, if it was a matter of safety, that would be different," Dial Control Foreman said thoughtfully. "Yes, that would be far different."

That afternoon, in the richly carpeted headquarters office of Fluph Manufacturing Company, vice president in charge of labor relations, P. Peter Fluph explained:

"Dwight Zuck was a pilot operation, you see."

"I don't," said Helmuth Kleig, partner in Drummer, Kleig and Horowitz, Inc., which advertised itself as offering "complete publicological service and counseling." Large and round, unkempt and crass-sounding, Kleig scratched the top of his knobby head, which was completely bald except for five or six scraggly hairs that for some obstinate reason hadn't been shaved off or pulled out.

"I don't see," he said. "I thought Dwight Zuck was an oiler."

"He was, he was indeed, God rest his chewed up soul," Fluph agreed.

"Not *chewed* up," put in Bones, whose grease-stained overalls ill-matched the plush office decor. "He was sliced up neat as anything. One thing about our plant: it don't do anything sloppy-like. As operating superintendent, it's my job to..." His voice trailed off, noticing the sharp-fixed eyes of the other two men upon him.

"Sliced up neat," he said emphatically.

Kleig cleared his throat gruffly. "You were saying, Zuck was an oiler."

Fluph's head bobbed. "A pilot operation. An experiment. As you know, human oilers haven't been economical for Lord knows how many years."

"I wouldn't know. I'm no efficiency expert."

"Be that as it may, we decided to give the thing a try," said Fluph. "Especially since our Mobile Oil Carrier—he was a little Unirob Model Five—blew out on the job and had to be scrapped."

"Retired," Kleig corrected, adding, "so instead of a new Unirob you decided to try out a man?"

"Sounds ridiculous from an economic standpoint, doesn't it?" Fluph said. "But the choice was a little more complicated than that."

"A mite bit more," Bones wheezed.

"A new Unirob we could have afforded, cheaper than Zuck by far, once you figure in depreciation and all. But the union didn't want a Unirob," Fluph explained.

"Didn't want no Zuck, neither," added Bones.

Fluph glared at the operating superintendent. "They demanded—*demanded*, mind you—we install a Marvel Electronics Tri-Cell Vacufeeder. That's a recent innovation in lubrication. Looks like a giant octopus, only with more arms. The arms connect permanently to your oil fittings and carry oil to the proper fitting automatically when the heat of any machine raises a degree or two over normal. The big feature is that the Vacufeeder can handle more than one machine at a time, whereas Mobile Oil Carrier was limited."

Kleig said, "And the Vacufeeder's cost, I assume, was too high?"

"High?" Fluph's voice broke. "For the price we could put on five new Unirops—Model Sevens."

"And three Zucks," Bones added.

Fluph ignored the interruption. "But the union, all they care about is their creature comforts. Mobile Oil Carrier made some of them wait a moment or two, and the slight heat increase made them a mite uncomfortable. But they never complained while he was on the job. They liked him."

"He had seniority," Bones said.

"But as soon as we retire him, then suddenly a Uni-rob isn't good enough for them."

"Neither was Zuck, apparently," Kleig observed.

"We dunno," Bones said. "We never got much of a chance to find out."

Fluph said, "The first machine Zuck had contact with was Swing-Around Slab-Lifting Plate-Slicer."

"First day on a job's always the toughest," Bones contributed.

Kleig stood. "All right, then. The question boils down to this: Do you want to install a Uni-rob or a man in there?"

"Machines won't take neither," Bones warned.

"You let me worry about what the machines will or won't take. How about it?"

The question was directed to the vice president, who shifted his weight from one foot onto the other. "A man's what I'd like. He'd be less trouble."

"Be plenty of trouble when Swing-Around Slab-Lifting Plate-Slicer gets hold of him," Bones snorted.

Kleig thought for a moment. "That machine is going to be a problem."

Fluph said, "Always has been. While not the head of the local union or even the steward, he remains in control of the other machines by the very fact that without him the others can't work. He's the most vital and most expensive piece of machinery we own. And the biggest bully."

"Have to pull him down a peg. Knock him out of commission," Kleig said.

Fluph raised his hand abruptly. "We can't. We *need* him."

Bones was grinning. "You can't anyway. Generator wouldn't dare cut off his power—against union rules. Only other way would be to break his plate-slicing blade, and you ain't about to do that. It's thick, highest-strength vitgren. Ain't nothing tougher."

"We shall see," Kleig said. "For the present, let's set up a meeting with the union for tomorrow."

"Can't," Bones said. "Tomorrow's Tuesday. Labor negotiating committee meets on Thursdays. Now, if this was a safety matter, it would be different."

On the management side of the conference table, Fluph looked nervous, Kleig looked confident and Bones wheezed. Labor was represented by Dial Control Foreman and Synapsitized Computing Negotiator, a mobile computer measuring seven feet high by three feet in depth and width.

"We do not find the qualifications of a human-type worker equal to the job of oiler," grated the high-pitched voice of Synapsitized Computing Negotiator. "In fact, we cannot find any approximation on our tapes. Speaking of humans is therefore a futility."

Kleig rose and walked to a chair in the corner of the room. He returned with three rolls of tape. "I think you've started with the right point," he told Negotiator. "I also think you've had very little knowledge stored in you about the human type of worker. Correct?"

Negotiator speedily checked, his data library. "That is correct. There is little need for such information."

"Until now," Kleig corrected. "In light of which, I've brought some with me. If you'll kindly allow me to remove your back..."

Seconds later, after Negotiator had spun through the three reels, he grated. "Workers of the human type are trainable for the job of oiler. Point conceded."

"How about his comparison with a Unirob?" Kleig asked. "Would a human be superior?"

"Of course not!" snapped Dial Control Foreman.

"Hastily spoken," admonished Negotiator. "While in respect to speed and accuracy, the Unirob *is* superior, a human worker would have the ability to determine which machine had the most dire need for oiling in the event two or more units registered a need within a short period of time. The Unirob would complete his oiling tasks in consecutive order of registered need, with no consideration given to the possibility that the second or third machine to register a need for oil might be rising in temperature two or three times as fast as the first."

"Very well spoken," said Fluph.

"Very well indeed," said Dial Control Foreman testily. "Not that it really matters that a human might be superior to a Unirob. You recall, gentlemen, that our demands have nothing to do with a Unirob. We want a Tri-Cell Vacu-feeder."

"Outrageous!" Fluph exclaimed.

"Crap," Bones snorted.

"Impossible," Kleig said quietly.

Negotiator ignored the first two responses, but at the third a small red light in his forehead flashed. "Impossible, Mr. Kleig? You will please explain where the impossibility lies. I cannot find it."

Kleig gestured toward the window. "Out there are several companies that make products similar to or the same as Fluph Manufacturing."

"We are not concerned with companies other than Fluph," interrupted Dial Control Foreman.

"You should be," Kleig went on. "It's the other companies that make installation of the Vacu-feeder impos-sible. Simple economics. Fluph puts in the Vacu-feeder, let's say. This boosts production costs."

Negotiator nodded. "True, but these can be passed along to the consumer in the form of higher prices."

Kleig grimaced. "That's the problem. Fluph prices go up, but the competition's don't. The result: the competition sells its products, Fluph doesn't. No sales results in no company, no production and no need for machinery. At best, you wind up on the used machine market. Possibly on the scrap heap."

"Ridiculous," said Dial Control Foreman angrily. "That can't happen to us. We have a union!"

"But, as you yourself said, your union is not concerned with companies other than Fluph. If Fluph goes down..."

"So do we," finished Negotiator.

Dial Control Foreman turned on Negotiator. "Whose side are you on anyway?"

Negotiator's red light flashed. "What appears to be an inQonsistency on my part is explained by the nature of the problem. All intelligent machines are built to recognize the futile and to give up when the futility point is

reached. In this they differ from men *and* less intelligent machines, and so are more efficient. Your difficulty, Dial Control Foreman, is that you have not yet recognized your demands as impossible!"

"All we want is faster oil delivery!"

"Correct. But if your demands are realized, the long term result is no oil at all."

Kleig pushed his chair back from the table. "Then, gentlemen, it's decided. The oiler's job goes to a man."

Negotiator whirred. "Agreed. A man should be installed at the first opportunity."

Dial Control Foreman sputtered. "Hold on. I have recognized an impossibility which you have not. Swing-Around Slab-Lifting Plate-Slicer. He won't go for it. He'll make hash out of any man who gets near him."

Kleig tapped the storage banks of Synapsitized Computing Negotiator. "I admit we expect some difficulty from the machine you mention. But the man I have in mind for the oiler's job, I expect will handle that difficulty with dispatch."

"The special slab is ready," Kleig said to the new oiler, a lean and athletic-looking young man dressed in bright, clean overalls. "Good luck."

Kleig stood with the new man, Bones and Negotiator in the middle of the plant floor. They had watched a twenty-foot-long slab of medium-strength vigtren placed into the feeding system. Kleig pointed to the slab as it moved upward to the main conveyor. "You've got three minutes before Swing-Around Slab-Lifting Plate-Slicer has to handle that metal coming through."

"I should be able to last that long," the new man said.

Negotiator's voice cracked. "I cannot say I readily approve of harming any machine, but in this case I agree a lesson needs teaching."

Kleig, Bones and Negotiator watched as the oiler, oil spewer in hand, approached the huge machine. The machine was waiting, the multijointed arms it normally used for lifting the heavy slabs of metal into its blade bed now poised high for attack. The man, of course, would keep his distance in view of such menace. Surely he would not dare—

"Hello, you ugly slob. Remember me?" the oiler shouted and, dodging under a swooping tentacle, he gave the machine a clanging kick in its shiny control plate.

"*What's going on?*" barked Dial Control Foreman, wheeling swiftly to Kleig's side.

Kleig ignored the question. His attention was completely given to the new oiler. "The arms! *Watch out for the arms, Zuck!*" he roared.

"*Zuck?*" said Negotiator, Dial Control Foreman and Bones as in one voice.

The scooping arms of Swing-Around Slab-Lifting Plate-Slicer had been converging—one high, the other low—upon the oiler. At the sound of the familiar name they halted a millisecond, then continued on their deadly course. The oiler sprang upwards. As if flying, he executed a perfect somersault in mid-air as the tentacled hands clanged together below him. Down came the oiler, the hands swiftly separating for another grasp. And now from the oil spewer there shot a liquid substance that covered the machine's high-strength vitgren blade. Another spring from the man, a second somersault, and he stood outside the range of the tentacles' grasp.

"It's all over now," the oiler yelled. "Go pick up the special present I've sent to you."

The great metal slab now was booming along the main conveyor toward Swing-Around Slab-Lifter Plate-Slicer. As the slab registered on the

machine's pick-up activator, the arm-base turret swiveled 90 degrees, the mighty multijointed arms rose upward—and paused.

A red light on the machine's control panel flashed: DANGER. But a green light below canceled the signal. What could possibly endanger the vitgren blade? The powerful hands plunged on, grabbed the slab as if it were balsa wood and slapped it thumpingly onto the oily blade bed.

Swiftly the blade came down to take the first of forty or more scheduled slices which in four seconds would cleanly cut the slab into prespecified widths. It came down with a smack.

Just once.

For when it rose, the blade brought the entire slab with it. There was a sound of crunching metal, for although the blade was vitgren, the blade hood and casing were made of softer, less expensive, structural-quality steel.

The red light on the machine's control panel flashed on and off, then stayed on. Dial Control Foreman sped to Generator. "Off power! Off power!" he screamed. Negotiator wheeled swiftly to the side of Swing-Around Slab-Lifting Plate-Slicer. Bones giggled hysterically.

"You did it," he clucked at Kleig. "He's out cold!"

"Really very simple, that part of it," Kleig said. "Merely put duropoxy cement all over the slab of vitgren we fed into the system. The oiler sprayed the quick-drying bonding agent on the machine's blade and when the two met..."

"The oiler—you called him—"

Kleig waved Bones to silence as Negotiator rolled up. "I think we shall have no more trouble from Swing-Around Slab-Lifting Plate-Slicer. I have explained to him how Zuck returned to get revenge, and that it would do no good to try to kill him again."

"Kill *Zuck* again?" said Bones, looking at Kleig questioningly.

"Again," Kleig affirmed. "Among the information I programmed into Negotiator were all the *facts*"—*he* looked hard at Bones—"concerning reincarnation. Negotiator recognizes—as all the union members will soon—that to kill Zuck again would only cause his return in another form. Such killing therefore—"

"Would be futile," Negotiator said.

"And the ability to recognize futility is one of the advantages machines enjoy over men," Kleig said smiling. As Negotiator rolled away, he added, "I trust, Mr. Bones, that you can find a suitable replacement for our new oiler. I'm afraid he must be getting back to his circus."

"Another oiler? Sure, got just the man in mind," Bones cackled. "Fellow named—"

"Zuck," Kleig said quietly.

By the nature of their profession, those in the entertainment world apply themselves diligently to acquire a set of skills which happen to be exactly those necessary to successful hoodwinking. And in the entertainment business, where the stakes can be extremely high, who can blame an understudy like Fraz Lootma—who Croy Heriot admits has been pushed "to the rear of the action"—for not taking into account in his plot-hatching an innocent Donald B. Snowbird?

SNOWBIRD AND THE SEVEN WARFS

"Excuse me, sir, but can you tell me the exact time?"

Donald B. Snowbird was in a hurry to get down the stairs into the Sixth Avenue subway. He was plenty early for his date with Verna, but it paid to be early, he figured, in that Verna was a real prize catch and he-well, *she* was a real prize catch, anyhow.

Being in such a hurry, Donald B. Snowbird gave the man with the odd-looking walking stick only a cursory glance. A naturally courteous young man, however, he looked down at his watch and responded to the question.

"Time 8:30," he muttered and moved to the steps.

"Wrong. Warf *one!*" came the almost gleeful shout from behind him. Not pausing to look back—New York is full of nuts shouting slogans-r-he continued his downward journey for four steps. Then he stopped cold.

It was on the fourth step that he looked at his watch again. The man with the walking stick had said he was wrong. But as he looked down at his wrist, Donald B. Snowbird forgot all about the accuracy of his timepiece.

Because the timepiece was gone.

So was his left hand.

Just gone. Not at all where one would have expected to find what up till now had been a normal and, more times than not, quite useful left hand.

There was no pain in his wrist, no slice or cut or mark indicating how the hand had vanished, no blood. Just smooth unscarred flesh surrounding the nub which now ended his left arm.

Donald B. Snowbird, of course, didn't take all this in at first glance. Or at second glance. For, once the shock of that first glance had worn off, he

did what was natural under the circumstances. To his Cheyenne forebears, the natural reaction would have been a bloody oath or a chilling war hoot. But Donald B. Snowbird was civilized, so he told himself to remain calm.

Calmly he fainted.

Passersby who noticed the man with the silver walking stick propping up the seated Donald B. Snowbird on the first landing underground didn't give very much thought to the sight. At Fiftieth and Sixth on any Friday evening in the city passersby give any sight very little notice. After all, people are entitled to privacy, New Yorkers know that. Even if the people are unconscious as was Donald B. Snowbird.

And he wasn't unconscious for very long. Anybody looking on would have seen the man with the walking stick place a vial of something under Donald B. Snowbird's nose and a moment later would have heard the once-fainted Snowbird announce his consciousness.

"Where's my goddam handF' he announced at the top of his lungs.

"Please, no profanity on the vid, sir," said the man with the walking stick. It was the same man who asked him for the time, Snowbird saw, and at this close range there seemed to be something different about him. His suit, for instance, was of an odd cut and its color was a shade of red suggesting that *The British Are Coming*. His facial features were for the most part normal except perhaps for the eyes. Two of them looked quite normal. It was the third one, when it winked open in the man's forehead, that appeared to Donald B. Snowbird as being abnormal.

"Who—wha—" he began.

"Hush! We're back on vid. I had to cut us off when you became incapacitated. Might have been interesting to the viewers, your falling down the stairs and all, but vidtime is valuable and I'm not sure about the sponsor's reactions."

"Sponsor? What—"

"*Hush!* We're taping now." There was a whirring sound and the man's face brightened. Snowbird noticed that he seemed to be grinning into or at the walking stick which suddenly no longer looked like a walking stick. It had wires and dials and other electronic-type stuff on its head. Donald B. Snowbird could recognize electronic-type stuff. His job was behind the counter of a retail store that so[^]d it.

The whirring sound ceased and the man's grin flashed even wider. Snowbird watched as the third eye winked deliberately into the head of the stick.

"What sponsor?" he began again. "Who—"

"Hi-hi-hi, out there in vid land. This is Croy Heriot again. And here we are, courtesy of the Scomfit Company, makers of those ever-tasty prymeroles on your dispenser's shelves. Rush out and buy some, you hear? But not *now*, for goodness" sakes no. You stay right where you are. And we—we'll stay right where we are. "As you know, tonight we're broadcasting from Sham's Planet, called *Earth* by its almost human inhabitants. And we're playing our little game with—ah, what is your name, sir?"

Ignoring for the moment the passersby who in turn were still ignoring him, the seated Snowbird stared at the stick head pushed toward him. "Snowbird. Er, Donald B. Snowbird."

"And your age and occupation; Mr. Snowbird?"

"Thirty-two. I'm—I'm in retailing." He suddenly remembered that he was missing a left hand. "Say, what kind of game is this?" he said, his face flushing.

"The name of the game, as our vid audience all knows, is *You Bet Your Mass*, that fun-filled half hour that has the whole galaxy shaking in its pod. But have no fear, Mr. Snowbird, they're all pulling for you out there. From Gaffney to Dodran Five, from the Omal Smark Belt to Teven's Enric, they're all hoping you'll avoid the warfs and intelligize your way to

winnership! Isn't that right? How about that, you folks out there in the studio audience?"

A thumb touched a dial on the stick head and canned cheers, clapping and whistles bounced off the walls of the subway entrance. Croy Heriot whispered to Snowbird, "Helps give the illusion that we're in a studio. Everybody knows we're not, of course." Another touch of the dial and the audience noise subsided.

"Yes-oh-yes—and what a great time we're having here on Sham's Planet. Right, Mr. Snowbird? Right! Even though, vid viewers, as you just heard and saw, Mr. Snowbird muffed the first question and we had to warf his left hand. Ah, Mr. Snowbird, for your information, the *exact* time in this sector was 142 heets after bote nine. Or to use your local customs in time-telling, it was precisely 8:28 p.m. Eastern Standard Time. Either answer would have been acceptable."

"I didn't know I was playing a game," Snowbird said, looking sadly at a hand that was no longer there.

"Ha-ha-ho! Mr. Snowbird, you gave me little chance to explain that you were selected from among our studio audience. Oh no, sir," again he winked his third eye into the stick head, "I'm afraid you justly deserved your first warf. Isn't that right, gang?"

The stick let loose with thunderous applause.

"But fear not, sir, fear not," Croy Heriot said when the hand-clapping died down. "You've got six more warf questions in which you can beat the game, during which time if you happen to say the secret alien word you'll automatically take home the bacon! Or, ha-ha-ho, the beef, if you prefer! Now, for your second question. Tell us, where were you going when the game began?" Snowbird's eyebrows raised. "Where? I was going down to Fourteenth Street. I got a date with my girl, Verna, and—*hey!*"

He had been gesturing with his left arm as he spoke. The shout followed his realization that there was nothing attached to his left shoulder to

continue gesturing with.

The audience thundered with glee.

"Warf *two*, Mr. Snowbird," chortled Croy Heriot. "Now isn't it true that you were in fact going down these stairs which are on Fiftieth Street?"

"Well, yes; but you asked me where I was going to."

"No, I didn't, ho-ho. I asked you where you were *going*. I'm afraid you didn't intelligize that one too carefully, Mr.—"

Snowbird's right fist shot out in the general direction of Croy Heriot's third eye. He missed. He was cocking back for a second try when Croy Heriot leaned out of range, smiled hesitantly into the stick head and said, "And now, before we get to Mr. Snowbird's third question, some words about Scomfit's prymeroles, dandy and delicate and delicious at your neighborhood—er, take it away, ho-ho!"

The audience giggled and the stick head whirled.

"Please Mr. Snowbird. Violence isn't at all *in* this season! And it certainly won't help you win the game," Croy Heriot cautioned. •

"You give me back my arm!" Snowbird threatened. The Cheyenne blood in him had never quite come to surface before, but right now he was thinking of scalping this bird, third eye watching and all.

The third eye.

It stared at him. Looked so odd. Looking back at the eye, into it...

It calmed him down.

"Now, Mr. Snowbird, perhaps we can get on with the game."

Snowbird spoke almost mechanically. "But I don't know how to play the game," he said.

Croy Heriot looked stunned. "You don't know how— but doesn't everybody watch *You Bet Your Mass*? Come now, Mr. Snowbird, our ratings are among the highest in the galaxy." He paused. "You... really don't know how we play?"

Snowbird shook his head no.

"Dear me," Croy Heriot said. "Dear, dear me. I could get fired if... Well, no harm done, really," he said, brightening. "You still have five warf questions to go."

The third eye winked strangely at Snowbird and he shook off a kind of drowsiness. "Five," he said. "And what do I lose if I get them wrong?"

Croy Heriot grinned. "Right wrist, right arm, left leg, right leg and head, in that order. But all our losers take consolation in the fact that their lost limbs are donated in their names to the Inter-World Limb Bank on the medical world of Mogg. And think: you still have a chance to win by saying the secret alien word."

"Hüüyeaaaaahh!" cried Donald B. Snowbird.

"No, that's not tonight's word. But a good try, Mr.—ⁿ

This time Croy Heriot didn't see Donald B. Snowbird's right fist until it had made contact—especially hard contact—with the area lying between two of his eyes. The impact tumbled him over on his back, during which time Snowbird sprang to his feet and took the stairs up to the street three at a bound.

He ran south for two blocks to Forty-eighth. Then, still running, he turned east until he reached Fifth Avenue. Now he walked, still trying to move swiftly, but he couldn't run. He was out of breath. And running was difficult without a left arm to hold him in balance.

Without a left arm. What would Verna think of him now? She'd already told him in no uncertain words that she didn't think he rated much as a man.

So all right. So he wasn't a Don Juan. But now! And who in blazes would believe how it happened? He hardly believed it himself. But it had happened, the loose flapping left arm of his jacket told him that. He stuck the sleeve into the jacket pocket below.

It was fifteen minutes later when he stopped walking. He'd made it as far as Forty-second. Crossing to the Public Library side of the street, he walked west the half block to Bryant Park and the first bench he saw unoccupied by the city's lover types. He sat. He had to think. He had to—

"You have to intelligize better," offered Croy Heriot, who, walking stick in hand, sat down next to Snowbird.

"You! How—"

"Never mind that," Croy Heriot countered. "Look, suppose I make the questions a little easier. You know, give you a better chance to win. It's not exactly on the up-and-up, but in this case I think there might be just cause."

"Why?" Snowbird asked cautiously. "Why would you want to do that?"

Croy Heriot shifted his weight uncomfortably. "Well, to be quite candid, your reaction back there unsettled my mind as well as my body. I mean, I've never had a contestant respond quite like you did. So I made a quick and highly confidential check with one of our assistant producers and... well, I don't know exactly how to put this, but this planet... I mean, I was supposed to be vidding from Sham's Planet, which I've just discovered isn't at all called Earth by the local inhabitants. I'm here by—ah, a mistake as it were."

"Some mistake," Snowbird growled.

Croy Heriot nodded. "I'm not sure, but I have my suspicions. I have an assistant, sort of an understudy really, a chap by the name of Fraz Lootma, who I've charged to make out my schedules, set my coordinates, research customs, things like that. Admittedly, my pushing him to the rear of the action may not have been exactly fair, but in this business... But to

delibefately send me off the beaten track like this..." He rubbed his jaw reflectively. "I fust don't know, but you can be sure I'll check when I get back."

Snowbird had brightened. "Since you must be on your way, then, how about getting that arm of mine back? Quick, if you please. I'm late as it is."

Croy Heriot's expression was one of unease. "It's not all that simple, I'm afraid. Vid time and vid tape are very expensive, and schedules are tight. And the sponsor—well, to be absolutely truthful, Scomfit's prymeroles haven't been doing all that great in the marketplace. They're thinking of moving to another show, and if Scomfit leaves us, somebody's head is going to roll. Somebody on *You Bet Your Mass*. Now if the top vidwork boys discover this error which will be tagged to me— I'll just bet Fraz Lootma did, *deliberately*—well, anyway, I've got a family, Mr. Snowbird."

"And I used to have two arms!" Snowbird snapped. He was beyond sympathizing.

"You'll get the other one back. I'll make the questions easy, I promise. And who knows—maybe you'll say the secret alien word?"

"Easy?"

"So easy any school boy could handle them," Croy Heriot assured. "Now how about it?"

Wearily, Snowbird sighed, and the canned studio audience came to life.

"Hi-hi-hi! Welcome back out there, gang. Here's old Croy again, and we've changed location here on Sham's Planet to let the vid camera show you a little more of this out-of-the-way world I've just been chided, by the way, by our contestant here who tells me that the local people don't call this world Earth after all. You remember I said that earlier? Well, ho-ho, they call it Tanling Gop. Nice name for a planet, hey folks?"

The whistles in the audience intimated that those in the studio heartily agreed.

"Donald B. Snowbird, you'll recall, is now up to his third warf question. Mr. Snowbird—ah, this one from our computergram-selector shows that the machine has more heart than we generally acknowledge. Ho-ho, this one should give you very little trouble, sir. Who—that's what *You Bet Your Mass* wants to know—who was known as the Father of his Country, on the planet Gaff-ney?"

"George—" Snowbird stopped in mid-answer. "What's Gaffney?"

"But—but surely you know who—" Croy Heriot gasped. Realizing he was still on vid, he smiled weakly. "Well, ha-ha, it looks—"

When the canned audience exploded, Snowbird raised his remaining hand to scratch his ear. He was confused. He was more confused when he saw he had no remaining hand.

"*Gerrragggghr* he choked. "You dirty son of a lying—"

"Hold it, hold it right there! Mr. Snowbird, you said it! The secret alien word *gimg*, the Fergantine Four word meaning good fortune. You're a winner!"

"I—" said Snowbird.

The audience sounded like an on-the-spot recording of a Cape Kennedy launching.

Croy Heriot was delirious. "Warf his limbs back here, boys. Hurry now. Ah, ha-ho-hey—well, what say you now, Mr. Snowbird?"

Mr. Snowbird couldn't say anything. He too was deliri-ous as he heard three *pops* and saw that he now had all his missing parts back. Even his watch.

"Well, sir, Mr. Snowbird, you're even; but now it's your chance to *gain*. Yessir, saying the secret alien word gives you the opportunity to gain the mass of your choice. What'll it be? An extra arm? A leg? Bulging chest muscles?"

"Huh?" said Snowbird.

Croy Heriot repeated the offer while the audience continued going wild. Before the cheers and stomps and hand-claps were over, Snowbird had made up his mind.

And as he walked to the subway, he knew it was the right choice. Sure he could have used an extra arm and maybe those big chest muscles. But this was better. The additional mass wouldn't show at all when he was clothed, and he'd get used to feeling a little bit heavier below the belt. Let Verna say what she liked about his being late. One thing she'd never, never say again was anything about his not being a man.

Did she have a surprise coming! Ho-ho-hey-hey!

Maybe this story shouldn't be in this collection. But to my mind—which, I'll grant, is not always reliable in such matters—it fits for two reasons. First, a high percentage of UFOologists are involved in hucks-tery hanky-panky and nothing more. Second, even if the* personal integrity of Gerard Bufus is beyond question, I think you'll agree he's involved personally in a very big put on.

THE LOCATOR

Gerard Bufus was an orderly bachelor. He lived in an orderly apartment containing an orderly kitchen and bathroom and living room and library. The library was especially orderly. Even the colored pins in the map of the world on the wall were placed as closely parallel to the floor and to each other as Gerard Bufus could manage.

It was difficult to be really orderly in such an unorderly city as Chicago, but Gerard Bufus was highly successful. His life was unencumbered by friends of either sex. His work was accounting, and Gerard Bufus was the kind of accountant that other accountants will insist is merely a stereotype and that doesn't exist in real life. Fussy and finicky was Gerard Bufus, accountant, neat to fanaticism in his balance sheets as in his dress.

His dress. Gerard Bufus selected only symmetrical clothing. Which is to say that, in suits, his taste dictated tiny pinstripes, but only those whose lines were perpendicular to the horizon with the precision of a plumb line. His neckties all were solid colors. Design in a tie made him feel unbalanced.

He used a tie clip. Letting his tie flap loose would have been inconceivable, and a tie tac presented the problem of assuring exact centering. The tie clips presented their problems too. They had to be the correct length, precisely matching the width of his ties. Other men who deemed this a problem might solve it by moving the clip up or down on the tie until the length of the first was equal to the width of the second, but not

Gerard Bufus. Tie clips were to be worn directly over the fourth button down from the shirt top—at least, all tie clips belonging to Gerard Bufus had to be worn there.

At forty-one, Gerard Bufus dyed his hair jet black. Not that he was overly vain. He would not have minded having gray hair, if only the gray

had made its appearance evenly, equally on both temples. It hadn't, hence the dye.

Without his keen sense of balance, Gerard Bufus could never have constructed the analog which he hoped would make him world famous. The map on his library wall was part of it. Each colored pin represented an authenticated report of a flying saucer landing—either an actual landing or a documented observance of a UFO which when seen seemed to be looking for a place to land.

"Living organisms intelligent enough to conquer the difficulties of space travel would have to be orderly people," Gerard Bufus explained once to an informal group of attendees at a Chicago convention of saucer buffs. "Their landings here—regardless of their intent—must be in accord with a harmonious pattern of place and time, a master plan. One would need only to discover that plan to be able to predict future landings accurately."

"Who cares about that?" asked one enthusiast. "What's important is, how do the space people's women feel about sex?"

That had been the first and, last such conference attended by Gerard Bufus. But his analysis continued. Every mention of a UFO landing was carefully checked to determine with the highest degree of accuracy possible where and when the landing took place, if it did take place. The hobby was not fun, or at least Gerard Bufus didn't think of it that way. It was all important that when the Outsiders began to talk to the men of Earth that someone like Gerard Bufus be included. Only then would the aliens get a good impression of us. But as far as Gerard Bufus knew, there weren't very many people like Gerard Bufus. So it was up to him.

He had a personal reason, too. It also stemmed from the fact that there weren't many people like Gerard Bufus. Deep down, he was lonely for companionship. They—the Outsiders—being orderly people, might make good companions for him. Loneliness was an unpleasant, equilibrium-upsetting feeling.

So he spent all his free time on the analog: marking known landings, making rough but logical estimates of unreported and therefore unknown landings, then making test predictions.

His first prediction was three weeks and four hundred miles away from a September landing south of Caracas, Venezuela. Two months more work and four landings later, he was within a square mile and two hours of a landing reported as a "strange event" near Cork, Ireland. There would be, according to the future-extended analog, three landings in far-distant places before the one came about that he could take advantage of.

He was overjoyed to find his bank account wouldn't suffer much in providing travel expenses, which would include only an airline ticket to Binghamton, New York, and a rented car to travel the few miles to a northeast spot in the town of Union. He was dismayed only a little that the Union landing wouldn't take place for another eight months.

The time was spent valuably checking and rechecking the analog, pinpointing and documenting the three intermediate landings, and studying topographical maps of the Binghamton-Union area to discover the precise landing spot—determined mostly by terrain within the specific area. Then, almost before Gerard Bufus was ready, it was time for his rendezvous with orderly destiny.

The night was dark. Gerard Bufus was dressed impeccably in a light summer-weight charcoal pinstripe. It was 10:30; there were but fifteen minutes more to wait—at least, according to Gerard Bufus's schedule. He could feel a high-pitched nervousness shooting through his system and was somewhat annoyed with the feeling. Excitement would not do, not now, he told himself. Calm, orderly, rational—that's what he must be. He concentrated on controlling his breath.

The terrain had suggested only one logical landing place, a flat semi-isolated area covered with waist-high scrub bushes. Among them now, Gerard Bufus crouched low. It wouldn't do, he thought, to be seen prematurely. The aliens had seemed to be avoiding contact so far, probably

because they didn't want to strike fear in some poor Earthman's heart. But when Gerard Bufus approached them *after* they'd landed—a man obviously expecting them—naturally they would in their amazement tarry to speak with such a man.

One fear began to nag at Gerard Bufus: Suppose they didn't come? Suppose... suppose any number of things. Like a mechanical breakdown of their craft. Like completion of whatever project it was that had been bringing them to this planet. Like—and this was the worst possibility of all—the master plan had been changed to a further phase. If they did change it, surely he would discover the new logic eventually, but all the work he'd done all this time...

He lifted his eyes to the skies almost in prayer. He saw it then.

It was a pinpoint of light; it might have been taken for a star at first. But it was getting brighter, bigger, closer.

It was cigar-shaped, Gerard Bufus decided; then, crouching lower into the bushes, he reassessed it to be more of a saucer in looks. A brilliant white-blue-green flashing saucer, moving fast, sure, orderly through the black sky. Soon, Gerard Bufus thought, and glanced at his watch. His predicted landing time was three minutes away. Neatly squaring away the manila folder in which he'd brought his predictive data—he was sure the aliens would be interested in how he tracked them down—he again tried to control his breathing which, he now noticed, had once more become irregular. He allowed himself a symmetrical smile of anticipation.

Two minutes and fifty seconds later the smile left his face. For all his work, all his thought, all his planning, he had made one slight error in his preparation. He had been so concerned with locating the exact landing spot, he'd neglected to anticipate what might happen to something or someone standing—or, as it was, crouching—there.

Gerard Bufus's smile turned into an ear-shattering scream as the alien craft, large as a baseball diamond, crushed his neatly dressed body to jelly.

The landing was swift, orderly and precisely on target.

So much for the forces of Darkness, but what of the opposition? Should not the Good Guys be allowed a deception now and then? Of course, what happens to Harry Spender could not adequately be termed a practical joke, but it is at least practical...

APPOINTMENT AT TEN O'CLOCK

Spender awoke suddenly with the noises of street traffic honking and roaring through his brain. Daylight pierced his shut eyelids. He closed them tighter, submerging his mind in darkness, letting it communicate— letting it tell him where he was.

His fingers and toes told him he was laying on something soft and springy. His sweating shoulders said they were naked, and the small of his back and his legs reported that they were covered by a single sheet. He had begun to smile, when he had an unsettling thought:

They cover people with a single sheet in a morgue.

At least, Spender had seen movies where a single sheet covered the corpses. But he was on his stomach; in the movies the dead were always on their backs. And the light—he opened his eyes a fraction—morgues are dark. And the softness under him certainly was no slab, whatever it is those slabs are made of. He opened his eyes wide and exhaled in relief. He was in bed.

He sat up and shook his head. He had been in bed. He hadn't been... well, wherever he dreamed he had been. He tried to recall, but the dream had gone. It was too late. *Late*.

He realized at once that there was- too much daylight coming through his apartment window. The clock confirmed his suspicion that something was wrong. Nine fifty, it said. He snorted as a picture of Medwin came into his mind. Mousy Medwin, who would stare over his thick glasses, tap his foot, look down at his watch and, in his squeaky voice, say something clever like,

"And what time zone are accountants observing this morning, Mr. Spender?"

Time zone, yet. Real original stuff, that Medwin. Nine fifty.

He felt his face. At least he wouldn't have to shave. He'd done that last night, before going to see Laura.

Laura. Spender smiled and sank back on the bed.

Laura with the lips he'd first tasted last night. Laura with the endless chain of martinis, telling him over and over again that she wanted him, needed him. Laura in the light blue negligee, and later her body of ivory fur on the blue bedspread. Laura with the crookedest nose in the world. Well, you can't have everything. Despite the nose, he'd had his eye on her for a long time, watching her as she pranced around the office, as she took dictation from Medwin.

Medwin. And Laura. Medwin and Laura. Now that would be a *real* couple. He laughed out loud, then his eyes lit on the clock again.

Pants on, socks on, shirt and... blasted necktie! Thirty-one years old and still can't tie a four-in-hand. A quick swipe of the toothbrush and downstairs to the noisy outdoors.

He reached the outside steps when he saw the bus pull away from the corner. "Hey!" he yelled and his feet began to move. Maybe he could catch the bus at the next block.

He hurried through the sidewalk traffic, sidestepping, shoving and elbowing ("Sorry, lady.") his way closer to the end of the block where three men and a girl were climbing on the bus. He might make it yet, he thought.

And then he saw the little man in the green derby hat coming straight toward him.

Something told Spender that the little man wasn't going to give way. The man was somehow familiar, and the green hat too, but Spender had no time to dwell on these thoughts. Instead, *he* was thinking about how he'd spin the little guy on his tail if he stayed in his way. He chuckled inside. Maybe he could even knock the green hat into the street.

Spender swung to his left, but the little man moved directly into his path. To the right! The little man was there also. And when the little man stopped, Spender stopped too, wondering why.

The little man tipped his hat cordially. "Harry Spender?"

"Er, yes. I—"

Spender had no chance to finish whatever it was he was going to say. For, in the next few fractions of a second, hands of superhuman strength clamped down on his shoulders and pitched him into the street. There were sounds of a woman screaming and brakes screeching. There was the sight of an oncoming car and the feeling of being crushed...

Spender awoke suddenly. Daylight pierced his shut eyelids. He closed them tighter. He heard what might have been the sounds of traffic outside. It reminded him of... what? His body told him he was in bed, but the feel of the sheet on his back suggested something else.

They cover people with a single sheet in a morgue, he thought.

But the light! He opened his eyes a crack. Morgues don't have light. And there was softness that certainly was no slab.

He breathed a sigh of relief. Bed. Then it must have been a dream. He had just imagined that he... what *was* it he had imagined? A dream, something "about a green hat. He couldn't recall in time. *Time*.

He became aware of the rays of sun coming through his window. Too much light for this time of—nine fifty, the clock said.

Nine fifty. He thought of Medwin the Mouse and laughed. He felt his face. No need to shave, at least. He'd done that last night before... Laura.

Of the blue negligee. On the blue spread. Her ridiculous nose at the office. Office.

He dressed hurriedly and ran down the stairs. He had fust stepped outside when the bus pulled away.

"Hey!"

He ran, pushed, elbowed and sidestepped. At the next corner, people were getting on the bus. He might have time to make it...

Then he spotted a little man in a green hat.

Spender knew, somehow, that the little man wasn't going to let him by. The man's eyes focused on Spender as he came closer. And when the man stopped, Spender did also. There was something awfully familiar about this whole—

"Harry Spender?"

"Er, yes. I—" Hands grasped Spender. He was falling. A woman screamed, brakes screeched. There was a car coming. And a crushing weight.

He woke suddenly with the light of day piercing his eyelids and street sounds in his ear.

He was in bed, he discovered. But he hadn't been a moment ago. Then, he'd been... blast it, he'd been... there had been sounds, he could still hear them echoing in his brain. They were dimming. He couldn't catch them in time.

Time.

Clock. Nine fifty. Late!

Shave. No need—last night.

Laura of the blue, Laura at... *work!*

Dressing, running, "Hey!"

The sound of his own voice caused a snap somewhere inside his head. It was a very minor snap, but it gave

Spender the knowledge that he was doing things as he'd done them before. He ran after the bus, knowing he wasn't going to make it, knowing that any moment he'd see...

The little man in the green hat was coming toward him. And Spender knew why he was coming.

"Harry—"

"Not this time," Spender growled and, grabbing the man's lapels, slammed him against a building.

"Please. Don't interfere," the little man said, flushing. "You don't understand."

"Maybe not," Spender said through his teeth, "but nobody's pushing me in front of a car if I can help it."

"A truck," the little man corrected.

"Truck?"

"Truck, Mr. Spender. There, it hits you from behind." The little man pointed to a truck in the street. Spender turned and saw a strange scene. The truck wasn't moving. Nothing was moving. Cars, pedestrians, dogs on leashes, everything except himself and the green-hatted man looked as if they had been—

"Frozen in mid-motion." The man smiled. "We had to stop the time-flow, of course. After all, if you're to die at ten o'clock sharp, ten sharp it has to be."

"*Die?*" Spender's hold on the man's lapels relaxed.

"Why, yes. You're dead now, in a manner of speaking. But I forgot—you don't know about that."

"Dead. *Me?*" Spender released the little man and looked at the frozen forms around him. "Then... this is what it's like... afterwards?"

"Dear me, no. Not at all. Surely you have ideas about the Realm of the Afterlife—immortality, eternity and all that sort of thing?" Spender nodded. "Well, for the most part, your ideas are quite correct." The man sighed. "Ah yes, eternity..."

"Only one thing wrong with eternity, Mr. Spender. It's eternal. The everlasting Now. As your scientists might put it, it's one space-time."

"And something's wrong with that," Spender said.

"Indeed, yes, simply because an area of space can contain only one thing at a time. Therefore, a segment of space-time—no matter how large—can eventually get filled up." The little man looked frankly at Spender. "And that, sir, is exactly what's happened. The After-Realm is crowded."

Spender paced around two frozen women. "Crowded? But how could that be? I mean, didn't anyone... someone provide any advance planning?"

The little man suppressed a giggle. "Well, there were a few attempts at urban renewal, but your population explosion has also hit us, quite hard. To pun one of the sacred writers, there is no room at the In."

Spender began to laugh, and then realized that being told you are dead is not very funny. "What's this got to do with me?"

"Everything. Since we were running out of space in the everlasting future, it was decided to place a few test cases in space-time points in the past, where there could be no crowding problem. Sort of a revolving cycle—you are where you are and that's that."

Spender pondered this. "My 'cycle,' I take it, starts every morning when I wake up at nine fifty. Then I live for ten minutes and die, is that it?"

"Precisely."

"And every morning—or this one morning over and over—I have to get up *knowing I'm going to get killed*."

The green-hatted man laid a hand on Spender's shoulder. "I know the idea isn't pleasant. In fact, it's theoretically impossible that you should be able to have that knowledge. If you're actually reliving the moments as they really happened, how can you *know* what's ahead of you?"

Spender sat on the curb. "Well, I do know what's ahead, and I don't like it."

The little man shook his head. "I'm sorry to hear that, for my own sake as well as yours. You see, this cycle business was my idea in the first place. If it doesn't work out, my advancement may be blocked. And your not liking it could mess up everything, because your record of living is pretty clean. If you were one of the bad ones, it wouldn't matter if you didn't like it—kind -of a punishment, you know."

He sat down beside Spender and immediately jumped up again. "Suppose we set you further back? So, for instance, you die now and wake up the moment you are born. Then..." He slumped back to the curb. "No. Then it would be just a matter of a few years before you recalled everything again."

"No way out, huh?" Spender was beginning to feel sorry for the green-hatted man.

"If only," the little man said, "if only we could get you to *like* the cycle, even while knowing you'd have to die at a time you knew was coming..." His face screwed up in concentration.

Like the cycle, Spender thought. How could that be possible? And then he thought how.

The little man beamed when he heard Spender's proposal. "Why, yes. I'm certain it could be arranged," he said. "And that would make you happy?"

Spender pointed to the truck and laughed. At ten sharp, a woman screamed and brakes screeched.

He woke slowly. The light was dim. His body told him he was in a sitting position. Good. He wiggled his toes and discovered that his shoes were on. Good, good. He opened his eyes wide. Old Green Hat had done it.

"*Well*, I thought for a moment the martinis had put my handsome man under," Laura said. Ivory Laura. Laura in blue.

She crossed over to his chair and planted a kiss on his forehead. "Maybe we'd better take away your glass. There's work to be done in the morning, you know."

As he bent down to unlace his shoes, Spender told her not to worry about tomorrow morning. He had only one appointment, that was at ten o'clock.

The war between Science and Religion wanes, probably through increasing lack of interest in both, but it still is very much with us. While choosing no'sides, it has always seemed to me that Religion has one very distinct advantage. By careful choosing among the words of a Book of Books, one can prove almost anything. For a passage in the Book of Elmee can always be interpreted in the light of passages in Jaamee and Ketempee, even if the latter two Books had up till now been considered very minor. With this method you can huckster your way through any believing mind. Even your own.

ONLY A GOD

In the temple courtyard, Gimmee balanced himself on his thick tail and spun his dark purple body around twice. Pausing, he asked Lemmee, "Well, how about it?"

Lemmee surveyed the young Gimmee thoughtfully. "I must say you take too much pride in your tail-balancing. Pride goeth before a fall, as the Ancients say."

"You're evading the question," was Gimmee's reply.

Lemmee reflected that he was indeed evading the question. What does it feel like to be God, Gimmee had asked. Questions like that ought to have solid answers, and if anyone should be in possession of those answers, certainly it was the high priest.

The trouble was that Lemmee was the high priest, and he didn't have the answers.

"There are some questions that cannot with certainty be answered, regardless of one's competence in theology," he said. "While there are many avenues of speculation open to him who would probe matters beyond what revelation has disclosed, unfortunately the nature of God's inner thoughts cannot be truly comprehended."

When he referred to the deity, Lemmee, in accord with custom, thumped his purple tail heavily on the ground.

"Well," said Gimmee, "I for one have watched the God of the Sky—*thump*—for a long time. In my opinion, his aloofness, his refusal to give an indication about how he feels toward us, is unbecoming a personage of his caliber."

Lemmee drew himself up to his full height and spoke authoritatively: "One cannot attach to God—*thump*—

any attributes that are not revealed. We know objectively only that he flies from his heaven once each month to Holy Knoll on Sacred Plain and there claims his living sacrifice. Now, while we have no empirical proof of what happens to this unworthy sacrifice, the Ancients wrote in the Book of Books that the volunteer lives forever afterward with his Master in the highest clouds above."

"That's what the Ancients say," Gimmee agreed. "But the Youngers say we're killing off our best citizens by sacrificing them to nothing more than a big, hungry bird who's not a god at all."

Lemmee cleared his throat. "The Youngers know very little theology," he said acidly.

The silence that followed was broken by the smack of a rock Gimmee threw against an antwerp tree. "I'd better be going. It's almost time," he said. "Are you attending today?"

"No, not today. I do not feel pure enough. I'll be in the temple meditating. You may stay with me, if you wish."

"Not me, Your Reverence," Gimmee replied. "I'm going to see if I can't get me a real close look at Sky God today." He began walking away.

"Gimmee!" said the priest harshly.

Gimmee turned. "Beg pardon." *Thump!*

In the dim-lit sanctuary, Lemmee closed the heavy cover of the Book of Books. Beautiful words, he was thinking. Words which never failed to inspire him to attempt great things. And if ever there was a time for such inspiration it was now.

For faith was under attack. It was the Youngers, mostly. Wrapped up in their science and their philosophy, they were questioning the unquestionable, trying to answer the unanswerable. Some of the more radical were introducing measures in the Parliament to abolish the sacrificial

rites. Others, more moderate perhaps, had infiltrated most of the. Higher Schools and were doing grave damage to the minds of their pupils.

The result was that young folks like Gimmee were being tempted to argument with the priests. Gimmee's questions were honest enough, motivated only by a desire to know. But how could one know, really? How, without proper and authenticated revelation, could one honestly answer questions such as where is heaven and how God—*thump*—rules the universe?

Lemmee glanced up from the Book to the great carved wooden bird above the altar. Yes, in the Book were words of inspiration, comfort, hope. But even these words—written by Ancients mighty in the faith—could never constitute the *facts* the Youngers were ever more loudly demanding.

But you, he thought, looking into the beady eyes of the giant winged creature, *you could give them the facts they seek. Why do you not show them? Why do you stay silent? Don't you care—*

His thoughts broke off as he became aware of a commotion outside the sanctuary door.

"Your Reverence! Please, Your Reverence, sir!"

Gimmee and two other students hopped excitedly in the anteroom. Because they at first insisted on all trying to speak at once, it was moments before Lemmee realized they were trying to tell him about something that had occurred at the sacrifice.

"Out of the sky," gasped the larger of Gimmee's companions, puffing due to his obesity.

"Much smaller than Sky God," said the other student.

Gimmee added, "Smaller even than us, let alone Sky God."

Lemmee was about to remind both that they had not paid proper reverence when mentioning the deity's name, when Gimmee stopped him cold.

"Everyone at Sacred Plain wonders why you aren't there to welcome the new God."

"*New God?*" The chief priest himself was too staggered to thump.

"Tiny God," said Gimmee. "He came down in a metal shell while we were waiting for the Winged One."

"The shell came down on the Plain," said the fatter of Gimmee's companions.

"And *he* came out of the shell," added the other. "Then Sky God came."

"Yes? Then what?" Lemmee urged.

The three students were looking at one another. None wanted to continue.

"Then," Gimmee said unsurely, "then Sky God came... like usual, for his sacrifice on the Knoll. He swooped down fast, as has been his custom, but this time—"

"The fire!" interrupted his chubby friend.

"I saw it," said the other. "It came from his extended arm."

"What arm?" Lemmee said impatiently.

"Tiny God's," said Gimmee. "He pointed his arm at Sky God, and there was this fiery flash that went all the way from his arm to Sky God. And then Sky God fell down."

"He... fell down?" Lemmee's lower lip quivered.

Gimmee lowered his eyes. "Dead," he said.

Lemmee stiffened. "That is *heresy*!"

"Yes sir," Gimmee said. "But he sure looks dead, Your Reverence."

"The doctors say so, too," added Gimmee's larger companion.

Lemmee stroked his chin. "You call him Tiny God."

"Shorter than the height of a three-year-old's knee," said Gimmee.

Lemmee thought aloud: "The Book of Elmee hints at the coming of a new Spirit—at a time when the world is in dire trouble—but he is to be large as a mountain and swift as the night winds."

"He was swift, all right," said Gimmee.

"Quiet! I must think." Yes, swift. And the world *is* in trouble. Loss of faith is perhaps the greatest trouble of all. But *large as a mountain*, Elmee had said. A mountain. Perhaps...

Of course!

Jaamee XVI, üi: "And that day will come when the cool stream shall erupt with fire, when the anthill shall loom like a mountain."

And Ketempee VII, viii: "Ask not about the physical stature of a person, but of the stature of his deeds. In such way what might appear a tree is but a weed, but what appears a stone may be a mountain range."

Jaamee and Ketempee—and they had always been considered minor books!

Lemmee asked, "Where is this new God—*thump-now*?"

"Waiting on the Plain. But, sir..."

"Yes, Gimmee?"

"You thumped just now. Does that mean you will recognize him as... the deity?"

Lemmee explained the relevant passages of scripture. "Besides, it is really a matter of very simple logic. Who could kill a god? Only another god, of course."

"Then everything will be all right?" Gimmee asked, the worried look fading from his face.

"Very much so," Lemmee answered. "Let us be getting down to meet our God."

The four thumped and left the temple.

The Younger, a teacher in the local Higher School, met them on the path halfway to the Plain.

"Do you see this?" he bellowed. He held a lump of something up to the chief priest's face. ""You know what this is? It's flesh."

"It smells like it," Lemmee commented dryly, turning his head.

The Younger blocked Lemmee's advance. "Flesh like that covering you and me, Your Reverence! Common, ordinary flesh—and it came from the body of your so-called Sky God!"

Yesterday a revelation like this might have bothered Lemmee, but not today when wonderful things were at work in the universe. "What would you prefer your gods made of, good man—rock? Be secure in the faith. God—*thump*—lives. We go to meet him now."

"I warn you. We'll take no mystical explanation for this—not for plain, honest-to-goodness flesh, we won't. Because it proves what we've said all

along: the bird you called God was a leftover from an extinct pre-glacial species."

Lemmee allowed himself a smile. "*Extinct*, you say?"

"That's what I said."

"Illogical, muddy thinking. You can't say a species is extinct and then produce a living example of that species.* At least I don't think you can. Or has science changed?"

The dark purple of the Younger's face grew darker. "None of your logical hocus-pocus will save your arguments this time, my friend. No, this time the temple's doctrine will be challenged all along the line."

"We shall see," Lemmee said quietly. "Now you must excuse us. God—*thump*—awaits."

The citizens were singing a hymn when Lemmee stepped into the middle of Sacred Plain. He halted the singing for it was directed to the God of the Sky. Not that the people didn't wish to praise the new god; it was just that all the hymns they knew praised the old one.

Lemmee thought of all the work ahead, rewriting these hymns, and the prayers too. Oh, what glorious work!

He'd not seen Tiny God at first. It was when he turned to see what was causing the high, squeaking noise that his attention was drawn to the little figure about ten feet away. He was astonished.

Gimmee and the others had said he was small, but...

He was no longer than the chief priest's hand. Not only that, but what sort of body could this be: white and strange-looking. Yes, it had two arms and two legs and a head, albeit the head had some funny kind of fur on top. But there was no tail. How could any two-legged being balance itself without a tail?

But, let us realize, this was no ordinary being.

"Oh, King," Lemmee began, kneeling, "we pray that you will have mercy on our homeland, on our—"

The priest stopped. Tiny God was still squeaking. He was not paying attention to the prayer. He looked disturbed about something. His eyes darted about the masses of citizens standing about him.

That was it of course.

Standing. They were standing. They should be kneeling, that was the trouble.

Showing that he was to be an obedient servant, Lemmee turned from the god to the throng of worshippers. "Kneel!" he commanded. "Kneel before your God!" *Thump*. "Sing praises to your God!" *Thump*.

Seeing the multitude bow their faces to the ground, Lemmee raised his eyes to the sky and let the sound of the loud chanting and thumping ring clear through his head. Yes, the songs were old, but that would be all right for now. He turned to do his personal homage to...

Tiny God no longer squeaked. He was quiet. Completely still. He was lying facedown in the dirt. Squashed.

Dead.

Killed by? The thump of Lemmee's tail!

But Lemmee had said it himself. A god could be killed only by...

There was a brand-new God.

And as Sacred Plain resounded with the uplifted praises of the ground-faced citizens who were now his as yet unknowing but nonetheless truly spiritual subjects, Lemmee knew the answer to a question Gimme had asked earlier in the day. He knew how it felt to be God.

God felt frightened out of his mind.

Freud says (and there's magic in them words) that it was the killing of All-Father, by that or any other name, that gave man his still-existing fears-cum-guilt-feelings regarding an all-powerful, omniscient god figure. Maybe so, but while it's not to be denied that Freud has written some great science fiction with some ingenious plot twists, I think when he got around to the All-Father tale he fell rather flat. As flat as Strong Ax and his brothers.

THE FALL OF ALL-FATHER

All-Father had all the women: the short ones, the tall ones, the pretty, the ugly, the lean and the fat.

I, Gangly, had none.

All-Father's room in the great cave was a place of laughing and joy. Gangly's room and the rooms of his brothers were sad places for we had no one to cook and clean for us, no one to share our beds of leaves and fur on the cold nights. It had always been so, and so it would always be, my brothers said. No one questioned All-Father's rights to the women, they said.

But legend remembered one who did. The tribe spoke rarely of Strong Ax, who aroused five of his brothers against All-Father. He, Strong Ax, led his followers into the great room. They would complain to All-Father, and when he saw their number and their strength and their determination, he would yield—or so they thought. The huge rock that All-Father hurled at them still lies in the spot where it crushed out their lives.

The tribe spoke in whispers of Strong Ax. Aloud, the tribe repeated the lesson: No one questioned the rights of mighty All-Father. I, Gangly, questioned. But only to myself.

Gangly was young and tall and powerful. Gangly was smart and handsome. Many of the women liked Gangly, but would not show it. They did not dare. All-Father would kill and eat them. So, in our rocks, there was no woman for Gangly. So I, Gangly, decided to leave our rocks to find a woman of my own.

The spirits of good fortune made me choose the paths I traveled. I was out of our district but two days when

I heard the screams that were to end in All-Father's destruction.

They were puny humans, the man and the woman. Not as hairy as we of the caves, they dressed in odd gray animal skins like I'd never seen before. They stood away from the strange-colored shiny rock that was held up from the ground by three long spindly legs.

It was the greatcat that caused the woman to scream —the yellow fanged cat which stood between them and the strange rock. The man appeared unable to defend his woman. If I saved her, she would be mine. *Gangly's woman!*

I shouted a war whoop and jumped into the clearing, my knotty club held high. The cat snarled and roared and left the ground in a mighty leap. I stepped to one side and my club came down with full force on the cat's back. There was a sharp crack and the cat crashed to the dirt, screaming. Two powerful smashes of my club to his head left the cat silent in death.

A jabbering sound behind me made me turn. The man and the woman were rushing toward me with their arms extended. *Gangly's woman!* But the man must die first. I raised my bloody club.

They stopped in their tracks. The woman shouted something at me and ran to the strange-colored rock. I watched her from the corner of my eye as I lifted the club to finish her man. My arm stopped in its motion. The rock, I saw, was no ordinary rock.

Part of it opened. The woman rushed inside, then she was outside again, running toward me. In her hand she had three curved strips of something. When she had almost reached me, she placed one of these strips over the top of her head. The second she gave to her man, who did the same. The third she offered to me. The gesture she made with her hands said I should put the strip around my head. It was pretty and shiny and hard, and it did not harm these puny humans. So I did.

At what I heard, I at first felt fear. But the fear stopped because happiness was what I heard. Not *heard*, really—more like *saw*. Little pictures danced through my head. Pictures of my new woman and her man laughing and doing all sorts of strange things in a place Hke I never knew

there was. I saw that it was far away, farther up in the sky than the clouds that rain. The men and women there did wonderful things. They lived in tall, smooth mountains and they wore clothing not made of skins but of trees (?) and liquids (?) that were under the ground. I did not understand much of this, but I saw happiness everywhere.

Then Gangly's woman made a picture that said she wanted Gangly to make pictures. She touched her head, and somehow I knew she wanted me to make a picture of the place I lived in. I put a picture of the cave in my head, and when Gangly's woman smiled, I knew she somehow could see our cave, too.

"Not Gangly's woman," I heard, or saw.

I looked from my new woman to the man with her. He was looking at me strangely. In my head was the picture of him and the woman with their arms around each other.

I formed a picture of the woman in my bed of leaves —she with me. I was happy in the picture, then the image changed and she was not happy at all.

"Why Gangly has no woman?" the image in my head asked.

I made a picture of All-Father with all the women. I made pictures of Gangly being lonely, and all his lonely brothers, and the women who would like to be Gangly's women. I made pictures of Strong Ax and what happened to him and his followers in All-Father's cave.

The woman and her man began to make pictures back and forth to each other, but I could see them too. There were pictures of Gangly with a woman of his own, and pictures of Gangly's brothers fighting with Gangly over the woman. Gangly was victorious in these fights. Then All-Father's image appeared. All-Father wanted Gangly's woman, too. A fight, and Gangly dead. I did not like these pictures.

The man turned to me slowly. "Gangly *give* his woman to All-Father."

"Gangly *not* give," I put into my head.

"Gangly yes give. *Yes* give!" And the pictures showed what would happen if I gave a woman to All-Father. They were hard to believe. They showed my brothers and I with women of our rocks—together.

"But All-Father wants *all* women,** I protested. "Just one will not be enough for him."

The puny man and woman did not answer. They laughed and walked to the shiny rock. Part of the rock opened and the man went inside. The woman came back and sat down by me. I sat with her and the pictures in my head began again. Her man, the pictures said, was going to give me a female nonhuman to be my woman, for a while.

"Woman? Where?" I said, looking around.

In my head a rock went through the sky. It was the shiny rock the man was now in. But in my mind the rock was going higher than the clouds. Somebody was making it do this,, from inside. It was a woman (non-human, the picture corrected itself—but how can there be a nonhuman woman?). The rock came down and landed, in the spot it was now. My woman and her man came out, but the nonhuman woman stayed inside, sitting at the front of the rock.

The next picture was horrible. It showed my woman's man taking the nonhuman's body apart and putting it back together again. In the image he was laughing wildly.

She, the nonhuman, was beautiful. As she and I made our way back to the rocks where I lived, I did not know if I wanted to do as the puny woman and man told me. Before they took from me the shiny picture-band and went into the rock that rose straight up into the sky, they put two images into my head. The first was not, not, *not* to take this woman for myself. The second was to give her to All-Father.

What the picture said would happen if I did take my nonwoman for my own, I did not fully understand, but it stopped me from doing as I wished. As for giving her to All-Father, I did not have to. No sooner did he lay eyes on her than he swatted me with his club and ripped her from my side.

As All-Father carried her to a dark place in the great cave, my brothers crowded around me. Where, they wanted to know, did I *gef* this woman? Were there more? They had other questions, but I had one of my own. I rose to my feet, lifting my club high, and said with a snarl, "Which of you would have courage enough to claim all the women for yourself, if All-Father were no more?"

None answered. Gangly, a proven warrior—Gangly, finder of women where there were no women—had triumphed. He would be the next ruler of the tribe.

I grunted. "Come, to the place where All-Father and his new woman lie."

I and my brothers had just about reached the dark place in the cave when a flash like that of lightning blinded us. Rushing to the spot, I saw the once-powerful All-Father groping to get to his feet. It was pitiable, for there was nothing but charred bone and scraps of flesh from his knees up to his formerly rippling stomach.

With a cry of anguish he crashed to the floor of the cave over the body of the nonhuman, which was no body anymore, just bits and scraps of unfamiliar materials.

My brothers looked upon the scene with awe. "All-Father is... dead?" they asked, not believing their eyes.

"*All-Father is dead!*" I roared. "The women are to be distributed among all the men!"

I then thought for a moment and added: "I, Gangly, will choose first."

It was the right thing, for Gangly was chief now.

When speaking of deviousness, oftentimes we contrast to it something called "childlike innocence," a term you may be certain was invented by no parent with his feet on the ground. Even to wish innocence upon a child may be a complete disservice. And not only to the child, but to the rest of his world.

BECAUSE OF PURPLE ELEPHANTS

Trevis couldn't believe what he saw. He and little Ritchie lay flat on their bellies and peered carefully over the edge of the great pit. Ritchie had no idea what the things were. He was curious, but not scared. But he was only four years old. Trevis was ten and scared, because he knew exactly what he saw. But he couldn't believe it.

It was a warm spring Saturday and they had been playing in the woods behind the town. Ritchie had asked Trevis to take him up to Bald Hill—as the children called it—a steep, bare mound of earth deep in the woods. The older kids played there frequently, disregarding their mothers' advice. Four-year-olds like Trev-is's little brother were never allowed that far into the trees. There were dangers in the woods near Bald Hill.

But Trevis knew what the dangers were and how to avoid them. And so the two had set out with flashlights for any dark places they wandered into, long poles for killing any snakes they met, and canteens of fresh water around their necks. Less than two hours later, they were lying flat on their stomachs, peering down into a pit that had not been in the Hill when Trevis had last seen it.

They had watched the bright light flash into the back of the hill. They had heard the muffled crash of contact. And now they saw what had caused both.

"What kind of ship is that?" Ritchie asked.

"Shush!" Trevis said. "It's not from here. It's from another world."

"Oh," said Ritchie, not comprehending at all what a world might be, or what *another* world might signify. "What are them black things around the ship?"

"Sporgs is what they are," Trevis said heavily, "and it looks like one or two of them are still alive."

"What's a Sporg?"

A month ago Trevis couldn't have answered that question. It was less than thirty days past when his entire school assembled in the auditorium where the professor from the college in the city had flashed slides of a Sporg on the screen.

"This," the professor had said, "is a form of life which you must come to know instantly on sight. It's name is Sporg. You will see this Sporg, now dead, on television constantly through the next few weeks. Everybody is being alerted, everyone must know a Sporg if and when he should see one because the Sporgs are searching for new places to live. And this planet is one they're checking on."

That day in the auditorium Trevis hadn't paid as much attention as he now wished he had. A sting in the back of the neck had caused him to pull his peashooter from his sleeve and come clandestinely to his defense. But he remembered the slide of the lean, tall, gray-black, almost human-looking Sporg. He remembered the sinewy tail. And he remembered the triangular opening in the center of the Sporg's forehead and what the professor had said about it. But most important, he remembered what the professor said had to be done.

"No Sporg must be allowed to step on this planet and return to his homeland. No Sporg must be allowed to even *communicate* with his homeland after landing on Earth. From the Sporg we captured, we've learned several things. We learned that he was the first to explore Earth's surface. We were lucky. Previously they had made atmospheric tests and found our air is congenial to them. Now they must see if Earth's natural animal or vegetable life can provide them with food, or failing that, whether or not Earth can support the growth of plants and animals from the Sporgs' home planet.

"The fact of the matter is that our planet checks out with the Sporgs' needs. The Sporg we captured admitted that only after extreme torture, unfortunately. Fortunately, he had not yet reported his findings when he was

taken. If he had—and if *any* Sporg is allowed to duplicate his experiments and report them—it would be disastrous. Twenty billion Sporgs will descend on Earth and make it their home."

A question was raised by one of the teachers in the audience: How were we to prevent such a communication?

The professor looked incredulously at the teacher. "That's relatively simple. Kill any Sporg you find."

KILL SPORGS. On television, on radio, in the newspapers—that was the constant message. KILL SPORGS. Or they will kill us. Earth can't support them *and* us. Their science of warfare *is* more advanced than ours. KILL SPORGS, KILL SPORGS. And now Trevis had found Sporgs.

"I'm going down. You stay here," he commanded Ritchie.

"Water. Please... give me... water."

The badly mangled Sporg looked pleadingly into Trevis's eyes. He was dying, Trevis could see. Of the three who had manned the small space craft, only this one was still alive. And he would be dead shortly. If it were not for one thing, Trevis could have left him to die by himself. That one thing was a radio transmitter—or what looked to be one—which the Sporg had been fumbling with when Trevis found him.

"Water... please..."

Trevis's hand moved down toward his canteen. Then it stopped. "I... I can't. Sporgs must die."

"Water... will not... save me."

No, it probably wouldn't Trevis thought. The poor dying man—Sporg, rather—just wanted a drink. Trevis had been thirsty lots of times. He knew how it felt when your throat was dry and hot and rough, and you wanted water so bad...

But this was a Sporg!

The radio gave him the idea.

"Have you contacted your home?" Trevis asked.

"Radio... on now," whispered the Sporg.

"They can hear us talking?"

The Sporg nodded yes.

"I will get you some water," Trevis said decisively.

Trevis and Ritchie scrambled down Bald Hill and into the trees.

"Where are we running to?" Ritchie asked.

"To Forest Stream," Trevis said. There were two other streams in the woods, but this one only had a name. The older children all knew it; so did their mothers.

"But Mom says we shouldn't ever go near there," Ritchie protested, slowing his pace.

Trevis yanked him along by the sleeve. "Mom says you're not to come into the woods at all. Maybe I should have left you home?"

"No, but—"

"Then shut your mouth and hurry. This is a special thing we're doing. Mom would agree with it." Would she? Trevis dismissed the thought. The stream was just ahead.

"What is the special thing?" Ritchie prodded as Trevis filled his canteen from the stream.

"We're bringing water to the dying Sporg," Trevis snapped.

"How do you know he wants water?"

"How do I—" His voice cracked. His body stiffened. How *did* he know? Sure, the Sporg told him; but how did the Sporg know *how* to tell him? That was the problem. How was the Sporg able to speak Trevis's language? And then he knew. It was the triangle in the Sporg's forehead.

The three-sided indentation above the eyes is the Sporg's telepathic transmitter and receiver, the professor had said. It had a physical limitation of about thirty yards, but it allowed mind reading at this distance. The Sporg had known Trevis's language by reading his thoughts!

The canteen was full and the two boys were puffing upwards to the Hill. Ritchie was out of breath and his thoughts lay only with how tired he was getting. Trevis's thoughts were being taken up with purple elephants.

It was a kind of joke his father liked to play. "I'll make a bet with you," he'd say. "I'll bet you can't do what I tell you. Now, *don't* think about a *purple elephant*! Aha, see? You're thinking of a purple elephant— aren't you, Trevis?" And sure enough, Trevis would be. You couldn't help it.

Just like now, Trevis knew he wouldn't be able...

"Ritchie, I want you to bring this water to the Sporg," he said when they reached the rim of the pit.

Ritchie looked up into his brother's eyes. "Are you coming, too?"

Trevis hesitated. "No. Just tell him you're my brother and that I sent you."

Ritchie trustfully took the canteen from Trevis and ran down into the pit. Trevis flopped onto his stomach and watched. *Damn the purple elephant!* he thought.

It should be him down there, not little Ritchie. But it had to be Ritchie because Ritchie didn't know about the purple elephant. And you couldn't

give a man—or Sporg—a drink of water without coming any closer than thirty yards of him.

Thirty yards.

Trevis had not been more than six feet from the Sporg when the idea first—

"*Ritchie!*" Trevis sprang to his feet. Down in the pit, Ritchie was drinking water from the canteen. The Sporg had suspected something, but seeing Ritchie drink the water, he now had the canteen and was eagerly drinking from it himself.

"*Ritchie!*" yelled Trevis^ "Come up here! Now!"

"I'm tired," Ritchie complained when he reached the top of the pit.

"Want me to carry you home piggyback?" Trevis asked.

Ritchie nodded gratefully and clambered aboard his big brother's back.

"How come you drank the water?" Trevis said.

"He asked me to," Ritchie said sleepily. "He asked if the water had poison in it, and I said water isn't poison. Lots of things are poison... but water isn't. We drink water all the time, I told him."

Trevis took a last look down into the pit before turning toward home. The Sporg had rolled away from the radio. He lay still on his stomach, arms and legs akimbo.

"You're a hero, Ritchie," he said. His throat was beginning to choke up.

"I'm just... tired," Ritchie whispered. His body on Trevis's back suddenly became heavier.

Slowly on the path through the woods they went, the tears streaming down Trevis's cheeks. "Damn. Damn," he sobbed. "Damn the Sporgs... and

the poison in Forest Stream... and the purple elephants... and the radio." It was the radio that would have told its faraway listeners that Earth water could be drunk by humans but not Sporgs.

"That was the point of it, Mom..." he said through his tears. "Dad, Mom, you understand... don't you, Mom?... *Mommy!*" He wanted to run now, all the way home, but he would not let himself. He was carrying a hero, and that demanded dignity.

Another examination of "childlike innocence," this story asks: Can the hoodwinker be excused if at the beginning he wasn't aware he was hoodwinking? In Robert's defense, he had no way of knowing the professors were wrong about his genius—not until Ellsworth Scroggle, anyway—and by then he was firmly committed to the idea. It might be pointed out, however, that Robert's ploy with the boy Harold showed his true character early in his career.

The reader, who as always must judge for himself, should be appraised of but one fact: Though the hero (or villain) of this tale takes his name from his author, the following is in no way autobiographical.

ROLLING ROBERT

Once upon a time a boy named Robert was born with a little round bump thing on his elbow.

Now, hardly anybody noticed the bump thing right away. It wasn't long, though, before you had to notice, even if you were too polite to say anything, which most folks were at first. You couldn't help but notice. The bump thing was growing. The rest of Robert wasn't.

Day after day Robert's Ma would force food down his tiny throat. Week after week, month after month, she watched anxiously for his legs to get longer and the rest of her son to get big like the other kids in the neighborhood. But no improvement, no growth, except for the bump thing which got to be the size of a golf ball, then the size of a tomato, then...

It was six days after Robert's fourth birthday that the ball sucked him in.

Ma of course got worried. And she got mad at Pa, who drank a lot and laughed at Robert. But Robert could still eat, since he had an opening for food.

For a mental picture of Robert, think of a jack-o'-lantern. Imagine it all white with small blue eyes—Robert took after Ma that way; "He's got my eyes," she'd say—and a little mouth and two small holes above the mouth for breathing.

Robert.

Robert had brains, too. Ma could tell that by the way he'd roll himself over to the radio set and turn it on with his mouth. He bounced to the music. Ma was happy Robert had brains. She wished they were rich enough to have a TV for Robert. She was mad at Pa because he wouldn't work and drank a lot and kept saying that Robert's being how he was saved a lot of money on clothes and things.

When it got cold, Ma would keep Robert nice and warm in Pa's bowling bag. Once Pa took Robert to the bowling alley by mistake. There wasn't much he- could do except to use Robert. The team was counting on Pa.

When Robert was five, and about as big as a medicine ball, Ma wanted him to go to school like other boys. After all, Robert was smart. He could talk. And bounce to the music on the radio.

Trouble was, Robert couldn't travel very fast, rolling by himself. So, in order not to be late for school which was six blocks away, he enlisted the aid of a strong eighth-grader named Harold. After a while the neighbors got used to having the kids stop all the cars at side streets while mighty Harold heaved Robert to school. With practice Harold got so he could do it in one heave.

Naturally, Robert was worried when the time approached for Harold to pass on to high school, which was across town. Training a new hurler would be both time-consuming and painful. Robert solved the problem by coaching Harold for his end-of-year exams. Harold flunked and remained to be with Robert for another year. At least, that was the way it looked. Something happened that changed things.

The big city newspapers got hold of Robert's story. The newspaper in Robert's town was surprised at the fuss the big city papers made. After all, Robert wasn't news. He'd been around a long time.

It was Robert's teacher that drew the national attention to him. She submitted to a scholarly journal an article called "The Well-Rounded Child."

After Robert had made headlines for a couple of days, a group of university professors visited Ma and Pa.

They wanted to borrow Robert for a while, they said.

Pa at first wasn't willing. Robert had been improving Pa's bowling average. But Ma insisted. "To think," she told Pa, "he'll be getting a college

education at such an early age."

At the university the professors studied Robert. It was the way they talked about him that gave him the idea of taking over. The world.

"A mutation," said one.

"A totally new organism," said another.

"The next step in man's evolution," said the most respected of all, who poked Robert in the eye with a pointer.

The others listened eagerly as the learned man continued: "The next step. The perfect shape: a sphere. Note the complete absence of any hampering appendages to the body. No doubt his brain is far superior to an ordinary human's."

A superior brain, thought Robert. Why, I bet that's so.

As a matter of fact, it wasn't so. But Robert believed it was. And after much testing so did the professors.

It was easy. All Robert did was answer their questions as best as he could. The professors did the rest. Example:

"Tell us, Robert, what is the shape of the Earth?"

"Flat." Robert thought it was.

"*Flat?*" said two of the professors, astonished.

"Flat, gentlemen," said the professor most respected among them. "Obviously, this advanced creature knows something we do not. After all, with relativity, warp and whatnot entering the picture it seems only logical that the Earth *could* be flat."

So, after a short discussion, they resolved that the Earth was flat because Robert said it was.

In other sessions they resolved that two plus two equals three, that two plus three equals three as well, that litmus paper is harder than structural steel, and that Shakespeare's works were written by Queen Elizabeth. Robert said so.

This display of advanced learning had two effects: First, Robert believed he was supplying the correct answers—he believed himself a genius.

Second, the professors were becoming attached followers of Robert. Disciples, they were. And Robert sensed that this was just the beginning. With this small nucleus, he could begin to make an impression on other leaders, political and military as well as intellectual. And then, when he had enough strength, he could just take over. He wasn't too sure of the mechanics of the thing, but surely a person of his mental caliber would find a way.

Unfortunately, Robert didn't take Ellsworth Scroggle into account.

Ellsworth Scroggle was an eleven-year-old genius who became the talk of the world when he developed a single potion that could cure any disease known to man. The basic ingredient in this cure-all was dry vermouth. The professors decided that an intellectual combat between the two youths might be interesting to observe. Ellsworth was not pleased that a new series of experiments with sloe gin had to be interrupted so he could come and debate with Robert, but his curiosity had been aroused.

He certainly was not pleased when Robert won all the debates—at least by the decisions of the professors. Robert was a dunce and Ellsworth knew it. And suddenly Robert realized he was a dunce. He also realized that Ellsworth knew it. Therefore, reasoned Robert, Ellsworth would have to be liquidated.

Oddly enough, Ellsworth had come to a similar conclusion about Robert. For Ellsworth had seen the power

Robert had gained over the professors, and he could tell by something in Robert's eyes that this power would never be enough. Ellsworth already looked upon himself as the savior of civilization. He liked the image.

And so, one day when the two debaters were left together—the professors had rushed to the university library to check some obscure fact in Hittite history—Ellsworth slapped Robert with a glove.

"On behalf of the human race I hereby challenge you to mortal combat," Ellsworth said solemnly.

Robert bit Ellsworth's thumb, signifying acceptance of the challenge.

They prepared for the battle which was to take place the next night. Ellsworth carefully chose his weapons. Robert practiced rolling and bouncing and dreamed of the type of crown he'd wear as King of the World.

On the appointed night Ellsworth got rid of the professors. He told them that the sun could be seen at mid-might if one stood at a certain spot four hundred miles away from the campus.

At eight o'clock the combatants faced each other in the university's chemistry lab.

Robert bounced menacingly and surveyed Ellsworth's weapons—a strange assortment. Strapped on his back was a tank, like skin divers use. Ellsworth held the hose and mouthpiece in his left hand, leaving his right hand free. In his mouth dangled the end of a long piece of adhesive tape.

Neither spoke, each circling around the lab, each looking for an opening.

Ellsworth took the first offensive by heaving a Bunsen burner, which Robert dodged easily.

They continued to move around the edge of the walls, the distance between them closing ever so slowly.

Then, with a sudden thrust, Robert bounced off the wall to his rear and shot across the room, knocking Ells-worth sprawling to the floor. Robert quickly bounced upwards, came down and darted up again, trying to gain momentum for one good crushing blow.

Up and down and up goes Robert, while Ellsworth springs to his feet and scurries to a corner.

Up and down and up, at each bounce controlling the angle of deflection; then *bam*, he hits the ceiling and is thrust to the floor like a cannon shot. Now the momentum is right, thinks Robert. Now goodbye to Ellsworth Scroggle.

Up *bam* down *bam* up. Robert stalks Ellsworth who runs from corner to corner, upsetting tables and crushing glass under his feet.

It was sudden when it happened.

On one of Robert's upshots, Ellsworth quickly computed where his opponent would land after bouncing from the ceiling. Robert saw what was coming too late. On his way down he spied Ellsworth below. Calmly waiting.

Down came Robert, hitting the floor at an angle, and smashing up into a lab table placed accurately by Ellsworth. When Robert's head cleared he knew he was in trouble.

He could feel the hose jammed into his mouth. What was worse, he could feel his body expanding. And he couldn't breathe except through his mouth: Ellsworth had taped his nostrils.

Robert tried to roll away, with no result except for a vicious kick from Ellsworth. He tried to spit out the hose, but couldn't.

He was helpless. Even when Ellsworth picked him up and carried him outside there was nothing he could do. With that infernal hose in his mouth, all his efforts were spent trying to breathe.

He suddenly realized what was happening to him.

Robert was getting bigger: twenty to thirty times his normal size.

He knew why. The red letters on Ellsworth's tank said H-E-L-I-U-M. And Ellsworth had other tanks he'd placed out here before meeting Robert in the lab.

Bigger and bigger, and then he felt himself floating. Up... fast.

One of the last sights Robert recognized on Earth was Ellsworth Scroggle's tongue sticking out at him.

Sure, Robert is unhappy in orbit. But he'd be unhappier still if he could hear those countryside bucks who pause in their nighttime lovemaking long enough to stab their fingers up at him and drawl, "Lookie, Emilia Jane, there comes old Echo IV again."

There's an astrologer mentioned in the following. Nothing more should be said. Come to think of it, maybe not even that. So forget it.

DEBUT

Beverly stretched her long, nude body to its fullest height before the large mirror and twirled around gaily.

"Oh, Mother, oh, Father—the Juno Cotillion!" she said. "I'm so thrilled."

Mother and "Father looked up at her with admiration. "We are too," Mother said. "It isn't every day our child makes her debut."

"Oh, what a glorious night it will be," Beverly sang. "To come out, to officially enter society at long last. I'm the happiest girl on Earth!"

Mother smiled knowingly. "Yes, how well I remember my own coming out."

Beverly looked lovingly upon her little mother. "How does it feel? What I mean is, how does it feel to know you're really a part of the world around you?"

"You feel—*free*, is the word, I suppose," Mother said, said.

"Free," Beverly repeated. "Oh, yes, free! When I think about it I could simply *burst* with anticipation!"

Father laughed. "You'd better control yourself a little. Making your debut doesn't give you *absolute* freedom, you know."

Beverly danced over to Father and patted his head. "Father, I assure you, I'll always remain your good little girl."

A glum look came over Father and he left the room.

"Mother, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt Father's feelings," Beverly said.

A tear dropped from Mother's eye. "I know. It's just that your father wanted a boy so much. I remember the day the astrologer told us. You were just a fertilized egg then, when the interpreter of the stars consulted his charts, suspended an amulet over your incubating fetus, and told us you'd be a girl. Father was crushed."

Beverly smiled fondly at the doorway Father had used in leaving. "Poor, dear Father. The astrologers never have been wrong yet, have they?"

"Astrology, darling is an *exact* science," Mother admonished. "All the really great civilizations of this world knew that, and while some of our younger set talk as if they think otherwise, it's just their bad upbringing showing. I certainly hope you'll keep away from that crowd. Your father and I have set our sights high for you. We went to considerable expense to have you come out at the Juno Cotillion. See that you continue to make us as proud of you as we are now."

"I'm sorry, Mother. Sometimes I just feel... different, sort of."

Mother smiled. "Nonsense. If you were different, you'd never have made the Juno Cotillion."

"I do hope the orchestra plays some of the old songs," Mother said to Father. They sat with the rest of the parents in a long balcony that overlooked the dance floor.

Father grunted. "If those noisemakers down there were playing on key, you'd recognize the fact they *are* playing the old songs. The Juno Cotillion be damned!"

Mother was no longer listening. She never listened when Father knocked the established way of doing things. Her eyes were fixed on the ripples in the sea of bare flesh that moved gracefully over the beautiful dance floor below.

Beverly was dancing with a girl almost as tall as she. But, Mother reflected, just almost. Not only were all the rest shorter than her daughter,

but none of the nude bodies turning and cavorting to the music could match Beverly's in beauty and strength. *We've given her a splendid body*, Mother was thinking, *but I pray her mind has developed as well*. Sometimes, Mother said to herself, Beverly does act—different.

The orchestra's change in tune stopped Mother's unpleasant thoughts.

"It's time," she told Father, who in spite of his determination to have a bad disposition, focused his attention on the line of girls awaiting the call of names.

He held Mother close to him. "It is, after all, our little girl down there."

The call of names began. Applause broke out from the balcony as each girl in her turn officially came out and was accepted as a member of society. And then it was Beverly's name that was called.

Beverly walked gracefully to the middle of the floor. The applause grew greater as her face began to contort.

Mother gasped. "She's frightened. She's going to spoil it!"

Beverly's naked body shook, completely out of time with the slow music the orchestra was playing. Then it happened. Her body slumped downward, and she lay there, face upward. Her eyes closed in pain, her hands tore at her ears. Over the crashing applause a piercing scream sounded, and from the open mouth of the now-lifeless body on the floor Beverly came out, her twelve stubby legs proudly finding their balance.

The hall filled with screams then. Not of horror but of surprise, then of congratulations to Father and Mother.

"*My Beverly*," Mother cried. "All this time—eighteen long months—incubating in the best human money could buy from any of the slave camps, and she's—she's—"

Father's green antennae clapped in joy at the sight of the lone green spot in the swarm of orange spider-like debutantes who now were feeding on the dead bodies of the young females whose species, before the invasion, had ruled planet Earth.

"*Our* Beverly, Mother, and she's no she. She's green, not orange. Astrology be hanged, it's a boy!"