

AN HONORABLE

DEATH

FROM THE arboretum at the far end of the patio to the landing stage of the transporter itself, the whole household was at sixes and sevens over the business of preparing the party for the celebration. As usual, Carter was having to oversee everything himself, otherwise it would not have gone right; and this was all the harder in that, of late, his enthusiasms seemed to have run down somewhat. He was conscious of a vague distaste for life as he found it, and all its parts. He would be forty-seven this fall. Could it be the imminent approach of middle age, seeking him out even in the quiet back-

water of this small, suburban planet? Whatever it was, things were moving even more slowly than usual this year. He had not even had time to get into his costume of a full dress suit (19th-20th cent.), with tails, which he had chosen as not too dramatic, and yet kinder than most dress-ups to his tall, rather awkward figure — when the chime sounded, announcing the first arrival.

Dropping the suit on his bed, he went out, cutting across the patio toward the gathering room, where the landing stage of the transporter was — and almost ran headlong into one of the original native inhabitants of the

He'd planned Happy Escape Day's celebration with such care. Lucky there was no lawyer — doctor and native chief made trouble enough.



BY GORDON R. DICKSON

Illustrated by GAUGHAN

planet, standing like a lean and bluish post with absolute rigidity in the center of the pretty little flagstone path.

"What are you doing here?" cried Carter.

The narrow, indigo, horselike face leaned confidentially down toward Carter's own. And then Carter recognized the great mass of apple blossoms, like a swarming of creamy-winged moths, held to the inky chest.

"Oh — " began Carter, on a note of fury. Then he threw up his hands and took the mass of branches. Peering around the immovable alien and wincing, he got a glimpse of his imported apple tree. But it was not as

badly violated as he had feared. "Thank you. Thank you," he said, and waved the native out of the way.

BUT THE native remained. Carter stared — then saw that in addition to the apple blossoms the thin and hairless creature, though no more dressed than his kind ever were, had in this instance contrived belts, garlands, and bracelets of native flowers for himself. The colors and patterns would be arranged to convey some special meaning — they always did. But right at the moment Carter was too annoyed and entirely too rushed to figure them out, though he did

think it a little unusual the native should be holding a slim shaft of dark wood with a fire-hardened point. Hunting was most expressly forbidden to the natives.

"Now what?" said Carter. The native (a local chief, Carter suddenly recognized) lifted the spear and unexpectedly made several slow, stately hops, with his long legs flicking up and down above the scrubbed white of the flagstones — like an Earthly crane at its mating. "Oh, now, don't tell me you want to dance!"

The native chief ceased his movements and went back to being a post again, staring out over Carter's head as if at some horizon, lost and invisible beyond the iridescences of Carter's dwelling walls. Carter groaned, pondered, and glanced anxiously ahead toward the gathering room, from which he could now hear the voice of Ona, already greeting the first guest with female twitters.

"All right," he told the chief. "All right — this once. But only because it's Escape Day Anniversary. And you'll have to wait until after dinner."

The native stepped aside and became rigid again. Carter hurried past into the gathering room, clutching the apple blossoms. His wife was talking to a

short, brown-bearded man with an ivory-tinted guitar hanging by a broad, tan band over one red-and-white, checked-shirted shoulder.

"Ramy!" called Carter, hurrying up to them. The landing stage of the transporter, standing in the middle of the room, chimed again. "Oh, take these will you, dear?" He thrust the apple blossoms into Ona's plump, bare arms. "The chief. In honor of the day. You know how they are — and I had to promise he could dance after dinner." She stared, her soft, pale face upturned to him. "I couldn't help it."

He turned and hurried to the landing stage, from the small round platform of which were now stepping down a short, academic, elderly man with wispy gray hair and a rather fat, button-nosed woman of the same age, both wearing the ancient Ionian chiton as their costume. Carter had warned Ona against wearing a chiton, for the very reason that these two might show up in the same dress. He allowed himself a small twinge of satisfaction at the thought of her ballroom gown as he went hastily now to greet them.

"Doctor!" he said. "Lidi! Here you are!" He shook hands with the doctor. "Happy Escape Day to both of you."

"I was sure we'd be late," said Lidi, holding firmly to the folds of her chiton with both hands. "The public terminal on Arcturus Five was so crowded. And the doctor won't hurry no matter what I say — " She looked over at her husband, but he, busy greeting Ona, ignored her.

THE CHIME sounded again and two women, quite obviously sisters in spite of the fact that they were wearing dissimilar costumes, appeared on the platform. One was dressed in a perfectly ordinary everyday kilt and tunic — no costume at all. The other wore a close, unidentifiable sort of suit of some gray material and made straight for Carter.

"Cart!" she cried, taking one of his hands in both of her own and pumping it heartily. "Happy Escape Day." She beamed at him from a somewhat plain, strong-featured face, sharply made up. "Ani and I — " She looked around for her sister and saw the kilt and tunic already drifting in rather dreamlike and unconscious fashion toward the perambulating bar at the far end of the room. "I," she corrected herself hastily, "couldn't wait to get here. Who else is coming?"

"Just what you see, Totsa," said Carter, indicating those present with a wide-flung hand. "We

thought a small party this year — a little, quiet gathering — "

"So nice! And what do you think of my costume?" She revolved slowly for his appraisal.

"Why — good, very good."

"Now!" Totsa came back to face him. "You can't guess what it is at all."

"Of course I can," said Carter heartily.

"Well, then, what is it?"

"Oh, well, perhaps I won't tell you, then," said Carter.

A small head with wispy gray hair intruded into the circle of their conversation. "An artistic rendering of the space suitings worn by those two intrepid pioneers who this day, four hundred and twenty years ago, burst free in their tiny ship from the iron grip of Earth's prisoning gravitation?"

Totsa shouted in triumph. "I knew you'd know, Doctor! Trust a philosophical researcher to catch on. Carter hadn't the slightest notion. Not an inkling!"

"A host is a host is a host," said Carter. "Excuse me, I've got to get into my own costume."

He went out again and back across the patio. The outer air felt pleasantly cool on his warm face. He hoped that the implications of his last remark — that he had merely been being polite in pretending to be baffled by the significance of her costume —

had got across to Totsa, but probably it had not. She would interpret it as an attempt to cover up his failure to recognize her costume by being cryptic. The rapier was wasted on the thick hide of such a woman. And to think he once . . . you had to use a club. And the worst of it was, he *had* grasped the meaning of her costume immediately. He had merely been being playful in refusing to admit it . . .

The native chief was still standing unmoved where Carter had left him, still waiting for his moment.

"Get out of the way, can't you?" said Carter irritably, as he shouldered by.

The chief retreated one long ostrichlike step until he stood half-obscured in the shadow of a trellis of roses. Carter went on into the bedroom.

HIS SUIT was laid out for him and he climbed into the clumsy garments, his mind busy on the schedule of the evening ahead. The local star that served as this planet's sun (one of the Pleiades, Asterope) would be down in an hour and a half, but the luminosity of the interstellar space in this galactic region made the sky bright for hours after a setting, and the fireworks could not possibly go on until that died down.

Carter had designed the set piece for the finale himself — a vintage space rocket curving up from a representation of the Earth, into a firmament of stars, and changing into a star itself as it dwindled. It would be unthinkable to waste this against a broad band of glowing rarefied matter just above the western horizon.

Accordingly, there was really no choice about the schedule. At least five hours before the thought of fireworks could be entertained. Carter, hooking his tie into place around his neck before a section of his bedroom wall set on reflection, computed in his head. The cocktail session now starting would be good for two and a half, possibly three hours. He dared not stretch it out any longer than that or Ani would be sure to get drunk. As it was, it would be bad enough with a full cocktail session and wine with the dinner. But perhaps Totsa could keep her under control. At any rate — three, and an hour and a half for dinner. No matter how it was figured, there would be half an hour or more to fill in there.

Well — Carter worked his way into his dress coat — he could make his usual small speech in honor of the occasion. And — oh, yes, of course — there was the chief. The native

dances were actually meaningless, boring things, though Carter had been quite interested in them at first, but then his was the inquiring type of mind. Still, the others might find it funny enough, or interesting for a single performance.

Buttoning up his coat, he went back out across the patio, feeling more kindly toward the native than he had since the moment of his first appearance. Passing him this time, Carter thought to stop and ask, "Would you like something to eat?"

Remote, shiny, mottled by the shadow of the rose leaves, the native neither moved nor answered, and Carter hurried on with a distinct feeling of relief. He had always made it a point to keep some native food on hand for just such an emergency as this — after all, they got hungry, too. But it was a definite godsend not to have to stop now, when he was so busy, and see the stuff properly prepared and provided for this uninvited and unexpected guest.

THE HUMANS had all moved out of the gathering room by the time he reached it and into the main lounge with its more complete bar and mobile chairs. On entering, he saw that they had already split up into three different and, in a way, inevitable

groups. His wife and the doctor's were at gossip in a corner; Ramy was playing his guitar and singing in a low, not unpleasant, though hoarse voice to Ani, who sat drink in hand, gazing past him with a half-smile into the changing colors of the wall behind him. Totsa and the doctor were in a discussion at the bar. Carter joined them.

"— and I'm quite prepared to believe it," the doctor was saying in his gentle, precise tones as Carter came up. "Well, very good, Cart." He nodded at Carter's costume.

"You think so?" said Carter, feeling his face warm pleasantly. "Awkward get-up, but — I don't know, it just struck me this year." He punched for a lime brandy and watched with pleasure as the bar disgorged the brimming glass by his waiting hand.

"You look armored in it, Cart," Totsa said.

"Thrice-armed is he —" Carter acknowledged the compliment and sipped on his glass. He glanced at the doctor to see if the quotation had registered, but the doctor was already leaning over to receive a refill in his own glass.

"Have you any idea what this man's been telling me?" demanded Totsa, swiveling toward Carter. "He insists we're doomed. Literally doomed!"

"I've no doubt we are — " began Carter. But before he could expand on this agreement with the explanation that he meant it in the larger sense, she was foaming over him in a tidal wave of conversation.

"Well, I don't pretend to be unobjective about it. After all, who are we to survive? But really — how ridiculous! And you back him up just like that, *blindly*, without the slightest notion of what he's been talking about!"

"A theory only, Totsa," said the doctor, quite unruffled.

"I wouldn't honor it by even calling it a theory!"

"Perhaps," said Carter, sipping on his lime brandy, "if I knew a little more about what you two were — "

"The point," said the doctor, turning a little, politely, toward Carter, "has to do with the question of why, on all these worlds we've take over, we've found no other race comparable to our own. We may," he smiled, "of course be unique in the universe. But this theory supposes that any contact between races of differing intelligences must inevitably result in the death of the inferior race. Consequently, if we met our superiors — " He gave a graceful wave of his hand.

"I imagine it could," said Carter.

"Ridiculous!" said Totsa. "As if we couldn't just avoid contact altogether if we wanted to!"

"That's a point," said Carter. "I imagine negotiations — "

"We," said Totsa, "who burst the bonds of our Earthly home, who have spread out among the stars in a scant four hundred years, are hardly the type to turn up our toes and just die!"

"IT'S ALL based on an assumption, Cart"—the doctor put his glass down on the bar and clasped his small hands before him — "that the racial will to live is dependent upon what might be called a certain amount of emotional self-respect. A race of lesser intelligence or scientific ability could hardly be a threat to us. But a greater race, the theory goes, must inevitably generate a sort of death-wish in all of us. We're too used to being top dog. We must conquer or — "

"Absolutely nonsense!" said Totsa.

"Well, now, you can't just condemn the idea offhand like that," Carter said. "Naturally, I can't imagine a human like myself ever giving up, either. We're too hard, too wolfish, too much the last-ditch fighters. But I imagine a theory like this might well hold true for other, lesser races." He cleared his throat. "For example,

I've had quite a bit of contact since we came here with the natives which were the dominant life-form on this world in its natural state — ”

“Oh, natives!” snapped Totsa scornfully.

“You might be surprised, Totsa!” said Carter, heating up a little. An inspiration took hold of him. “And, in fact, I've arranged for you to do just that. I've invited the local native chief to dance for us after dinner. You might just find it very illuminating.”

“Illuminating? How?” pounced Totsa.

“That,” said Carter, putting his glass down on the bar with a very slight flourish, “I'll leave you to find out for yourself. And now, if you don't mind, I'm going to have to make my hostly rounds of the other guests.”

He walked away, glowing with a different kind of inner warmth. He was smiling as he came up to Ramy, who was still singing ballads and playing his guitar for Totsa's sister.

“Excellent,” Carter said, clapping his hands briefly and sitting down with them as the song ended. “What was that?”

“Richard the Lion-heart wrote it,” said Ramy hoarsely. He turned to the woman. “Another drink, Ani?”

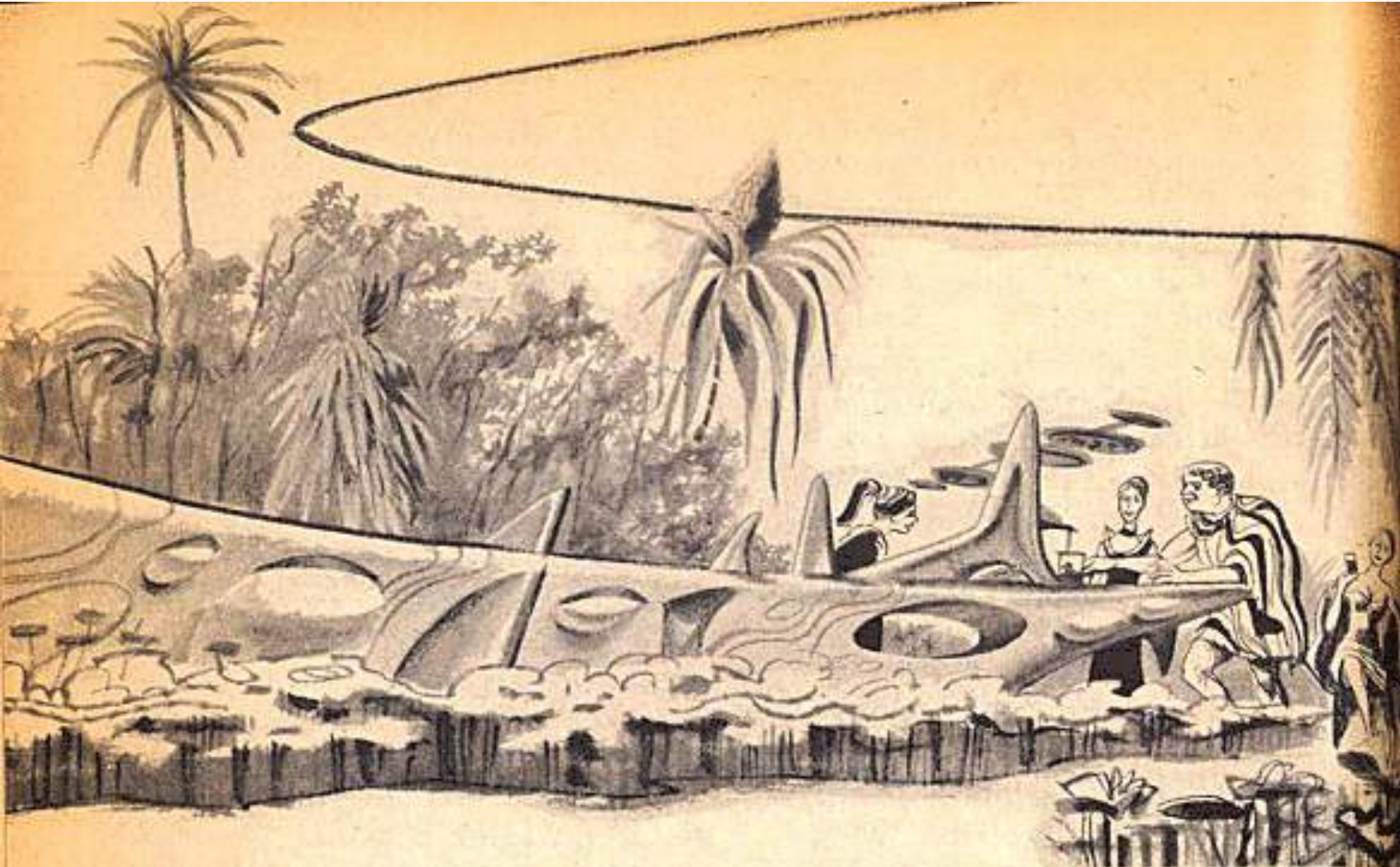
Carter tried to signal the bal-

ladeer with his eyes, but Ramy had already pressed the buttons on the table beside their chairs, and a little moto unit from the bar was already on its way to them with the drinks emerging from its interior. Carter sighed inaudibly and leaned back in his chair. He could warn Totsa to keep an eye on Ani a little later.

He accepted another drink himself. The sound of voices in the room was rising as more alcohol was consumed. The only quiet one was Ani. She sat, engaged in the single-minded business of imbibing, and listened to the conversation between Ramy and himself, as if she was — thought Carter suddenly — perhaps one step removed, beyond some glasslike wall, where the real sound and movement of life came muted, if at all. The poetry of this flash of insight — for Carter could think of no other way to describe it — operated so strongly upon his emotions that he completely lost the thread of what Ramy was saying and was reduced to noncommittal noises by way of comment.

I should take up my writing again, he thought to himself.

AS SOON as a convenient opportunity presented itself, he excused himself and got up. He went over to the corner where the women were talking.



" — Earth," Lidi was saying, "the doctor and I will never forget it. Oh, Cart — " She twisted around to him as he sat down in a chair opposite. "You must take this girl to Earth sometime. Really."

"Do you think she's the back-to-nature type?" said Carter, with a smile.

"No, stop it!" Lidi turned back to Ona. "Make him take you!"

"I've mentioned it to him. Several times," said Ona, putting down the glass in her hand with a helpless gesture on the end-table beside her.

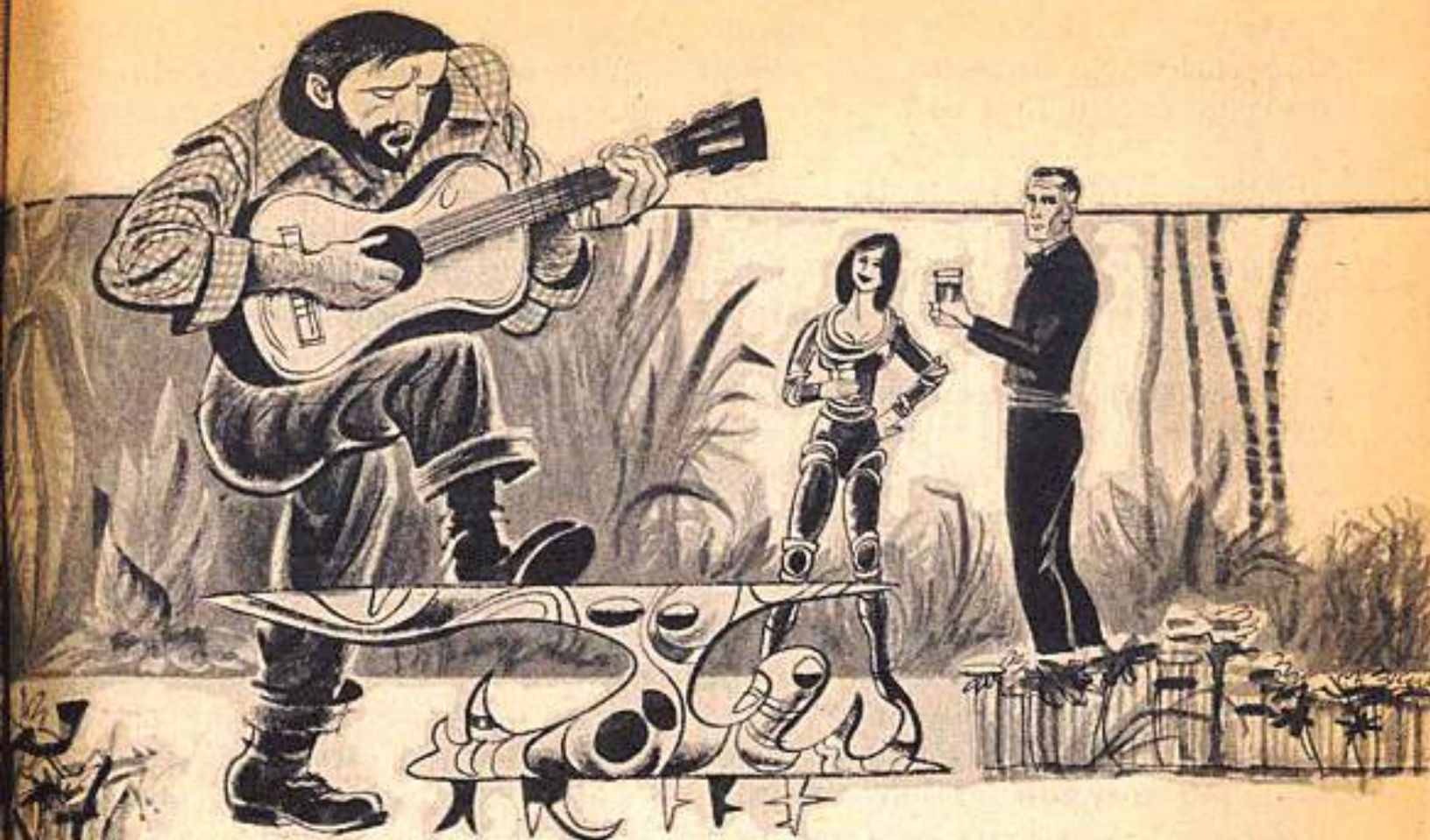
"Well, you know what they say," smiled Carter. "Everyone

talks about Earth but nobody ever goes there any more."

"The doctor and I went. And it was memorable. It's not what you see, of course, but the insight you bring to it. I'm only five generations removed from people living right there on the North American continent. And the doctor had cousins in Turkey when he was a boy. Say what you like, the true stock thins out as generation succeeds generation away from the home world."

"And it's not the expense any more," put in Ona. "Everyone's rich nowadays."

"Rich! What an uncomfortable word!" said Lidi. "You should



say *capable*, dear. Remember, our riches are merely the product of our science, which is the fruit of our own capabilities."

"Oh, you know what I mean!" said Ona. "The point is, Cart won't go. He just won't."

"I'm a simple man," Carter said. "I have my writing, my music, my horticulture, right here. I feel no urge to roam — " he stood up — "except to the kitchen right now, to check on the caterers. If you'll excuse me — "

"But you haven't given your wife an answer about taking her to Earth one of these days!" cried Lidi.

"Oh, we'll go, we'll go," said Carter, walking off with a good-humored wave of his hand.

As he walked through the west sunroom to the dining area and the kitchen (homey word!) beyond, his cheerfulness dwindled somewhat. It was always a ticklish job handling the caterers, now that they were all artists doing the work for the love of it and not to be controlled by the price they were paid. Carter would have liked to wash his hands of that end of the party altogether and just leave them to operate on their own. But what if he failed to check and then something went wrong? It

was his own artistic conscience operating, he thought, that would not give him any rest.

THE DINING room was already set up in classic style with long table and individual chairs. He passed the gleam of its tableware and went on through the light-screen into the kitchen area. The master caterer was just in the process of directing his two apprentices to set up the heating tray on which the whole roast boar, papered and gilded, would be kept warm in the centerpiece position on the table during the meal. He did not see Carter enter; and Carter himself stopped to admire, with a sigh of relief, the boar itself. It was a master-work of the carver's art and had been built up so skillfully from its component chunks of meat that no one could have suspected it was not the actual animal itself.

Looking up at this moment, the caterer caught sight of him and came over to see what he wanted. Carter advanced a few small, tentative suggestions, but the response was so artificially polite that after a short while Carter was glad to leave him to his work.

Carter wandered back through the house without returning directly to the lounge. With the change of the mood that the

encounter with the caterer had engendered, his earlier feelings of distaste with life — a sort of melancholy — had come over him. He thought of the people he had invited almost with disgust. Twenty years ago, he would not have thought himself capable of belonging to such a crowd. Where were the great friends, the true friends, that as a youngster he had intended to acquire? Not that it was the fault of those in the lounge. They could not help being what they were. It was the fault of the times, which made life too easy for everybody; and — yes, he would be honest — his own fault, too.

His wanderings had brought him back to the patio. He remembered the chief and peered through the light dusk at the trellis under the light arch of which the native stood.

Beyond, the house was between the semi-enclosed patio and the fading band of brilliance in the west. Deep shadow lay upon the trellis itself and the native under it. He was almost obscured by it, but a darkly pale, vertical line of reflection from his upright spear showed that he had made no move. A gush of emotion burst within Carter. He took a single step toward the chief, with the abrupt, spontaneous urge to thank him for coming and offering to dance.

But at that moment, through the open doorway of his bedroom, sounded the small, metallic chimes of his bedside clock, announcing the twenty-first hour, and he turned hastily and crossed through the gathering room, into the lounge.

"Hors-d'oeuvres! Hors-d'oeuvres!" he called cheerfully, flinging the lounge door wide. "Hors-d'oeuvres, everybody! Time to come and get it!"

DINNER could not go off otherwise than well. Everyone was half-tight and hungry. Everyone was talkative. Even Ani had thrown off her habitual introversion and was smiling and nodding, quite soberly, anyone would swear. She was listening to Ona and Lidi talking about Lidi's grown-up son when he had been a baby. The doctor was in high spirits, and Ramy, having gotten his guitar-playing out of his system earlier with Ani, was ready to be companionable. By the time they had finished the rum-and-butter pie, everyone was in a good mood, and even the caterer, peering through a momentary transparency of the kitchen wall, exchanged a beam with Carter.

Carter glanced at his watch. Only twenty minutes more! The time had happily flown, and, far from having to fill it in, he would

have to cut his own speech a little short. If it were not for the fact that he had already announced it, he would have eliminated the chief's dance — no, that would not have done, either. He had always made a point of getting along with the natives of this world. "It's their home, too, after all," he had always said.

He tinkled on a wine glass with a spoon and rose to his feet.

Faces turned toward him and conversation came to a reluctant halt around the table. He smiled at his assembled guests.

"As you know," said Carter, "it has always been my custom at these little gatherings — and old customs are the best — to say a few — " he held up a disarming hand — "a very few words. Tonight I will be even briefer than usual." He stopped and took a sip of water from the glass before him.

"On this present occasion, the quadricentennial of our great race's Escape into the limitless bounds of the universe, I am reminded of the far road we have come; and the far road — undoubtedly — we have yet to go. I am thinking at the moment," he smiled, to indicate that what he was about to say was merely said in good-fellowship, "of a new theory expressed by our good doctor here tonight. This theory

postulates that when a lesser race meets a greater, the lesser must inevitably go to the wall. And that, since it is pretty generally accepted that the laws of chance ensure our race eventually meeting *its* superior, we must inevitably and eventually go to the wall."

He paused and warmed them again with the tolerance of his smile.

"May I say *nonsense!*"

"Now, let no one retort that I am merely taking refuge in the blind attitude that reacts with the cry, 'It can't happen to us.' Let me say I believe it *could* happen to us, but it won't. And why not? I will answer that with one word. Civilization.

"These overmen — if indeed they ever show up — must, even as we, be civilized. *Civilized*. Think of what that word means! Look at the seven of us here. Are we not educated, kindly, sympathetic people? And how do we treat the races inferior to us that we have run across?"

"I'm going to let you answer these questions for yourselves, because I now invite you to the patio for cognac and coffee — and to see one of the natives of this planet, who has expressed a desire to dance for you. Look at him as he dances, observe him, consider what human gentleness and consideration are involved in

the gesture that includes him in this great festival of ours." Carter paused. "And consider one other great statement that has echoed down the corridors of time — *As ye have done to others, so shall ye be done by!*"

CARTER sat down, flushed and glowing, to applause, then rose immediately to precede his guests, who were getting up to stream toward the patio. Walking rapidly, he outdistanced them as they passed the gathering room.

For a second, as he burst out through the patio doorway, his eyes were befuddled by the sudden darkness. Then his vision cleared as the others came through the doorway behind him and he was able to make out the inky shadow of the chief, still barely visible under the trellis.

Leaving Ona to superintend the seating arrangements in the central courtyard of the patio, he hurried toward the trellis. The native was there waiting for him.

"Now," said Carter, a little breathlessly, "it must be a short dance, a very short dance."

The chief lowered his long, narrow head, looking down at Carter with what seemed to be an aloofness, a sad dignity, and suddenly Carter felt uncomfortable.

"Um — well," he muttered,

"you don't have to cut it *too* short."

Carter turned and went back to the guests. Under Ona's direction, they had seated themselves in a small semicircle of chairs, with snifter glasses and coffee cups. A chair had been left for Carter in the middle. He took it and accepted a glass of cognac from his wife.

"Now?" asked Totsa, leaning toward him.

"Yes — yes, here he comes," said Carter, and directed their attention toward the trellis.

The lights had been turned up around the edge of the courtyard, and as the chief advanced into them from the darkness, he seemed to step all at once out of a wall of night.

"My," said Lidi, a little behind and to the left of Carter, "isn't he big!"

"*Tall*, rather," said the doctor, and coughed dryly at her side.

The chief came on into the center of the lighted courtyard. He carried his spear upright in one hand before him, the arm half-bent at the elbow and half-extended, advancing with exaggeratedly long steps and on tip-toe—in a manner unfortunately almost exactly reminiscent of the classical husband sneaking home late at night. There was a sudden titter from Totsa, behind Carter. Carter flushed.

Arrived in the center of the patio before them, the chief halted, probed at the empty air with his spear in several directions, and began to shuffle about with his head bent toward the ground.

Behind Carter, Ramy said something in a low voice. There was a strangled chuckle and the strings of the guitar plinked quietly on several idle notes.

"Please," said Carter, without turning his head.

There was a pause, some more indistinguishable murmuring from Ramy, followed again by his low, hoarse, and smothered chuckle.

"Perhaps — " said Carter, raising his voice slightly, "perhaps I ought to translate the dance as he does it. All these dances are stories acted out. This one is apparently called 'An Honorable Death.' "

HE PAUSED to clear his throat. No one said anything. Out in the center of the patio, the chief was standing crouched, peering to right and left, his neck craned like a chicken's.

"You see him now on the trail," Carter went on. "The silver-colored flowers on his right arm denote the fact that it is a story of death that he is dancing. The fact that they are below the elbow indicates it is an honorable, rather than dishonorable, death.

But the fact that he wears nothing at all on the other arm below the elbow tells us this is the full and only story of the dance."

Carter found himself forced to clear his throat again. He took a sip from his snifter glass.

"As I say," he continued, "we see him now on the trail, alone." The chief had now begun to take several cautious steps forward, and then alternate ones in retreat, with some evidence of tension and excitement. "He is happy at the moment because he is on the track of a large herd of local game. Watch the slope of his spear as he holds it in his hand. The more it approaches the vertical, the happier he is feeling —"

Rami murmured again and his coarse chuckle rasped on Carter's ears. It was echoed by a giggle from Totsa and even a small, dry bark of a laugh from the doctor.

"— the happier he is feeling," repeated Carter loudly. "Except that, paradoxically, the line of the absolute vertical represents the deepest tragedy and sorrow. In a little paper I did on the symbolism behind these dance movements, I advanced the theory that when a native strikes up with his spear from the absolute vertical position, it is because some carnivore too large for him to handle has already

downed him. He's a dead man."

The chief had gone into a flurry of movement.

"Ah," said Carter, on a note of satisfaction. The others were quiet now. He let his voice roll out a little. "He has made his kill. He hastens home with it. He is very happy. Why shouldn't he be? He is successful, young, strong. His mate, his progeny, his home await him. Even now it comes into sight."

The chief froze. His spear point dropped.

"But what is this?" cried Carter, straightening up dramatically in his chair. "What has happened? He sees a stranger in the doorway. It is the Man of Seven Spears who — this is a superstition, of course —" Carter interrupted himself — "who has, in addition to his own spear, six other magic spears which will fly from him on command and kill anything that stands in his way. What is this unconquerable being doing inside the entrance of the chief's home without being invited?"

The wooden spear point dropped abruptly, almost to the ground.

"The Man of Seven Spears tells him," said Carter. "He, the Man of Seven Spears, has chosen to desire the flowers about our chief's house. Therefore he has taken the house, killing all within

it — the mate and the little ones — that their touch may be cleansed from flowers that are his. Everything is now his."

THE SOFT, tumbling sound of liquid being poured filled in the second of Carter's pause.

"Not too much — " whispered someone.

"What can our chief do?" said Carter sharply. The chief was standing rigid with his head bent forward and his forehead pressed against the perfectly vertical shaft of his spear, now held upright before him. "He is sick — we would say he is weeping, in human terms. All that meant anything to him is now gone. He cannot even revenge himself on the Man of Seven Spears, whose magic weapons make him invincible." Carter, moved by the pathos in his own voice, felt his throat tighten on the last words.

"Ona, dear, do you have an antacid tablet?" the doctor's wife whispered behind him.

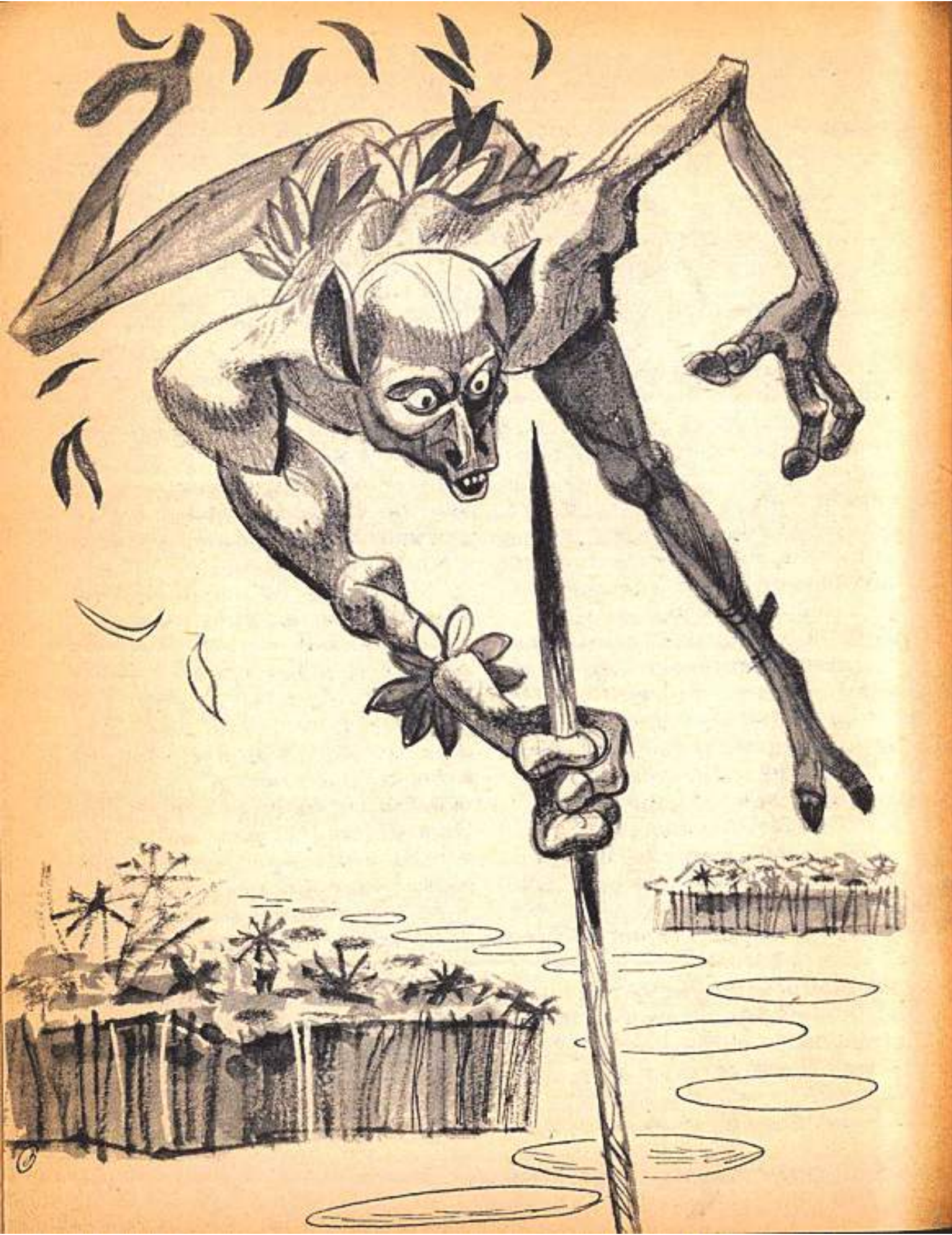
"He stands where he has stopped!" cried Carter fiercely. "He has no place else to go. The Man of Seven Spears ignores him, playing with the flowers. For eventually, without moving, without food or drink, he will collapse and die, as all of the Man of Seven Spears' enemies have died. For one, two, three days he stands there in his sorrow; and

late on the third day the plan for revenge he has longed for comes to him. He cannot conquer his enemy — but he can eternally shame him, so that the Man of Seven Spears, in his turn, will be forced to die.

"He goes into the house." The chief was moving again. "The Man of Seven Spears sees him enter, but pays no attention to him, for he is beneath notice. And it's a good thing for our chief this is so — or else the Man of Seven Spears would call upon all his magic weapons and kill him on the spot. But he is playing with his new flowers and pays no attention.

"Carrying his single spear," went on Carter, "the chief goes in to the heart of his house. Each house has a heart, which is the most important place in it. For if the heart is destroyed, the house dies, and all within it. Having come to the heart of the house, which is before its hearth fire, the chief places his spear butt down on the ground and holds it upright in the position of greatest grief. He stands there pridefully. We can imagine the Man of Seven Spears, suddenly realizing the shame to be put upon him, rushing wildly to interfere. But he and all of his seven spears are too slow. The chief leaps into the air — "

Carter checked himself. The





chief was still standing with his forehead pressed against the spear shaft.

"He leaps into the air," repeated Carter, a little louder.

And at that moment the native *did* bound upward, his long legs flailing, to an astonishing height. For a second he seemed to float above the tip of his spear, still grasping it — and then he descended like some great, dark, stricken bird, heavily upon the patio. The thin shaft trembled and shook, upright, above his fallen figure.

MULTIPLE screams exploded and the whole company was on their feet. But the chief, slowly rising, gravely removed the spear from between the arm and side in which he had cleverly caught it while falling; and, taking it in his other hand, he stalked off into the shadows toward the house.

A babble of talk burst out behind Carter. Over all the other voices, Lidi's rose like a half-choked fountain.

" — absolutely! Heart failure! I never was so upset in my life — "

"Cart!" said Ona bitterly.

"Well, Cart," spoke Totsa triumphantly in his ear. "What's the application of all this to what you told me earlier?"

Carter, who had been sitting

stunned, exploded roughly out of his chair.

"Oh, don't be such a fool!" He jerked himself away from them into the tree-bound shadows beyond the patio.

Behind him — after some few minutes — the voices lowered to a less excited level, and then he heard a woman's footsteps approaching him in the dark.

"Cart?" said his wife's voice hesitantly.

"What?" asked Carter, not moving.

"Aren't you coming back?"

"In a while."

There was a pause.

"Cart?"

"What?"

"Don't you think — "

"No, I don't think!" snarled Carter. "She can go to bloody hell!"

"But you can't just call her a fool — "

"She is a fool! They're all fools — every one of them! I'm a fool, too, but I'm not a stupid damn bloody fool like all of them!"

"Just because of some silly native dance!" said Ona, almost crying.

"Silly?" said Carter. "At least it's something. He's got a dance to do. That's more than the rest of them in there have. And it just so happens that dance is pretty important to him. You'd think they might like to learn some-

thing about that, instead of sitting back making their stupid jokes!"

His little explosion went off into the darkness and fell unanswered.

"Please come back, Cart," Ona said, after a long moment.

"At least he has something," said Carter. "At least there's that for him."

"I just can't face them if you don't come back."

"All right, goddammit," said Carter. "I'll go back."

THEY returned in grim fashion to the patio. The chair tables had been cleared and rearranged in a small circle. Ramy was singing a song and they were all listening politely.

"Well, Cart, sit down here!" invited the doctor heartily as Carter and Ona came up, indicating the chair between himself and Totsa. Carter dropped into it.

"This is one of those old sea ballads, Cart," said Totsa.

"Oh?" asked Carter, clearing his throat. "Is it?"

He sat back, punched for a drink and listened to the song. It echoed out heartily over the patio with its refrain of "*Haul away, Joe!*" but he could not bring himself to like it.

Ramy ended and began another song. Lidi, her old self

again, excused herself a moment and trotted back into the house.

"Are you really thinking of taking a trip Earthside —" the doctor began, leaning confidentially toward Carter — and was cut short by an ear-splitting scream from within the house.

Ramy broke off his singing. The screams continued and all of them scrambled to their feet and went crowding toward the house.

They saw Lidi — just outside the dark entrance to the gathering room — small, fat and stiffly standing, and screaming again and again, with her head thrown back. Almost at her feet lay the chief, with the slim shaft of the spear sticking up from his body. Only, this time, it was actually through him.

The rest flooded around Lidi and she was led away, still screaming, by the doctor. Everyone else gathered in horrified fascination about the native corpse. The head was twisted on one side and Carter could just see one dead eye staring up, it seemed, at him alone, with a gleam of sly and savage triumph.

"Horrible!" breathed Totsa, her lips parted. "Horrible!"

But Carter was still staring at that dead eye. Possibly, the thought came to him, the horrendous happenings of the day had sandpapered his perceptions to an unusually suspicious aware-

ness. But just possibly . . .

Quietly, and without attracting undue attention from the others, he slipped past the group and into the dimness of the gathering room, where the lights had been turned off. Easing quietly along the wall until he came to the windows overlooking the patio, he peered out through them.

A considerable number of the inky natives were emerging from the greenery of the garden and the orchard beyond and approaching the house. A long, slim, fire-hardened spear gleamed in the hand of each. It occurred to Carter like a blow that they had probably moved into position surrounding the house while the humans' attention was all focused on the dancing of their chief.

His mind clicking at a rate that surprised even him, Carter withdrew noiselessly from the window and turned about. Behind him was the transporter, bulky in the dimness. As silently as the natives outside, he stole across the floor and mounted onto its platform. The transporter could move him to anywhere in the civilized area of the Galaxy at a second's notice. And one of the possible destinations was the emergency room of Police Headquarters on Earth itself. Return, with armed men,

could be equally instantaneous. Much better this way, thought Carter with a clarity he had never in his life experienced before; much better than giving the alarm to the people within, who would undoubtedly panic and cause a confusion that could get them all killed.

Quietly, operating by feel in the darkness, Carter set the controls for Police Headquarters. He pressed the Send button.

Nothing happened.

He stared at the machine in

the impalpable darkness. A darker spot upon the thin laquered panel that covered its front and matched it to the room's decor caught his eye. He bent down to investigate.

It was a hole. Something like a ritual thrust of a fire-hardened wooden spear appeared to have gone through the panel and into the vitals of the transporter. The machine's delicate mechanism was shattered and broken and pierced.

— GORDON R. DICKSON



FORECAST

April's a triple-treat month for us, with a line-up that includes Fritz Leiber, J. T. McIntosh and Theodore Sturgeon . . . not to mention half a dozen or so other top-ranking science-fiction writers who have given us stories with excitement and impact. (Sorry, but we can't tell you just now who the others are—depends on how the type sets, as always.)

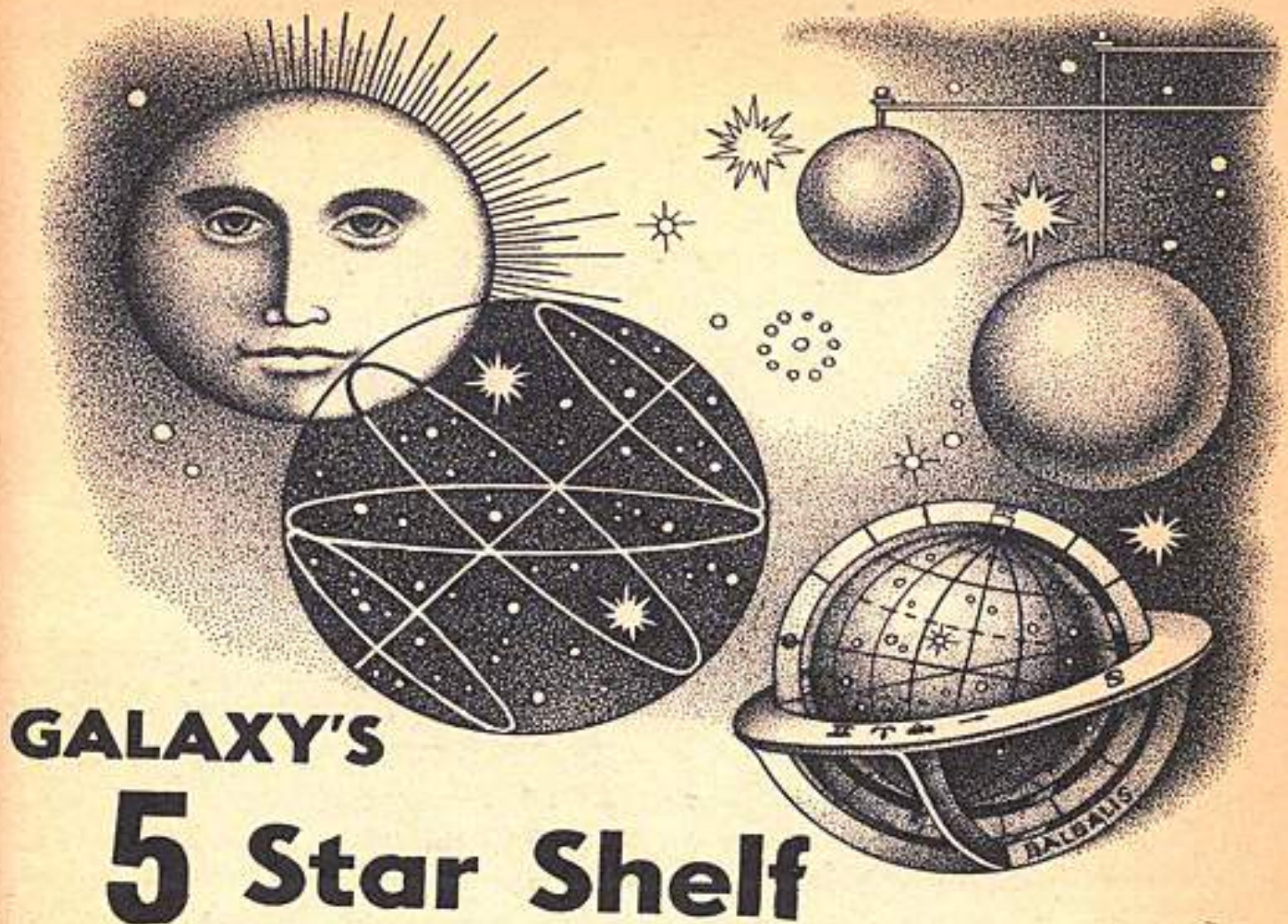
The Leiber is a beautiful short job. Leiber says we don't have to go to the stars for aliens. He says the aliens are right here among us—licking their paws and living their secret lives—and he says it in *Kreativity for Kats*.

McIntosh's yarn is *I Can Do Anything*, and that's exactly what his hero can do. The trouble starts when he has to prove it . . . and does.

Then we come to the Sturgeon—*Tandy's Story*—and the only thing that can be better than being able to tell you this one is coming up in April is to be able to tell you (which we can!) that this is only the first of many. You'll love Tandy, a perfectly charming little girl who loves to build doll-houses.

But not for dolls.

What else? Well, a great deal else (Poul Anderson, Frederik Pohl, Frank Herbert, Mack Reynolds, Jack Vance and just about everybody else is in inventory), but as mentioned we can't yet be sure just which. We're sure of Willy Ley, of course. And we're sure of the other regular features. And we're surest of all that April's a month you shouldn't miss!



GALAXY'S 5 Star Shelf

A CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ by Walter M. Miller, Jr.
J. B. Lippincott Co., Phila., \$4.95

MILLER'S ORIGINAL *F&SF* material was an effective evocation of a post-nuclear world. Based on a seeming gag situation, a monastic order devoted to the blind salvaging of written knowledge by an obscure electronics technician, Isaac Leibowitz, the story far transcends the humor of incongruity.

The expanded novel deals with three historical eras, spaced 600

years apart, that delineate the role of the monastery in the slow climb back to comprehension of the sacred circuit diagrams and fragmentary mathematical texts.

Practically all *SF* stories dealing with religious themes have been top-drawer, written with a careful eye toward perfection because of their controversial nature. Miller's belongs at the very top of the top. It has many passages of remarkable power and deserves the widest possible audience.

Rating: *****

NEXT DOOR TO THE SUN
by Stanton A. Coblentz. Avalon
Books, N. Y., \$2.95

SF HAS evolved enormously since the early Thirties. Today's best compares favorably in sheer writing with most of the best mainstream efforts. But Coblentz's work still suffers from the crudity, creakiness of plot and poor characterization that marked his early work.

His two young spacemen, investigating the lost Mercurian colony 500 years after the Hydrogen Wars have devastated Earth, refer to each other *ad nauseum* as "Old fellow; old pal; old chap; old chum; old sport" or "old duck" in dialogue and plot a half cut above Tom Swift or the Rover Boys.

Rating: **

FROM GALAXIES TO MAN
by John Pfeiffer. Random House,
N.Y., \$4.95

PFEIFFER'S PROSE is reminiscent of the poetry of Carson's *The Sea Around Us*. By unflinchingly choosing the most dramatic and communicative effect, his story of the gigantic sweep of the evolution of galaxies and life is as gripping as a novel.

"We exist in an enormous near-nothingness, a universe which

just barely falls short of complete emptiness."

"Information contained in a set of genes is enormous. Compared with Nature's feat of cramming messages into DNA molecules, engraving the Lord's Prayer on the head of a pin is sky writing."

And wonder of wonders, "Sex appears early in the history of life. It has even been observed in bacteria."

LEVEL 7 by Mordecai Roshwald. McGraw Hill Book Co., Inc., N.Y., \$3.75

GOVERNOR ROCKEFELLER of N.Y. has gone on record advocating bomb shelters for the common man. Roshwald's book is an extension of this idea of escape into a grave. Although the theme has been done to death in SF, the subject book is a clinical study of the psychology of the principals involved in modern push-button warfare.

The nominal hero (no name—just Push-Button Officer X127) has received training exclusively for the purpose of pushing the buttons required for retaliation against attack. He and three other PBX officers are the reason for "Level 7," a complex of 500 souls, 4400 feet underground,

completely self-sustaining and equipped to last 500 years without surface contact.

All are buried for life, whether or not they are called upon to button push, in this safest of all possible shelters. The story of the adjustment of X127 and his male and female companions to their strange life has the weird unreality and impact of the too intense reality.

Rating: **** 1/2

THE UNPLEASANT PROFESSION OF JONATHAN HOAG

by Robert A. Heinlein. Gnome Press, Hicksville, N.Y., \$3.50

THE TITLE story, a long novella from *Unknown*, vintage 1942, should shock present-day Heinlein lovers with a brand of fantasy-mystery they would never associate with him.

Hoag, though well-heeled, has no idea of his profession or daytime activity. A doctor tosses him out in horror after analyzing the filth from under his fingernails. A husband-wife detective team, retained by him to uncover his alter ego, become ensnared in impossible happenings, the distaff half losing her soul in escrow to an organization called the Sons of the Bird. They walk through mirrors.

Fantasy always reads silly in

synopsis, doesn't it? But Heinlein's skill makes his ding-dong story credible. Several free bonuses also: "They," "He Built a Crooked House," "All You Zombies," "Our Fair City" and the wonderfully titled "The Man Who Traveled in Elephants" round out this delightful book.

Rating: **** 1/2

HANDBOOK FOR SPACE TRAVELERS by Walter B. Hendrickson, Jr. Bobbs, Merrill, Inc., Indianapolis, \$3.95

AUTHOR HENDRICKSON claims that his book "may be helpful even after you become a spaceman." This is indisputably so since it is cram-packed with all manner of information from rocket design to escape velocities of the planets.

However, to let the punishment fit the crime, I recommend that either he or his proof-reader be marooned on Triton: "Triton is 2,800 miles in diameter. It is 220 miles from Neptune." "Titan is 3,500 miles in diameter. It is 1,200 miles from Saturn." "The satellite farthest from Uranus is Oberon, 365,000 miles distant. It circles Uranus in an orbit 900 miles above that planet."

Even worse, "The reefs in the solar system have practically all

been *chartered* (my italics) from Earth."

The list of Bloopers is dishearteningly long. What if the Pentagon had not "checked the manuscript and given it an intensive going-over in the interests of both accuracy and security"?

THE EXPLORATION OF SPACE, edited by Robert Jastrow. The Macmillan Co., N.Y., \$5.50

ROUND-TABLE discussions, questions and answers and technical papers, as presented at the April 1959 Washington Symposium on Space Physics, make up the daunting-looking pages of the book. However, there is more than enough clear text for even the layman to realize that this is the stuff on which dreams are made.

The names: Whipple, Newell, Kuiper, de Vacouleurs, Shapley, Maenzel, etc., etc. The subjects: every field which touches on the book's title (first used by Arthur C. Clarke).

An exciting, up-to-the-stars, down-to-Earth volume.

WHEN THE KISSING HAD TO STOP by Constantine FitzGibbon. W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., N.Y., \$3.95

ENGLAND UNDER the heel of Russian communism is hardly a virgin theme. However, Fitzgibbon is concerned with cause rather than effect, with the events that might conceivably lead to a Russian coup.

Unfortunately for comfort of mind, his logic is based on close-fetched possibilities — a general election in which almost all elected candidates run on an Anti-Nuclear-Bomb platform. Committed to disarmament, the new government must force the U. S. to dismantle all air- and rocket-bases and evacuate all troops.

Key officials can then unlock the Trojan gates, first to a Russian Inspectorate, then to police forces, called by the government to help quell an internal disturbance.

As for story plotting, there are a romantic triangle, a quadrangle, a tragic interracial affair, a homosexual, a working-stiff nobleman, a Jewish banker turned Catholic, but not a single individual on which to hang reader-identification.

Rating: ***

THE MATHEMATICAL RECREATIONS OF LEWIS CARROLL, 2 vols. Dover Publications, New York, \$1.50 each volume.

DOVER'S EXCELLENT paperback series of notable reprints is enriched by the above exercises and puzzles by the most famous Oxford Don of all. It joins priceless reproductions of some of the most famous works of Mankind: Newton's *Opticks*, Descartes's *Geometry*, Galileo's *Dialogues*, *Einstein on Relativity*, etc., etc. Each book is a beauty, sewn binding, fine paper and clear typography.

THE STORY OF CHEMISTRY
by Georg Lockemann. *Philosophical Library*, N. Y., \$4.75

A MORE apt title would be *The History of Chemistry*, for this is not narrative in style or intent. Rather, it is a concentrated encyclopedia of chemical events and personae. Some nine hundred names stucco its pages, each with complete chronology.

For the average layman, the book is a rubble of names and dates, but for the specialist or information seeker, it is a rich vein of lore.

INVADERS FROM RIGEL by Fletcher Pratt. *Avalon Books*, N. Y., \$2.95

EVEN WHEN I first read the magazine version as a lad back in '31, the story seemed utterly

improbable. On rereading, I have to revise my estimate utterward.

Rigellian invaders wipe out all but a selected few humans by intensive radiation which converts flesh to metal and turns the survivors into wonderfully fabricated mechanisms. *Machina ex deus*, sort of.

But the Rigellians behave with unbelievable stupidity and the metal humans with their built-in stiff upper lips are too flip and glib, considering that only forty-odd Americans survive the holocaust.

Pratt's reputation rests secure on much better ground than this bog.

Rating: **

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY FILM CHECKLIST
by Walter W. Lee, 2519 Armacost Ave., Los Angeles, Calif., \$2.00

THE ABOVE is "an attempt to list *all* feature-length SF and Fantasy motion pictures released up to time of publication." Release date, scenarist, stars and other pertinent information are offered.

Appreciation is due Lee for his labor-of-love compilation. Order direct.

— FLOYD C. GALE