



GENESIS 500

Before we can say "God Is Dead" we must define just what is meant by the term "God". For a primitive people it's a simple, primitive term—and very real!

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Hunting down a superbeing is like driving in that ancient superchariot race they used to call the "In-dianapolis 500". The only time those drivers were really alive was when they were on the track. That's the way it is with us. The only time we're really alive is when we're on the trail of an ogre, a dragon or a god.

—Harry Westwood

Starbrook brought the airfarer in on a near-horizontal plane, keeping it well below the height of the taller trees and landing it neatly in a pleasant meadow not far from the Mesa's southern edge. Since Y(. did not expect company, it was unlikely that the deity would be watching the skies; but Starbrook had learned long ago not to take chances on superbeing hunts. It was late in the day, but the sun had not yet set and the meadow was golden with late-afternoon sunlight. Starbrook had told the members of the Planet Preparatory Team that he could reach the Mesa before nightfall, and he had been right.

He made maximum use of the sunlight while it lasted, canoping the area with a repulsifield, erecting his tent and unloading his provisions. He took advantage of the afterglow to open a self-heating container of beans and a self-heating container of coffee; he ate squatting on his haunches in front of the tent, gazing across the meadow to the woodland that lay beyond.

By the time he finished eating, the last of the light was gone and the darkness was complete. He stood up and threw the two containers into the tall meadow grass. The face of night was pimpled with stars, only one of which he recognized. Even this was not a true star, but the sister planet of the one upon which he stood. Both planets had unpronounceable names, and the PPTeam had renamed them. The one upon which Starbrook stood they had christened "Love," the other, "Light."

When the starlight became bright enough to see by, Starbrook went over to the airfarer and got the transmissifield projector out of the cargo compartment. Rummaging through the cockpit, he found his Vii5 goggles, and put them on. Instantly the pale luminescence cast by the stars turned into a grayish murk and the stars themselves took on the aspect of orange peels. However, the murk did not hide one

tenth as many de-tails as the starlight did, and he had an eidetic map to augment it. The original of the map was a multi-mag-nified orbital photo belonging to the PPTeam.

His repulsifier unit was already at-tached to his belt, and he turned it on. The field it generated enveloped him at a mean distance of three quarters of an inch and was a mini-version of the repulsifield that cano-pied the camp. Although both fields provided protection from direct at-tack, their primary purpose in the present instance was to ground thun-derbolts. Thunderbolts were stan-dard weaponry for primitive gods like Y(.(/, and he could be counted upon to use them for two reasons: (1) under ordinary circumstances they could be relied upon to turn an interloper into a cinder; and (2) like most such deities, Y(.(/ was handi-capped by his own divinity and con-sidered physical contact with a mere mortal demeaning.

Starbrook grimaced as the field needled his nerve-ends. He waited till he grew accustomed to it; then, carrying the projector, he crossed the meadow—the smaller field nullified the larger one long enough for him to pass through it—and entered the woodland. To his left, he knew, the terrain dropped gradually to form one slope of a shallow cwm; to his right lay higher ground. He maintained as straight a course as the trees would allow, and at length he came to a gravelly plain. Beyond the plain a range of rocky hills showed.

Before leaving the woodland, he spent several minutes studying the terrain and listening to the night noises. The terrain told him nothing he didn't already know, and the night noises were the ones little animals make in their pursuits of and flights from one another. When he started across the plain, the hills seemed to creep out of the grayish murk to meet him. Beyond them, he knew, lay a large garden, and be-yond the garden, flanked on the north by a thick forest, the idyllic hinterland that constituted Y(.(/'s demesne. The map in Starbrook's mind showed the deity as well as his demesne. He was lying Jehovah-like on a grassy hillside, his huge and shaggy head supported by a slablike hand which in turn was supported by a columnlike forearm.

Starbrook reached the hills with-out incident. They were like the ruins of ancient buildings. Entering them, he made his way to the ones nearest the garden and began search-ing for a pass. Presently he found one. It was more than wide enough for a superbeing of Y(.(/'s dimen-sions to walk through, and it led directly into the garden. Climbing halfway up the eastern slope, he cut a shelf for the projector and set the unit in place, anchoring it with a pair of self-driving spikes provided for the purpose. After ascertaining that it was correctly positioned, he turned it on.

The transmissifield that the unit generated and projected crosswise into the pass was invisible, but Star-brook knew it had gone into effect because the feedback rendered the projector invisible also. In a few mo-ments the field would join hands with the receivifield that had already been set up on Light, and anyone passing through the former would be atomically disassembled and pro-jected to the latter, there to be reas-sembled and to emerge in a new milieu.

The trap was set. In the morning, Starbrook would bait it.

His nocturnal task completed, he lingered on the hillside. He knew that he should be starting back to camp so that he could get a good night's sleep, for the stratagem he had decided upon after the PPTeam had briefed him on Y(.(/ involved considerable physical labor. But he was curious about the garden that lay beyond the hills. The upper slopes of the hill he had climbed halfway were treacherous, and he was hesitant about climbing higher. Perhaps if he descended and made his way eastward, he would find an-other pass.

He found one a quarter of an hour later. It was narrower than the first one, and he had to climb a rocky slope to reach it. He walked halfway down a similar slope on the other side. The garden lay below him. There were trees and flowers, paths wide enough to permit the passage of a god. He could smell apples, or their equivalent—pears, peaches, grapes . . . Somehow he was reminded—perhaps by the brooding loveliness of the place—of the many women he had been attracted to, some of whom he had married, but none of whom he had loved.

As he stood there, he became gradually aware of a strange outcropping some distance to his right and slightly beyond the periphery of his vision. Turning his head, he saw a pair of gray columns that seemed to have broken halfway up and fallen back upon the hillside. Rising from their juncture with the

slope was what appeared to be a granite monolith surmounted by a boulder. Granite pillars somewhat smaller than the columns seemed to lean against the monolith on either side and these, too, seemed to be divided into two sections. Tangled vines covered the top and the sides of the boulder and the lower part of its face. The face was craglike, frightening. A pair of glacial eyes glinted in the depths of two dark caverns.

Even as recognition smote him, Starbrook saw the pillarlike arm come up and the blinding thunder-bolts leap forth from the extended fingers of Y(../'s left hand. There were at least a dozen of them. All of them found their mark—and all of them passed harmlessly into the ground. A terrible silence ensued. Starbrook could not move. Suddenly he felt a terrible tearing sensation in his chest, and pale mists of pain rose about him. Through the mists he saw Y(../ rise to his full height, a scepter-like object in his right hand. He saw the deity turn and walk disdainfully away. He felt the ground shudder, saw the orange-peel stars shiver in the sky. A spasm of pain sledgehammered him to his knees. He forced himself to stand erect, made his legs move in the direction of camp. End of Round One.

(The introduction of civilization to the natives of Love parallels the introduction of civilization to the natives of the Solomon Islands. First came the traders with their trinkets, then came the missionaries with their mis-sals. The neotraders were university bred, but basically no different from their ancestors. The neomissionaries were suave salesmen, but the god they carried in their briefcases differed but little from the god their ancestors had sold to the Melanesians. During their stay on Love they proselytized all of the major races, but only one need concern us here—the 70Z. The 70Z were bronze-age husbandmen without a spoken language who communicated by means of mentally projected ideograms. Like most primitive races, they were capable of creating superbeings—i.e., of subverting reality through the sheer weight of a collective belief and subconsciously bringing to life the object of that belief—and if left to themselves they probably would have come up with a Grendel or two and have supplied themselves with a suitable cosmogony by inventing—and bringing to life—a pantheon. The missionaries changed all this by instilling in the minds of their converts the concept of one god—their own—thereby eliminating any need either for a pantheon to explain the inexplicable or for an ogre to wreak vengeance. The missionaries were unaware of the 70Z's gift, because at that time space travel had brought to light only a few superbeings, and the Inquiry into the Past that was to reveal that the gift of creation was not confined to extraterrestrial races but had once existed among the primitive races of Earth had only just begun. Inevitably, after the missionaries' departure, the 70Z gave subconscious birth to a god much like the missionaries' own. They endowed him with both omnipotence and omniscience and programmed him with Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy and all the rest, and located him on a remote mesa. Remembering how their race had been exploited by the traders, they instilled in him—as a sort of subconscious afterthought—a hatred for and an instinct to destroy outsiders. Despite his vindictive nature—or perhaps because of it—Y(../ turned out to be a good god. Although he seldom descended from the Mesa—or left his demesne, for that matter—and was rarely seen, he succeeded by the mere fact of his existence in keeping the 70Z on a straight and narrow path. As a result, when the PPTeam arrived to make Love ready for the latest batch of Terran colonists, they decided not only to relocate the 70Z upon Light but Y(../ as well. They saved him till the last, only to find that none of them had the remotest idea of how to go about the job. Ordering him to go was out of the question. Forcing him to go involved the risk of life and limb. At length they decided to contact the Department of Galactic Guidance and request that a professional Beowulfer be dispatched to the scene. Enter Starbrook.)

There was an anvil resting on Starbrook's chest. He tried to shove it off, only to find that it was as intangible as it was invisible.

He rolled over onto his stomach and crawled out of his tent. Morning sunlight lay softly on the meadow. Birdsong came sweetly from the woodland, and the morning sky was blue. He found that he

could stand, but every time he breathed, fire filled his left lung. Unbuttoning his shirt, he discovered that the whole left side of his chest was swollen and discolored. Moreover, the entire area was so sensitive he could not bear to touch it.

He searched for some sign of a wound, found not the slightest pinprick. He was angry, though not surprised, that Y(.(/ should have a weapon the PPTeam hadn't found out about. Aerial surveillance threw a great deal of light on a super-being's habits, but left most of his capabilities in the dark.

Before retiring for the night, Star-brook had injected himself with self-renewing antibiotics, so even had there been a wound, there would have been no danger of infection. However, the pain-arresters which he had taken coincidentally had long since worn off. He took some more, shaking them into his mouth out of the plastic dispenser he had found in the airfarer's medicine cabinet. They took hold quickly, and he was able to eat a good breakfast.

As soon as he finished, he went over to the airfarer, pulled the mule out of the cargo-compartment, tethered it to a tree so it wouldn't float away and began loading it with the equipment and supplies he would need for his morning's work. It was piled high when he got through and he had to increase the pressure in the buoyancy tanks and secure the load with several lengths of rope.

He deactivated the repulsifield to get the mule through, then went back and reactivated it. Before setting forth, he checked the area surrounding the invisible canopy for footprints—large ones. He did not find any, nor had he expected to. One of Y(.(/'s characteristics that the PPTeam's aerial surveillance had thrown light on was his disinclination to wander far from his demesne. There was yet another reason Starbrook hadn't expected to find footprints: if Y(.(/ had wanted—or been able—to finish him off, he would have done so last night on the hillside. The fact that he hadn't implied either that he couldn't or that he had other plans.

Pulling the mule behind him, Star-brook set off across the meadow. The woodland was filled with birdsong and bright splashes of sunlight. At length he left it behind him and moved out onto the plain. The hills, brownish now in the light of day, marched to meet him. Entering them, he chose a spot some fifty yards south of and on a direct line with the invisible transmissifield, tethered the mule and unloaded it.

The tilt furnace gave him the most trouble. After jockeying it into place, he loaded it with three twenty-pound 81-3-7-9 brass ingots. Then he thrust the muzzle of the flame thrower into the fuel aperture and turned the thrower on. Before sliding the furnace cover into place, he checked to see whether the flame was swirling round the crucible. It was.

The roar of the thrower filled the morning, driving the silence from the hills. Before long, Y(.(/ would come around to investigate. Star-brook kept an eye out for him as he went on with his work. There was a flat expanse of gravelly ground not far from the furnace that would do nicely for a floor. He carried the flask and the pattern over to it, inserted the pattern between the cope and the drag and set the flask down, drag uppermost. Then he got the two cartons of perma-moist molding sand and dumped one of them into the drag. Getting his shovel, he tamped the sand down with the handle, then smoothed it out. Then he got the bottom board, set it in place and turned the mold over. Glancing sideways, he caught a vast movement beyond the transmissifield. He grinned. Y(.(/ was taking the bait. Moreover, he was approaching the trap from exactly the right angle.

After making the cope and cutting the sprue, Starbrook checked the heat. The flame thrown by the thrower was of such high intensity that the ingots were already molten. Returning to the mold, he raised the cope to the accompaniment of the cicadalike crescendo of the inbuilt vibrator. Both the flask and the sand were lightweight; nevertheless, the mold was a large one and the lift required all his strength. Setting the cope to one side, he raised the pattern. Thanks to the special molding sand, both the cope and the drag-impressions were flawless. Getting the core, he set it carefully in place, then he punched half a dozen tiny holes in the cope so the gases could escape. Finally he lowered the cope onto the drag, searched for and found a flat rock about ninety pounds in weight, and set it on top of the mold.

The metal was not quite ready. While waiting for it to reach the 2,100 degrees Fahrenheit he needed for teeming he paced back and forth between the furnace and the mold. He could see Y(.(/ clearly now. The deity was standing just beyond the transmissifield, looking first at the furnace and then at the mold.

By light of day he seemed far less formidable, although his proportions were transheroic. He was wearing a sa-ronlike garment fashioned from a length of material large enough to sail a boat. His gray beard fell all the way to his middle, and his shaggy hair was shoulder-length. His arms were on the skinny side, and so were his legs, which were slightly bowed. But his eyes left no doubt as to his godhood. They were like a pair of pulsars. He still carried the scepter-like object Starbrook had noticed the night before. Somehow it did not jibe with his appearance or his back-ground. A staff would have suited his Judaeo-Christian character better.

In one way, it was ridiculous to be going to so much trouble to transmit him to Light. Superbeings existed only for that length of time their creators believed in them strongly enough to keep reality from realign-ing itself. Generally the length of time they were able to sustain such beliefs was limited to two or three generations; hence, any superbeing's days— Y(./'s included—were num-bered, and whether he were trans-mitted to Light or remained where he was, Y(./ was due to pop out of existence in the foreseeable future.

Starbrook checked the heat again. The yellow-whiteness of the metal told him that it was ready, and he turned the flame thrower off. Getting the long-handled ladle, he put the furnace on tilt and lined up the ladle with the lip. He caught the molten flow deftly, his repulsifier protecting him from the heat, and when the fur-nace was empty and the ladle full he set the latter down and skimmed it. Then he carried it over to the floor and poured the mold.

Laying the ladle aside, he re-moved the stone weight. He was sweating, and the pain in his chest was coming back. Y(./ had moved farther into the pass and was stand-ing little more than an arm's length from the transmissifield. The success of his stratagem thus far made Starbrook temporarily forget his pain.

While waiting for the casting to cool, he looked for a suitable pedes-tal. There was a flat-topped boulder several yards from the floor that would do nicely. An altar wouldn't be necessary: the analogy didn't have to be letter-perfect. To kill time, he walked back and forth be-tween the pedestal and the mold, no-ticing for the first time that the range of hills was really two ranges sepa-rated by a wide arroyo. It was in the middle of this arroyo that he had set up his one-man foundry.

He waited about forty-five min-utes longer, then approached the mold and raised the cope. Using the sprue for a handle, he pulled the casting free from the drag and shook it. It looked good. He got the au-tomatic saw and the portable sander and, working with his back to Y(./, cut off the gate and the sprue, and the gas-hole risers, after which he sanded the areas flush with the cast-ing proper. Then he went to work on the metal with a wire brush. It began to gleam—though not as brightly as gold would have; but of course gold had been out of the question, and besides, Y(./ wouldn't know the dif-ference.

Starbrook grinned. Picking up the "golden" calf, he carried it over to the flat-topped boulder he had cho-sen for his pedestal and set it in place. It was slightly smaller than life-size, but realistic in all other re-spects. Starbrook grinned again, then backed up several paces and gen-uflected. Straightening, he stepped to one side, providing Y(./ with an unobstructed view of the object of his reverence.

Y(./'s craglike face grew gray. Crevices opened up between his flared nostrils and the corners of his traplike mouth. His eyes, black to begin with, acquired an even deeper darkness. In the absence of a Moses to do his will, he should have come rushing through the transmissifield with the intention of dashing the calf from the pedestal and pulverizing it beneath his feet—and have wound up millions of miles away on Light.

He should have, and perhaps he would have, if, in his monumental rage, he hadn't forgotten Starbrook's immunity to thunderbolts and launched a dozen of them in the hated outsider's direction. When they vanished less than a cubit from his fingertips, he blinked.

For a long while he stared at the point in space where the bolts had disappeared. At length, he smiled. A cunning smile. He raised his arms.

It began to rain.

The rain sent steam rising from the furnace. It hissed when it struck the still-warm "golden" calf. Star-brook's repulsifier broke it up into infinitesimal particles, but failed to keep it out.

It fell gently at first. Then it picked up tempo and was accompanied by lightning and thunder. All at

once, it turned into a cloudburst.

The arroyo filled with frightening rapidity, and a young and vigorous river took form between the hills. Starbrook tried desperately to reach the mule, only to see it break free when he was halfway to it and drift off in the direction of the current. Next, he tried to reach higher ground, but by this time the water had risen to his waist, and he hadn't gone three yards before he lost his footing.

Helpless, he went tumbling down-stream. His repulsifier shielded him from the rocks, but it could do nothing about the water that forced its way into his lungs. He grabbed frantically at the boulders he collided with, at the outcroppings the current threw him against. At last his fingers found and gripped the roots of a small tree and he pulled himself laboriously from the torrent and crawled halfway up a friendly hill. As though by prearrangement, the rain stopped and the sun came out. Dejectedly Starbrook looked back the way he had come. The pain in his chest was so intense he could hardly breathe and the water he had swallowed made him retch. Once again he forced himself to his feet and made his legs carry him in the direction of camp. End of Round Two.

(It should be emphasized that both "omnipotence" and "omniscience" are relative terms. Thus, while the 70Z had endowed Y(./ with both qualities, he was all-powerful and all-knowing only to the limited extent they could conceive of him as being. And it should be emphasized also that although the 70Z attributed to him the ability to create life, his actual ability was severely curtailed. Reality, already strained to the breaking point by the mere fact of his existence, permitted him to exercise his power only if the basic materials were available and allowed him to perpetuate life only so long as he could, by force of will alone, hold reality at bay. Once his will faltered or once his presence was removed, reality asserted itself and whatever changes he had made in the natural order of things were quickly corrected.

It was well past midday by the time Starbrook got back to camp. A handful of pain-arresters had put his pain to rout, but he was as tired as he was bedraggled, and after slipping through the repulsifield, he headed directly for his tent.

The loss of rounds one and two to Y(./ nettled but did not dismay him. The transmissifield projector was impervious to water and on high enough ground not to have been washed away by the river. Therefore, he still possessed the means of evicting Y(./ However, since there was little likelihood that the diety would voluntarily step into the field, the projector would have to be relocated.

Getting Y(./ out of the way long enough to accomplish the task posed no problem, but finding a new site did. The plan Starbrook finally settled upon could not be effected till after dark, so he lay back on his inflatable bed and relaxed. Despite his pain, which was coming back again, and despite his tiredness, he felt keenly, intensely alive. He was reminded of a remark Harry Westwood had made about Beowulfing when the two of them were on a hunt together. "Hunting down a superbeing is like driving in that ancient superchariot race they used to call the 'Indianapolis 500'. The only time those drivers were really alive was when they were on the track. That's the way it is with us. The only time we're really alive is when we're on the trail of an ogre, a dragon, or a god."

At the time, he and Harry had been standing about a hundred yards from the mouth of the rocky cave where their quarry lived. The quarry was a genuine fire-breathing dragon named Sssth which the Zendi of the planet Lost had invented to scare their children and subconsciously brought to life when they began believing in it themselves. The fact that Galactic Guidance had assigned two Beowulfers to exterminate it was an index of its size and ferocity.

"I'll tell you what," Harry said presently. "I'll go in and step on its tail and flush it out."

Starbrook hadn't demurred. He had known it wouldn't do any good. He disliked the idea of working with Harry Westwood. Westwood was too reckless. He had a prosthetic hand to prove it. Harry never talked about it, and GG's publicity division, in contrast to its usual custom of bruiting the exploits of Beowulfers to the four thousand corners of the galaxy, had kept the story secret; but Starbrook had it from a reliable source that the reason Westwood had a prosthetic hand was that an ogress had bitten off his real one.

Anyway, Harry had gone into the cave to flush Sssth out, and Starbrook had waited about a hundred yards from the mouth, Dammerung at ready. But the two Beowulfers had been badly briefed, and less than a minute later Harry came stumbling out of the cave, blinded by a poi-sonous spray neither had known to be part of Sssth's arsenal. Some thirty yards from the mouth, he tripped and fell, adding a sprained ankle to his troubles. By then, Starbrook was running to the hunter's aid. By the time he reached him, Sssth had emerged from its cave like a young locomotive under full steam. Straddling Westwood's body, Starbrook calmly shot out the beast's four eyes, then sent a charge straight into its brain. The ghastly thing fell dead hardly a foot from the toe of his boot.

Westwood's vision had returned in time for him to witness the finale. "Damn you, Barney," he said, "why'd you do such a crazy thing!"

"I didn't think you'd look right with a prosthetic head."

"But you could have got the thing from where you were standing. You could have played it safe!"

"I guess I was trying to prove that my third wife didn't have any more justification for walking out on me than my first and second ones did," Starbrook said.

"Only to prove," Westwood said, "that she had all the justification in the world, because if you'd still been married to her you'd have done the same thing—without a thought of what your death might do to her."

Starbrook didn't say anything. He helped Westwood to his feet. The two men looked at the loathsome mountain of carrion before them. Soon, the Zendi would divide it into choice and not-quite-so-choice cuts and a celebration would be held and the two hunters feted. Starbrook shuddered.

"Knock it off, Barney," Westwood said. "You've killed enough of them by now to be used to it."

"It's not the killing that bothers me. It's what makes people like me tick."

"Well it shouldn't bother you," Westwood had said. "Because what makes you tick is the same thing that made Lindbergh tick when he flew that prop-propelled orange crate of his across the Atlantic, that made Harding and Caldwell tick when they refused to be rescued from the Wall of Morning Light, that made Hannibal cross the Alps, that made Kennedy into a sitting duck in Dal-las. If it didn't bother those guys, why should it bother you?"

At dusk Starbrook ate a leisurely meal. After he finished, he spread out the map of the Mesa that the PPTeam had provided him and stud-ied it by lantern light. It was based on the same multi-magnified orbital photo whose image he carried in his mind, but it contained a mileage scale, and the image didn't.

After computing the distance to his target area, he rotated the air farer's small turret cannon till its muzzle pointed in the proper direc-tion, then fed his computations into its brainbox. He waited till the weapon adjusted itself, and when its ready light went on he sent three in-cendiary shells climbing into the sky. Reaching the apex of their trajec-tory, they coasted down into the thick forest that flanked Y(.(/ 's de-mesne on the north, and detonated. The northern sky turned red.

Starbrook was going to have to move fast. Y(.(/ was bound to in-vestigate a forest fire of such sudden-ness and intensity, but a deity of his rain-making capability would have no trouble containing it. Donning his V/ii5 goggles and activating his repulsifier, Starbrook set forth. The northern sky had brightened to a vivid orange by the time he reached the plain, but even as he congratulated himself he saw the first bolts of lightning and heard the thunder, and knew that Y(.(/ was al-ready taking countermeasures.

Presently he entered the hills. Only a scattering of puddles remained of the river that had raged through the arroyo that morning. Nothing whatsoever remained of his founding operation—not even the "golden" calf. Alert for the slightest sign of Y(.(/ he climbed the eastern slope of the pass to the shelf where the transmissifield projector sat. Carefully he felt for the switch, and turned the field off.

Carrying the projector, he de-scended the slope, walked through the pass and entered the garden. It was his intention to reset his trap in one of the garden paths. He came to one presently, and began following it. It was wide, and appeared to be well-traveled. Yes, it ought to do.

He was dumbstruck when a girl emerged from the shadows of the trees and stepped into the starlight.

Thunder sounded from the north, but above the garden the skies re-mained clear.

The girl barred Starbrook's way. She wore nothing but her nakedness. It was all she needed to wear. A dark swirl of hair swept the left side of her face. Her black eyes seemed to glis-ten.

He removed his V/ii5 goggles, found her lovelier yet. She projected her name into his mind: (* L *). He tried to project his into hers, but of course he couldn't, for it had no 70Z equivalent.

But she couldn't be a 70Z. She was as Caucasian as he was. Besides, all of the 70Z had been relocated on Light.

Somehow, it did not seem to mat-ter what she was, or what she was doing on the Mesa. She reached out to touch his face, recoiled when her fingers came into contact with the re-pulsifier. He turned it off She reached forth again, and this time her fingers brushed his cheek. She drew him eagerly into the shadows of the trees, down into the scented softness of flowers. It was as though he were the first man she had ever seen.

He could smell apples, and the ap-ples were her breath. The pounding of his heart became a huge drumbeat in his ears. It grew larger, louder, spread throughout his body and pen-et-rated the very earth. Shudders like rhythmic seismic waves shook the ground. It was as though a giant were walking

A giant—or a god.

The truth detonated in Starbrook's brain, brought him to his feet. His frantic fingers found the control knob of the repulsifier on his belt, and in a second he was safe.

The forest fire had saved his life. If Y(.(/ had not gone to investigate, he would have been in the garden, wait-ing. Now, aware that the fire had been a ruse, he was hurrying back to check his trap, hoping that Starbrook had taken the bait and was still vulnerable.

Retrieving the projector from where it had fallen among the flow-ers, Starbrook seized (* L *)'s hand and began running with her toward the hills. All was not yet lost. With a little luck, he not only could escape Y(.(/, but evict him as well.

Half dragging the girl and ignor-ing the recrudescence of his pain, he entered the hills. From behind came the crackling of tree branches as Y(.(/, desperate to reach his enemy before it was too late, plunged into the garden. Starbrook moved deeper into the hills, looking for a high ledge that was unassailable from the front but easily accessible from the side. He was hampered by the loss of his V/ii5 goggles, which he had dropped in the garden.

The hills were full of ledges, and eventually he found what he wanted. By this time, Y(.(/, too, had entered the hills, apparently having con-cluded that Starbrook and the girl were no longer in the garden. The ground trembled at his approach, and the rattling of small avalanches filled the night. Flanking the ledge on the left was a gentle slope that be-gan at right angles to it, then U-turned halfway up. Pulling the girl as far as the turn, Starbrook left her there and returned to the base. There, he set up the projector and projected the transmissifield at right angles to the cliff.

Rejoining (* L *), who had been watching the proceedings with mysti-fied eyes, he took her hand and led her up to the ledge. There, he waited till Y(.(/ came striding over the hills, then took the woman the deity had made of his rib into his arms.

She recoiled from the tingling of the repulsifier, which now engulfed her as well as him, and he had to hold her tightly so that Y(.(/ would assume that, unable to resist her, Starbrook had turned the "thunderbolt shield" off. The deity could not know, of course—and indeed, Starbrook himself had forgotten only a short while ago—that the juxtaposi-tion of a second body caused the field to double itself.

Y(.(/ had halted about a hundred feet from the cliff. Significantly, the "scepter" was missing from his right hand. The expression on his face was a curious mixture of self-satisfaction and 'righteous indignation. His an-alogy hadn't been letter-perfect ei-ther, but it had served its purpose. Now, the re-enactment of the origi-nal sin was taking place right before his eyes. Small wonder that he should assume that the "thunderbolt shield" was no longer functioning.

His self-satisfaction was short-lived. It died with the first series of thunderbolts he sent Starbrook's way. After the second, it turned over in its grave. Meanwhile, his right-eous indignation grew into righteous wrath—a wrath so overwhelming that he forgot he was a god and strode purposefully toward

the cliff, his eyes burning like black bonfires. But his fingers fell far short of the ledge where the Man and the Woman were, and though he tried mightily, he could not claw his way up the rock face of the cliff.

Suddenly he saw the slope, followed it up with his black bonfires of eyes to where it U-turned. A giant step brought him to its beginning. A second giant step carried him all the way to Light.

Starbrook looked down to where the transmissifield invisibly pulsed in the night. The slope was empty.

His heroic rescue of Harry West-wood had made him famous. His successful eviction of the 70Z god would make him legend.

He became aware of the girl beneath him, of the warmth of her naked body, of the adoration in her eyes. Of necessity, his love-making had been simulated. Now, the passion he had known in the garden re-turned, tempered by a quality he had never experienced before and therefore did not recognize.

As he looked tenderly down upon her childlike face, he realized that the grayness of the ground was showing through her features. Simultaneously, as the rib that Y(./ had psychosurgically removed began to rematerialize, he experienced a lessening of the pain in his chest.

"No," he whispered. "No!"

(* L*) was diaphanous now. He watched helplessly as she faded away. Only after she had vanished utterly did the knowledge smite him that he had found—and lost—the only woman in the world whom he could ever love—who, in a way, he had been in love with all his life.

He got numbly to his feet.

Bone of my bones. Flesh of my flesh ...

He struck across the hills and over the plain and walked through the woodland. The airfarer awaited him. Like Charon, it would ferry him across the Styx. He always came in first in the Indianapolis 500, but he never won.