

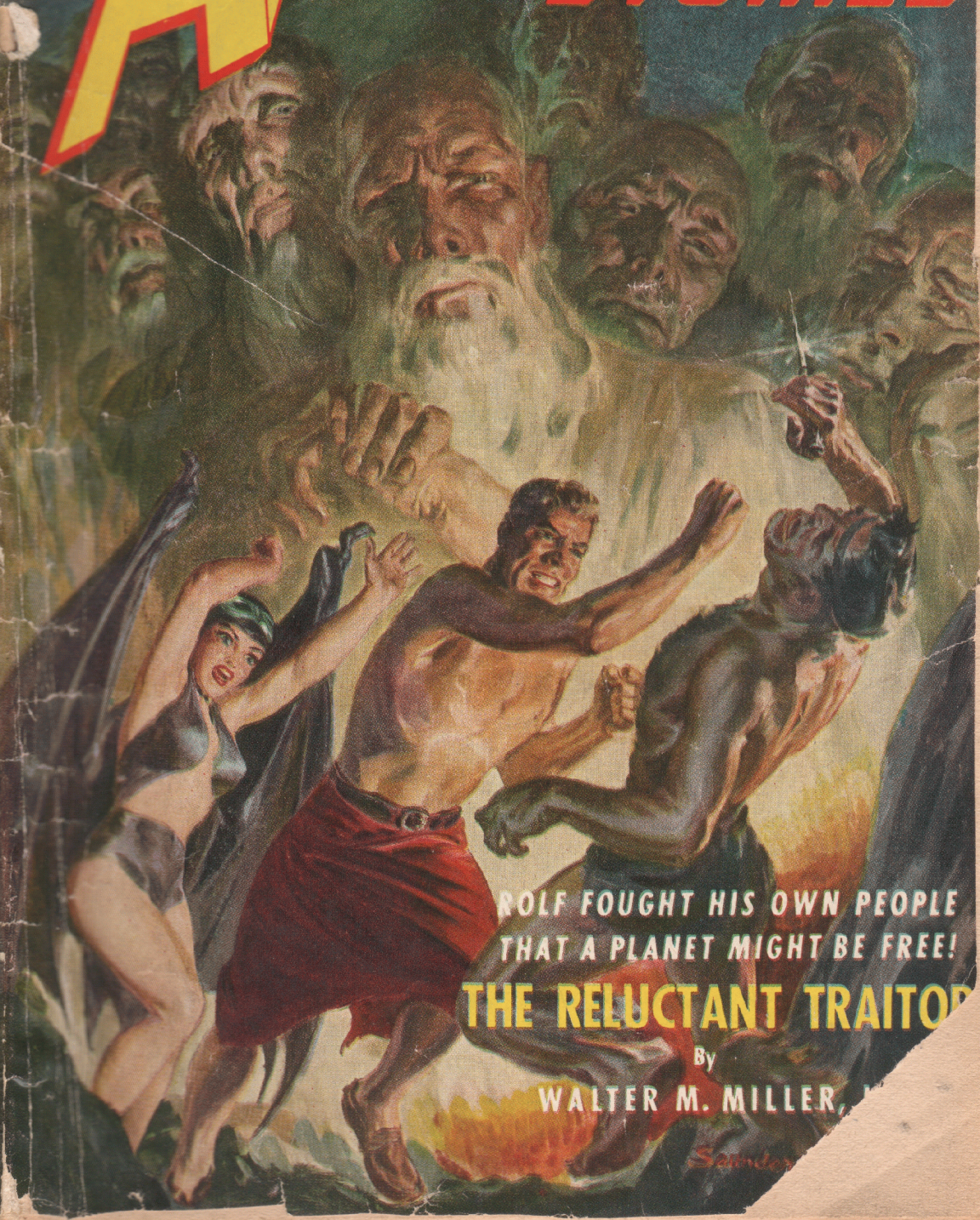


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ROLF FOUGHT HIS OWN PEOPLE
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THE RELUCTANT TRAITOR

By

WALTER M. MILLER, JR.

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All **STORIES** *Complete*



THE RELUCTANT TRAITOR (Complete novel—40,000) by Walter M. Miller, Jr. 8

Illustrated by James Otis

When his own people put a price on his head, Rolf was forced to flee into the hills of Mars. But was he better off in the hands of a race of savage batmen?

THE LAST REVOLUTION (Novelette—15,000) by Stephen Marlowe 84

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Drayton knew he was dead—and nothing he could do about it. But if this was Heaven, why did these wise old men want him to kill the rest of the angels?

NO GREATER WISDOM (Short—9,000) by Rog Phillips 112

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You say Americans are lousy lovers? Then meet Henry. With a single kiss he burned off all Marge's clothes, broke her leg and knocked her clear out of this world!

C'MON-A MY PLANET (Short—2,500) by Gerald Vance 128

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Sam Davis, first Earthman to reach Mars, found he'd really hit the jackpot. Not only did they "give him everything"—they even included a socko "doubleheader!"

THE IMPOSSIBLE WEAPON (Short—6,000) by Milton Lesser 134

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How was Venus able to ruin Earth's "impregnable" defenses? It took Stanley hours of hard reflection on the puzzle before he found that the answer was—reflection!

Front cover painting by Norman Saunders, illustrating
a scene from the story "The Reluctant Traitor"



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THE OBSERVATORY

by the Editor

THIS is the story we can't tell you.

ON A bright June morning in 1950, an American named Charles Cross stumbled upon a strange object at the extreme tip of Cape Carvoeiro, a promontory jutting into the Atlantic about halfway down the west coast of Portugal.

THE object proved to be a container about the general size and shape of an ordinary cashbox. It was of a curiously light metal, encrusted with marine growth as though it had been long immersed in the sea. Examination failed to reveal the slightest incision of a lid or panel; except for its extreme lightness and the hollow sound it gave off when tapped, it might well have been a block of solid metal.

CROSS, thinking it might be some sort of booby trap left over from the last war, handled the thing with understandable caution. Placing it on the back seat of his car, he drove to the nearest village and persuaded a native blacksmith to rip the thing apart, if necessary, in an effort to learn what, if anything, it contained.

THIS turned out to be much more difficult than either Cross or the blacksmith had anticipated, for the metal proved incredibly tough. But when it finally did give way, there came to light a thick sheaf of ordinary white bond paper covered with single-spaced lines of type, with the first page showing the title: *Master of the Universe*.

CROSS'S first reaction was bitter disappointment, not only because he had hoped for something of more intrinsic value, but because at first glance the manuscript appeared to be in a language unknown to him. Closer scrutiny, however, disclosed that many of the words were English as written today, while practically all the rest had its roots in the same language.

NOT until eight months later did Cross refer again to the manuscript. Late in February, 1951, he had occasion to show the script to a professor of languages at

a university in Rome. The professor expressed considerable interest in the document and Cross left it with him....

THE remaining steps between far-off Rome and the editorial offices of *Amazing Stories* need not be recounted here. But in due course we came into possession of both the original manuscript and an extensive translation. Tests proved the paper to contain a watermark unknown to the writer, that the words on it were not typewritten or printed there, but were put down by some process which authorities in the field could not identify.

WHEN translated, the manuscript purported to be a factual history of the known Universe from the current era to a far-distant day when our entire galaxy faced annihilation on a scale so staggering that the human mind cannot encompass it. There is no wavy-haired hero with swelling muscles and a space tan, no scantily clothed heroine menaced by a twelve-headed pawnbroker, no blasting off to do battle with the space raiders of Sirius. But there is the epic sweep of the march of human destiny across the Heavens to new heights of nobility and to new *depts* of infamy. It is science-fiction in the sense that it tells of an age which lies in the future, but paradoxically it is true because it recounts what actually happened during the remainder of the Twentieth Century and most of the six centuries that followed.

BUT, as we prefaced this month's column, we can't tell you of the circumstances surrounding the discovery of the manuscript. All we can do is give you a "fictionized" account of what lies ahead for mankind in the next five to seven hundred years. For us to present it as "fact" would bring down on us the outraged howls of those thousands of readers who bitterly denounced the so-called "Shaver hoax." For it is the nature of double-the-wool stf readers that they will believe accept statements of Man's eventual domination of at least one corner of the universe, but gag at the slightest suggestion of comparable miracles today or yesterday.... **MASTER OF THE UNIVERSE** will start in these pages soon. —HB

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"Scream, Ralph Kenlan," Krasala whispered. "Scream as though you were in agony."

THE RELUCTANT TRAITOR



By

Walter M. Miller, Jr.

Freedom from their conquerors lay in the Martians' grasp if Rolph could show them that the gods they worshipped were guns!

THE TRIAL was secret, and the prisoner was held incommunicado. Menshrie, of the *Martian Messenger*, printed the Commission's press releases verbatim. Rewording them would have been in the spirit of *lese majeste*, and Menshrie was a cautious man. His disapproval, if any, of the lurid colors the press officer used to paint a portrait of Captain Jason Kenlan, was not evident in Menshrie's editorial comments. A segment of the population naturally agreed with the reports and therefore hated Kenlan with a bright white hate, which burned fiercely enough to include Ja-

son's sons in its reflected glare. The sons quietly slipped away to the other side of the city and stayed out of sight. One grew a moustache as a hindrance to recognition. Their father was beyond their aid. It was their considered opinion that their mother was lucky to be five years dead.

They hanged Captain Kenlan in the late afternoon. Publicly. Thousands of citizens jammed the Marsville city park, and several hawkers wandered through the crowd selling nuts and candied quois. There was little ceremony to the execution. The guards led Kenlan past a platoon of space marines who turned their backs on the officer. They dragged him up on the platform where the colonel ripped off his insignia. They gave him no opportunity to speak, but as the executioner fixed the noose in place, Jason cried out, "They *are* human, I tell you!" The lever was tripped before he could say more. The drop was too shallow for the light Martian gravity, and he strangled beneath a bat-flecked violet sky.

There was an atmosphere of festivity in Marsville on the night after the hanging. The city of eighty thousand had reaffirmed its faith in human dignity by executing a man who wanted to share "humanity" with a species of Martian wild life. By eight o'clock, a barfly minstrel had built a ballad around the hanging. The tune was old, but the words were new. Its mournful strains floated out into the night air in front of a space port saloon near the city's outer gate, where two shabbily dressed men loitered against the wall and listened.

*"Kenlan was the son of the colonel;
Kenlan was the fourth planet's pride.
Kenlan got lost in the mountains,
And brought back a hairy brown bride."*

*Now the gallows were high and windy;
The steps were seven and six.
Yes, it's thirteen steps to heaven,
If you're in love with a..."*

"Think it'll make the hit parade, Rolf?" drawled one of the shabby men as he brushed ice crystals out of a bristling brown moustache.

Rolf Kenlan eyed his brother briefly, then glanced back at the gate. A staff car had just pulled away, carrying the old guard, while two fresh sentries entered the hut to spend their four-hour shift. Beyond the gate lay five miles of frigid tundra, and then the foothills, immersed in darkness.

Rolf waited for the guards to get inside, then spoke softly: "Okay, Lennie, let's go. Make like you're drunk."

ARM IN arm, they shuffled along the wall to the gate. Then they sat down in front of the shack and began tipping from a bottle of kwoyo and arguing noisily. When they heard a guard's footsteps on the floor of the hut, Lennie bent forward and made retching noises. The door opened and a gust of warm air fanned Rolf's neck.

"Hey! Not in front of the shack!" the guard bellowed. "You there! Get him away from here." He nudged Rolf's back with the toe of his boot.

"Yeh, yeh, sure," Rolf grunted. He staggered to his feet and began tugging at Lennie's arm. He lost his grip and sat down hard.

The guard came out cursing. "Blind lead blind," he growled as he jerked Lennie roughly erect and dragged him toward the shadows. Lennie was still belching sickeningly.

Rolf dragged himself up and stood swaying dizzily. He glanced through the glass door of the shack at the other guard who was pressing his face against a window to see where his

companion had gone.

There was a dull *thuk* from the shadows, then the sound of a body falling. Lennie reappeared with a gun in one hand and a short length of pipe in the other. He tossed the gun to Rolf, who darted up the steps and burst inside, just as the guard turned away from the window with a bewildered expression.

"Turn around," Rolf growled.

The guard glanced at the gun, lifted his hands, and turned. "Y-you're the son of—"

Rolf clubbed him with the gun butt before he finished. The guard slumped across a table and rolled to the floor. Lennie came in dragging the other man.

"Anybody see us?" Rolf grunted.

"Couple walked past. Didn't even look around."

"Good! Bust the locker open and get into a night suit. Then get the fur horses out of the stable. I'll pack up whatever we can take with us."

Lennie smashed the lock of a wooden chest with his pipe joint. "Ammo's in here," he grunted as he struggled into a heavy all-covering night suit and pulled the wind mask over his face. Then he went outside.

Rolf broke open a first-aid packet and gave each guard a shot of morphine to insure a lengthy sleep. Then he ripped a blanket from the cot, dumped it full of ammunition, chocolate and vitamin tablets. He rolled it into a pack, donned a night suit, and went outside to join his brother in the darkness.

Lennie was waiting in the shadows with a pair of mutant fur horses, saddled and shod with asbestos-packed shoes. Rolf tied the bundle behind his saddle, then mounted the nervous steed. A last glance at the street told them that they were still unobserved.

"Let's don't forget that this was your idea," growled Lennie as they trotted through the gate and onto the frozen tundra.

"Go back if you want to," Rolf responded. "Nobody's making you come."

LENNIE grunted resignedly and fell silent for a time. The sky was misted by its usual thin cloud of ice crystals which dulled the ghost light of the twin moons to the faintest glimmer. Faintly, they could see the shadows of the foothills in the distance ahead, while behind them the lights of Marsville made an aura in the dusty sift of falling pin-head sleet. The lights were a threat, and the gathering darkness was a comforting cloak that drew slowly about them. This was the first time that either man had ventured beyond the walls of the city where they were born. The law confined the populace to Earth's only city on Mars, and it also kept Mars-creatures from entering.

"When'll they find the guards?" asked Lennie, who was younger and needed a certain amount of reassurance.

"Whenever the O.D. makes his tour, if he makes one. If he doesn't, we've got until they mount the next guard." Rolf spoke irritably, and tightened the straps of his wind mask against the icy air.

It was still cold on Mars, but warmer than it had been when man first came. Five centuries had passed since Dawson and Heide had set off the deuterium-helium fusion-cycle in the heavy water icecap, thereby furnishing the fourth planet with a denser atmosphere of oxygen and helium—a breathable atmosphere, and one which could hold heat.

"Lordy, Rolf!" Lennie muttered

nervously. "It's hard to believe we're not ever coming back! I don't mind saying I'm scared. Y'reckon we'll ever find that place Dad was talking about—before they arrested him?"

"If we don't, we won't live long. Just shut up and watch over your shoulder. And let's ride a hundred yards apart in case they throw a searchlight out here."

Lennie reined his horse aside obediently. But the mount stumbled, and the rider cursed. He stopped to peer down at the ground. "Wait, Rolf!" he snapped. "Look! A fresh grave!"

Rolf hesitated in the dim moonlight, staring back at the newly frozen mound of earth. "That's what I thought," he grunted bitterly. "You guess whose it is?"

"Yeah," Lennie breathed. "Yeah. The androon gal Dad brought back from the mountains. The dirty so-and-so's said they let her go."

Rolf muttered a quoted phrase from one of the trial's news releases. "In accordance with the Commission's policy of mercy toward alien life forms, the androon female was set free..." He snorted a scornful curse and spurred his mount onward.

In a way, Rolf thought, the androon woman was their foster mother, although they'd never seen her. Jason had taken her to wife in a ceremony before an androon priest, while he was lost for a year in the mountains. He'd brought her back claiming that he'd found proof that her species was really human. So they hanged him under the bio-laws.

THE TWO riders trotted westward among the giant lichen patches. They kept abreast, but separated by shouting distance. Rolf hoped to reach the fringes of the quioie orchards before someone discovered the guards.

If they were caught, there was only one possible penalty: death. Only officers of the patrol could venture beyond the walls. And even patrolmen needed special orders—such as the reconnaissance mission which had first sent Jason into the hills. The only reason the Commission gave for such a harsh quarantine was a single word: "security".

Mars was still nearly unexplored except from the air. Marsville was a ten-mile square, and it was the entire world to its natives, who were five generations removed from Earth. It was an industrial city, mining its own ore, making its own steel. It had become nearly self-sufficient and, as soon as its economic independence was assured, it was to become the tool-maker to a Martian civilization which would expand outward from the Marsville nucleus. It was to become the hub of an empire. But until that time, its attentions were to remain focussed upon its own growth. Rolf's and Lennie's knowledge of the rest of the planet was purely academic. The hills ahead were only a mystery.

"Reckon we'll meet any androons?" Lennie called from the darkness.

"Shut up!" Rolf barked. "They might hear you."

Sound travelled far in the icy air across the frozen flatlands. Rolf stole a glance back at the city, but it was still drowsing peacefully in its glow-aura.

When they were a thousand yards from the quioie orchards, Lennie called out again—this time with fear in his voice: "Rolf! Look! A light! On the wall!"

Rolf reined up and stared back at the city. The pencil beam of a searchlight was stabbing out into the night. Slowly, it swept the area to the north of them, then darted southward. Rolf

dismounted with a curse. "Get your horse down!" he shouted.

Then he tugged his own mount behind a waist-high clump of lichen and tried to force the animal's fore-legs into a kneel. The mare remained stubbornly erect. The light was sweeping closer.

Despairingly, Rolf drew the stolen pistol and shot her between the eyes. He stepped back as she crumpled behind the lichen patch, then threw himself down out of sight as the searchlight swept over him.

LENNIE shouted something about his horse, then screamed as a burst of machine-gun fire chattered from the city. Rolf glanced up to see the beam rigidly stationary, attached to the spot where Lennie had dismounted. There was another burst of fire, and bright tracers arced across the tundra. Rolf heard the bullets whipping the earth a hundred to the south, and occasionally spanging off a rock in a whining ricochet. There was no sound from his brother.

"Lennie? You okay?"

There was no answer. The firing ceased, and the light began slowly sweeping the tundra again. Keeping behind the lichen clusters, Rolf crawled southward. Several times the light passed over him, and he flung himself full length on the turf. Then the light stopped once more near Lennie, and Rolf saw the prostrate fur horse with Lennie's legs pinned beneath it.

"Len! Are you all right?"

He heard a faint groan, and crawled closer. Hoofbeats were echoing in the distance. He paused to call again from just beyond the splash of brightness. "Lennie! Are you alive?"

This time he heard a weak answer: "Go on...before they come....

Belly shot. I can't go. Hurry... Rolf."

Rolf hesitated. Without a horse, he couldn't carry Lennie along. And the riders were coming out of the city. Even if he had a horse, he couldn't take care of an abdominal wound with a first-aid kit. Grimly, he realized Lennie would have to be left behind.

"So long, kid!" he called; then, crouching low, he began running toward the orchard, angling away from the road of brightness which the beam carved, leading the patrol riders toward the downed fugitive.

Rolf raced against fear, expecting the searchlight at any moment to shift half a degree and catch him in its beam. But, evidently, the patrolmen were not yet aware that there had been two riders. Soon they would find the extra horse, however, or notice that two were gone from the stables. And from that moment onward, Rolf's life would become an endless flight. The city was a prison and escapees were hunted down by air. The guards had the right to kill them summarily.

Rolf reached the orchard just as the clatter of hooves stopped beside his fallen brother. He darted among the furry-barked quoin trunks, then stopped to look back. The silhouettes of three horsemen were gathered around the wounded man in the searchlight's splash. One of the men pointed at the ground. Rolf strained his eyes for a better look. A gunshot came to his ears faintly, and the rider stopped pointing.

ROLF STIFFENED with horror.

There was no question in his mind about Lennie's fate. Slowly he took out the pistol, braced it against the tree-trunk, then realized that there was no hope of hitting the man at such a distance. He pocketed the weapon and stood staring at the scene in froz-

en hate. Someday he would come back, he swore. Someday that man would die.

Then, as the riders began circling about in the area, he turned and drove deeper into the orchard's blackness. Tomorrow the chase would begin in earnest, and he hoped to be in the foothills before morning.

The first feeble rays of dawn, however, found him still in the orchard. In despair, he realized he had wandered onto a side path and had been plodding south instead of west. Soon the aircraft would rise from the city to begin their search. How could he escape them on foot?

Wearily he sat down on a dry stump to consider his plight and to gnaw at a bit of frozen chocolate from the pack. His stirring about roused a giant wool-bat which had spent the night roosting in one of the parabolic cups which constituted the foliage of the quioie trees. The creature came awake with a flutter, peered over the side of the cup, bared its needle-like fangs at the human, and departed with a series of shrill eee's and a whipping of gigantic wings. Rolf started up in fright, then settled back with a disgusted grunt to finish his breakfast.

The bats were harmless unless attacked. The sharp teeth were used to tear through the leathery insulating hide that covered the fruit of the quioie trees, and bats were normally vegetarians. The androons used them for food, and rode them for sport. The winged beasts were untrainable and useless for directed transportation, but they could provide a wild sky ride that ended only when the bat became exhausted and settled to earth. Rolf had seen them soaring above the mountains, looping and twisting in an attempt to unseat their androon passengers.

Directed transportation?

Rolf came to his feet suddenly and stared up at the semi-translucent quioie cups, frost-covered in the dawn. The early sun's rays colored them a dull orange, and here and there a dark hulk lay huddled in the heart of a cup. Other bats had nested for the night, but they were beginning to stir as the light grew brighter. What need did he have of a *directed* ride? One thing was certain: no bat would fly back to the city.

Quickly he gathered up the rope that had bound the pack, spotted a tree that contained a bat, and began shinnying up the furry trunk. The tree shook with his weight. The bat grinned at him from over the side, then took wing noisily, arousing several others. Rolf dropped to the ground with a curse. Snaring the creatures would be a job.

He stared blankly at the tree and waited for inspiration. It came. He stretched the rope out in a straight line on the ground, made a noose at one end, then unzipped his suit and removed the canteen from its warm nest next to his ribs. He began soaking a twelve-foot length of the rope, just aft of the noose. The water froze almost immediately. He built up a strong sheath of ice about it, then carried it to the nearest tree which contained a late sleeper. He tied one end about the trunk, then stood on tiptoe to rattle the noose against the lip of the nest. The ice made a stiff rod.

With a startled squeak, the bat awoke with a jerk that rocked the tree. It caught the rope in its teeth with an angry snap. Rolf threw his weight against the frozen pole, and it became suddenly flexible as the ice shattered. With a shriek to awaken the dead, the bat burst skyward and fought fren-

ziedly at the end of the tether. But the loop was securely locked about its lower jaw, and the sharp teeth nailed it in place.

FOR A MOMENT, Rolf thought the beast would either break the rope or uproot the swaying quioie. The beating wings set up a wind that fanned his face and rocked the neighboring trees. Quickly, he began guiding the creature's struggles so that it wrapped the rope several additional times around the trunk. Then he loosened the knot and tied a loop about his waist. He had meant to transfer the snare to the bat's legs, as the androons did, but the monster's furious struggle made it impossible. He would have to chance the jaw sling.

With some misgivings, he began walking about the trunk to unwind the rope. After two turns, he was being dragged around it. Then he found himself spinning upward, crashing against tree trunks, and tearing through tough quioie foliage. He closed his eyes, clung to the rope, and tried to pull himself higher upon it. Then he was rocking and swaying in the icy wind. The bat swooped, soared and looped over the orchard as it tried to shed its unwanted cargo. Suddenly it climbed high, jerked its neck and folded its wings, tossing Rolf upward like a ball on a string.

He caught a glimpse of the bat's taloned feet slashing toward him, and he caught at them with his hands to protect his face. The claws knifed through the heavy padding of his night-suit, and he felt them dig into the muscles of his forearms. Howling with pain, he clutched the hairy ankles and held on. The jaw rope went slack. With horror, he watched the jaw noose loosen as the beast snapped at it, uttering shrill *skreees* of rage. The



Rolf Kenlan

talons kept clawing at his forearms, but the thickness of the padded sleeves lessened their effect.

They were fluttering a hundred feet above the orchard when the noose fell free, and the rope dangled from Rolf's waist. In mid-air, the bat tried to bend double and slash the man with its fangs, but its jaw seemed to have come unhinged. As Rolf threw his boots up to kick, the bloody slaving mouth only beat against them weakly. But the battle was causing them to plummet earthward again.

A deafening *thwoomp* suddenly shocked Rolf's eardrums, and a dark pall of smoke opened up above them. The bat shrieked in wild terror as a fragment of shrapnel ripped a small hole in a membranous wing. The city had a pair of anti-aircraft guns, and the guards had evidently spotted the wild fight above the orchard.

Then Rolf was no longer holding on. The bat's talons tightened instinctively about his wrists as the creature dived like a fighter-rocket for lower altitude. Another burst of flak flared like a black umbrella with a heart of

fire. A metallic fragment slashed the fabric of Rolf's suit. The bat pulled out of the dive and began skimming along the tree-tops, darting a zig-zag course for the hills and screaming rage against the black threats that bloomed from nowhere with the stink of cordite. Its talons flared open and shut, trying to rid itself of the unwanted weight, but Rolf had recovered his grip on the ankles.

HE DOUBLED his body into a ball, lest he be dashed to death in the treetops. With his knees, he pulled up enough of the trailing rope to catch it in his mouth. Letting go with one hand, he managed to loop it about one of the bat's ankles, and by shifting his grip, about the other. After a moment, his own fate was securely tied to the bat's.

And the bat was fluttering a hysterical course for the hills. The gunners were finding it difficult to cope with the sudden changes in direction. Rolf breathed premature relief as the beast swooped into a gulley and turned out of the city's sight behind a ridge, winging low over the rocks and lichen patches. But the gunners could still lob them over the hill, and they did—but with less accuracy.

He stole a glance backward and saw what he expected to see—aircraft. Three pinpoints in the sky were streaking westward—the city's only jet-planes. Because of their altitude, and their slight off-target heading, he knew they hadn't spotted him yet, but it would certainly be only a matter of minutes. The bat's rust-colored fur offered some camouflage, but they would see the black shadow darting up the hillsides, and dive in for the kill.

The bat drove deeper into the hills, taking a winding course through the

valleys and keeping up a *skree skree* that seemed to become weaker by the moment. Rolf noticed that the sleeves of his suit were blood-drenched, and that some of the sticky fluid was not his own. A bit of shrapnel had found a home.

The planes were circling almost directly overhead, and losing altitude. Rolf noticed that his bat was heading for a low cliff of white rock where the mouths of three caverns yawned toward the sun. Several other of the beasts were sunning themselves on a ledge before the caves. Their nests?

One of the jets suddenly waggled its wings and dropped out of formation. It dived toward the other end of the valley, then banked sharply in a 180-degree turn. Rolf knew it had spotted him, and was coming in for a strafing run. The weakened and wounded bat was flapping its wings wearily, and barely managing to keep aloft as it struggled to reach the cliff caves which it apparently regarded as home. Rolf spurred it on with a couple of pistol shots near its breast. It *skreeed* weakly and summoned a last effort.

Like a shrieking arrow, the first jet streaked past, and Rolf pulled himself as close as possible against the bat's belly. A crash of machine-gun fire ripped a hundred-yard-long swath across the ground, and ricocheting tracers darted skyward. The pilot had overshot. But another jet was streaking up the valley.

THE BAT reached the ledge just as the first blast ploughed the earth, and the sound was answered by a growing chorus of shrill *skrees* from the cave. Rolf threw himself flat on the ledge as the caverns began belching forth a flood of frightened bodies with membranous wings. An army of bats streaked out like a herd of stam-

peding bison. The second jet pulled up sharply to avoid collision. The bats filled the air in a swirling, scurrying, bleating black cloud of confusion. The beast that had carried the fugitive lay dying on the ledge beside him. Rolf cut the rope and waited for the last startled creature to emerge. Then he slid into the mouth of a cave.

The strafing chatter continued intermittently. Evidently they had lost sight of him during the bat stampede. Rolf lay panting in the darkness, completely exhausted from the night of fleeing, emotionally drained by the sight of his brother's and father's death at the hands of the city which had been home. Home? It had been the world.

Why had they hung Jason Kenlan? Because he had committed miscegenation? Rolf remembered the bewilderment on his father's face when they treated him like the worst sort of criminal, remembered his cry, "But they're human, I tell you!"

Before the commission had closed Jason's cell off from the world and held him incommunicado, Rolf had spent half an hour listening to a disjointed account of his father's year of wandering in the Martian wilderness. But the conversation had been punctuated with anxious expressions of worry about the androon woman, and with irrelevant anecdotes concerning life in the androon caverns, or "mines", as Jason had called them.

Nevertheless, Rolf had managed to hear some of the officer's ideas before the guards chased him away. Jason claimed to have discovered evidence that Mars had once been a satellite of Jupiter, that it had been peopled by a now-extinct race of intelligent non-humans, and that the androons had come from Earth while Cro-Magnon man still prowled the forests of Europe.

And that the androons were, in fact, descended from the Cro-Magnon tribes. He claimed that the "Bolsewi" had raided Earth in prehistoric times, captured a dozen pairs of humans, and rocketed them back to Mars for breeding purposes, using the offspring as slave labor.

Rolf and Lennie had quickly decided that their father was executed to close his mouth, rather than to punish him for violating the bio-laws, which would be void if the androons were proved human. Impulsively, and driven by bitterness, they had decided to escape the city and go in search of proof which would posthumously absolve Jason Kenlan of guilt. Jason claimed to have brought such proof, but he had presented it to the Commission in secret session, rather than announcing it directly to the people of Marsville who now would never see it.

OTHER scientists had proposed that Mars had once been the outer moon of Jupiter, while the king planet was still in a molten, fiery state. According to the theory, Mars had received more light and heat from the mother planet than it got from the sun. It had cooled more rapidly than the giant, and had developed the first life in the solar system. But after the fashion of all moons which revolve about fluid-surfaced planets, it drifted farther and farther away from the waning, cooling king. Some of its orbital energy was lost in the daily work of raising and lowering the Jovian tides. When the tides fell back with the moon's passing, the spring-tension of the mutual attraction diminished by a tiny amount, and Mars slipped another inch away from its master. When it reached the point where Sol's gravity met and exactly opposed that of Jove, Mars wavered, drifted free, then

accelerated sunward. Keeping some of Jupiter's orbital velocity, it spiraled inward, dashing through the asteroids to gather up Phobos and Deimos. By missing the sun, of course, it was doomed to wheel forever in its own new orbit.

The scientists who held for such a theory pointed to the eccentricity of Mars' orbit and to the peculiar behavior of her moons, and to the known fact that Earth's own moon was gradually slipping away due to tidal influences. But such scientists were held in political disfavor.

Rolf, having heard what his father had to say, now suspected a political reason for this disfavor. If Mars life had indeed evolved while Mars was a satellite of Jupiter, then Mars' sudden change of orbit would be a disaster of the first magnitude to whatever beings originally inhabited it. The sudden shift in climate might drive them underground, wreck their civilization, and devastate their non-intelligent life-forms and food supply. Such a civilization, after painful rebuilding, might go searching for organisms who could better withstand the changed conditions. And what more likely place to look than upon Mars' new neighbor—Earth? The kidnapped life-forms could be taught to handle the heavier labor, while the natives kept themselves sheltered from the fiercer climate.

If the lost-satellite theory were shown to be true, it might lead to a belief that the androons were human.

But then, Rolf asked himself, why should the Commission care whether the creatures were originally born of Earth or of Mars? The city's tyrannical quarantine had set a barrier about it anyway. Rolf knew no possible answer. Yet he believed that the Commission had killed his father to

keep intact the assumption of the androons' inhumanity. And, in a sense, the Commission had killed his mother—by the ruling that women with children must spend thirty hours a week in factory labor, as well as caring for the family. Overwork had destroyed her health, taken her life. Of the family he had known since birth, Rolf alone remained—Rolf, and hatred.

HE THOUGHT of these things in a hazy way as he lay resting in the mouth of the cave. The jets had stopped strafing the area, but he could still hear their rushing hiss as they circled overhead. Sooner or later, Rolf knew, they would send helicopters to land and search the area for him. Unquestionably, they would search the caves. He must move on—somehow. There could be no rest until he was either safe or dead.

He turned around in the narrow passage-way, then stiffened. For an instant he thought that a bat had breathed in his face, but then, removing his mask, he felt a gentle draft that was warmer than the outer air. The blackness was impenetrable. Fumbling, he found his flashlight and shone it back into the cave, but the tunnel made a turning fifty feet ahead, and he could not see beyond it.

Toward the bend the tunnel widened, and a pair of young bats blinked at him from a ledge. They slowly folded and unfolded their wings, which were still too feeble to bear them aloft. He crawled past them quickly, let the female return and object to his presence. The little beasts eyed him solemnly with little peeps of curiosity. He grinned and paused to scratch the silky neck of one of them. The bat nuzzled his hand affectionately.

"Your old lady oughta warn you against strangers," he told it. "I might

be hungry.”

The bat *eeeked* several times, and maneuvered its neck against Rolf's hand again. He chuckled, scratched it lightly, and moved on around the turn in the tunnel. The cavern widened still more and, by stooping slightly, he found that he could stand. But the passageway took a winding downward course that prevented his seeing what lay ahead. He thought grimly that he might be walking into doom; but it was better, at least, than what lay outside.

Instead of being smooth and water-worn, as were the caverns of Earth, the walls about him were rough, yet glazed over, as though the surface film had once been fused by a sudden and intense heat. Their appearance plus the strange relative warmth of the air troubled him with a vague uneasiness. He was perhaps the first human to tread the winding, sloping corridor, for the bulk of Mars was as yet unexplored. The Commission seemingly didn't want it explored. They wanted Marsville to be built up quickly as the central fortress of future empire. The difficulty of space transportation, its present limitations, meant that Marsville must grow without transfusions of men and tools from Earth. Time, equipment and manpower were scarce commodities which could not be wasted upon satisfying Marsological curiosity. Curiosity would have to wait for production.

SO SAID the Commission. But Rolf wondered if perhaps the Commission didn't know more about Mars than it admitted to the city's citizens, who, although being nominally free within its walls, were born within the Commission's jurisdiction, attended Commission-regulated schools, and read whatever news the Commission

saw fit to release. News of Earth? Rolf knew vaguely that some sort of major political upheaval was in violent progress on the mother planet, but he knew little of its nature. The Commission kept reminding the citizens of Marsville that they were too far from Earth to bother worrying about it.

As he drove deeper into the cave, he began unzipping the bulky suit. It seemed to be growing steadily warmer, although the temperature was probably still below freezing.

Suddenly he stopped, stood rigidly in his tracks, and listened. A sound from behind him? At first he thought that he'd been mistaken. Then he heard it again—a faint rustling sound, as of someone brushing against the rocks. He doused the flashlight, traded it for his pistol, and pressed himself back against the icy wall, holding his breath and waiting. The sound stopped, then continued, drawing nearer.

It could only be an enemy, he thought. There were no androons this close to the city; at least, none had been observed. Quietly, he knelt in the darkness, meaning to shoot upward in case the prowler tripped over him. Then the rustling noise hurried toward him. His finger tightened on the trigger.

Eeeek eek eek...

A warm little mouth nuzzled his hand in the darkness, and a small wing brushed his leg. He cursed disgustedly and switched on the light. The bat-pup had followed him, dragging its wings along the floor. Its tiny talons caught in his suit and clung. It squeaked with tired pleasure as it sagged against his chest drowsily.

But it seemed interested in his hands, which were still dirty with dried blood. "Little vampire!" he grunted at it. But it seemed interested only in

sniffing the scent. He remembered that some of it was bat blood then, and wondered if the creature which bore him to the caves was the pup's mother.

"Whoever she is, she'll have to come after you, doc," he murmured as he resumed the journey. He pried the pup's talons loose from his clothing, and lifted the furry bundle to his shoulder. It squeaked once, folded its wings, and promptly fell asleep.

It was peculiar, he thought, that they couldn't be domesticated. The young were friendly enough. So was a tiger kitten, however. But who said they couldn't be domesticated? The Commission said so, via the schools. And Rolf was prepared to place his complete mistrust in the Commission. The androoms obviously hadn't domesticated the bats, but the androoms were still in a stone age. He decided to keep the pup for a while, unless it grew hungry for a morsel of his arm.

Glancing at his watch, he estimated that he had gone at least a mile. But the cave showed no signs of tapering off or ending. Where were his pursuers? Surely they would guess his whereabouts and follow—or else seal the mouth of the cave with rocks. He shuddered as he thought of it, even though he hadn't intended to return. The steady air movement seemed to insist that there was another exit.

AN HOUR later he came to a wide place, and sat down upon a low rock to rest and to gnaw at a brick of bitter chocolate. He crumbled some of the bar and gave it to the pup, telling himself that it was an investment toward the day when he would be hungry enough to eat a bat. The pup seemed suspicious of the food, but devoured it nevertheless.

Rolf rubbed it between the ears. "Mighty big head you got, doc," he

murmured drowsily. "Either a lot of bone or a lot of brain." In ratio of skull-size to body-size, the bat was brainier than most monkeys. Rolf hadn't noticed it before because the creature's wings added to the apparent body size. Maybe, he thought, if Mars had a future, bats would be the up-and-coming species.

The chocolate was making him sleepy. He sat on the rock, willing himself to arise but remaining seated. The cave was soundless, save for the steady whisper of the air drift. He reminded himself that he'd had no sleep in forty hours. If they were coming, they would surely have caught him by this time—at the weary pace he'd been setting. Perhaps, he thought unhappily, they might really know what lay in the caverns and have decided to leave him with it.

He arose and placed his flashlight on a projecting corner of rock, aiming its beam back along the tunnel in the direction whence he had come. If a guard came around the corner and saw the light, Rolf hoped he'd shoot at it before realizing it wasn't in the fugitive's hand. Thus he would be awakened before he was seen. Then he stretched out in the blackest shadows for a nap. The rocks were rough, and the pup refused to be used for a pillow, but sleep demanded possession of him and cared little for comfort.

Sometime later, Doc's squeaking penetrated the sleep shroud and brought him half awake. He grumbled incoherently and tried to close his ears. Then the squeaks choked off. Rolf sighed contentedly.

A stick of dynamite suddenly exploded inside his skull. Bright tracers arced up out of a bright red fireball. Pain was an intermittent blip dancing on the sweep-line of consciousness. He sat up howling and clawing at his

head. He caught a glimpse of a hand holding a large jagged rock.

The hand moved up, then down. A second jolt ended the pain.

There was flickering torchlight bathing the rough, moist ground. His head hung four feet high, face down, but there was no body beneath it. His chin was buried in a hairy, heavy-muscled back. Then he realized he was draped over someone's shoulder. The ground jogged up and down, and a pair of legs flashed in and out of view. The thighs were human, but from ankle to knee a thick shaggy pelt enveloped them. The small horny feet were wrapped in bat-skin sandals.

An androon was carrying him. He heard voices and knew that there were three of them. He watched the ground moving beneath him. A red dot appeared, then receded behind them. Another appeared. Then another. He was fascinated by the rhythm of the red dots. But he soon discovered that his head was their source.

The blood filled him with slow anger, but he was too weak to fight. His legs were numb, and the bony shoulder shut off circulation in his thighs. With his head hung low, his skull was exploding with pressure.

In petulant rage, he caught a mouthful of the androon's back, sank his teeth in it, and tore. The man-thing set up a slow wailing yell that rose in volume. The androon was afraid to drop him, lest the drop cause Rolf to tear out a patch of his back. He bent his knees, held on gingerly, and howled for help. Rolf bit deeper.

A pair of knuckles jabbed into his cheeks, one on either side. They drilled into his jaws and ground against something tender. He opened his mouth reflexively. The androon put him down. His legs buckled beneath him, and he sat on the hard stone floor.



Krasala

Someone saved him from being kicked in the face by the androon he had bitten.

THE THREE of them stood over him, murmuring among themselves. Rolf glanced around weakly. They had been carrying him deeper into the cave, for there was some moisture on the rocks. He looked up at his captors—two bushy-bearded males and a girl. The males were lean, furry, and barrel-chested with rose-tinted hides and large pale eyes. The girl was slender and well-shaped with peach-fuzz skin. But below the knees she was as furry as the males. Her boot-pelt was parted down the center of the shin and combed back neatly into a cowlick behind her calves. All three of the creatures were dressed in short bat-skin skirts and jackets. They carried short clubs of hatchet-shaped bone.

One of the warriors nudged him with his toe and grunted, "*Hauka d'lag Saralesara, Erdmad!*"

Rolf glared up at him angrily and told him where to go.

The warriors glanced at each other,

then growled a word at the girl. She shook her head doubtfully, paused to summon her thoughts, and spoke to him haltingly.

"Wye you... keel girl Saralesara, Erdman?"

Startled, Rolf made her repeat it. It was Earthtongue, all right, but where had she learned it? There was only one possible answer—his father!

"Who's Saralesara?" he growled. "I didn't kill anybody."

"She go you city. We see Erd-war-r'ors take her out walls. Shoot t'roo head wid Erd-weapod. You Erdman, yes?"

Rolf explained that he had had no part in the killing of his father's androon mate, told them of Jason's execution, and related the events involved in his flight from the city. After he'd told it three times, the girl finally seemed to understand what had happened, but she failed to grasp any reason for it.

"Wye they kill for get marry?" she demanded angrily.

Rolf's pain-dazed mind balked at furnishing any lengthy explanations. His throbbing undermind popped a quotation from Kipling at him. "There are nine and sixty ways of constructing tribal lays, fur-legs."

The girl's eyebrows arched high with surprise. "An avery zeengle wan uv tham is right, huh? You son uv Yason Kanlan, hokay! He usta say that!"

Rolf remembered vaguely that his father had been sold on Kipling, and quoted the old balladeer frequently. The girl turned to the others and began speaking rapidly in the guttural but pleasantly rhythmic androon tongue. Rolf took advantage of the interruption to study them more completely. He had seen androons only in textbook pictures and through binoculars when staring toward the moun-

tains.

They were not more hairy than the Japanese Ainu tribes—above the knee, at least. And they were remarkably well developed for having evolved in Martian gravity—if they had in fact done so. They were tight-muscled and long-limbed, with high foreheads and thin features. With a generous application of the razor, they might easily pass for a polyracial mixture of Scandinavian, American Indian, and Hawaiian.

ONE OF the warriors was holding Doc by the feet. The bat-pup's wings were dragging the ground limply, and its small frightened eyes were darting about in weary terror. The warrior carried the pup like a chicken on its way to the chopping block, and Rolf suspected that the little beast was headed for a cook-pot. He pushed himself toward the warrior and tried to wrest the bat from him. The warrior snatched it back and moved aside with a surly growl. Doc revived enough to squeak plaintively.

Rolf struggled to his feet and demanded the bat. The warrior held it behind his back, and brandished his club at the Earthman. It was a mistake. Doc sank his needle-teeth into the most available portion of androon anatomy. The warrior yelped and released him. Doc fluttered to Rolf's feet, climbed up his clothing, and perched on his shoulder to shriek invective at his former persecutor.

The androons muttered among themselves in surprise. The girl looked at him respectfully. "You blessed by Menbana, god of bat. Is not many who can do this thing."

Rolf nodded solemnly and neglected to mention the bat-blood on his sleeves.

"You go," said the girl, pointing a slender arm deeper into the cavern. "We take you to council."

Rolf took a few steps, then leaned against the wall, his head spinning sickeningly. A warrior stepped on either side of him, caught his arms, and helped him along the tunnel. "What's the council?" he muttered to the girl who walked a few paces ahead, carrying a sputtering torch.

She glanced back at him coolly. "Is three priests of Phanton, Erdman. They say somebody got to die for life of Saralesara. They decide if somebody should be you."

Rolf gasped, then raged at her for a time, telling her about how he had traded a life among his own people to come and find the androon tribes. "Why don't you kill your enemies instead of your friends?" he growled.

She shrugged. "You already here. Is nice and convenient. But I dunno—if you blessed by Menbana, maybe they pick somebody else."

Rolf resolved to treat Doc with all the affection he could muster.

AS THEY moved ever deeper into the cave, Rolf's dazed senses began to warn him that there was something unusual here, something of which he should take note. After a time, they stopped to let him lean against a steel supporting column to rest. He tried to think about it, but the wounded bulge on his head kept firing volleys of pain through his reasoning organ.

They led him on again, dodging the heavy steel columns that gleamed rustlessly in the torchlight. Stainless steel columns?

"What the hell!" he gasped.

The girl looked back curiously. "You pain, Son of Kenlan?"

He stared at the columns in unbelief. They supported the ceiling under the crushing tons of rock overhead. "Who dug these tunnels?" he barked.

The girl laughed, then spoke to the warriors, who also laughed. Rolf repeated the question.

"Gods build tunnels," she told him promptly. "Our fathers served gods here, but gods go away."

Rolf stumbled on for a moment in silence. So it was true—there had been an earlier race of intelligent beings on Mars.

"Where did your people come from?" he asked.

"Gods make us." She laughed again. "You father, he say we come from Erd. Make priests mad, but we don't believe anyway. Gods make us."

They passed a sudden turn in the tunnel, and the girl whipped the torch against the wall, extinguishing it. Rolf stared ahead in amazement. The ceiling was aglow with pale green light, apparently fluorescing from gamma-radiation originating in troughs that ran high along the walls. The corridor was no longer jagged rock, but had been finished and polished to a high lustre. Doorways led off the main hall, and several androons appeared in them to stare at the captive. A hundred yards ahead, he could see a huge, brightly lighted room with a fountain in the center. A steamy pool surrounded the fountain, and an androon woman came out to dip water.

It reminded Rolf of a million-dollar hen house built by a chicken-fancier with money to burn. Certainly no androons had built it. They apparently lived in it without thinking twice about the wonder of it. He could hear the distant hum of machinery—wholly automatic, undoubtedly, and running for thousands of years, untended by its users. Certainly they couldn't understand it—or they wouldn't still be carrying clubs and wearing skins. He glanced at his captors in scorn. They had probably lived here for milleniums

without wondering what processes gave them light, heat, and water.

BUT THEN his scorn faded. How long had man lived in the forests without understanding what process made a tree bloom in Spring to hand him an apple in the Fall? Without knowing why the rain came to give him water, and the sun to give him warmth? He spoke to the girl again.

"Where does the light come from?"

She watched him with a faint frown. "You are ignorant as you father, Erdman. He too think light God have only one eye. Has one big-eye in sky, many little ones here."

He shrugged and looked around again. There was some lead shielding around the wall troughs. They undoubtedly contained a good gamma-emitter which would last for many ages, while the ceiling was coated with a thick phosphor.

They entered the mighty room and he saw that it was as large as a giant space-freighter hangar. He looked around and instantly knew the nature of the builders. Fiery phosphorescent murals depicted scenes of an ancient Mars. And he also saw the place of the bats in the biology of the fourth planet.

For the builders—the "Bolsewi", as his father had called them—were cousins to the bats. The first joints of their wings ended in short arms with long, delicate fingers. Their bodies were spindly, and their heads oversized. Their wings were much smaller than those of the bats. But, as he looked at the murals, he knew that Man was to the apes as the Bolsewi were to the bats—cousins out of a common "Father Abraham". He looked around at his captors questioningly.

"Bolsewi," the girl told him, "The gods who made us."

Androons were congregating in the central room to stare. Rolf was being led toward a flight of steps that led to a second-story balcony. It was hard to believe that they were several thousand feet beneath the surface. But then, the fainter gravity would make deeper excavations possible on Mars. The crushing weight of rock would not be so great.

He looked at the murals again. Some of them involved ships of curious design, obviously meant for flight into space. His heart leapt at one of them—a ship lancing toward a blue-green planet with a single moon. Earth! The Bolsewi had been to Earth, possibly while Man was little above the ape.

So they had killed his father for telling the truth!

The warriors led him up the steps and made him sit upon a low, wide pedestal facing the deep balcony where three stone *cathedrae* were set against the wall. They were unoccupied. Above the *cathedrae* hung a pair of long, thin objects that reminded Rolf of weapons, although he had seen nothing like them before. They appeared to be a pair of bagpipes with a flame thrower in place of the chanter. He questioned the girl.

"They are the sacred symbols of Phanton," she told him. Then she went away, leaving him alone on the platform with the two warrior guards and Doc, who was asleep again on his shoulder.

ROLF WONDERED if he had escaped from the Mars-Commission guards only to be killed in the name of superstition by the guards of the people he had meant to befriend.

Toward the rear of the balcony a door opened and three ancient androons shuffled out, followed by the girl. The old men took their places upon the *cathedrae* with appropriate

rustling of robes and stroking of beards. Then they bent forward to peer officiously at the prisoner. Their bat-skin togas draped them from shoulder to toe, and each wore a metal pendant about his throat. Upon closer examination, Rolf decided that the pendants were stainless steel wing-nuts borrowed from some Bolsewi machine. He snickered. One man's toy was another man's god.

A priest barked a question, and the girl translated: "Why you laugh, Erdman?"

Rolf removed his smile and replied acidly, "I was surprised to see such intelligent-looking gentlemen."

She translated tonelessly and the priests appeared neither pleased nor insulted. They were eyeing the bat-pup while they spoke to the girl.

"The elders ask—you blessed by Menbana, Erdman? They ask also you name. And why you people kill Saralesara, who is daughter of elder?"

Rolf glanced at them quickly and decided that the elder with the fiery demanding eyes was the father of Jason's bride. He assured them that he had always been chummy with Menbana, told them his story again, and insisted that the angry-eyed elder was his grandfather-in-law. The priests appeared baffled as the girl translated. They went into a huddle and argued noisily among themselves. The girl turned frequently to ask questions about his father, questions apparently designed to confirm the contention that he was Jason's son. Rolf began to get the impression that Jason had won their respect and friendship.

The priests broke off their argument suddenly to gaze at him. Rolf felt the chilly nervousness of a prisoner awaiting judgement. Then the father of Saralesara spoke to him directly, without the girl's translating.

"Jason Kenlan was a guest in my

house," he said in slow but well-managed Earthtongue. "We accepted him as one of us, and he took my daughter in marriage. But his heart went back to his own people. He spoke dreamily of a day when Earthmen would be our brothers. He said that they now wish to conquer us and make us slaves—as soon as their city has grown enough. But he said that he would tell them that we are also men, and that then they would welcome us. Is it for this cause that they killed him?"

Rolf nodded, then frowned. "He never was able to tell the people. He told the rulers. That was a mistake. The rulers didn't tell the people. They killed him to keep him quiet. If the people knew, then they would want to leave the city—to make homes in the hills—homes where they could be free as they were once free on Earth...."

The priest leaned forward suddenly. "Your father said that the gods did not make us. He said that our patriarchs came from Earth. Do you believe this also?"

ROLF NOTICED the challenging expression on the oldster's face. He saw the eyes flicker toward the murals—and he paused. It was clear that the old man believed the tribal legend. The caverns had obviously been made by the "gods". The caverns were the androons' world. The world was the Bolsewi's and the fulness thereof—including the inhabitants. Why should the priest believe some far-fetched tale of a foreigner? Rolf weighed his words carefully.

"I believe," he said, "that your tribe and my tribe have a common ancestor. Perhaps the Bolsewi planted some men upon this world and left others upon Earth. If you think the Bolsewi created you, don't you suppose that they could have left some of your kin on another world?"

The old man looked startled. He stared at Rolf thoughtfully, then spoke to the others in the androon tongue. The girl was watching him with a faint smile. Then she winked. He started slightly, having no doubt as to where she had learned to wink. Jason, he thought, must have looked over the crop before he picked Saralesara. At fifty, he had certainly not been ready for the rocking chair and flannel muffler. Rolf wondered if the androons were polygamous, and if Jason had brought home only one of his wives. He ignored the wink and watched the old high-priest, who had finished his discussion with the others.

"You are indeed blessed by Menbana, who is god of wisdom," the priest said. "We think your explanation is possible. The Bolsewi created our patriarchs and carried some of them to your world."

Rolf saw no reason to contend upon which planet man had originated. If the priest wanted to believe that Earthmen were an offshoot of Martian stock, then he would let them believe it. He was at least one notch righter than before. Rolf kept his mouth tightly shut and thanked the elder with a nod.

"You are an outcast now?" the priest asked.

"As long as the present rulers are in power."

"You wish to live among us?"

"That was my intention."

"Then you may do so upon certain conditions." He gestured toward the ones who had captured Rolf. "These were sent out to capture a victim for sacrifice—in reparation for the death of Saralesara. You must see that we find some Earthman to replace yourself."

"And if I don't?"

"Then you will be hung by the heels and skinned alive," said the

priest with a faint smile.

Rolf swallowed a dry place in his throat and thought of the man who had shot his brother. "How much time will you give me?" he grunted.

The priest hesitated. "There is no set time for the sacrifice. But do not wait for Phanton to become impatient. He is a thirsty god. You may have time for your head to heal, and a reasonable time to learn our ways."

Rolf nodded, seeing no way to escape the injunction.

"You must also take up some duty—some responsibility—if you wish to join our people. You might bear arms, or take some housekeeping chores, or..." He paused, eyeing the sleeping bat-pup. "It is a high responsibility for an outsider, but... if you have been blessed by the bat-god..."

ROLF NOTICED that the girl cast a startled glance from one to the other of them. She seemed to shake her head slightly, and her eyes warned him.

"You might join the bat-hunters," said the elder. "But that would also oblige you to become an acolyte of Menbana, and serve his priestesses in the temple. Do you object to this?"

Rolf hesitated thoughtfully. For some reason, the girl was frowning at him and saying "no" with her eyes. But he thought of the possibility of domesticating the bats; if they could be trained from puphood, they should make good mounts, and intelligent. And, as an acolyte in the temple, he might have access to a wealth of information. It was obvious that the androons had attached sacredness to the artifacts of the Bolsewi civilization, and through the minor priesthood he might gain access to some of them.

"Make your choice, Rolf Kenlan," the high-priest told him. "Let me tell you that an acolyte of Menbana must

endure a humiliating initiation, and he is but a lackey to his priestess. But that is somewhat mitigated by his hunting activities, although few acolytes are really able to enjoy hunting after their initiation."

Rolf was irritated by the girl's warning glances. Did she think he couldn't take a little entrance exam? He had been shot at, exposed to the Martian night, nearly dashed to death by a giant bat, strafed by a Marsville jet, and clubbed in the head with a rock—all in the space of a day. What more could he expect from an initiation? A flogging? Dancing on live coals?

He snorted at the girl and spoke to the priest: "It would please me to serve Menbana," he said.

The girl's glance turned to scorn, but the elder smiled and stood up, indicating that the interview was at an end. The three old men started from the balcony, but the girl called out in the androon tongue, addressing the old one as H'nrin. H'nrin turned to frown, and glanced from the girl to the Earthman.

He answered in Earthtongue, but addressed the girl: "I don't know, Krasala. You seem too new to the Sacred Order to make such a request. Your sisters would resent it."

She reddened, apparently because Rolf was being admitted to the conversation via his own language. But she replied in kind: "What is better, High Sir: He son of Yason. I best maid of you daughter, before she keel. I lead warriors who capture him. Is fair...."

"But it was only five passages of Phobos since you were admitted to the order of Menbana."

"An I got no acolyte yet."

The priest sighed. "Very well, I'll speak to your superior. But you'll have to perform his initiation service. Are you prepared for it?"

The girl bowed slightly. "I have study under Na'Riga."

"All right, Krasala, you may have him. Take these two guards to assist you until the initiation." He paused, then spoke briefly to the warriors in the native tongue. They murmured assent.

THE THREE priests departed from the balcony. Rolf glanced at Krasala in irritation, thinking that she might prove to be a haughty little minx of an overseer. But at least she had known his father, as Saralesara's maid, and she might be more kindly disposed toward him than some other female. And, despite the natural boots of silky brown fur, she was a nice-looking morsel of androon

They returned by the way they had come—across the massive room with a fountain and toward the corridor of polished stone. He watched Krasala striding on ahead and he decided petulantly that she wasn't his type. He had always favored the short, pleasingly plump and jolly. While Krasala walked with the too-easy grace of a Commissioner's wife. Her waist was pinched, and her back was straight. She was full-hipped and ample-breasted, but there was nothing softly feminine about her. Or at least nothing *soft*. She was feminine like a female panther, he thought. And he began to feel some misgivings. Maybe he should have volunteered for the soldiery and carried a bone club.

They moved halfway down the corridor, turned left and walked a hundred paces down another. Rolf decided that there must be a network of tunnels beneath the mountains, possibly connecting a group of "community centers" like this one.

Krasala stopped before a large door, unbolted it, and gestured for him to enter. He stepped into a small win-

dowless cell lighted only by a single splotch of phosphor on the ceiling. Its only furnishings were a hammock, a large block of stone for a table, and a small one for a chair. He shook Doc awake and set him on the floor. The bat squeaked resentfully.

"You stay here till 'nishiation," she told him curtly.

Rolf stretched out gratefully in the hammock and gingerly felt his scalp wound. Krasala was still watching him from the doorway.

"You wait," she said. "I get water to wash and bring food."

"Thanks," he grunted. "Bring something for my pet, will you."

She nodded and went away. A few minutes later she returned with a bowl of meat, a bottle of water, and a dripping slab of pickled quois. The bat shared the meat with relish, although Rolf guessed the little beast was eating his own kind. He sat at the table hungrily wolfing the food while Krasala bathed the blood out of his hair.

"Is shame you sucha beeg fool," she told him scornfully.

"What do you mean?"

"Is better you should have been soldier-warrior. You don't like 'nishiation."

"I guess I can take it as well as the next guy. What is it, anyway?"

He felt her shrug indifferently. "Is to make you acolyte of Menbana. Is much pain. Oh well, after it over you won't care anymore. You won't care bout mucha anything."

Rolf stiffened uneasily. "What constitutes the initiation?"

"Hah?"

"What're you going to do to me?"

"Is simple. Guards tie you up to wall." She gestured toward a steel ring imbedded in the stone near the ceiling. "Guards go away. Is not permitted to see. I bring little altar, build fire, heat iron to red glow. I say pray-

er, concentrate you to Menbana. Is simple."

"Consecrate. What do you do with the hot iron?"

"Consecrate you wid it. Menbana don't like his acolytes should fall love wid his priestesses. I fix it so you don't. You don't love anybody after—"

THE HAIR on Rolf's neck turned to wire. He choked on a mouthful of batmeat, spat it across the room and bounded to his feet. "*You do like hell fix it!*" he bellowed six inches from her ear. He grabbed for her with violent intent, but she bounded away like a startled bat. She sailed through the door on overdrive, slammed it in his face and bolted it.

Then she peered back through the peep-hole, white-faced and panting. "Was you idea," she reminded him.

He beat against the door and cursed eloquently. Her eyes were wide with bewilderment.

"You want change your mind?"

"You're damned right I do! Why didn't somebody tell me!"

"Is not correct high priest should speak such things. I shake my head, but you don't pay tenshun. You want me to speak to H'nrin for you?"

He choked out an affirmative and a gasping insult.

"I speak, but H'nrin not like." She scurried away as he tried to get at her through the peep-hole.

Rolf paced his cell in rage, and the bat-pup retreated to a far corner, sensing his anger. He cursed himself for not guessing the nature of the initiation. Primitive religions were full of eunuch-acolytes. And the high priest had dropped a hint of sorts.

He searched through the pockets of his torn clothing. His pistol was either lost or taken from him, but he still had his pocket knife and fifty rounds of ammunition. His captors had not

worked out the folding feature of the blade, and the cartridges would be meaningless to them, unrecognizable as weapons. He could never hope to escape alive, but at least they'd have to kill him before perpetrating such an initiation.

Glowering within himself, he waited for Krasala to return. Surely she could make H'nrin realize that he hadn't known what awaited him in the service of the bat-god. This was worse than being sacrificed in vengeance for Sarasara's murder at the hands of the Commission's guards. This was an assault against his dignity as a man. Raw savagery! He stalked about the cell with growing resolve to kill as many as possible before they clubbed him down.

Agnes later, Krasala peered at him through the peephole again. They stared at each other in silence for a moment.

"Well?"

"He say he already speak to high priestess. She enter you name. He say you get use to it afta while."

"You'll have to kill me first," Rolf roared. "You're a damn bunch of barbarous beasts. Savages! Whatever made me think you're human!"

She watched him calmly, feeling the safety of the door between them. "Savage? Like you father say, 'Are nine-an-sixty ways uv construction tribal laws, an—'"

She bolted away from the door as he reached for the peep-hole with a snarl. Then he heard her footsteps padding away in the corridor.

AFTER MORE floor-pacing, he sat down to damn himself thoroughly. His anger had cost him his only hope. He thought of it belatedly. He might have gotten out of it by making love to the young priestess, much as he disliked the idea. But now his rage

had ruined any possibility along those lines. Surely she wouldn't come back—until she brought the small altar and a hot poker.

He sat at the table and began prying slugs out of the cartridges and emptying the powder into the metal-foil wrapper from a candy bar. When he finished, he had what seemed to be half a pound of high explosive. Then he tried to decide the most effective way to use it.

The hinges were on the other side of the door and there was no keyhole. He might try wedging it under the sill, but he was uncertain that the amount of explosive was enough to blast it off. And also uncertain that it was not too much. He could wait until they came and touch it off in their midst, but he needed a tight-walled container to get a decent explosion out of it. And the cell was small enough to insure his own death if he managed to detonate the others. He laid it aside and pushed the problem to the back of his mental stove to simmer while he made a thorough examination of his cell.

There was a ring in the floor directly below the one in the wall. He could feel himself dangling there, lashed by hands and feet while Krasala did hot tricks with the poker. He shuddered and turned away. There were a few sifts of ashes on the floor where the altar had been placed previously. How many men had entered the cell, to leave it again as something less than men? He wondered if Krasala had already participated in any such savageries. But H'nrin had said she hadn't been a priestess for long. And she had tried to warn him. Maybe she was a nice kid—within the limitations of her society.

Surprisingly, she brought his next meal. She entered warily behind a pair of burly guards, deposited the food on

the table and tossed a cloth bundle in his hammock. "You ceremony robe. Pud it on," she told him.

He fashioned a curse, but left it unspoken. She started out of the cell.

"Wait a minute," he muttered, fingering the knife in his pocket. "Tell me about this thing. What happens."

"I tell you awready. Pretty soon I show you."

He saw with amazement that she was pouting. Primitive psychology, he grunted to himself. The executioner gets his feelings hurt because the condemned man says an unkind word. The executioner calls him an ingrate for squirming when the axe falls.

Rolf forced a sweet smile. "Don't go away yet. There's nobody else I can talk to. Can't we discuss this thing logically?"

"Ha!" she snorted. "You think you grab me. Choke me, mebbe. Like you try to do before. Hah-uh!"

SHE SHOOK her head knowingly and her eyes were wary. She glanced at the guards to make certain they were alert by her side.

"I won't touch you," he assured her. "I lost my temper a while ago. But I know you can't help what you have to do. Just sit down and talk a while."

She stood her ground. "What you wanna talk about?"

He winked at her solemnly, remembering that she had done it in the council meeting. "Who knows? I may never enjoy the company of a pretty girl again."

Primitive minds flattered easily, he noticed. She reddened, let a smile flicker, then erased it and looked unhappy. She immediately perched on the corner of the table and said, "We talk."

Conceited little savage, he thought angrily, but kept a wistful smile in

place. "The guards," he murmured miserably. "Do they have to stand there staring that way?"

She stiffened suspiciously, watched his bland gaze for a moment, then began to relax. "You promise?"

"I promise."

She snapped an order at the guards, and they moved out into the corridor. "They come kill you if you don't behave," she told him calmly.

He put on a wounded expression which she noted with another smile. She sat dangling furry shins over the edge of the stone table and watching him curiously. He guessed her age at eighteen, an age which could be both cruel and sentimental. He let his eyes wander over her young figure in a casual but interested way.

"The last time," he muttered dolefully. "I guess I won't forget."

He could see her wince, but he knew very well that if he had been looking at some other wench she would have treated the self-pitying statement with merciless sarcasm or icy indifference.

"Tell me," he said, "can you ever marry while in the service of Menbana?"

"Of course not. Menbana is a jealous god."

"It's a pity, but I'm glad. If I'm to be your acolyte, then at least I'll be satisfied that someone else can't... well... can't have you..."

He paused to let it take a set before he continued. She sniffed unconvincingly and tossed her head, but she appeared disturbed. He felt himself treading the borderline of ridiculousness. Was he laying it on too thick? But it had to be a swift frontal assault before she got her wind.

He continued in a bitter voice: "...but I guess it won't matter, will it? I won't be able to care. You'll just be a piece of furniture, like this table. It's like H'nrin said, the acolytes aren't

able to enjoy much of anything...not even looking at such a one as you."

She whirled to stare at him. He weighed her expression and decided that it was born of complete confusion. If he didn't act quickly, she might defend herself against the confusion by waxing suddenly derisive. He leaned forward slowly, keeping his eyes on hers, and making no sudden moves to startle her. Gradually he came to his feet and touched her bare arm with his fingertips. Absorbed in his unexpected display, she swayed lightly against the hand. But he knew that in a moment she would react strongly against her brief weakness. He inched nearer, murmuring half-incomprehensible things to her eyes. In his other hand was the pocketknife. Soon, his face was a breath away from hers, and she was still watching the slow whisper of his lips. He slipped his arms around behind her, aiming the knife for her ribs.

SUDDENLY SHE kissed him, to his surprise and dismay. She stood up, wound her arms around his neck, and did it again. He toyed for an instant with the idea of switching back to a former plan, but decided he couldn't trust her. He'd have to go on with what he had intended.

"Send the guards away," he whispered.

"They can't see inside," she breathed, fawning his mouth with her lips.

He pressed the point of the knife against her back. "Send the guards away," he repeated.

She caught a small breath of surprise and became rigid as a board, staring at him but saying nothing.

"I'm sorry, kid," he whispered again. "You're probably a nice sort, on your own way. But damned if I'll let you butcher me, even if your tribe

tells you that it's really all the rage this season, and your gods approve it. Now, send the guards away. I won't hurt you if you behave. If you don't, I'll kill you."

She was still staring at him in bewilderment. He caught her shoulder and moved around behind her. He sat on the table and pulled her back against him with the knife against her kidney. "Tell the guards to take a walk," he hissed, giving her a light jab.

She hesitated, then called out in a calm voice in the androon tongue. There was an unhurried shuffling of feet in the hallway. Then, to Rolf's dismay, the bolt snapped and the guards entered. They stopped in the doorway, staring at the close positioning of the priestess and the prisoner. One of them asked a quick question. She shook her head and answered with a monosyllable. Obviously they were unaware that he had a knife against her back. She began to pull away from him. Rolf saw despairingly that he must either kill her or let her go.

Suddenly she wrenched free, and he concealed the knife quickly. The guards started forward, but she waved them back with a scornful snort. She turned in the doorway, and glanced back coolly.

"Are more than nine and sixty," she said. "Put on the ceremony cloak. I be back soon. You eat now."

They left his cell and the bolt clicked in place. He stared after her for a moment. Why hadn't he killed the treacherous wench? But then, he was no match for two burly guards. He might as well concentrate on working an effective explosive out of the gunpowder. He sat down at the table and unrolled the package.

Why had she left him the knife? Why hadn't she warned the guards of

what was happening?

He shrugged. What difference did it make? He spread the metal foil out smoothly, then covered it with a thick layer of powder and rolled it into a cylinder. He crimped one end tightly, and twisted the other out into a fuse. A thick yellow suet was congealing atop his cooling dish of meat. He covered the foil cylinder with the grease, then rolled it in a scrap of paper from his pocket. He sliced half a dozen of the soft lead slugs into thin slivers, and stuck them to the cylinder with more suet. After another wrapping of paper, he laid the crude grenade aside to set while he ate some of the meat. It had a peculiar taste, he thought, but blamed it on his nervousness.

WHEN THEY entered the cell, he intended to light the grenade and toss it, then make a dash during the confusion. He wondered if the clumsy contraption would explode at all, and he doubted seriously that it would inflict any grave injuries. But if it even made a bright flare and a hiss, it might divert the guards' attention for an instant.

He yawned suddenly and stretched. It was a helluva time to get sleepy. He stood up and walked around the table, lurching against it slightly. The metallic after-taste of the meat still lingered in his mouth. He was staggering a little as he sat down again.

Drugs! The meat...they were insuring his peaceful behaviour. He fumbled in his pockets, searching for a match. A match...to light the powder. Weren't there footsteps in the hallway...and voices? The pockets were hard to find among all the folds of cloth. He pawed at them, then decided he'd lost his matches. He wobbled dangerously.

They were just outside the door,

and the bolt snapped suddenly. What to do with the grenade? They'd have him in the silly ceremonial robe in a few minutes. Pockets were no good. Where?

He crammed the egg-sized object in his mouth as they entered, then collapsed across the stone table, thinking, "Maybe she'll light it for me with her poker."

He was hanging by his wrists, and he couldn't let go. He tried to open his eyes, but they wandered and fogged. At last he managed it, but he saw through a mist of sleep. The girl—Krasala—she was standing before a tongue of blue flame that arose from a gleaming brazier. Her arms were outstretched, and she chanted a polytonal litany to the fire wherein lay a blunt knife of reddening steel.

The pain in his shoulders kept him half awake and he resented it. Why the hell was he dressed in the silly blue nightshirt? Something in his mouth—oh, the grenade! He was supposed to spit it in the brazier. He worked it to between his front teeth, and tried to keep his head straight. The brazier was large enough, and close enough, but he was so unsteady.

The girl lifted the hot iron and turned. She saw his eyes were open, and gazed at him steadily. He summoned energy to spit the explosive, but she spoke to him, stepping closer.

"Scream, Rolf Kenlan," she whispered. "Scream convincingly."

How could he scream with the grenade in his mouth? No, he wouldn't scream. He'd spit death in the pot.

"Scream!" she commanded irritably, and touched his thigh with the hot iron. It sizzled and fried for an instant, and Rolf screamed fervently. The grenade shot toward the altar, missed the brazier, and rolled aside.

"Keep screaming," she told him, folding her arms and stepping back a



"Put that gun down," Lalyahe commanded. "Let him show us what he can do."

pace.

He howled with real artistry. He eyed the hot iron and shrieked for mercy. She winked at him and nodded.

"We gotta get the right smell, too," she said, and prodded the iron into what was left of the dish of meat. The cell filled with the odor of burned flesh.

"Hokay, you faint now."

She chanted again briefly, then burned the thongs that bound him to the steel rings. He crumpled weakly to the floor. She tugged at his arm and helped him into the hammock.

"You sleep."

THE CELL door opened. An elderly hag entered with a pair of guards, looked around, and nodded. She spoke briefly to Krasala and seemed satisfied by the answer. They cleaned up the mess, and just before they left, Rolf saw the hag pick up the grenade, look at it curiously, and toss it in the brazier. They started down the corridor.

"Krasala! Wait!" he muttered.

She paused in the doorway while the others moved on ahead.

"Yes? Whatchoo want?"

There was a muffled roar from the hallway, followed by several shrieks.

"Nothing," he murmured. "Never mind."

He rolled over and went to sleep peacefully, after making certain that he was still anatomically intact.

When he awoke, the girl was sitting in his cell watching him with a placid green-eyed gaze.

"You sleep two days," she told him.

He rolled over and sat up, shaking the fuzz from his mind.

She narrowed her eyes and gazed at him accusingly. "Firepot blow up and blast off high priestess' hands. Burn off all her hair. She might die.

Whatchoo know about?"

He shrugged innocently. "It's too bad. What should I know about it?"

"I dunno. Never happen before. I think you magic."

"Anybody else think so?"

"High priestess does. Council don't believe."

"The will of Menbana," he told her. "Thanks for leaving me in one piece."

She snorted angrily. "You beeg fool. Why you think I ask H'nrin for you in first place? He might give you to somebody who really do it."

Rolf began to see the light. "Do most of them do it or not?"

"Is supposed to. Old ugly ones do. Others don't." She walked to the door and swung it open. "You free to go now, when you feel like. But you supposed to be sick a few days."

Rolf nodded and decided to be properly sick. He wanted no repetition of the initiating procedure.

He lay in his cell for a time, making plans for the future. His father's goal had been to convince the people of Marsville that the androoms were human and not unfriendly, that there were no threats lurking in the mountains to prevent a free expansion and colonization. Contrary beliefs held the people imprisoned in the city and under the thumb of the Commission.

Rolf now thought he knew why the Commission imposed the rigid segregation and insisted upon the androoms' inhumanity. The colonization of Mars was to be a controlled colonization, not a free one. The people of Marsville, if given their liberty to roam forth, would shed the shackles of the tightly integrated city, and build homes for themselves in the hills and valleys where they would be free to live as their ancestors had done on the last frontiers of Earth. Growing room always gave men freedom, but it also denied the hope for a closely knit in-

dustrial civilization, which was Earth's hope for Mars. A man would not work in a crowded factory if he could own a thousand acres of land, rule his family clan, and be free of outside interference. He turned to the specialized bee-hive society of industrial civilization only when the population-density became so high as to void the hope of living free on the land.

ANOTHER FACTOR might be the fact that there were thousands of androons on Mars for every Earthman. Earth culture could easily be swallowed up by sheer weight of numbers, by intermingling and intermarriage—if such intermingling ever occurred. Rolf doubted that it would. The androons stuck close to their caverns, their traditional home. Even since the Dawson-Heide Operation Icecap had made the surface conditions endurable, the androons had kept to their underground habitation, because the caverns had always been their world. Probably, after many more generations, they would gradually seep forth to live upon the surface, but it would be a slow process. And when the Earthlings settled, they would settle on the surface. There would be some intermingling, but not enough to destroy the cultural traditions of the settlers.

Rolf envisioned the consequences of the Commission's probable plan. They would allow Marsville to expand very slowly, keeping the tight industrial organization and the concentrated population, with its consequent regimentation of the citizenry. The smoking industrial monster would spread gradually across the plain until it became the manufacturing belt of a nation, still dependent upon its hydroponic tanks for food, and upon the factories for all of its needs. The Commission, which was Earth-appointed

and subject to recall, meant to keep close supervision of the industrial production, the culture, and the very lives of the people, to insure that they remained loyal and useful vassals of Earth.

Rolf asked himself how a Martian civilization could be useful to the mother planet, when space freighting was so difficult that the Commission could not afford to replenish Marsville with the fruits of Earth industry. Marsville had to take care of itself. But then it struck him that space freighting would not be so difficult in reverse. A ship needed less fuel to escape Martian gravity with full load. And the twin moons made good stockpiling points for cargo. Even combustion rockets could run ferry service between Mars and her satellites, where nuclear-powered ships could await conjunction of the planets. A good healthy boot kick would be nearly enough to get a ship off Phobos or Deimos, and even the sun's gravity would aid the flight of the freighter bearing Martian steel earthward. On the return trip, the freighter would be empty—or loaded with chewing gum, maybe.

Was the Commission aiming to make a slave planet out of Mars? A working planet that labored while Earth played?

And how would the androons figure in such a plan? There was only one possible answer. An industrial feudalism in which the androons were at the bottom rung of the ladder. Empires had always kept their colonial slaves happy by letting the slaves have lesser slaves to serve them. Even now there was grumbling talk in the city: "Why don't we go out and round up a bunch of andies to do some of this dirty work?"

And the Commission did nothing to discourage such talk, although they politely refused. Their attitude was,

"Wait awhile. Not yet." But some day they would graciously assent. That day would be when Earth started bleeding Mars of her resources.

IN A FEW more generations, the Commission would succeed in culturally conditioning the Marsville citizenry to such an extent that they would regard themselves as rulers by divine right over Mars, the androons as their natural slaves, and Earth as their rightful king. Then there would be no hope for a free society on Mars. Hope for such had passed on Earth long ago. It passed when the population exceeded three billion or thereabouts. Freedom was inversely proportional to man-density per square mile.

Rolf was not thinking of these things for the first time. Snatches of such ideas had come to him before and, indeed, he had discussed them casually and quietly with other citizens of the city. Such talk was considered unpatriotic, but it was something like griping about dirty politics or congressional stupidity. Nobody bothered to do anything about it.

But now that the Commission had killed his father and his brother, Rolf felt differently toward it. The Commission was his personal enemy now, and he saw Jason and Lennie as sacrifices to its ambitions for empire. The city was the mother that had nursed him from birth, and he loved the city. But the Commission ruled her cruelly, and he could never see her again unless the Commission's power were destroyed.

So? What could he do about it? He would have a hard time getting much effective aid from the superstitious androons.

On the third day after his initiation, H'nrin and the other two council members came to Rolf's quarters. The oldsters' faces were grim with solemn

anger, and they wasted little time for ceremony.

"Perhaps you can tell us," H'nrin said acidly, "why a party from your city entered our caves, killed three bat-hunters, captured four warriors and two women, and carried them away in mechanical bats. Phantom is becoming very thirsty indeed."

Rolf gasped. "When did this happen?"

"This very morning."

"How close did they come to the living quarters here?"

"A thousand paces, perhaps. What difference does it make?"

"A lot, maybe. The city's rulers know you live underground, but they've never explored these places. They probably don't really know what's down here. It might be dangerous for you if they did know."

"Why?"

"There seems to be some valuable machinery here. They might decide to take it off your hands."

H'nrin stiffened visibly. "The creations of the Bolsewi are holy. Some of them are even gods. We will guard them with our lives." He paused, then relaxed slightly. "But surely the captives won't tell."

"They will when the Commission police get through with them. Dad probably told them anyway, come to think of it." He hesitated. "Maybe that's it. Maybe they're afraid I'll teach you how to use the Bolsewi machinery."

H'nrin recoiled at the thought of such sacrilege. "We must not touch the articles of the gods."

"Yeah? Well, they don't know that. I can guess what their plans are if you'll show me everything that Dad saw while he was down here. I want to know how much they learned from him."

H'NRIN DEMURRED at first, then submitted reluctantly when Rolf hinted direly of things that the Commission might do.

"You should see first the temple of Menbana, where you will serve as acolyte. I will have your priestess conduct you there." He paused, eyeing Rolf suspiciously. "I've heard rumors about your initiation... certain irregularities. And now I think I'm inclined to believe them. You don't seem to be grieving particularly for your lost manhood."

Rolf paled. "I am, I assure you!"

"Baloney—as your father used to say. However, it's not my business. You're now the property of the Order of Menbana, which is autonomous in such matters. If they choose to wink at their own code, I shan't interfere."

"Thank you," said Rolf.

"One thing, however. If the high priestess manages to convince me that you were responsible for the fire-pot's behavior, I'll have you flayed."

Rolf thanked him again. He was sorry that the old hag had gotten her just deserts, but he didn't feel responsible. The initiation was a crime against sanity and human reason, and if she got her hand blown off while supervising its perpetration, then it was probably the will of some god or other—maybe even Menbana.

Krasala brought him another night-shirt—a white one this time—and briefed him on temple ritual. He was to enter the temple with a dragging pace, just behind Krasala, and his only duty was to keep the tips of her artificial bat-wings from dragging the floor. They would advance to kiss the great toe of the high priestess who sat upon the wing of Menbana.

"The same high priestess?" he asked anxiously.

"No. She's still fighting the devil

that entered her arm. They say she'll retire. There's a new one now."

"Good," he grunted as they went out into the corridor. "Say, your Earthtongue is improving."

"It's come back. Long time since I talk it with Saralesara. Now you get in back of me. Is not right for acolyte to walk beside priestess."

They passed across the fountain room and entered one of the many corridors which led away from it. The temple lay at its end, but a draped doorway hid it from view. Krasala left him in the corridor and stepped into an anteroom to vest.

When she came out, smiling faintly and self consciously, he closed his eyes and shook his head. Now he knew why the acolytes were eunuchs. Her vestments consisted of a pair of bat-wings and a gauze kerchief. His confusion brought back her pout. She tossed her head and flicked the kerchief under his nose. "Follow me, acolyte. Lift my wings."

AT LEAST there was a certain amount of modesty in her noble walk, he thought as he followed her into the House of Menbana, holding the tips of the wings delicately as he had been instructed to do.

The temple was gloomy, pierced by the flickering tongues of yellow fat-burners and hazed by their smoke. The room was gigantic and appeared ceilingless. Rolf peered about him hurriedly trying to digest all that he saw—the stately processions of bat-winged priestesses, followed by their submissive acolytes, the side-altars along the walls. He noticed that many of the acolytes were plump and dull-eyed creatures, while others followed their mistresses with a not-so-humble stride that suggested the continued influence of testosterone. Rolf grinned

to himself; there seemed to be a certain correlation between the shapeliness of the priestess and the masculinity of her acolyte.

"Stop crowding me!" Krasala hissed. "Sorry."

For the first time, he searched the room for the focus of activity. It lay directly ahead. The high priestess, a middle-aged but not unshapely androon, sat between a pair of sputtering fat-burners. She wore a bat's head as well as wings. Rolf strained his eyes in the gloomy light. Then he stopped in stunned unbelief, dropping Krasala's wingtips.

Menbana, bat-deity, and god of knowledge, was an ancient, mouldering, stub-winged rocket craft, obviously meant for transatmospheric service. The androons had lovingly given it a bat-skin hide, stitched over it like a jacket, but the landing gear and the jet tubes were still in evidence. He guessed by its design that it had not been used for interplanetary rocketing, but rather perhaps for moon flight.

Krasala was shaking his arm in rage and muttering about blasphemy. Rolf resumed his duty in awed silence. Such grandiose stupidity was awe-inspiring. The man who suggested the experiment with the monkeys in a roomful of typewriters probably hadn't considered the possibility that the anthropoids might start worshipping the machines.

They advanced toward the ship, where the high priestess perched on a wingtip. Krasala knelt to kiss the superior's horny toe, and Rolf felt himself being inspected by the eyes that lay behind the unblinking bat's head. The seeress was bulgy in spots, with a middle-age sag, but she might have been a beauty in her day. She said nothing and they moved to take their place in line but, glancing over his shoulder, Rolf saw the bat's head turn to stare after them.

The lesser priestesses formed a long line facing Menbana, while their acolytes stood silently behind them. They began a monotonous chant, while the high priestess slipped down from her wing tip to begin the sacrifice. She accepted a thurible from a burly acolyte, then leaned close to whisper something to him. His eyes swept along the rank of priestesses; then he hurried away. The high priestess incensed Menbana with the thurible. A portable altar was brought forward, and she began a ritual offering of food.

ROLF FELT someone nudging his elbow. He glanced around and saw the burly acolyte who had whispered with the high priestess. The man touched his fingers to his lips for silence. He was accompanied by a short pudgy eunuch who wheezed and looked frightened. The burly man took Krasala's wingtips away from Rolf and gave them to the eunuch. Rolf was pushed roughly aside.

"What's the idea?"

"Shhhh!"

The burly acolyte took his arm and tugged him quickly away. Krasala seemed unaware of the change in her escort. Rolf judged the size of the acolyte and decided to follow peacefully. He was led to a small phosphor-lighted anteroom behind a row of columns.

"You wait. Lalyahe come," grunted the acolyte.

"Who's Lalyahe?"

The acolyte nodded gravely. "You wait. Lalyahe come."

"Your mother was a mangy bat," said Rolf.

The acolyte nodded gravely again. "You wait. Lalyahe come," he repeated, proving the extent of his vocabulary. He left the room, leaving the door ajar.

Rolf sat on a stone pedestal and listened to the chanting in the temple. He was certain that Lalyahe was the high priestess, but the open door suggested that her intentions were not unfriendly.

The temple had evidently been some sort of hangar at one time, and the lack of a visible ceiling suggested that it had opened to the surface in ages past. Or perhaps, far up in the darkness, there were swinging hatchways that opened it to the sky.

He glanced around the anteroom curiously. There was a table altar at one wall, and above the altar were a pair of small doors. He tugged them open and found an array of small tools hung on steel pegs in the cabinet. Some of them were recognizable—a drill with a self-contained power unit of some sort, a group of oddly shaped wrenches, a device that had the appearance of a spray gun. They were fashioned of some rustless metal that gleamed dully in the dim light. He toyed with some of them, but the moving parts were frozen from lack of lubricant.

Glancing around the room again he saw other cabinets set in the walls. Making a complete inspection of them, he found parts bins, racks of bottles, and one of the bagpipe affairs that hung over the *cathedrae* of the council. He examined the last carefully. It consisted of a collapsible plastic-metal tank, a long tube or barrel, a hand crank with a vernier slide geared to it, and a heavy steel breech that suggested high pressures. A pair of tiny rings atop the tube and at either end of it suggested gun-sights. He tried to turn the crank but the mechanism was frozen.

SEARCHING among the bottles he found several that still contained fluid. The one that opened most easily was a jellied lubricant. He used it to



Lalyahe

loosen the caps on some of the others. One liquid smelled vaguely like kerosene. He poured some of it in with the lubricant and stepped back. Nothing terrifying happened. He shook the bottle and the lubricant dissolved to make a thin oil. He used it to soak the breach and movable parts of the "bagpipe" until the crank came unfrozen. He worked at it until it turned freely.

Shaking the mechanism, he heard a sloshing sound in the collapsible tank. It was half full of liquid. He gave the crank a few turns and noticed that the tank began to expand. He kept twisting it until a pair of heavy lines met and became one on the vernier. The tank had grown plump and hard, the size of a basketball. He found a button on the breach, pointed the tube toward the wall, and fingered the button thoughtfully.

Then, as an afterthought, he found a length of heavy wire in a cabinet and prodded it into the barrel. It brought out gobs of fibrous dust. He soaked the barrel in oil and scraped out choking dust wads with the wire. When he had it clear, he again fingered the stud nervously.

Suddenly he was aware that the chanting had ceased in the temple. He glanced up just in time to see the door swing open and the high priestess appear in the entranceway. She froze at the sight, caught at the door jambs for support, and stared down at the blasphemy on the floor.

Rolf sat spraddlelegged in his "night-shirt" ceremonial robe amid a litter of bottles and tools. He returned her stare apprehensively. She ripped off the bat's head, letting a frowsy mop of gray-brown hair burst forth. She turned and shrieked a word into the temple. It could only have been a summons for the guards.

Rolf dived forward, caught her ankle and dragged her inside, kicking and clawing. The bolt was on the inside of the door. He slammed and locked it as a group of acolytes faced toward the anteroom. Then he tried to hold off the snarling fury of the high priestess. She raked at his arms with fingernails while he seized her throat and held her away. He pushed her roughly into a corner, tripped her, then pinned her against the wall with his foot when she fell.

"Be good, baby, or I'll kick you to sleep," he growled.

Gradually she subsided, panting and glaring at him.

"Now, send your flunkies away!" he told her, jerking his thumb at the door where the guards were battering against the bolt. He increased the pressure of his foot to speed her reaction.

She moaned and called out: "*W'nu poyit ya!*"

The battering ceased.

"Okay, what did you want to see me about?" he asked acidly. "Or do you speak Earthtongue?"

"Your father taught it to all our leaders," she replied, staring at the bag-pipe on the floor.

He picked it up. "You know what

this is?"

"Holy symbol of Phanton, god of light, king of the gods. It is not to be touched by such as you—under penalty of death."

"Nobody but you has seen me with it. What did you call me here for?"

SHE WAS silent for a time, her eyes narrowed thoughtfully. She moistened her lips nervously, and kept glancing toward the door. She had a small sensual face, touched lightly by age and pleasurable living.

"You have much magic, don't you, Earthman?"

Rolf neglected to disagree with her.

"I called you here because your magic disposed of my rival. I wished to make you my acolyte." Her voice was slow and musing, and she glanced from Rolf to the bagpipe with a calculating expression. "Perhaps none of the others did see you with it, at that."

He grinned at her. "That's right. But what do you want with me as an acolyte? And if there's another induction ceremony involved, the answer's no."

She stiffened proudly. "It's not for you to refuse," she snapped. Then snorted scornfully: "You have already been consecrated to Menbana. That is enough. Tell me, are you a eunuch?"

"Why, of course!" he answered nervously.

"You lie! Ha! I have heard how this young wench Krasala is mooning over you. Would she fall in love with a eunuch? Let me tell you. There are two factions among us. One faction believes that it is enough if the acolytes are merely celibates—which is to say, eunuchs in spirit."

"Which party do you belong to?"

She gave him a speculative head-to-toe glance which suggested that there might be a third faction which favored an altogether different course.

"Let it suffice to say that you will not need to endure reconsecration. I might manage to forget your blasphemy, if you will serve as my acolyte and teach me your magic."

They watched each other for a moment. Rolf was still fingering the Phantom gun. "Useful magic will involve blasphemy," he told her. "You'll become a party to it."

She frowned haughtily. "As high priestess, I define what is blasphemy, in the temple of Menbana, at least."

He nodded. This could possibly be a useful alliance, although he suspected Lalyahe of some rather high and shady ambitions. "Very well," he told her, "I'll serve as your acolyte. But we'll make a trade on this magic business."

"I make no bargains."

"I make no magic."

Her eyes flared haughtily for a moment, but she asked, "What do you want of me?"

"Your help in a rather hopeless cause—that of unseating the rulers of the surface city and breaking down the barriers that surround it."

SHE CAUGHT her breath, then smiled wickedly at him, sat down on the table altar and leaned her elbows on her knees to grin. "Ah! You wish to rule your city; I wish to rule mine. We should work well together, son of Kenlan. You are not the gentle man your father was. Tell me, would you like to be my lover as well as my acolyte?"

Rolf suppressed a shudder and stammered apologetically. She sighed and shrugged. "I thought not. Krasala has caught your eye. Well, your bare shins are rather repulsive anyway. But enough of that. Shall we work together for our purposes?"

"Maybe. I suggest we make some plans." He paused, listening to the

mutter of voices beyond the door. "Send that rabble away and then we'll talk."

She hesitated, then nodded. "Get the holy articles out of sight. I'll open the door to reassure them. The sacrifice is over; it's time to clear the temple anyway."

Rolf quickly gathered up the scattered relics and returned them to their cabinets. But he propped the bagpipe in a corner, and stood in front of it for concealment. Lalyahe watched with mingled curiosity and superstitious nervousness. Then she unbolted the door and swung it ajar. The mutter arose to a babble. She barked several curt words, and the babble ceased. Rolf caught a glimpse of Krasala peering over the high priestess' shoulder, and he shivered at the murderous expression on her pretty face. Lalyahe spoke again, and the crowd began dispersing.

She closed the door, leaned against it, and smiled nastily at him. "I think I shall have your Krasala flogged. Did you see the way she glared at me?"

"You do and the deal's off."

"Don't you threaten me, acolyte!" she snapped, advancing to snap her fingers in his face.

Rolf grinned mockingly, but said nothing. He decided that it would be a bad day for the androon tribe if Lalyahe ever got the power she desired. She glared at his grin for a moment, then said, "Well! The priestesses have gone. Show me a demonstration of your magic."

Silently, he recovered the bagpipe and stepped to the door. The temple was empty, save for a pair of guards that flanked the entrance. "Send them away," he told her.

SHE PUSHED her way past him and shouted across the great room in a piercing voice that sent echoes rever-

berating from high above them. The guards departed silently. Rolf moved outside, carrying the bagpipe and the stiff wire. He removed a fat-burner from its tripod, dragged the tripod near a massive column that supported a balcony, and rested the bagpipe against it, aiming the muzzle toward the vault of darkness overhead. "Keep out of the way," he told her, as he stepped behind the column and straightened the wire into a prod.

"What will happen?" she asked nervously.

"I'm not sure," he grunted uneasily. Then he leaned around the column and pressed the button with the wire.

There was a brief high-pitched shriek and a burst of light. It was followed by a distant *ping*, a bright violet light that flooded the temple, and a continuous sizzle from above. The gun had fallen from the tripod. Rolf stepped out to recover it, and darted back just in time to escape a white-hot shower of sparks that danced downward and rolled about the main floor. Lalyahe was whimpering insanely. She crouched in the foetal position and hid her head in her arms.

Rolf glanced upward around the edge of the balcony and saw a ball of violet incandescence clinging to the underside of a metal ceiling a thousand feet above them. It burned out suddenly, but the immediate vicinity lingered at white heat, dripping bits of liquid hell. By its light, he could see that the ceiling was braced with heavy struts that slanted down to the side-walls, where they appeared heavily anchored.

The racket had aroused the androons in the caverns beyond, and he heard them racing toward the entrance. He kicked Lalyahe lightly in the hams and dragged her to her feet. She was still whimpering and glancing around with wild frightened eyes. He

shook her.

"Brace up!" he growled. "It's over. All but the shouting. Now, get this straight. Your crowd is coming back. Tell them that Menbana has spoken, or something." He shook her again. "Listen to me!"

She nodded weakly. "I'm listening. But why should I tell them that?"

"You want prestige, don't you? Tell them Menbana has spoken to you personally. And that you'll reveal his prophecy later."

Androons were pouring into the temple and stopping to stare up at the distant ceiling, which had subsided to a cherry red heat. Rolf pushed the high priestess out into the open, then darted back to the anteroom to conceal the weapon. Suddenly Lalyahe's fog-horn contralto was ringing out dramatically in the temple, and Rolf grinned to himself. The grasping witch was shivering in her fur boots, but she did a good job of rabble-rousing. The mob fell silent. She cried out several words of a ritual chant, and after a moment the crowd sang a brief responsory. She was quieting them with an impromptu service honoring Menbana, whose bat-fur jacket was smouldering impressively from the shower of sparks.

WHEN THE chanting was done, she spoke a few sonorous sentences, which were followed by the shuffling of many feet. Lalyahe returned to the anteroom. Some of her arrogant calm had returned, but she gazed at him in a new and fearful light.

"Was that sufficient magic for you?"

She nodded grudgingly. "A few more demonstrations like that and I shall be able to unseat the council, I think. But be careful you don't go too far." She glanced at the weapon in the

corner. "This is not your magic. This is the magic of the Bolsewi."

"True. But I control it. Have any of you done that before?"

"No. It's not good to do so. When the Bolsewi went away, they instructed our ancestors to guard their possessions and worship them until the gods returned. It's not good to tamper this way."

Rolf decided her ambitions needed further whetting. "Baloney!" he snapped. "How many other tribes are there besides this one?"

She shook her head. "They are countless. It is said that there is no end to these caverns."

"All right! By controlling this magic, you can rule all the tribes. Why think of stopping with this one?"

She gnawed at her lower lip and stared speculatively at the bagpipe. "Why should you suggest this to me, son of Kenlan?"

"Because you can't do it without my help, and I want you to buy that help by helping me."

"I don't trust you."

"I don't trust you either, but it might be a good idea to start."

"What do you expect from me?" she asked suspiciously.

"Twenty-five bat-hunters who aren't eunuchs: Able-bodied men who will obey orders. And I want access to all the so-called holy articles in your jurisdiction."

"Why? Why do you want the men?"

"We'll need a small fighting force," he explained impatiently. "And twenty-five are few enough to attract little attention."

"Don't worry about that, Kenlan," she said. "Only priestesses and their acolytes may enter Menbana's temple. You won't be observed."

"Will you provide the men? And I'll need a translator, too."

She nodded. "I'll give you the men,

but the translator...none of the acolytes speaks Earthtongue. Krasala might..."

"No!" he snapped, remembering her furious expression outside the ante-room.

"Krasala might prove treacherous," Lalyahe finished haughtily.

"Think of anyone else?"

"My successor... But she couldn't be trusted either."

"Then you'll have to do until I learn your language."

Lalyahe's smile told him that it was exactly what she wanted. Rolf promised himself that he would pick up a working knowledge of the androon tongue as quickly as possible, for until then the high priestess would be in a favorable position for treachery.

"One more thing," he muttered. "I want living quarters in one of these temple anterooms. It might be better if I stay away from the council's jurisdiction as much as possible. They might get wind of something."

"Certainly. As my acolyte, you would arouse no suspicion by living in a special..." She paused and cocked one eyebrow. "You will share my quarters, in fact. That is permissible for eunuchs." She smirked nastily.

"The hell I will!"

"Then you may return to your former cell."

Rolf said nothing but decided to sleep on the floor in the main temple. He had a brief vision of Krasala wielding a bone club in the direction of his skull.

HOURS LATER, he met Lalyahe again in a larger room off the main floor. In compliance with his request, she had chosen the specified number of bat-hunters, and had assembled them outside. He gave her brief instructions before the hunters

entered.

"Tell them that Menbana expressed his will at today's manifestation. Tell them he gave you special instructions which must be obeyed."

She eyed him curiously and with faint amusement, seeming to enjoy the intrigue. "What are the instructions that Menbana has given me?"

"That live bats are to be captured for his temple. Two or three dozen of them. Large ones, but not too old. Say Menbana will teach you how to tame them."

She frowned sharply. "Why, Kenlan? What good—"

"Never mind!" He smirked. "And tell them your new acolyte has been chosen to lead them. But swear them to complete secrecy. It'll be both our necks if the council hears of it. Now call the men in and make your speech."

Lalyahe's resentful glance told him that she was unaccustomed to taking orders. But she donned her bat's head, marched to the door, and barked a command. Twenty-five toughs filed silently in and sat spraddle-legged in a ring about the walls. Rolf had seen some of them during the sacrifice service, but now they were wearing bat-skin skirts and jackets in place of the robes, and they carried hunter's snares looped across their shoulders. He noticed with satisfaction that they were heavily muscled men, and fiercely bearded.

Lalyahe began speaking crisply, turning slowly to eye each man, and punctuating her speech with much posturing and arm-waving. While she spoke, Rolf noticed that one man was glaring directly at him and hardly listening to the priestess. The man looked familiar. After a time, he placed the fellow. It was the acolyte who had whispered with Lalyahe during the service, the one who had nudged Rolf out of line and brought the fat eunuch to

replace him.

Rolf was startled by the realization that the man must have been Lalyahe's acolyte before he had acquired the job. Someone certainly must have been fired to make room for him. Rolf was disturbed; the man might try to make trouble.

When the priestess finished speaking, Rolf murmured a question about the angry-looking hunter. She nodded.

"He was my acolyte. Why?"

"We'd better make him an honorary something-or-other. He's got fire in his eye. Tell him Menbana designated him to lead the bat-snaring party. Tell him Menbana has promised him special rewards later. Tell him anything, but make him happy."

LALYAHE called the man aside and spoke to him in low tones. The man stood breathing heavily, swelled with self-righteous indignation, and firing angry glances at the interloper. But suddenly he broke into a wide grin and bowed humbly before Lalyahe. When he returned to his place, he was still grinning vacuously and licking his chops.

"What did you tell him?" Rolf asked suspiciously.

The priestess chuckled. "I told him Menbana had given him a special dispensation to have a mate. To have young Krasala, in fact."

Rolf felt himself going white. He turned away to keep from striking her. It was a deliberate cruelty, an act of sadism. But it could not be easily undone. He fumed in silence until Lalyahe dismissed the men for the hunt. Then he turned on her in fury.

"Why did you do that?" he roared.

She inched away, but smiled mockingly. "To assure myself that you have no ambitions here among my tribe."

"It's a damn poor excuse and a lie!" he raged.

"What are you going to do about it?"

He sagged onto a pedestal and kicked angrily at the floor. There was nothing he could do about it. The ex-acolyte would reveal his good fortune to the others. And a god dare not go back on his word. He cursed the high priestess fervently.

"It's what you deserve for refusing to be my lover," she told him blandly.

Rolf vowed to himself that the burly huntsman-acolyte would meet with a serious accident if he tried to claim Krasala. But the settling of such accounts would have to wait. Rolf was uneasy since the Marsville guards raided the outer tunnels and kidnapped the party of androons. Something was afoot.

There was ample evidence here that what his father maintained was true. The tools and weapons of the Bolsewi were part of the evidence, and Rolf was certain that Jason had told the Commission about them. The Commission might have been willing to bide their time, but since they knew that he was taking refuge in the caverns, they would fear the weapons. Androon hands might learn to use them.

He realized gloomily that such fears were for the most part without foundation. There were probably not a dozen men in the whole tribe who were brave enough to touch one of the "symbols of Phanton". Bolsewi equipment among the androons was as mystifying as an electronic calculator would be to a tribe of Australian aborigines. They would need a grasp of basic principles, and an end to magical thinking. That would take generations. The best he could hope for would be to find a few neurotics among the acolytes of Menbana who would take a perverse delight in profaning the sacred.

WHILE THE hunting party was gone toward the cave entrances, he spent his time searching the temple's anterooms for more of the bag-pipe guns. Those that appeared serviceable, he cleaned and oiled. But testing them would be disastrous to both the temple and the morale of the tribe. He hoped fervently that they would never be used.

Lalyahe brought word that the council was demanding his presence.

"Why?" he grunted.

"They didn't witness the Bolsewi magic you released. They don't believe the god has made himself known. They accuse you of trickery."

"Well, stop smirking about it," he snapped. "You're in it too. If they make trouble, you're as hot as I am! I can't see them. You'll have to worm out of it somehow. Think up a good ceremonial reason why I can't leave the temple for a few days."

"I suppose you could be fasting for five days. But if they insist, and I don't release you to them, they'll make trouble."

"What kind of trouble? They can't come in here, can they?"

"No unconsecrated male may enter, but they can send women."

"Stall them the best you can," he told her.

Some of the hunting party began returning with live bats. With their wings, feet, and jaws bound, and with their eyes tightly bandaged, the beasts scarcely struggled. Rolf had them stacked like a cord of wood in a dark corner of the temple.

The huntsmen brought word that a group of men from the city was camped a thousand paces from the mouths of the bat caves, and they reported a larger party was making its way across the plain. Rolf was disturbed. The Commission was striking sooner than he had expected.

He reasoned that the raiding party would consist entirely of officers from the Commission's elite guard—men who could be trusted to remain silent about what they found in the caves. Very probably the Commission would promise them a transfer to Earth when the job was done. Their immediate goals would be to capture him, to inspect the Bolsewi artifacts, and report the findings to the Commission. He had no doubt that the Commission would follow it up with a forced evacuation of the androoms from all caverns on the city-side of the mountains, and a permanent occupation of the caverns by Commission police, for the purpose of studying the Bolsewi civilization in the light of the Commission's master-plan for Mars.

Lalyahe came with more news of the council's suspicions. "They want to know why we collect the live bats. They're tired of hearing about 'the will of Menbana'. They don't believe it, and they say if you don't come out before three more eating times, they'll send in a party to arrest you."

Rolf hesitated. "If it comes to that, I'll parley with them just outside the temple." He grinned. "Accompanied by our two dozen bully-boys. By the way, are they all back from the hunt yet?"

She smiled knowingly. "All but one. P'yan, my former acolyte, lingers with his new mistress. It might interest you to know that she made no protest when I told her. In fact, I think she rather liked the idea. She called you some unpleasant names. Shall I list them for you?"

ROLF CONTROLLED an impulse to kick her, and kept his face expressionless. "Get P'yan in here with the others. We've got to hurry."

"Why? Suppose you explain what all this has to do with overthrowing the council, with making the temple of

Menbana the center of authority. I trust you less and less, Kenlan. I'm thinking of letting the council have you."

"Fool!" he growled. "If those Earthmen get in here, there won't be any council to overthrow. They want to drive you out of here. They want your holy articles before you learn to use their magic."

She gathered a slow frown, then left him. He wondered if her tribal loyalty was stronger than her personal ambition. Probably, but he could not be certain.

Another factor bothered him. When the Commission police made their first move, the council would undoubtedly want to solve the problem by releasing him to them. The Commission would certainly demand his extradition before making a show of force. And H'nrin would offer him in the hope of appeasement.

After a brief inspection of the bound bats, Rolf sent a dozen acolytes to gather enough rawhide to make harnesses. He directed Lalyahe to assign several priestesses to the task of sewing weight-bags full of rocks, specifying that each should weigh as much as a heavy man. He put two acolytes to work trimming the tips off the bats' talons. Then, with the help of another, he dragged one quivering beast out of the heap and began fashioning a pair of rawhide leggins to fit tightly about the bat's wooly ankles. With loops laced through the leggins, he bound a two-foot length of bone between the bat's ankles, so that it could stand spraddle-legged but not walk. He slung another just below it for a seat, so that a man could sit on the lower rung and cling to the higher one for support.

His assistant, regarding the whole affair as purposeless sport, chuckled

gleefully and chattered incomprehensible jokes in his own tongue. When they were finished with the seat, Rolf began a harness, using a whole bat-hide, with its natural holes for the wings. He laced it tightly under the beast's belly, and sewed a pair of rein-guide rings near the shoulders. Next came a hackamore with an extra loop beneath the lower jaw. Then he instructed the men to outfit the other bats similarly.

While they began work, Rolf tied a sack of rocks to the first bat's feet, tethered it at the end of a hundred-foot braided hide rope, and unbound its jaws and wings. With a shriek, it beat its way upward, reached the end of its tether, and began a mid-air battle with its cargo. The temple, half-full of working, idling, or praying androons, paused to watch and murmur curiously.

WHILE THE bat flailed angrily at the air, Rolf went to search the anterooms. He needed a number of light metal rods for use as chin-poles to guide the bat's heads vertically. But as he stepped into a gloomy corridor that paralleled one side of the temple, he saw a shadowy figure flit behind a column. He started to pass on, then, thinking that H'nrin had perhaps sent an observer to watch the temple, he reached around the column, caught a slender arm, and dragged.

Krasala came lurching against him and snarling. She wore the secular bat-skins, not the wings of the temple. Nor was she carrying the ceremonial kerchief. He frowned at her suspiciously.

"Why are you hiding here?"

"I saw you coming!" she hissed contemptuously.

"Why aren't you in the temple?"

"Your love-one tell me to stay out. She say to keep house for P'yan. She say I no good as priestess. Is okay

with me. I take P'yan, you take what P'yan leave. Is she old enough for you?"

Rolf shook her roughly. "You're crazy!" he snapped. "There isn't a damn thing between us except politics. Good Lord! And to think I wanted you myself for awhile! Well, I hope you enjoy married life with your P'yan. Me, I'll take an Earthgirl any day!"

He turned to stalk away, then paused. "I still want to know why you're hanging around here!" he growled.

"I woman. Is my right come in temple."

He grunted an oath, then moved on down the corridor and turned in at the first anteroom. After searching through most of the cabinets, shelves, and bins, he found a dozen aluminum tripods, half corroded but still useful. He removed their legs and began drilling holes in both ends of the rods.

A gasp from the doorway startled him. He glanced around to see Krasala again.

"You blasphemy!" she breathed.

He groaned disgustedly and waved her away. He'd heard enough of the word to last for the duration. "Then run get the guards and have them brain me," he growled.

She subsided gradually and watched him work. "Is true what you say?"

"About what?"

"About you and Lalyahe."

"It's true that it's not true. Now beat it. Go find your P'yan and play footsie or something."

"Then why Lalyahe say you her lover?"

"Because she's an evil old hag!" he roared. "Now beat it!"

She stared at the floor and dragged her toe in the dust. "Okay, I go, soon's I tell you why I hide."

"Do tell me," he sighed wearily.

"I hide from P'yan. He not find me

yet."

He stiffened reflexively, dropped the rod, and almost grinned.

"I been to see council," she added.

His grin disappeared and he stood up to frown at her. "The council! Why?"

"Protest Lalyahe kick me out of temple. But they ask me questions about you. Say I should watch what goes on, and tell them."

He advanced menacingly. "What have you told them?"

She eyed him anxiously, but stood her ground. "I tell them you boss acolytes around, but they already know that. I don't tell them anything else."

HE PAUSED a moment to think.

Lalyahe had cautioned the priestesses and their acolytes to silence, but H'nrin could easily slip some of his aides into their ranks. Nor could H'nrin be blamed for his caution and his suspicion. The old man wanted only to preserve the status quo in his realm, and he suspected that Rolf was disturbing it. The reports of the encampment of Earthmen by the cave's mouth probably helped to increase his anxiety.

"Listen," he said to Krasala. "When you go back to the council, tell them that I'm violating the temple, poking into the holy relics. Tell them that a group of priestesses are plotting to kill me. Will you do that?"

"Why? Is probably true."

"That they're plotting to kill me?"

She nodded solemnly.

"Well, tell the council just that and nothing more."

"Why?"

"Because if they think a priestess group is after me, they might keep hands off and hope the job gets done without their help."

She said nothing, and resumed dragging her toe in the dust. He watched

her for a moment, then returned to his drilling.

"You like Lalyahe a little maybe?" she asked without transition. "Maybe you learn to like."

He glanced up at her downcast face. Her dark brows were dragging low over her green eyes, and there was a hint of petulance about her mouth. Heavy locks of hair dangled about her cheeks as she toed the floor.

"How many times do I have to tell you?" he grumbled in a not unkindly tone.

She met his eyes suddenly, and after a moment exchanged sheepish grins. "Maybe we get away from here," she suggested. "Maybe we get to cave of another tribe."

"Who's we?" he asked in bewilderment.

"You me. Mebbe you don't want me to be you woman?"

Rolf thoughtfully drilled the last two holes. Then he nodded solemnly. "Sure. I want you. Yeah. I was sort of figuring on it, before... oh, well. Sure, I want you."

She beamed at him, then glanced up and down the corridor. "Then why we wait? Let's go!"

He gathered up the rods in his arms and moved to the door beside her. He couldn't possibly explain the full scope of what lay ahead. He looked down at her for a moment. "I've got a lot of things to do first, baby. It'd take as long to tell you about them as it would to make them happen. Can you just keep quiet and wait?"

"And watch you politix with Lalyahe?"

"Yeah, but not for long."

She wrestled with herself for a moment. "Okay, I trust."

He pushed her out into the corridor. "Go talk to the council now, kid. I'll see you later. And stay away from P'yan."

"You be careful," she warned as he moved away. "Is some would like to kill you all right."

THE BAT had settled to the floor, and crouched panting in exhaustion when he reentered the great room of the temple. Its eyes had remained bandaged during the ordeal. He left the bandage in place, but loosened the tether and prodded the beast's flank with a rod. It squeaked in fright and took wing again wearily, bearing its load of rocks. He watched it ascend in slow circles, avoiding the walls by some extra sense, possibly reflected sound. Soon it disappeared into the overhead darkness, no longer fighting its cargo.

He left it to fly freely while he carried the rods to the circle of workmen who were laboring over the harnesses. Lalyahe met him and frowned at the rods.

"The usual explanation?" she asked.

"Yeah." He glanced around at the harness makers. "They probably won't know where they came from. How many outfits are finished?"

"Three. But it's going faster now. I found some experienced garment-makers."

"Good. Have them rig out the bats and tether them until they're tired, as I did the first one."

He stacked the rods against the wall, sat down amid the scraps of leather to fashion a pair of toe-stirrups. When they were finished, he lashed them to one end of a rod and fitted them with thongs to be bow-knotted about the rider's ankles for easy loosening. The other end of the rod would be tied to the loop under the bat's lower jaw. He showed it to the harness makers and set some of them to work duplicating it.

The first bat was down again, crouched with folded wings and droop-

ing head. Occasionally it shuffled about irritably, trying to clear its feet of the strange rigging. Rolf pitied the animal, but there was no time to waste on either gentle training or comfortable harnessing. He hoped simply that the beasts could be ridden without dashing the huntsmen against the rocks.

While the bat was resting, he slipped a loop about its jaws and had a helper wrestle with the creature's head while he bound the chin-pole to the hackamore. Eight men gripped its struggling wings while he fitted the reins in place. They eased it up until its feet were off the floor, and another huntsman came in to grasp the legs while Rolf slipped beneath the furry belly and sat on the underslung swing. He pressed his toes into the stirrups while a hunter tied the ankle-thongs.

BUT THE perch was too precarious. He had a strip of belting brought forward and fastened in a loose loop between the bat's ankles, passing it behind his back as a safety-rest. He grinned nervously at the men who gripped the wings. All he needed now, he thought, was a twentieth-century ten-gallon hat. And an embalmer, maybe, if the blind-folded creature became panicky and flew into a wall. It seemed safer with the blind-fold, however; the bat might be less willful about resisting the tug of the reins.

"*Hyo!*" he barked, and waved the holders back. They released the struggling wings and ducked to safety.

Instead of bolting, the bat spread his wings high and sat down, pinning Rolf's legs beneath the feet-spreading bar. Mercifully the leggings were loose enough to prevent slippage, and the fracture of the rider's legs. The base of his spine ached from the jolt, and he cursed fluently as the beast's weight doubled him over. The huntsmen, who had ridden for sport with no gear other

than wrist-straps, howled with glee.

Angrily, Rolf caught a double handful of bat-fur and jerked. With a squeak of dismay, the bat crouched lower, then sprang aloft. It immediately began swooping low over the heads of the assembly and fighting at the chin-stick. Rolf let his feet ride free with the beast's head at first, letting it resign itself to the new and unwanted object. Despite the blindfold, the bat banked sharply as it approached each wall, swinging its rider wide, then soaring back across the temple.

Still fighting the stick, it suddenly leaned back on its wings for a landing stall, perhaps meaning to fight it out with the stick on the ground. Rolf lurched dangerously forward. Clutching at the cross-piece, he stiffened his legs and jerked the bat's head down with the chin-stick. The bat shrieked and beat at the air with its giant wings, darting higher to escape the steady downward tug. Rolf kept some of his weight on the stick, and the bat circled higher. The lake of light around the temple receded beneath him.

When the beast flew toward a wall, Rolf kicked upward lightly on the stick and swung its head aside with the reins, thus anticipating its behaviour by a fraction of a second. He encountered a flurry of rage when the relative merits of right and left were in dispute, but after a dozen passes, the bat began to agree more frequently with the reins. The stick, however, remained a center of contention. A downward tug would produce a fight for altitude. An upward kick would bring a stall, but if the stick continued to press upward, the bat winged over, dived shallowly, and soared high again as soon as the sharp maneuver caused Rolf to lose the upward pressure.

After a few tries, he found that a gentle upward pressure, though insufficient to cause the bat to apply brakes,

would bring a slow descent.

He was at least five hundred feet above the floor of the temple now, and the vertical shaft was widening considerably. Its shape and its method of bracing were engineering masterpieces, protecting the bottom against cave-ins. Evidently it had once served as a lift-way for huge ships—from the surface to the caverns of the Bolsewi.

SOARING HIGHER, he passed a ledge, visible only as a black up-shadow, encircling the walls. He guided the bat closer to it, and made a slow circle, peering into the gloom. He saw a cave entrance, and looped back. No . . . not a cave . . . a large entranceway, like an opening onto a freightdock. Perhaps it was, he thought. A rocket, lowered into the shaft, would need a clear length of tunnel beneath it for blast-off.

Feeling the draft, or hearing the tunnel's echo-response, the weary bat settled toward it. Rolf started to wrench its head away, then decided to chance it. The entrance was wide enough to keep him from being dashed against the floor. He tugged the bat's head down to keep it from alighting on the ledge. Then, as it soared into the entranceway, he kicked up for a stall. The bat dropped quickly. As he struggled out from under its belly, he promised himself a padded seat for the future.

He caught the reins near the hackamore, then felt around for something to tie them to. After his eyes adjusted, a faint ceiling glow became apparent, a metal door handle ended his search, and he tethered the winged animal securely. It folded its wings and stretched out on its belly with a blubbery squeak of relief.

Rolf waited, breathing and straining to accustom his eyes to the dim glow. He was in when the light had appeared. He had been

a warehouse at one time. It was a huge empty vault, or nearly empty. He spied a motionless, shadowy hulk across the floor, and he moved cautiously toward it. It proved to be a heap of lightweight metallic boxes, shipping crates perhaps. He pried one of them open and found that it contained instruments, wrapped in thin plastic and packed in fibrous insulating material.

Another contained similarly protected machine-parts of strange design. He examined them briefly. The production methods that had fashioned them were obviously superior to anything that Marsville could manage. Machined surfaces in the form of hyperbolic paraboloids. A Moebius band whose unihedral side still bore faint marks of a cutting tool. Cutting a Moebius band on an earth-lathe would be an impossible feat, as far as Rolf knew.

He opened a third box that lay aside from the others, then drew back with a shudder. A white skull stared at him vacuously from atop a heap of ashes. Its needle-fangs were still intact in the slender jaw. Its tiny face was bat-like, but the braincase was larger than a man's. The remains of a Bolsewi! He sifted the ashes through his fingers. Evidently they cremated their dead, but left the head intact for religious reasons.

The boxes perhaps were part of a shipment which had never been made. But where had the Bolsewi gone? To another sun-system perhaps? Or had they become extinct, contrary to the androon legends?

But he had no time for idle speculations. A fluttering of bat's wings, and the excited shouts of other riders brought him back to the present. Other huntsmen were wrestling with their mounts in the vertical shaft. He moved back to the entrance and watched the darting shadows for a moment. The riders still regarded it as sport. He

wondered how they would react when the Earth guards fired upon them.

THE BAT was still dozing by the entrance. He quietly slipped a loop over its body to bind its wings against a premature take-off. Then he struggled under the belly, released the loop, jerked a handful of fur, and burst forth into the shaft once more. He guided the beast downward.

Lalyahe met him as he alighted. Most of the harnesses were finished, and the acolytes had taken the bats aloft. "I have a plan," she said. "Let's lure the council's she-guards into the temple. Then you can swoop down to capture them from above."

"It's a good plan," he murmured diplomatically. "But perhaps we can frighten the council into submission without using force. Go tell them that the temple of Menbana will soon open its mouth to the sky. And clear everyone out of the temple."

She caught her breath and glanced up toward the darkness. "How can—"

"There's no time to explain. If you want to be the ruler of the tribe, you'd better hurry."

She nodded, and moved away. Rolf noticed a eunuch who had been standing near a column watching them impassively. When Lalyahe was gone, the eunuch approached him. He tossed his head toward the shadows beyond the columns and grunted. "Ea Krasala."

"Krasala? Is something wrong?" Rolf asked.

But the eunuch spoke no Earth-tongue. He gestured toward the shadows again and gave Rolf a slight push in that direction. Rolf obeyed nervously.

She was waiting for him behind a column, and her face was tense with worry. "The council! They are in session with the men who returned from your city!"

"You mean with some of my people?"

"No! With the ones your people kidnapped! Your people turn them loose. They bring a message for the council."

"A demand to turn me over to them?" he growled.

She nodded. "They say if you don't come out, they pour something in the caves that make everybody die that smell it."

"Gas! What did the council say?"

"They say you—" Her voice choked off as she stared across his shoulder. "P'yan!" she hissed, and began backing away.

Rolf pivoted quickly. The thick-limbed bearded huntsman was standing a few feet away with folded arms, glaring at them suspiciously. He grunted, twirled his bone club for effect, and advanced on Krasala with a surly side-glance at Rolf. He growled at her in the androon tongue with a demanding note in his voice. She retreated with a snarl.

ROLF LET the burly acolyte step past him. Then he threw a hard fist to the base of P'yan's skull. The punch numbed his hand and sent thrills of pain up his forearm. The blow should have felled the huskiest rocket-tender. But P'yan only lurched forward slightly. He turned with a growl that arose to an enraged roar.

Rolf ducked as the huge club fanned air past his head. Then he darted in to inflict the greatest possible injury upon the most convenient and unethical regions of the giant's anatomy. His fists battered against hardwood and hairy granite. P'yan scorned defense. He caught the Earthman's shoulder in one hand and threw him sprawling to the floor. He pinned Rolf down with a heavy foot and lifted the club like an axe.

Krasala threw herself into the fray

with the fury of a lynx, raking at the giant's eyes with her nails. Before P'yan shook her off, Rolf managed to get out his pocket knife. He sank the blade in P'yan's leg, and ripped a twelve-inch gash down the thigh. The huntsman howled, and sent the club downward in a wild blow. It shattered on the stone floor as Rolf rolled aside. Krasala huddled by a column, holding her face and moaning. P'yan had struck her with a furious back-hand.

In a rage, Rolf darted forward with the knife. But hands suddenly gripped his arms. A sea of shouting women engulfed the fighters, pressing them apart, and seizing Rolf with many hands. He was borne off his feet and rushed out into the temple proper. Squirring frantically, he tried to break free, but a chopping blow to his temple dazed him. They were carrying him toward the entranceway. A delegation sent by the council to capture him!

He cried out to Krasala: "The symbol of Phanton! Get it! Point it at the wall and press the stud!"

A hand was clapped over his mouth. He bit it savagely, and another blow struck his head. Through the tight crowd of bodies, he caught a glimpse of Krasala darting to the anteroom where the bagpipes lay in storage. He prayed that the urgency of the moment would help her overcome superstitious fear. P'yan was pursuing her at a limping trot, but his leg wound left a trail of red across the floor.

A few huntsmen-acolytes who had returned from their bat-flights bore down on the party of fighting women. Lalyahe shrieked orders for counter-attack, but the eunuchs and priestesses only parted ranks before the tight phalanx of knife-and-club-armed raiding party. The door closed in with flailing clubs, beating down several of the counter-attackers, but the council's guards kept a shouting about

their prisoner, and chopped their way steadily toward the entrance. They left a trail of bodies—dead, wounded, or unconscious—behind them, but they drove on without pause, occasionally battering down one of the small party of defenders.

Rolf saw himself being turned over to the Mars Commission guards and summarily shot. He pleaded with his captors. "They'll kill you or drive you out anyway!" he shouted above the roar. "You can't buy them off! Don't you understand? If it would save your hides, I'd give myself up! But it won't—"

The side of a fist bashed his face, and a squat, ugly she-guard growled for silence. He realized that they couldn't understand him.

A weird shriek filled the temple. It was followed by a rising tide of violet light. The raiding party paused a dozen yards from the entrance, muttering fearfully. Struggling to peer through the sea of heads, arms and shoulders, Rolf saw the growing orb of violet incandescence clinging to the stone wall a few feet above the floor toward the rear of the temple.

A WILD cry of fright went up from the crowd. There was a sudden surge toward the entrance. Rolf was released, but felt himself being carried along in the tide of escape. He let himself be borne to the entranceway where the stream of bodies narrowed. Then he tore free and began running along the wall, battering his way through the converging crowd. The fiery orb was blazing with sun-brilliance and spitting bits of molten slag that rolled like gleaming marbles across the smooth floor. In a few moments, the entire herd of priestesses, acolytes, and raiders were surging in a tight sea about the doorway, leaving the rest of the temple barren, except for several teth-

ered bats, P'yan, Krasala, and Lalyahe.

Glancing up, he saw the bat-riders who were still aloft. Their frightened mounts had retreated upward toward the top of the shaft, and without a doubt their riders were letting them have their way.

He hurried toward Krasala. She lay in a dead faint near the anteroom entrance. The bagpipe gun had fallen beside her. He dragged her to safety from the rolling bits of slag, then called out to Lalyahe, who crouched behind a column. She answered weakly, but refused to move. He caught up the bagpipe, twisted the crank, and aimed a shot at the wall just above the entranceway. The first inferno had burned itself out. But a new one blossomed with a shriek over the entrance. It would keep the raiders from reentering, although he doubted that they needed the warning. It would also keep the bat-flyers aloft, for he feared that if they descended they would flee the temple.

P'yan was moaning on the floor and holding his leg. An occasional bit of slag rolled through the puddle of blood that surrounded him. It hissed, sent up a cloud of steam, and lay darkened. Rolf approached the huntsman warily. The knife had severed an artery, and the giant was bleeding to death.

Rolf motioned for him to lie down. P'yan growled defiance and gestured threateningly. He tapped his chest arrogantly and grunted, "Moe Krasala!" Rolf knelt at a safe distance and indicated by sign that he wanted to apply a tourniquet to the leg.

"Moe Krasala!"

Rolf shook his head vehemently. Then he stabbed a finger at the giant, winked, and grunted, "Lalyahe. You can have Lalyahe. Do you understand? You...toi...Lalyahe."

The effect was immediate. P'yan's eyes widened thoughtfully. He scratched his beard and glanced toward the pillar where the high priestess now stood watching them, but beyond earshot. Then he grinned and nodded. As a celibate acolyte, he wasn't particular. He just wanted a woman. Rolf crawled forward and fitted a rawhide tourniquet in place. Then he bound the wound with his undershirt. If crude androon medicine had saved the ex-priestess with the blown-off hand, it should be able to mend P'yan's leg, he reasoned.

P'yan butted heads with him in gesture of friendship, then staggered weakly to his feet, and without further ado shuffled determinedly toward Lalyahe, who simply frowned and looked bewildered. Rolf left the giant to his wooing and hurried back to Krasala, who had roused herself to wakefulness and sat shivering in fright caused by her own boldness toward the Bolsewi weapon. He tugged her to her feet, embraced her, and kissed her gratefully. But she was too frightened to respond to the unfamiliar expression of affection.

THERE WAS a sudden howl of anger from the high priestess. Rolf glanced around quickly to see her struggling with the amorous P'yan. Suddenly the frustrated giant raised his hammy hand and brought it down atop her head with what seemed to be only a gentle tap. Lalyahe crumpled limply. The hardy huntsman caught her up, threw her across his shoulder, and staggered toward the entrance. He grinned back at Rolf defiantly.

Rolf fumed impotently. There was no stopping P'yan from lugging off his prize. But he needed the high priestess as a translator. P'yan's libido wouldn't wait. He cautiously approached the entrance where the inferno had subsided

to a red glow. Rolf thought of halting him with another shot, but then he would encounter trouble from the giant, unless he killed the man. While he debated with himself, P'yan slipped through the entrance and disappeared. Krasala, watching them go, giggled with perhaps a trace of hysteria.

Rolf took her arm gently. "I need your help now," he told her. "None of the huntsmen speak Earthtongue. Will you come with us?"

She hesitated, frowning.

"Some of us may be killed," he said quietly. "You can leave if you want to. Maybe I can get along with sign language."

She snorted angrily, and stamped her foot. "Of course I come! Is just I don't see how we get out of here. The council's guards wait for you. Is only one entrance. How..."

"Never mind!" he said, looking up toward a flutter of wings. "Tell those riders to go back up, or another sun will bloom down here."

She faced the center of the temple and called out in a quavering voice. A rider who was stalling his bat for a landing jerked the beast's chin down and shot quickly upward again. Rolf glanced around at the tethered mounts whose riders had run away with the crowd. There were five of them, crouched low and squeaking with fright.

"Collect all the weapons from the storeroom," he told Krasala. "I'll get the bats ready."

"Weapons?" She looked puzzled.

Rolf held up the bagpipe. "These things. You shot this one. You shouldn't be afraid of them now."

Her face went chalk-white and she moistened her lips.

"Listen, kid," he said impatiently. "If you can't get over your silly fright, you might as well stay here. And if we don't use the Bolsewi weapons,

we'll probably all die."

She set her jaw defiantly, turned, and marched angrily toward the store-room. Rolf grinned, gathered up a coil of rawhide rope, and tied four bats together in an aerial mule-train, leaving the fifth for Krasala. He weighted the riderless ones with rock-sacks to prevent an overly frisky flight, and made certain that all blindfolds were adjusted as insurance against willfulness. When he was finished, he began carrying away the few wounded guards who remained, and depositing them in the corridor just outside the temple's entrance. At the other end of the corridor, the crowds stared at him from the huge council room. Someone threw a club which skidded off a wall and missed him by a wide margin.

He started to turn away, then paused. A loud and metallic voice was echoing from the distance, making itself heard above the grumbling voice of the crowd. "We'll give you half an hour to produce Kenlan. Do you understand? Half an hour. Then we turn on the gas. Do you understand 'gas'? You stupid beasts, you understand 'death', don't you? 'Gas' is 'death'. Send Kenlan to us, or we'll..." The voice hesitated, then went conversational: "Hey, Peterson! Somebody's coming up the tunnel. Looks like the chief."

ROLF QUICKLY guessed what was happening. The Commission guards had dragged a public address system halfway down the bat-cave. H'nrin was evidently going to meet them for a parley. But the name 'Peterson' left him startled. Could it be the same Peterson who was a member of the Commission? If so, then the public address announcer must also be a Commissionman; for no one else would dare to call the official by his last name without using the title

"Commissioner". It seemed unlikely—yet the rulers might submit themselves to personal danger rather than let too many others see the caverns and understand their significance.

Rolf returned quickly to the temple. Half an hour made a dangerously close deadline. And if his plan failed, several thousand androoms would die unpleasantly. He wondered how they planned to force the gas into the caverns when the natural drafts flowed in the opposite direction along the tunnel. They must mean to close off the mouth of the bat-cave as soon as the delegation came out. Or perhaps they had already walled it up, leaving a small escapeway.

Krasala had stacked half a dozen of the Bolsewi bagpipes near the tethered bats, and she stood back from them nervously, her expression shifting from awe to pride to anxiety. He grinned and applauded her bravery. She replied with a cocky smile and a sniff, but her hands were trembling. "The flyers try to come down again," she said. "I send them back up."

"Good girl. Think you can ride one of these flying ponies?"

She eyed the beasts doubtfully, but snapped, "Certainly!"

Rolf packed the Bolsewi weapons beneath a bat, but kept one to strap on his back. He helped Krasala under her mount, released the beast's tether, and slipped off the loop that bound its wings, whose sudden beating sent him sprawling. Krasala yelped as it sprang aloft.

"Jerk its head down!" he bellowed after her.

After a few wild passes across the temple, the bat began ascending. Rolf kept his own mount bound and tethered while he released the others in the four-bat train. They fluttered up to the end of the lead-rope and began tugging against one another amid furi-

ous beating of wings. Leading them would not be simple. He slipped quickly into his seat and set his own bat free.

At first it added its bit to the general chaos, and Rolf clutched the cross-piece fearfully as he felt himself being flung about like a rock at the end of a string. But he managed to exert some control; and since the vector-sum of the forces exerted by the riderless bats was frequently zero, his steady guidance urged the unwilling train steadily upward.

He peered about in the deepening gloom for the other huntsmen, but saw no one. Apparently they had already discovered the high-level storeroom. Once Krasala swooped down past him, howling angrily at her mount. But then she regained control and climbed again.

"Can you handle him yet?" he shouted, causing his own bat to squeak and dart erratically.

"I—I think so!" she called nervously.

"Go up till you see a ledge. There's a big door. Fly inside and wait."

SHE CALLED acknowledgement and soared on above him. Suddenly a riderless bat fluttered past and descended toward the floor far below. Rolf cursed to himself. Whoever had let the beast escape would be marooned in the storeroom. He unstrapped the Bolsawi bagpipe, cranked it, and aimed between his legs at the patch of light beneath him. The weapon's shriek sent the bat bolting upward with an acceleration that nearly unseated him.

A minute later, they were flurrying madly at the top of the shaft, darting dangerously close to the steel-struts that supported the cavern's lid, while the violet light blazed far below them. While he fought to regain control, he

caught a glimpse of the stray bat streaking for safety within the storeroom. But he was more interested in keeping the train away from the struts. If they fouled the lead-rope and became entangled, he would be marooned a thousand feet above the floor, with no way to get down.

He jerked savagely on the reins and kicked his bat's chin high as the last beast tried to encircle a strut. There was a flutter of wings against steel, then a series of enraged squeaks. The train tugged at its rope. With a yelp of fright he glanced back. The bat was clinging to the strut with its feet. One of its wingtips dangled, broken from beating against a sharp metal edge. Rolf jabbed his mount with the weapon's muzzle.

The last bat tore free. The train sagged at the end, as the crippled creature fought to stay aloft. But its limping efforts helped to tug them slowly downward. Suddenly his bat saw—or "heard"—the storeroom entrance and began fighting toward it valiantly. A moment later, the train was inside, alighting in the midst of the others.

He climbed wearily to his feet and noticed irritably that none of the mounts was tied. They remained in the storeroom as a sanctuary from the outrages that had been perpetrated upon them in the shaft. But what he was about to do would send them into a panic, and they would have to be properly bound.

He looked around for the riders, and at last saw them huddled as a shadowy patch of collective fright in a far corner.

"Krasala!" he called into the gloom. "Where are you?"

Her slender figure detached itself from the shadow of a bat, and approached him slowly. When she drew near, he could see she was smiling weakly, although she appeared sick

from the wild ride.

"Is always be like this, when I your woman?" she muttered wearily.

He chuckled and gave her a rough little hug. "Go tell the men to come tether the bats securely."

SHE NODDED and moved toward the murmuring huddle of frightened huntsmen. He listened as she relayed the order. A voice replied from the group, a protesting voice. She spoke again in a louder tone. The voice grunted a monosyllable. She raged at it in a furious snarl. Several voices answered sulkily. She turned on her heel and marched back to Rolf.

"They won't do anything," she told him. "They say they wait for Menbana to punish you."

"Tell them," he said stiffly, "that if they don't obey, the whole tribe will be killed by the Earthmen from the city. Tell them we're trying to save their people. And... tell them I'll toss any man who disobeys off the ledge."

She went to relay the order, while he stood regretting the latter threat. There was not a man among them who did not outweigh him by at least twenty pounds. He waited, listening to their heated conversation with Krasala. At last two men arose and advanced toward him. He cranked the sun-weapon and waited tensely. Krasala was hurrying behind them, chattering rapidly.

"Stop!" he barked when they were within five paces. He lifted the gun menacingly. The pair stopped and looked bewildered.

"No, they came to help you!" Krasala explained.

"What about the others?"

She shrugged. "I ask if anybody isn't coward. These two is all that come."

"Have them tie the bats, then. We

don't have much time."

Rolf stacked the weapon against the wall, and went to drag the boxes of the Bolsewi shipment toward the entrance. There were six of them—the coffin, the instrument case, the machine-parts, a case of plastic scrolls that might have been books, a box whose contents had been reduced to mouldy dust, and a fat device that looked like a replacement unit for some electronic rig.

When the huntsmen had tied the bats in the pack-train, Rolf unhitched the rock-bags and emptied them. He slipped the electronic unit into one bag, the coffin into another, then began stuffing the third with samples from all the other cases. Krasala was watching him curiously.

"Where you take these god-creatures?" she asked.

He paused thoughtfully, then looked up. "Tell me, do you believe the gods die or not?"

She shook her head quickly. "Gods don't die. They go to live above the world."

"In soul, body, or both?"

Her mystified expression told him that she had no concept of soul, at least not as far as the gods were concerned.

"Another thing: would you recognize a Bolsewi if you saw one?"

"Certainly. The pictures in the council room—"

"That's all I want to know, baby." Quickly he unpacked the coffin and took out the skull. "Come with me," he grunted, and moved toward the group of idle huntsmen.

She walked beside him, staring curiously at the white object in his hands, but evidently not recognizing it. The batsmen were sitting in a tight motionless group, watching him resentfully as he approached. Suddenly he wished that he had brought the weap-

on. They might react violently to his words. He stopped before them and held up the skull, turning it slowly in the dim light.

"Is this the skull of a bat?" he asked rhetorically.

"*Ce vanina kr'nale subolsewa?*" Krasala translated.

THERE WAS a long silence. Then a man in the center of the group raised his voice to utter a few words. "He says 'no'," Krasala told him. "He says the top part is too big, and jaw too little."

"Is it the skull of a man?" Rolf asked again.

The same huntsman snorted derisively. "What man has needles for teeth and ears on top of his head?" he replied through the translator. Then his expression changed, became startled. A hushed murmur arose from the group. Krasala caught her breath and stared up at the pale and ancient bone.

"I found it here—in this room," Rolf said in a conversational tone. "Since the top of the shaft is closed, it must have come up from below. Have any of you seen something like this wandering through the temple?"

Krasala translated in a weak, halting voice. This time the man replied with only an uneasy head-shake.

"It was in a box," Rolf continued. "Somebody must have put it in the box, a long time ago. It's very dry and brittle. Would any of you like to handle it?"

An uneasy mutter was the only answer to Krasala's translation. She had backed away from him several steps, and she was swaying weakly. Rolf turned the thing over in his hands and put on a puzzled expression.

"Now, what do you suppose has teeth, jaw, and ears like a bat, but a head that's bigger than a man's?"

He opened the jaw to peer at the teeth—and made a new discovery. "It even has two metal teeth."

"Translate, please," he murmured when Krasala lagged.

She managed to get it said before she started to faint. He leaped toward her, gave her an arm for support, and shook her slightly. She moaned and shied away from the skull. He led her gently back toward the tethered bats while a babble of voices began to grow behind him. He let her sit by the wall to recover while he silently returned the skull to the coffin and the coffin to the bag.

Then he spoke to her again: "Go tell the men that they are about to see that Bolsewi magic can be used by men, without harm to them. Tell them that the temple of Menbana will soon open its mouth to the sky, with much thunder. Tell them to watch closely while I use Bolsewi magic again."

Wordlessly, she went to do his bidding, and he heard the heated argument die when she began to speak. He hurried toward the entrance, hoping that the bagpipes were powerful enough to make good his promise. He sat in the center of the opening and fired a shrieking bolt at the ceiling of the shaft. The violet globe stung the metal, and by its light he inspected the damage wrought by the first shot which had gained him Lalyahe's respect. There was a fused crater in the metal, but the center of the crater had bulged downward, as if pressed by weight from above.

He felt certain that the ceiling was several feet in thickness, and covered with a heavy layer of earth. Burning through it would take too long, and already the half-hour deadline was approaching. He hoped, however, that H'nrin's pleas would manage to stall the Commission for a time.

INSPECTING the roof, he wondered if its sudden collapse would bring a landslide and perhaps cause the store-room to cave in. But he had to chance it. He glanced down over the lip of the ledge to assure himself that none of the tribesmen was brave enough to enter the haunted temple. Then he began firing at a group of struts which supported a section of ceiling on the opposite side of the shaft, hoping thereby to limit the overall effect and confine any rock-slide to the one side. The globes of bright fury attached themselves to the struts and bit angrily into the metal. He ducked back behind the wall to avoid a shower of sparks and to protect his eyes from the sun-glare of four globes burning at once.

A deep-throated grumble began to pervade the shaft. He stole a glance around the corner and saw one of the struts begin to buckle at the point where the charge had heated it to white incandescence. The ceiling section seemed to sag slightly. But the fire-globes had died, and the struts were subsiding to a red heat. The grumble began to die.

Quickly, in the failing light, he fired three more bursts at the same struts. When the sun-orbs bloomed again, the heated shafts crawled rapidly to white luminescence. Rolf backed away from the entrance. Two of the shafts were slipping and twisting like fat lead bars pressed lengthwise in a vise.

The grumble returned, became a rumble, became a growling roar that shivered the solid walls of the store-room and tore at the eardrums with bursts of sound. He ran twenty paces into the storeroom, then turned and ran toward a far corner where Krasala huddled in fright. Somewhere outside, the piercing cry of shearing steel blended with the monstrous growl of tumbling rock. A hail of stones rained on

the ledge, bouncing through the entranceway. A small boulder came with the debris, tearing out a bite of rock from the side of the door. It hurtled through the storeroom like a juggernaut, struck the rear wall, and narrowly missed crushing a bat before it came to rest.

The room became choked with dust as the barrage continued. Faintly, above the uproar, he heard the outcries of the huntsmen. "What are they saying?" he shouted at Krasala, who was clinging to his arm and biting her lip to keep silent.

"They are praying," she called in reply.

"Not a bad idea," he said as he watched the wall toward the shaft begin to crack. The crack grew longer, as though an invisible hand were tracing it in black ink upon the polished stone. The same crack was moving more slowly across the ceiling. In grim fascination, Rolf watched it until it finally crept to a halt.

Then the rumble was coming from far below as the cave-in piled itself upon the floor of the temple. The rain of rocks in the entranceway had stopped. But there was darkness in the shaft. With a cry of dismay he ran toward the entrance. Only blackness above and below, blackness and choking dust. Had the collapse only sheared off a layer of rock above the metal, leaving the higher stratum hanging by its bootstraps? If so, they would all die rather slowly and unpleasantly—of starvation. For he was certain enough rock had fallen to bury the tops of the temple's doorways, thereby sealing off the merciful death of the Commission's threatened gas attack.

HE SEIZED a bagpipe and fired it upward in the shaft, then waited anxiously for the bloom of brilliance. It failed to come. He laughed with hysterical relief. The lack of daylight

was simple. It was nighttime on the surface. In the dayless, nightless caverns, he had lost track of time, having eaten and slept whenever the need arose.

He turned to call the news to Krasala, and was startled to see three burly shadows standing behind him. He lifted the weapon and edged toward the side of the entrance to guard himself against a sudden push. The three figures sidled with him.

"What do you want?" he barked.

One of the men stepped forward and knelt. Then the other two followed suit. A tongue of cold air licked down his back from the open maw of the shaft above. "Krasala," he called weakly. "Come find out what's wrong with these jerks!"

"I'm right here," she said from somewhere in the dusty shadows. Then her shape appeared, and she questioned the men quietly. The one in the center answered without looking up.

Rolf listened to the conversation impatiently. At first it occurred to him that they had taken him for a god, but he dismissed the notion with the thought that primitive peoples often failed to differentiate sharply between powerful natural and supernatural forces. A force could be slightly a god, partially a god, or wholly a god. And he had seen them kneel to their leaders.

"What is it?" he asked impatiently.

"They beg you pardon," she replied.

"They want you to be high priest, and teach them."

"Do they speak for all the men?" he grunted.

She repeated the question, and replied, "All but a few. A few too frightened to say."

Rolf breathed relief. "Okay, tell them to get their bats ready and start chasing out of here. Straight up. We'll assemble again on the surface, around

the mouth of the shaft. There's no time to waste."

One by one the bats began fluttering out of the opening and soaring up into dusty blackness. Rolf gave the train to another huntsman, to leave himself free for reconnaissance. Eight men refused to go; they remained in their corner, sulking and shivering. He decided to leave them. When the others had gone, he told Krasala to keep them assembled near the mouth of the shaft. Then they mounted their bats, and burst out into the shaft, climbing toward the invisible escapeway. A patch of stars came dimly into view as the dust thinned. Then they were out in the frigid night.

Rolf stalled his mount briefly over the mouth of the shaft, and by the light of the moons he could see that at least eight feet of rock and soil had been deposited over the metal roof. Since the walls of the shaft sloped inward, there would be perhaps twelve feet of debris covering the temple floor, blocking all entrances. The cult of Menbana was doomed.

A FEW RIDERS were still aloft, fighting their bats, who sensed freedom in the open night. But most had landed and tethered their mounts to small boulders. The shaft's entrance lay in a pass between two mountains.

He called a repetition of his order to remain in a group, then let the bat climb high. The lights of Marsville arose above a hilltop. He reined toward it and spurred the beast to angry speed by pulling hairs out of its shaggy belly. The half hour had certainly elapsed, but H'nrin's pleading together with the commotion caused by the cave-in had probably delayed the gassing of the caves.

He kept the bat high until he located the ravine where the bat-caves stared from their low bluff. It was not hard to find; a dim aura of light

arose from the encampment of guards. Then, lest they catch a glimpse of him in the moonlight, he swooped low, and darted east at fifty feet altitude. The camp lay about six miles down the slopes from the mountain pass. The icy wind numbed his face and froze his breath about his lips as he goaded the bat to furious speed.

As he drew nearer, he nosed his mount north, away from the moons, so that he would not be silhouetted as he circled at a radius of a thousand yards. From the number of portable huts erected about a monstrous bonfire, he estimated that there were at least a hundred men in the ravine. Bright lights gleamed about the cave entrances, and a group of men were working about the ledge. They had drilled into the rock, and had set a metal door over the mouth of the tunnel leading to the caverns. He murmured thankfully; the door was still open, and two men were peering into the cave. Evidently the delegation was still inside.

A tanker truck had been rolled up near the entrance, and dimly he could see a heavy hose coiled on the ground. The gas equipment. He reasoned that the gas would not be a lingering one, such as lewisite or the more deadly radioactive alphazene, for the Commission would want to reenter the caverns. Chlorine, perhaps, or a radioactive gas with a very short half-life.

Hovering at a distance of five hundred yards, he heard the sputter of an internal combustion engine. Briefly, he wondered why they hadn't brought a portable reactor instead, but then realized that there was no cooling water available in the ravine. He looked for the engine and spotted it on the bed of an open lorry. Undoubtedly driving the generator that furnished light for the encampment.

He twisted the crank of the Bolsewi bagpipe and eased the bat in

closer. He could not afford to miss either target. At a hundred and fifty yards, he heard a shout. Someone had spotted him.

He set the bat in a gradual stall and calmly aimed for the generator. A searchlight stabbed out, probing toward him. He ignored it and pressed the stud. Its shriek sent the bat into a hysterical climbing turn. A machine gun chattered, and tracers drew white lines across the landscape beneath him. The ravine became illuminated with bluish light as the orb fried its way into steel. The engine's sputter died. The lights grew dim, then failed. Bullets ploughed upward in his general direction, but the guards had looked toward the sun-glare of the bag-pipe charge, and their aim was poor.

The bat was fighting its way higher and tugging doggedly toward the mountains, while Rolf tried to tug it back and keep it satisfied with a vertical ascent. But soon he was circling a thousand feet above the camp. The smoke of the bonfire seemed to hide him from view, for the barking of small arms ceased, except for an occasional wild shot toward some other bat whose sleep had been disturbed by the commotion.

WHEN HE had control of his mount again, Rolf skidded aside out of the thin smoke-pall and aimed another shot at the tank of gas. It fell wide by several yards and burned its way into the rocky ground. The bat bolted again, but this time he regained control more easily. The animal was weary of fighting.

The guards saw his intentions, and began scurrying wildly about in the area. Some were running toward the huts, while others darted into the mouth of the cave. He gave them a little time to reach cover before he fired again. A few of them appeared wearing gas masks, while those who

apparently had no such protection sought refuge in the cave and closed the steel hatch behind them. A hail of bullets began streaking upward as the masked guards resumed their fire. There was a snapping sound as a slug bit through the bat's wing-membrane. The bat squeaked angrily, but evidently there were no somesthetic nerve-endings in the membrane. It seemed to be in no pain.

He aimed carefully and fired again. This time the sun-orb flared on the tank's hull. The small-arms barrage ceased as the guards raced for safety. Rolf gave the bat its head and let it streak toward the mountains. He counted the seconds... three, four... the tank was strong.

Then came an ear-numbing *thwang* as a bubble of white-hot steel swelled and burst. It was followed by a gushing roar that ended sharply and echoed off the mountains. He flew onward.

Looking back from a mile's safety, he saw that the bonfire had gone green as the gas swirled about it. Even the lights of Marsville were tinted with an emerald glow as the cloud billowed upward as a tenuous mist. It behaved as a heavy fog, spreading out from the explosion, covering the camp, and rolling slowly downward to fill the ravine. How long before it would disperse and blend with the atmosphere as free gas? The coldness of the windless night should help preserve it for a time as a low-hanging vapor shroud. He needed that time badly.

The sound of a helicopter engine startled him. He looked back to see its shadow flit up from the camp past the lights of the city. It arose above the vapor and hovered for a moment, the moons glinting on its fuselage. With its landing lights, it probed the night about the camp. Then, having reassured itself that the threat had passed, it darted cityward. Another copter arose to follow it.

Rolf prodded the bat to higher speed. The pilots would bring help from the city. And if the gas was tymbogen, as he suspected, it could be quickly dispersed by jets spraying the ravine with powdered graphite. The gas was his ally, keeping the men trapped in the tunnel.

The huntsmen had built a roaring fire from dry lichen, and they were huddled about it for warmth. It guided him back to the shaft, but upon landing the flaming lichen into the shaft. lest it be spotted by aircraft taking off from the city. Krasala relayed the order as she ran toward him, grinning and scolding. He nestled her small body in his arms for a moment, then pushed her away.

"Find me five men brave enough to carry the Bolsewi weapons," he told her.

She shook her head doubtfully but followed him toward the group of men who were beating out the fire and kicking the flaming lichen into the shaft. She waited until they had finished, then spoke to the huntsmen sharply. Rolf watched the men halt in their tracks and turn to stare uneasily at the leader. No one volunteered.

"Ask them if they have decided about the skull I showed them in the storeroom. Ask them if they think it was man, bat, or Bolsewi."

"I already hear them talk about it," she said. "A few think it was Bolsewi."

"Which ones?"

She spoke sharply to a thin, saturnine batsman who stood nearby. He nodded and grunted. "Bolsewi". Then he stared nervously at his fellows and rubbed his beard contemplatively. Three others echoed the word, but a murmur of dissent came among the group.

"Tell those four to step forward," he said.

WHEN THEY had approached sheepishly to within a few paces, he began asking Socratic questions about death, gods, immortality, and magic. They answered respectfully but briefly. But when the questioning reached the crucial stage—“Why not touch the weapons, if the Bolsewi were mortals?”—the men fell silent and inched away.

“Tell them that those who are cowards may leave,” he barked in despair.

“*Ga yaihi foebolsewi sundra k'raj!*” she snapped scornfully.

One of the men backed away a few paces, then turned and bolted. Two others seemed ready to follow. The saturnine huntsman's shoulders stiffened proudly, however. He tapped his chest, grunted a monosyllable, and caught up a stone from the ground. He spun around and hurled it after the timid runner. There came a frightened yelp from the shadows, and a clatter of loose gravel as the man sprawled to the ground and darted behind a boulder. The thrower turned and grinned smugly at Rolf. His action seemed to deter the others from fleeing. They stood uneasily waiting.

“Get the weapons,” he told Krasala.

She nodded and moved silently toward the tethered bat-train. Even the saturnine misfit's grin disappeared as she returned with them.

“Remind them that nothing horrible's happening to you,” he told her. “And stop shivering. They'll notice it.”

She placed the guns on the ground and translated. There was only a slight quaver in her voice, but she kept her hands clasped behind her shapely back. The men were staring down at the weapons with dismay. They seemed intellectually convinced that the Bolsewi were mortal. They had seen both Rolf and Krasala handle the bagpipes without misfortune. Yet they were afraid. Some kinds of fear were not quite reasonable, he reminded himself.

“Tell the thin one to take a gun,” he growled.

Krasala lifted one of the weapons and extended it toward the batsman, calling him S'rij. But S'rij moistened his lips and let his hands dangle by his sides. His face reflected anguish. Suddenly he looked at Rolf and asked a pleading question.

“He wants to know if you will perform a spell to protect him,” Krasala told him.

“What kind of a spell?” he asked in dismay.

She shrugged. “He regards you as a priest. Is business of priest to say what kind of spell.”

He paused a moment, then shrugged resignedly and took the weapon from her. If they wanted spells, then they would get spells. He turned the bagpipe over in his hands, made gestures at it, blew a jug-note on its muzzle, mumbled gibberish over it, and held it up to the sky like an offering. He grinned at Krasala. “Tell the guy I'm giving it instructions.”

THE BATSMAN nodded gravely as she translated. Rolf stepped forward, pressed the fellow's nose with his forefinger, and placed his hand forcefully across the breach of the weapon. “I now pronounce you man and wife,” he said solemnly: then, thinking the foolishness was perhaps a good idea, he spoke to Krasala. “Tell him he's now married to the gun, and that if he leaves it or mistreats it, it'll give him a bad time.”

No one laughed when she spoke. The hunter stared in awe at the thing in his hands. He turned it over slowly, inspecting its details with cautious interest. Then he nodded slowly at Rolf, and spoke in a low tone.

“He says he will guard it properly, but that he hope for a woman wife.”

“Tell him its only a marriage of convenience,” Rolf said, suppressing a

smile. "He can have a divorce when we're finished. He can trade it in on a priestess."

The huntsman-acolyte had undoubtedly been trudging along behind his strutting bewinged female for too many years as an unthanked lackey. He broke into a beaming grin, nudged his comrades, and promptly fell in love with the bagpipe. Rolf felt his own shoulders relax and his stomach return to its proper position. "Whhhh!" he breathed to Krasala. "Now to marry the others. Let's make it a double ceremony."

Having watched their comrade accept the weapon, the other two men agreed nervously but without protest. When he was finished, he asked for more volunteers and got another man. But there were still two extra weapons, not including his own.

"I'll carry it, but I won't marry it," said Krasala, who seemed to be becoming a godless heathen in imitation of her sacrilegious beloved.

"Okay, we'll leave the other. Now, get these guys over to the shaft for instructions."

The four armed batsmen followed him to the gaping mouth of the opening, and watched while he cranked and fired the weapon into the abyss. Its burst gleamed feebly up through the lingering dust from the floor of the wrecked temple far below. Then, he gave each of them individual instructions in aiming, cranking, firing, and had them fire several practice bursts into the shaft, where they could not be observed from the city or from aircraft. He feared that the operation might leave them unnerved, but after a few shots, the batsmen seemed to take heart and grow calmer.

Then he called the entire party to their bats. While he was giving them instructions, the moonlight seemed to grow brighter, bathing the ground in increasing brilliance. The men were

muttering among themselves and staring past him toward the plains.

"A star grows brighter!" Krasala gasped beside him.

He looked around, and saw that the light was coming, not from the twin moons, but from a magnesium flare hovering over the ravine to the east. He bellowed for silence and listened to the night. The distant growl of a jet engine came to his ears. They were spraying the ravine to clear it of gas. "Let's go!" he shouted to the men. "Single file, weapon-men in the lead. Head for the valley, but stay clear of the light!"

SHRILLING his orders to the others, Krasala followed close on his heels. Soon the weird procession was airborne, winging down the slopes toward the glow of the city. He saw the flash of a jet's wings dart past the flare, and a smoky cloud of fine powder trail out behind it to sift slowly downward. The vaporous tendrils of tymbogen were thinning in the ravine. As the dusty cloud drifted through them, they came alive with a faint green light of their own. When the luminescence faded, the tendril was gone, and the vapor lost its droplet form and blended with the air like vanishing steam. Nevertheless, its potency would linger in the area for a short time, depending on the faint up-currents of air along the slopes.

Rolf led the wavering column of bats a mile south of the ravine. A jet thundered past a hundred feet above them, causing the train to break up into a flurrying whirlpool of terrified moths. He bellowed for order, and shouted frantic explanations, but six batsmen bolted for the hills and refused to heed his angry threats. At last he let them go, and shouted at the others to fly toward the orchard and land in a group at its eastern fringes. He accompanied the flight, to assure himself

of obedience.

The foliage cups of the quioie orchards gleamed like a long ribbon of buttercups beneath them in the moonlight. It lay a half mile wide between the plain and the foothills. He guided his makeshift warriors to a landing at the edge of the tree line, then called to Krasala without climbing out from under his bat.

"Tell S'rij and one other weapon-man to stay here with the others and wait for us to get back. Tell S'rij to brain any man who tries to slip away. Have them tie the bats under the trees and keep themselves out of sight if a...mechanical bat comes snooping. You and the other weapon-men come with me."

When S'rij proudly assured him that any deserter would be chopped in bits and fed to his bat, Rolf led the four-man task force aloft. Keeping low, they made their way back toward the ravine. He sniffed the night air for the sickening bouquet of tymbogen, the maker of tombs. He smelled nothing, but nervously led the party higher when they approached within a thousand yards. "Get as much altitude as you can," he called. "We'll watch from above."

The dusting-planes had dropped another flare, and by its light Rolf could see several tiny figures moving about beneath the mouth of the cavern. They were still wearing masks, and apparently testing for lingering whiffs of gas. One of the jets had gone back to the city, but the other still circled far overhead.

"No closer!" Rolf warned the others. "If the plane spots us, scatter in all directions and regroup with the others."

They hovered in a slow circle, watching the party of men in the ravine. Rolf reflected that there was little chance of being spotted by the jet from above; the riders were hidden

beneath the bodies of their mounts, and enough other disturbed bats were flitting about in the area to make them inconspicuous. The ground-men's eyes were adjusted to the brightness beneath the flare, and although they cast frequent nervous glances skyward, Rolf doubted if they could see much beyond their immediate vicinity.

ONE OF the men suddenly detached himself from the group, hauled a portable radio from the back of a truck, and spoke into the mike. After a brief exchange of words, the sound of the jet took on a different note.

"Watch it!" Rolf warned sharply. "We may be spotted!"

But a moment later, the purring engine receded. Between wing flaps of his mount, he caught a glimpse of its luminous blue tail streaking toward the northeast.

"It's coming back!" Krasala cried suddenly.

"Not so loud! And don't worry, it's making another dusting run."

They watched and fought the reins, while the aircraft roared back up the ravine, scattering another haze of black powder from a greater altitude. It sifted over a wider area, and Rolf felt a few particles striking his skin. Krasala sneezed vigorously. He watched the ground as the dust drifted down, but there were no further signs of luminosity. The gas seemed to be gone.

But he waited until the cloud completely cleared. The masked guard was using the radio again when the haze thinned enough to allow visibility. He spoke for a short time, then replaced the mike and went to join his fellows. Rolf heard the jet turn off and recede toward the city. Its task was done.

He heard Krasala gasp suddenly from behind him. "Lights!" she warned. "Coming out of the city."

Rolf glanced back to see four pairs

of headlights file out of the west gate and begin crawling across the plain. Trucks, bringing back the guards who had fled when the tank exploded. Evidently the Commission had cleared a road across the plain since the last time he had seen it. He smiled to himself. If things went right, the road might have a lot of future traffic—peaceful traffic. The trucks failed to worry him. He should be finished before they arrived.

"Move in closer to the caves," he told the others. "But keep silent."

HE LED them lower as they swooped toward the ravine. The flare had fallen and was burning itself out on the ground. One of the men was heaping dry lichens on the dying embers of the bonfire, and stirring them up to a light-giving blaze. There seemed to be only six men in the party. Rolf watched one of them shaking a bottle of liquid, then holding it up to the light—apparently testing for lingering gas. He seemed satisfied, and laid the bottle aside. He cracked his mask slightly, then tore it off, and shouted to the others.

"Okay, men! It's safe! Get that hatch open before the Commissioner has kittens!"

"Wait here!" Rolf hissed to Krasala. "Cover me! Don't fire unless they shoot first."

He goaded his bat to a burst of speed and ducked in close to the ground. The men had stacked their rifles against the bluff. They clambered upon the ledge and began making their way higher toward the cave entrance. He stuck a flaming orb to the ledge just ahead of them. The party bolted back toward safety. He stuck another orb to the ledge, cutting off their retreat. One man leaped off the ledge, but underestimated the drop and the hardness of the ground. He rolled over and sat up howling, with

one leg twisted at a crazy angle. The others remained on the ledge, pinned between the two glaring globes.

Three of them produced side-arms and began firing at the flitting shadow of the frightened bat. Rolf retreated a hundred feet, gained altitude, and bellowed down at them: "Pitch your guns over the edge! And be quick, or I'll build a fire right between the other two!"

After a moment's hesitation, the men complied. "You'll get yours, Kenlan," a major roared angrily.

Rolf ignored him and called to the others to advance. "Watch that man on the ground!" he warned. "If he lets go of his leg, blast him!" Then he landed in the ravine while the others remained aloft. He tied his bat to the tailgate of a truck, then stood guard while the others brought their harried mounts to the ground. The sun-orbs flickered out, leaving white patches of softened rock.

"You'll get yours, all right," the major repeated.

"Yeah," Rolf growled. "But in the meantime, jump over that hot-spot and come down off the ledge. All of you! Then line up at the base of the cliff, facing it."

The five guards trooped sullenly down and obediently filed along the bottom of the bluff. The major kept glancing back curiously. Finally his professional curiosity got the better of his wrath. "Where did you get those weapons, Kenlan?" he grunted.

"Watch them while I look for rope," Rolf told Krasala.

THE OFFICER was not accustomed to being ignored. He repeated the question irritably.

"Plenty of them in the caverns!" Rolf called cheerfully as he leaped into the back of the first truck, and began rooting through the boards, tarpaulins, and coils of rope.

"Who made them?" the major asked. "You mean these androoms—"

"No, not these humans. They were made by an ancient civilization that borrowed a few pairs of our ancestors from earth."

The major sputtered contemptuously. "What do you take me for, Kenlan?"

"A fool!" Rolf replied calmly as he moved on to the second truck. In it, he found no rope, but stumbled across the assembly of a hydrogen welder which had evidently been used to mount the steel hatch over the cave entrance. He slit the oxygen hose with his pocket knife, tossed the end of it off the truck, and turned the cylinder valve full on. The hose writhed and hissed as the cylinder pressure needle crept slowly down the scale. When he got through with the hatch, they would need a cutting torch to open it; and he preferred that none be immediately available. While the oxygen spewed itself out, he moved on to the third truck.

But before he climbed inside, a loud-speaker voice called from the portable radio: "Major Mulvern, this is Longly, over."

"Better let me answer it, Kenlan," the major called.

Rolf cursed and darted toward the radio. He stuffed a handkerchief over the microphone to simulate the muffling effect of a talkie gas-mask, and grunted, "Go ahead, Longly."

"We've reached the orchard, sir. Shall we come on up the ravine? Uh... are you still in your mask, sir?"

"Hold it where you are," Rolf barked. "There's still a little gas in here. Should be clear soon. Half hour, maybe."

Longly called an acknowledgement, but another station interrupted on the frequency. The voice was charged with impatience and carried the crisp ring of authority. "I thought you said the

gas was clear, Mulvern. What's going on over there?"

"No trouble, sir. A little gas still lingering in the crevices."

"I'll send more jets, then."

"That won't be necessary, sir."

"Since when do you tell a Commissioner what's necessary!" the voice roared.

Rolf caught his breath. So some of the rulers had remained in the city after all. "Sorry, sir," he said meekly. "It's just that the vapor's already broken up. And the jets can't chase the fumes away."

THE COMMISSIONER broke off the conversation with a growl. Rolf replaced the mike and hurried back to the trucks. Someone was beating on the hatch from the inside of the tunnel, and shouting for news and assistance. He felt certain that the hatch could not be opened from within, since it was meant to imprison the cavern's inhabitants.

There was no rope, but he found a two-foot roll of copper wire, heavy enough for the purpose. He kicked it out of the truck, and carried it to the captives. "You've got seniority here," he told the major. "Lie down on your belly. Get away from the others."

Grumbling insults and threats, the major stretched out on the rocky ground. Rolf trussed him up like an unborn foetus, then turned to the others. "You're next, Captain," he barked.

Soon the prisoners were safely bound and propped in a circle around the bright embers of the bonfire. "You won't freeze," he told them, after glancing at the major's watch. "It'll be dawn in a couple of hours."

Longly was on the radio again, seething with polite impatience. "I've got a dozen men with masks, sir," he called. "Can they take one truck and come on up?"

"No need to," Rolf grunted into the

muffled mike. "You can all come in about ten minutes. By the way, do you have a welder with you?"

"Uh, no sir! Why? There's one in truck 35-A. Isn't there?"

Rolf glanced at the truck with the hose dangling over its tail-gate. "35-A" was stencilled on its rear. "Oh, sure. Oxygen pressure's a little low, however. Never mind, it'll hold out."

Longly murmured acknowledgement and signed off.

"I want those men out of that cave in fifteen minutes, Mulvern!" barked the Commissioner's voice.

Rolf laughed into the microphone, and left the set to sputter pompously. "Get your bats aloft," he told Krasala. "Stay high and look for the trucks. They should be down the ravine and just across the quioie orchard. Circle the area, but don't let them see you. Wait until they start through the trees. When they're about halfway through, start firing at the forest behind them. Don't shoot at the trucks, but keep your shots directed at the trees along the road. Don't stop until you've got a fire big enough to cut off retreat. Then fly back and join the others. Set fires as you go. We want to block off this whole area for a while. Got that straight?"

She nodded, and chattered the information to the others. They moved silently to their bats, and he watched them spring aloft.

"Like father, like son, eh, Kenlan?" growled the major, who had been staring at the girl.

"Exactly," he grunted as he stalked to the low end of the ledge, mounted it, and made his way toward the mouth of the caves.

"Not bad looking, even if she is non-human," the major said acidly.

Rolf turned slowly. "You people killed my father when he came to you in good faith, trying to tell the truth. I watched your men shoot my brother

while he lay pinned under his horse with a bullet through his middle. After all that, do you think I'd mind kicking your kidneys to a pulp and leaving you here to die?"

THE MAJOR began maintaining a rigid silence. Rolf went to inspect the hatch. It proved to be a door taken from some sort of safety vault, and its frame was set in the face of the cliff with heavy expansion-bolts. A circular hole just large enough to admit a hose had been cut through the door, and the hole was stuffed with rags that had been prodded into it from the inside. Rolf jabbed them out with the muzzle of the bagpipe, and observed that the steel was about four inches thick—probably not so thin as to melt completely through from a bagpipe blast. He turned to leave the ledge, but a muffled voice called through the hole: "Mulvern, this is Commissioner Peterson. Never mind the rags, just open the damned door."

"My name's Kenlan, Peterson!" he growled. "And don't hold your breath till I let you out."

No answer. They stalked along the ledge to the lower end, then moved back up the ravine to stand facing the door. He cranked the bagpipe, then placed three careful shots along each edge of the heavy plate of steel. He waited until the orbs died, making certain that the door was welded fast to the frame. Then he went to get the portable radio.

"Longly, this is Mulvern. You can start in now."

The junior officer responded eagerly. "Immediately, sir. Be with you in a few minutes."

"Take your time, take your time. And watch for signs of gas."

"Yes, sir."

Rolf sighed and sat on the ground to await signs of activity along the edge of the orchard, where Krasala and the

two huntsmen should be ready to set the fires. The heart-pulp of the quoin was very moist, but the cup-shaped foliage and the felt covering of the trunks were dry enough to burn nicely, with a little encouragement.

A few seconds later, he heard a distant squeak. It could only be the sound of the Bolsewi weapons. Several others followed it, then a burst of small arms fire, evidently from the trucks. Longly was babbling on the radio. "Sir, we're being attacked! They're starting fires!"

"Well, stop that shooting!" Rolf roared, "and get the trucks on through the orchard, you fool! They'll have you trapped in there!"

A moment later the firing ceased. He saw a tongue of flame lick up above a low hill that hid most of the orchard from view.

"Did you hit any of your attackers?" Rolf asked nervously.

"I think we winged one, sir," the officer said. "But it's like shooting ghosts in a cellar. We don't have a spot-light."

Rolf cursed to himself. If Kra-sala...

"Where are you now?" he asked.

"We're out of the orchard, sir. Starting up the ravine. You should see our headlights in a few moments. By the way, sir—you seem to still be wearing your gas mask. May I ask—"

"Just a minute," Rolf grunted. "Pull the trucks up and park. Just a minute."

THE OFFICER reluctantly acknowledged the order, and reported compliance. Rolf carried the radio to the major, who was shivering in his bonds by the now-blackened campfire. The only light in the ravine came from a few red embers in the ashes.

Rolf took the muffler off the microphone and held it close to Mulvern's mouth. "You can tell the world what

your present situation is. Tell Longly to keep his trucks or men where they are, or a few hostages will be executed. Including Peterson, if he's standing close to the cave door."

"Come on up the ravine, Lieutenant!" Mulvern roared into the dead pickup.

Rolf booted him unmercifully in the shins, pushed him over, and rolled him toward the smouldering remains of the fire. He was grateful for the major's scream when it came.

"Now, let's try it with the mike-button on," he barked.

The sweating officer eyed him with hate, then panted into the microphone. "Longly, this is Mulvern. You were talking to Kenlan. He's got us trussed up here. You better stay where you are. He threatens to kill Commissioners Peterson and White."

Rolf took the mike away and listened to the ensuing babble of two stations trying to speak at once. He carried the leather-encased instrument to his bat, and strapped it between the animal's legs. Then he slipped beneath the belly, tugged the tether free, and burst aloft. He flew up the ravine, away from Longly's men, then cut plainsward toward the meeting place at the edge of the orchard. A dozen fires pierced the darkness. Soon the entire orchard would be in flames, and communication or transportation between the city and the ravine could be accomplished only by helicopter. And he doubted if a copter could make the haul with heavy welding equipment.

He spoke into the mike again. "Marsville control, this is Kenlan. Get that Commissioner on the air again."

There was a long silence, during which he could hear a mic-button being keyed nervously. Then the curt voice barked, "All right, Kenlan. This is Commissioner Rathwich. Speak your piece."

"All right. Undoubtedly you've got

a direction-finder on this transmission, and a searchlight waiting to pick me up. I advise you not to do it, nor to make any other hostile move. We have a lot of your hostages over here. Over."

There was another pause, then: "You're clear, Kenlan. No d-f. What do you want? Not that you'll get it."

"I want a parley. I want to bring a party of my men to the city, under guarantee of safe conduct. Such guarantee, of course, being backed up by our possessing the persons of two Commissioners—and something like a hundred lesser beings, if they count for anything. Do you agree to that?"

"Just a minute."

There was an ominous silence while Rathwich took counsel with others or made some plans of his own. Rolf didn't like it.

"Make up your mind!" he barked.

"Okay, Kenlan. Meet us at the west gate of the city."

"Un-huh! I'll pick the spot myself."

"Where then?"

"I'll tell you after we get there, Rathwich. And listen! Keep the planes grounded and the searchlights off the sky. If we're not back in two hours, my men go to work on the prisoners. You understand?"

"Agreed," Rathwich snapped after a moment's hesitation.

"See you shortly!" Rolf called in signing off. He replaced the mike and reined the bat toward the spot where the others waited.

IN TWO hours it would be dawn, and Rathwich undoubtedly suspected that time was on his side and that, if he could stall until daylight, he would be able to strike quickly and effectively. Rolf shivered at the realization that his success depended upon the Commissioner's assumption that he was backed by a small army—instead of only a dozen frightened men and a girl.

The party came out of the trees to

meet him when he landed. Several batmen were kneeling around a prone figure in the shadows, and for a moment he thought it was Krasala. But the girl slipped out of the orchard and trotted toward him. "They fire at us," she panted. "Grandson of H'nrin is wounded."

"Badly?"

"His arm. It's shattered."

"Leave two men to take care of him. Get the rest on their bats. We're going into the city."

She caught her breath. "They'll kill us! They have always killed—"

"Not this time, I think. Let's get on our way."

She summoned the huntsmen, and together they arose above the plain. "Fly as high as the bats will go!" he ordered. "Keep well above the lights." They circled higher until the city was a warm square of brightness on the plain. Then he led the party eastward.

Somewhere in that patch of light, he knew that telephones were ringing, gate-guards were peering up into the darkness, and machine-gun crews along the walls were being alerted. Near the space-port ramp, the small ack-ack installation would be buzzing with activity, and searchlights were waiting to probe the sky. Rathwich's guarantee of safe passage meant nothing, although Rolf knew that he would observe it as long as it seemed to his advantage to do so.

Rolf, being at a disadvantage, didn't intend to bind himself by any rules of honesty. He meant to play the game the way Rathwich played it, and to use whatever opportunities arose. His only long-range weapon was public opinion.

THE COMMISSION, realizing that a police state would eventually fall, ruled by careful planning rather than by force. Marsville was an isolated society, a city-state that was an

independent entity. It had achieved its own form of cultural integration after several generations of living apart from Earth. It had a sense of its own destiny as a nucleus of a Martian future. Its spirit was mildly messianic and, in the mind of its citizen, Mars was an evil wasteland which could only be made into a paradise by the "chosen people", at an "acceptable time", and under the semi-divine leadership of the Commission, whose members were Earthborn and therefore symbols of that almost legendary Paradise which was Earth.

But the time for Martian ascendency was always "not yet", and there was no frontier spirit among the people. Such attitudes had been carefully preserved and encouraged by the Commission, under the guidance of Earth-state, who wanted to keep the sapling carefully pruned and controlled, and Martian civilization tightly integrated and restricted as to pattern, thereby insuring that it would be exploitable at the "acceptable time". That time would come when Mars' industrial capacity outweighed its potentialities as a mushrooming agrarian nation. Earth-state knew very well that a frontier society would quickly get out of hand, explode outward toward individual freedom, and lose its unity as a colony of Earth. When it reached the stage of reintegration, it would have lost its Earth flavor, and would be a new and hearty nation declaring its independence. Since space-flight was limited by fuel-supply, Mars could never be brought to heel by force. Not at the present level of technical development.

There were certain inherent disadvantages in Earth's scheme of control. It had set itself up as the great green mother, the benevolent symbol of good things and of righteousness. The word "Earth" brought the same feelings to the colonists as "Democracy"

or "Liberty" had brought to the ancients. Rolf, who had always been intellectually atypical, foresaw a day in the distant future when "all good colonials would go to Earth when they died". The disadvantage in Earth's scheme lay in its appeal to a mystical emotion.

A MESSIANIC spirit could always be aroused to some extent by the cry: "Now is the acceptable hour! The day of consummation is at hand!" Men who lived for a promise had always been stirred by sudden hosannas in favor of immediate fulfillment. Christianity, Bolshevism, Islam, the surge of the American frontier—history was full of examples. And Rolf had seen local political prophets arise in Marsville to proclaim that the time had come for spatial expansion. Such men had attracted sizable followings, but the Commission had always put them down with ridicule and scornful propaganda. When the hubbub died, the prophet faded from sight and finally disappeared completely.

But if proof could be furnished to show the lichen plains and quioie forests of Mars could be colonized with only the present industry to furnish the necessary tools, and if at the same time the Commission could be discredited, then there would be no restraining a gradual outpouring of emigrants without the use of force. And the Commission did not have the police power to hold down a sizable revolt.

As the small party of bat-riders crossed high above the city's walls, Rolf swept through the frequency bands of the receiver, listening for calls. The police station was busily deploying units to probable landing points. He heard the spaceport, the public square, and the administrative building mentioned, and he learned that his party would be shot "at the

slightest hint of hostility". The dispatcher was warning the units that the bat-riding savages were armed with non-human weapons of unpredictable effectiveness.

"If the traitor's behavior seems suspicious," the operator continued, "you are to shoot first, and shoot to kill. Be especially alert if the party lands near a vital public facility, such as the hydrogardens, the pumping station, central heating reactors, power plant, and so forth. A threat to the public facilities is expected, if only as a bargaining point."

Rolf grinned to himself. They were guessing close, but missing. They reasoned that his only chance would be to strike at the city's power, then follow it up with a raid by androoms waiting for a signal from beyond the quois orchards which were now blazing spectacularly. They saw the fires, and heard of the hundred captives, and promptly became guilty of a fallacy—"Big effect, ergo, big cause"—and assumed that he had an army.

Rolf led his small party toward a sprawling, windowless structure of insulated concrete near the north gate. It was the city's hospital—most certainly a public facility, but hardly what the police would suspect. He reasoned that one of its third-floor offices would make a safe meeting place, since the Commission's guards would scarcely dare to stage a gun-battle amid the sick and convalescent occupants. Rolf himself had no intention of starting one.

He pointed out the building to Krasala. "Think you could find it again if you made a circle over half the city?"

"Sure! Is easy to see. Where you going?"

"Down! Listen, fly a wide circle over the city, but keep that building in sight. Fly low over it every time you circle. When you see someone on

the roof, land. If no one comes by dawn, then go back to the hills and lead as many of the tribe as you can across the mountains."

HE HEARD her start to protest, but he goaded the bat and darted away from the others in the darkness. The moons had sunk below the horizon, and the predawn blackness was complete, save for the glow that arose from a few streetlights and from the headlights of prowl-cycles that sputtered about the city, watching the sky. Rolf kept the bat at a safely invisible height and flew toward the Public Information Building, which housed the city's newspaper as well as its popular "radio" station. It was not radio at all, since the city was confined to a limited area, and since there was only one channel in operation. News and entertainment programs were piped to the homes via telephone cables. Marsville had no time to waste on the production and installation of luxuries. Its industry was aimed at future empire.

Rolf skirted the gloomy cubical shadow of the building at a high altitude, then circled slowly downward. A streetlight glimmered on the corner, and he could see a few lights in the basement where printers were no doubt at work, but the rest of it was plunged in blackness. There would probably be a night watchman prowling on the first floor, hovering near the entrance-way, and waiting for daylight and relief. As he soared lower, he saw the dim outline of a roof exit, perched like a box atop the structure. He began jockeying for a landing stall.

Never had the *whooshing* of his mount's wings seemed so loud as the bat glided in toward the roof. He held his breath as the beast stalled and settled, but the only sound was a dull thump as he sat painfully on tarred concrete. The roof was flat, and a

yard-high guard fence gave him some protection. He sat frozen for a moment as a squad of motorcycles growled past, but soon their sound receded.

He waited until he was certain that he had not been observed or heard, then tied the bat to a steel drain vent, hobbled its wings, and went to examine the roof exit. The sheet-metal door was tightly locked, and there was no window. He worked at the lock with a scrap of wire; but it was hopeless. He stood cursing impotently for a moment. Why should the janitor lock the roof entrance?

He unshouldered the Bolsewi weapon, gave the crank a fraction of a turn, and hopefully aimed it skyward. If it shrieked, he would have to flee. He pressed the stud; a faint hiss was the only result. He berated himself again for not discovering that its intensity was adjustable. A second later, a faint star-glow appeared atop an adjoining building. It disappeared quickly.

He turned the weapon on the door and unleashed another modest burst. The startling brightness faded quickly, leaving a patch of distorted metal, but not a hole. He tried holding the stud down while he slowly eased the crank around and played the muzzle in a six-inch circle. The weapon burred a steady zzzzz and left a blue-white trail behind it.

"Swords and ploughshares!" he growled to himself. The thing was probably meant to be a portable welder, and not a weapon at all. He meekly recalled his irritation with the androons for misinterpreting it in another way. "Slaves of our cultures," he grumbled apologetically to any Bolsewi ghosts who might be hovering in the Martian night.

THE CIRCLE of hot metal fell inward, and made a sizzling sound on the stairway matting. He waited

for the door to cool from cherry red, then reached through to trip the night-latch. He paused briefly after entering, to extinguish the smoking mat, then tiptoed quietly down the stairway. The broadcasting rooms were dark and empty. A faint light gleamed up from the first floor. He swung the door softly closed and bolted it.

Then he turned to inspect the modulators, after switching on a rectifier unit to provide a faint light. A timing mechanism always switched on the equipment at five o'clock, and automatically broadcast two hours of recorded music before any of the station's personnel arrived after dawn. He found the clock, and assured himself that it had not been changed.

There were three input channels for the amplifiers. One was fed by the station's own microphones, and it was the one most frequently used. Another input was connected by wire to the administrative telephone circuits, so that the Chairman of the Commission could speak to the entire city over the entertainment system without leaving his office. A third input came from a radio frequency pickup which could be tuned to the space-port channel, or any of the special frequencies. The occasional landing of an Earth-ship was an important event to the people, and they were allowed to listen on their home amplifiers to radio-exchange between ship and ground-control.

Rolf found the selector and switched off the preset recordings. Then he turned the radio pickup into the modulator's input, and tuned it to the frequency of his portable unit. In fifteen minutes, the timer would cut on the modulators and begin transmitting whatever was picked up on the radio to the families who switched on their amplifiers while they ate, dressed, and prepared to man the city's industries at dawn.

On his way toward the stairs, he no-

ticed a lavatory and went inside. He glanced at himself in the mirror, shuddered, and dug a handful of depilatory out of the dispenser. He smeared the pungent paste over his cheeks, then washed off two weeks' growth of beard. As he turned to go, he saw a pair of worn coveralls hung on the peg by the door. Apparently belonged to the janitor. He slipped them on quickly over his ragged and dirty clothing, and borrowed the slightly greasy janitor's cap. The apparel was ill-fitting but believable.

THE IDEA of welding the door closed occurred to him briefly, but he feared that someone on the lower floor might hear the bagpipe's *buzz* and come up to investigate. He left it bolted and quietly returned to the roof.

A few minutes later he was hovering over the hospital, watching for the other riders. When he heard the flapping of their wings, he stalled in for a landing on the roof, and began unfastening the portable transmitter. The others swooped low, circled, and settled about him on the flat deck.

"Have the men unpack the bags from the extra bats," he told Krasala. "Keep reasonably quiet, and wait on the roof. I'll be back in a minute."

He carried the radio to the roof exit and found the door unlocked. He descended quickly to the dimly lit third-floor corridor, and tiptoed past the sleeping rooms toward the desk where a night nurse sat cleaning her nails and studying a paper. She glanced up wearily as he approached, returned to the paper, then gave him a second look and an irritable frown.

"Are you an orderly? What are you doing up here?" she muttered. "Say . . . you're not an orderly . . . what . . . ?"

"Never mind!" he snapped. "Where's your telephone? It's business."

"It better be. Who are you, any-

way?"

"Rolf Kenlan," he murmured as he reached for the phone. The name had no effect. She watched him suspiciously as he dialed.

After two rings, a curt voice barked, "Headquarters, Colonel Luling."

"Luling, this is Rolf Kenlan. I'm at the City Hospital. If the Commissioners are still interested, tell them to come over."

There was a brief silence while Luling breathed surprise into the mouthpiece. Then he grated, "Very clever, Kenlan. What part of the hospital?"

Rolf glanced at the nurse. Her face had gone white, and she was backing away from him. "Where's an empty room?" he snapped.

"Th-three oh seven," she breathed weakly.

"Three oh seven, Luling. How soon can you get here?"

"Three to five minutes. Let me warn you, Kenlan—"

"Yeah! We'll be waiting on the roof. If you bring more than one squad of guards, you'll have a fight on your hands, and you couldn't win it without hitting at us from the air. I don't think people would like having the hospital strafed. If you don't get tricky, things will be peaceable. Keep aircraft away from the building. We can burn a copter down."

HE HUNG up without waiting for an answer, then dialed the editor of the *Martian Messenger*. A plump-throated, sleepy voice grunted a disgusted "Go ahead".

"Listen quickly, Menshrie! This is Rolf Kenlan. Does the name mean anything to you? If not, you should remember my father, Jason. You gave him quite a build-up."

The phone sputtered confusion as Menshrie came fully awake. "Kenlan! What—"

"Don't ask questions. Just turn on

your amplifier, and call somebody from your office staff to take notes. You're going to hear a conference involving myself and the Commissioners. Will you print it straight?"

Menshrie stuttered for a moment. "Why, yes—if the Commission okays it. You don't just print anything—"

"Fool! It's going to be broadcast. Why should they disallow it? And if the people hear one thing, and then you run something else, they'll see you for the toady you really are. The people still believe the fiction that they're running things around here, and the fiction might soon be a fact. They can run you out. The Commission can't get you for printing what thousands of people have already heard!"

"I'll have to check with the Commission. Why are you calling, anyway?"

"You can't. They're on their way here now. That's why I'm calling."

Menshrie hesitated. "If I violate security, I get canned. Then they put a man in who'll respect security. But if an event is observed by enough witnesses, the Commission naturally can't hold it back. I'll get a steno on it, and see what develops. Don't get me wrong, Kenlan. I'm no bootlicker, but they've got me where—"

Rolf dropped the phone in its cradle and hurried toward Room 307. It proved to be a small office, windowless, but with a door in the outer wall. He swung open the door and found a balcony overlooking the grounds. A good place to leave the set. While it was warming up, a car's headlights swung around the corner and came to a halt in front of the building. Five men climbed out into the street and stood beyond the car with drawn weapons. They stared up toward the rooftop.

into the room. He found gummed tape on the desk and fastened the microphone button down. It was impossible to conceal the pickup effectively without diminishing its sensitivity, even though the instrument had a conference-dictate adjustment. He switched it to conference, left it in the corner, and dropped a sheet of crumpled paper over it. Then he raced out into the corridor and bounded up the stairs to the roof, where Krasala and the others stood watching the party in the street.

The sky was growing gray with dawn. Another car had drawn up behind the first, and a dozen men were holding a pow-wow behind the vehicles.

"Leave two men on the roof," he said quietly. "Have the others bring those three sacks and come with me."

She nodded and relayed the order. Rolf stepped to the rail and cupped his hands about his mouth. "Hey, Rathwich!" he shouted. "Are you down there?"

Colonel Luling's voice called back: "How many men have you got with you, Kenlan?"

"Come up and find out! Room 307."

Without further discussion he led the batsmen downstairs, after brief instructions to the roof guards. A morning-shift nurse squeaked and bolted for the elevator at the sight of the bearded and furry-legged squad trooping grimly down the corridor. He stationed a guard at either end of the hall, and the rest around the entrance of 307.

When the erect and long-limbed Colonel Luling appeared with drawn revolver beyond the doorway, Rolf was sitting at the desk with the contents of the bags arranged neatly before him. Krasala stood quietly in the corner with the bagpipe cradled easily in her arms. She lifted it suspiciously as the graying colonel strode into the

WORKING in darkness, Rolf adjusted the set, wedged the microphone under the door, and retreated

room. He glanced around, then nodded.

"I'll bring up eight men to match yours, Kenlan."

"Agreed. Where are the Commissioners? How many came?"

"Rathwich and Poele. Let me warn you against treachery. You won't get out of here alive, if you try it."

"Same rules apply in reverse. Get the wafflebottoms up here."

The colonel nodded curtly and departed. Rolf left the chair and darted to the microphone. "People of Marsville," he said quietly. "You are about to hear Commissioners Rathwich and Poele's reaction to a suggestion for a sensible end to the quarantine that binds us to the walls of the city. Let us listen carefully, reminding ourselves that the Commission's duty is to represent our interests as well as those of Earth—"

HE BROKE it off and returned to the chair as he heard footsteps in the corridor. Luling reappeared, flanked by two guards with sub-machine guns. Rathwich and Poele followed cautiously, while two more guards brought up the rear.

"I suggest we leave our regiments in the hallway," Rolf barked. "One guard on each side should be enough."

Luling nodded curtly and stepped aside to let the Commissioners enter. The plump and panting Poele glanced up to protest, but Rathwich, his hard face twisted into a faint smile, strode into the room and dragged a chair toward the desk. He appeared prepared to enjoy himself as he thrust out a formal hand toward Rolf and nodded wordlessly.

Rolf touched the hand briefly, while Poele sat aside and looked frightened. Luling closed the door and leaned back against it, his arms folded across his chest, his eyes on Krasala, and a revolver in his hand for safety's sake.

"It's your show for the time being,



Rathwich

Kenlan," grunted Rathwich. "Speak up. What do you want?"

"What every native citizen of Marsville wants, Rathwich—freedom to use the resources of this planet for some purpose other than the present one, which is insuring our own perpetual servitudé. Freedom to get out of the city and make homes where there's room to move. You and your predecessors have kept the city choked down with the myth that a man can't live out there without all the gadgets you promise to produce tomorrow. What you're really trying to do is insure that Mars will jump from nothing into the middle of complex civilization of specialists, without a ny intermediate stage."

Rathwich's smile tightened. "Go on. Make your suggestions."

"Fine! Do you see these articles here on the desk? Instruments, machine parts—tell me, Rathwich—did these come from the city's factories?"

The Commissioner glanced over them briefly and shook his head. "No, of course not."

"From Earth, then?"

"Obviously not."

"Then suppose you explain their ex-

istence, if the picture your people paint of the planet is a true one."

Rathwich shrugged without interest. "You're going to say, as your father did, that they're relics of an ancient civilization, eh? A pre-androon culture."

"Exactly! You admit that my father told you about it? That you withheld it from the people?"

"I'm not here to admit or deny anything, Kenlan. Get on with what you have to say."

FOR THE benefit of the microphone, Rolf reviewed briefly the events since his flight from the city, inventing a few extras to cover the existence of the imaginary army. He covered the murals in the cavern's council hall, stressing the significance of the Bolsewi spaceship with Earth in the background.

"The androons are human," he insisted. "And that's why you killed my father's wife, isn't it? She was with child."

"How did you know—"

The Commissioner caught himself, and jerked his head as if to glance at the colonel; then he replaced his faint smile and watched Rolf coolly. He was playing for time. Rolf saw Luling staring uneasily at the back of Rathwich's head. Suddenly he glanced absently at the pistol in his hand, and returned it to his holster. He leaned back to resume his thoughtful gaze at the Commissioner.

"Naturally, you've been appealing to 'race,'" Rolf continued. "You've used it as an excuse to keep the androons away from the city, and to keep our people away from the hills. You used it as an excuse to hang Dad. How long have you known about the Bolsewi civilization?"

Rathwich, who kept glancing at his watch, was beginning to look bored. "Ever since I came to Mars and read

the reports of my predecessors," he admitted.

Rolf nodded. "And you kept it from the people for just one reason: power." He patted the breach of the bagpipe that lay across the desk. "Power in small units. Tell me, Rathwich, what would happen if every human being could have—for instance—an unlimited supply of power in his own backyard, his own reactor, his own weapons? What would happen if every man could be self-sufficient?"

"Chaos."

"Freedom," Rolf corrected. "Recall your history? On the Great Plains they used to call a six-gun an equalizer, because it made the small man the equal of the large. Rathwich, small power-packs like these are going to be the equalizers of Mars, because they can make men independent of the city's industry. A man can take his family and go out on the plains to live as a city unto himself. Bat-ranching, raising quois, trading with the androons—all possibilities.

"With the artifacts of the Bolsewi civilization, and a knowledge of how to produce more of them, the people can have Mars now. There's no need to wait for the modern equivalents of barbed wire, windmills, and six-guns. The androons have them, and don't know how to use them. With some persuasion, they'll trade them for simpler tools—knives, rope, bat-saddles, small-calibre firearms, clothing—things they need that our industry can readily produce."

"That's enough, Kenlan," the Commissioner grunted. "I've been watching you carefully. Your two hours is up, and you've given no indication that you realized it. Evidently you're either in no position to make good a threat against the hostages, or else your savages have already slaughtered them. Our aircraft are at this moment going out to the hills. I imagine the men

have already controlled the quioie fires enough so that they can take a ground rescue party through. Your show's finished."

AN URGENT fist began beating at the door in the hall. Luling started away. Rathwich growled, "See about it."

The door burst open and a pair of officers came in panting. "With your permission, Commissioner," said one, as they began dragging furniture aside, and searching shelves and drawers.

Rolf heard a metallic *krirk* as Krasala cranked the bagpipe. "Hold it, kid," he told her.

"If you're looking for the transmitter, it's out on the balcony."

"What is all this?" barked Rathwich as the searchers bounded toward the outer door.

"The telecircuits, sir. You've been picked up. Half the town's been listening. We've got some men cutting the door down to get into the station. Bolted from the inside."

Rathwich lost his color as the men brought in the transmitter and ripped the tape off the mic-button. "Why wasn't this discovered sooner?" he belated.

The officer flushed. "Well, we heard it, sir, but we thought it must be an authorized broadcast. Finally we called administration, and—"

"Fool! Get the station back on the program. Squelch the newspaper before it prints anything. Call every guard on duty. Round up the administration staff for a meeting. Get moving!"

"One thing, sir. There's a big crowd outside. Around the hospital."

"What? How did they know we were here?"

"The hospital staff, sir. They spread the word."

"Are they disorderly?"

"Uh...no sir. It's not a mob.

They're just curious. Bewildered."

"Disperse them. Have a helicopter pick us up."

"I've instructed my men to fire on any copters that come in range," Rolf interrupted.

"Then you'll rescind the order," Rathwich snapped. "You're in a hornet's nest here, Kenlan. You can't get out. We can sit here all day, if necessary. You have a stalemate here, of course. But you can't get out of the hospital. You might as well submit."

"Eventually, I will," Rolf agreed. "At the moment, however, we're going to sit and wait. Krasala, if either of those men starts to leave, burn his legs off."

A hand darted for a holster. Rolf swung the bagpipe around and pressed the stud. He missed the man's hand, but the bright violet flare blossomed on the concrete wall a few inches away. The officer shrieked and began beating the flames out of his clothing. Poele slumped to the floor with a faint moan. Rathwich sat calmly but grew pale.

"Anybody else?"

No one spoke or moved as the orb filled the room with blinding light. When it died, all eyes watched the red spot flake away as powdered silica and fused slag.

Then Luling spoke: "May I make a suggestion, Commissioner?"

"Go ahead."

LULING glanced at Rolf and the girl. His hard cool face was impassive. "I suggest that we escort these people safely out of the city and allow them freedom, provided they agree to go beyond the mountains and stay there."

Rathwich shook his head. "We couldn't trust them to stay. I make no bargains with them. They're criminals, and they'll be properly punished."

Luling frowned. "I'm afraid there'd be some strong opposition to hanging them, sir. Captain Jason Kenlan was charged on several counts—miscegenation, desertion, quarantine-violation. You can charge this young man with treason and quarantine-violation, but you can't make the treason stick unless you can show that he meant to forcibly overthrow the administration. And the people won't stand for another secret trial, since they've heard some of his story. I can't see how you can try him without making a public investigation of his claims. It's true he broke quarantine, but unless the necessity of quarantine can be reestablished, a trial will cause a lot of trouble. Unless, of course, the hostages have been harmed."

"There are no hostages," Rolf interrupted. "The men sealed themselves in the cavern. The androons aren't adequately armed. If there's been any bloodshed, it's been the fault of the guards who entered the caves. My only support I have here with me."

Rathwich showed irritation and surprise, but maintained a calm attitude. Luling smiled faintly, but erased it when the Commissioner turned.

"When is the next Earth-ship due? We might send them to Earth for trial."

"Not for nearly a year, sir. Earth's on the other side of Sol. I'm afraid it's too long to wait. I suggest you get these people away from here as quickly as possible."

Rathwich drummed his fingers on the arm of his chair and stared at Rolf distastefully. "Will you agree to permanent exile, with the understanding that you'll be shot on sight if you try to return?"

Rolf hesitated. His real mission had been accomplished. The people had heard the truth, and the Commission could probably no longer maintain its enforced containment of the people in

the city. The outflowing would be slow, a matter of years, but it would be certain. At first a few misfits and petty criminals would steal away at night, to rob the caverns of the androons, to escape justice, or just to get away from a frustrating existence. There would be trouble with the androon tribes, but new nations always had growing pains, and they were normally built by misfits.

Rolf himself was a misfit, and so was his father before him. Jason had always chafed in the fetters of the tightly integrated little society, and had tagged around after first one prophet and then another who called for immediate agrarian outgrowth.

He glanced at Krasala, who stood alertly eyeing the Earthmen and thoughtfully fingering the stud of the bagpipe. Her batskin clothing contrasted sharply with the impeccable uniforms of the others. And the warm shin-fur that her race had developed since its exodus from Earth marked her as different, as a distinct branch of humanity. Sweaters and woolen slacks were standard feminine apparel in Marsville, and wearing them she could pass for an Earthwoman, despite the ruddy-rosy skin which always reminded him of a painful sunburn. But why should she ape Earthwomen?

In the ancient days, pioneers had often taken Indian women to wife, but they seldom brought them back to Boston or New Amsterdam.

THE FUTURE of Mars lay out on the plains and in the mountains, where men could go out to carve their own private empires. A nation would grow the way nations always grew—through strife, violence, and explosive expansion. When, after several hundred years, the frontiers were gone, the nation would begin to integrate. It would be an independent nation, not a chattel of Earth. Marsville would

still be an important center, no doubt—for any immediate outgrowth would begin with a timid trickle, and its industry would remain important. But Rolf had no desire to remain within it.

“Well, Kenlan?”

“I’m willing, Rathwich, provided we can work out a scheme to insure that we won’t be shot as soon as we’re beyond the eyes and ears of the city.”

“If you’ll permit me, sir,” said Luling. “I think I can arrange a plan of escort that will meet Kenlan’s approval.”

Rathwich looked around so that Rolf could not see his face. “All right, colonel,” he said incisively. “I’ll let you handle the details. I think you know what’s expected of you.”

There was another knock at the door. Luling opened it to admit a courier. The man saluted and spoke hurriedly.

“The other Commissioners request your presence if it’s possible, sir. There’s a lot of excitement, and people-off work. The newspapers—”

“Any rebelliousness?” Rathwich growled.

“No, sir, not exactly. It’s just excitement. People along the walls watching the guards come back from the hills. And the report on Commissioner Peterson—”

“What report?”

“Well, the way it’s told sir... there was some fighting in the caverns. There wasn’t any light in the tunnel, and the androons infiltrated our men. Firearms weren’t good in the darkness, with everybody all mixed up that way. Commissioner Peterson kept yelling for help, and somebody clubbed him. He’s dead, sir. Commissioner White’s gone, too. Disappeared. Major Mulvern took charge, once they got the door off the cave. He led a party back into the caverns to look for White, but they couldn’t find him. The androons pre-

tended ignorance. White had a talk with their chief priest, and now Mulvern’s behaving peculiarly. He ordered everyone back to the city.”

“Where are they now?”

“They’re about halfway across the plain, but they’ve cut around by the cemetery.”

“Cemetery!”

“Yes sir. There’re some androons with them. The androons are exhuming the body of the woman Captain Kenlan married. They want to take her back for tribal burial. Mulvern’s men are standing guard. The major hints that White might be released if we let them have the body.”

“Then let them!” Rathwich roared. “But get Mulvern’s crew away before they see it! The news’ll be all over town that the woman was pregnant!”

“Yes, sir!”

Luling looked at the ceiling and quoted from the bio-laws: “The generation of normal offspring by the union of a couple, one of whose partners is positively identified as human, shall constitute a criterion of humanity for the other partner, unless it be shown that the second partner is biologically inadmissible under Sections One and—”

“That’s enough, Colonel!” Rathwich warned.

“Sections One and Three,” Rolf continued with a wry smile, “which state minimum requirements for intelligence, physical appearance, and social adaptability—all of which the androons can pass.”

“Get Mulvern’s men away.”

“I’m afraid it’s too late, sir,” said the courier. “They started digging some time ago.”

RATHWICH ran his hands nervously through his hair and moistened his lips. “Colonel, get these people out of here. Keep them away from the crowds. Get them out of the city. And

Kenlan, stay away—far away.” He looked at the courier. “Drive me to the Administration Building at once.”

When the officials had departed, Luling nodded at Rolf. “Are you ready?” he asked, smiling.

Rolf watched him suspiciously. “If I were in your boots, I might take the unwanted group out to an open plain, let them go, then send a flight out to strafe them.”

“That,” said Luling, “is exactly what the Commissioner expects me to do. Let’s go to the roof so you can rescind the order against copters.” He lifted the telephone, listened, then replaced it. “No operator on the building switchboard, I guess.”

Rolf grinned and held up a pair of cut wires from beneath the desk. “I clipped them while we were talking. That’s why they sent messengers.”

When they moved out into the corridor, nervous orderlies and nurses were hurrying about their duties, giving a wide berth to the bearded tribesmen who stood silently against the wall, eyeing their surroundings with bewildered awe. Rolf beckoned them toward the stairway, while Luling stopped at the desk to call for a group of helicopters.

“There’ll be a transport plane waiting for us at the port,” he said to Rolf as they climbed to the roof and stepped out into the morning sunlight. “We’ll take you as far as you want to go.”

“I’m still waiting for some arrangement whereby we can be certain that we won’t be hunted down afterwards,” Rolf grunted.

“You’ll get it. Just be patient.”

The Commissioner’s car was nosing its way through the dense crowd in front of the hospital. The crowd was silent, moody. Occasionally someone shouted, “When’re you going to tear the walls down, Commish?” and, “Since when is Mars a jail?” But no

rocks were thrown, nor was the car molested. The crowd was sullen, waiting for answers.

Rolf watched it for a time, until someone shouted, “There’s Kenlan, on the roof.” The crowd turned to look, silently. He grinned and waved and turned away. The crowd could possibly become a mob, if they didn’t get the right answers.

“I don’t think you’ll be exiled for long, Kenlan,” Luling murmured as the copters appeared. “The Commission can be impeached by a nine-tenths majority on a popular referendum. Earth stuck the provision into the charter to make it look good, assuming you can’t get a nine-tenths majority on anything. But I think it can be done.”

“I don’t plan on coming back anyway, until...”

“Yes?”

He grinned at Krasala. “Prefer a j. p. or an androon priest?”

She wrinkled her forehead and looked bewildered.

“I guess we won’t be coming back,” he said to Luling.

“Confidentially, I won’t either,” murmured Luling.

HALF AN HOUR later, a twin-engine jet transport was winging westward over the gray-capped peaks. Four former batsmen had elected to accompany their leader, while the others chose to return to their own tribe. The Martian tundra lay red, gray, and dusty green behind them, while beyond the mountains lay hilly country, with quioe growing in the sheltered valleys and bats swooping low over the landscape. The colonel left the ship on autopilot and stepped back to sit with the passengers.

“You really intend to come with us?” Rolf asked.

Luling nodded. “Frontier fever, maybe. As a kid, I used to sit on the

walls and look out at the mountains and wish. I never stopped wishing. Lots of people feel that way, Kenlan, but there's been no precedent—until your father started it. Now there won't be any stopping it. When the transport doesn't come back, they'll send out searchers. Some of the searchers won't come back. By that time, the Commission will have to either get out, be impeached, or follow the popular will."

He hesitated, glancing toward the cargo compartment. "There are bail-out kits with the parachutes—rifles, food, and so forth. You pick your spot, and I'll circle while you heave it out. Then I'll set the autopilot to hold a westerly course, and we'll all bail out.

They'll find the ship a hundred miles or so away; not much chance of our being caught."

"I don't agree," Rolf murmured absently as he stared out at the terrain.

"Eh? You think we'll be caught? By whom?"

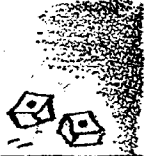
"O h—prospectors, b a t-trappers, traders, fugitives... in a few years."

Luling chuckled and went back to the cockpit. Rolf watched Krasala carefully preening her shins in a swept-back hairdo, lending the impression of winged feet. He had brought a jar of depilatory but, upon second thought, he decided to leave it aboard ship. Parachute silk should make fine hair-ribbons.

THE END



THE SHORT END OF THE STICK



By Jon Barry

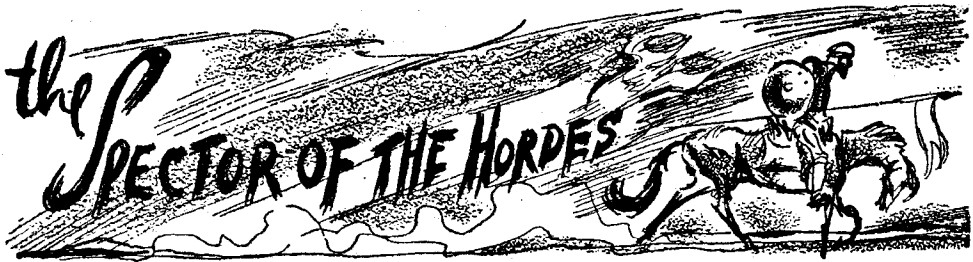
ONE FACET of human nature which scientists, psychologists and psychiatrists haven't been able to figure out yet, is the innate human urge to gamble. People know full well that almost invariably they are on the short end of the stick when it comes to the payoff in almost any game of chance where skill is not involved. Yet, for many, the certainty of earning money for a definite amount of work is not nearly as attractive as the one-in-a-million chance of hitting the jackpot in some gambling scheme. This reliance on Lady Luck, whatever its cause, is a powerful motive in human behavior. Knowledge of odds has nothing to do with the compulsion to "take a chance".

Dr. Skinner, a Harvard scientist, has discovered that this peculiar behavior is not restricted to human beings. Working with pigeons, he has found that their reaction to choice and chance is remarkably like that of people. He devised a machine which pays off in small kernels of grain when pecked on according to pre-set conditions. A pigeon will operate this "one-armed bandit" exactly as would a human. Like a housewife feeding quarters into a slot machine, he'll peck away furiously at the triggering key—set, for example, to pay off on two hundred pecks—and go mad with joy when it does deliver!

By varying the number of pecks required, by introducing random pay-offs, by experimenting with definite amounts of work, and by trying out the pigeons on a "piecemeal" basis, the scientist observed that the behavior of the birds was astonishingly like that of humans. Above all, it was noticed that the birds preferred the gambling system of chancing their own pay-offs to accepting a definite reward for a given amount of work. This is analogous to the human desire to be one's own boss—or the human desire to work like the very devil in the hope of hitting the jackpot.

While no conclusions may yet be drawn from the limited experiments, it must be pointed out that gambling in itself is probably fundamental to all human progress. Nearly every great discovery is the result of someone's taking a chance, gambling against odds, hoping against hope. This willingness to take the risks without definite knowledge of the reward has led to great things for all mankind. Perhaps if man's gambling spirit were to die, Man himself would decay, self-satisfied and unwilling to fight the odds, afraid to bet against Fate or Nature.

Fortunately, to judge from the merry ringing of the slot machines and the exchange of tickets at the pari-mutuels, this is not likely to be the case!



WESTERN civilization holds life precious. Experience has shown that as nations adapt themselves to the machine age and begin to develop industrial civilizations, their birth rates decline gradually. Even now, though the short view shows increasing populations, the western countries of the world are actually dying. This seems to be an inevitable consequence of progress.

But the other half of the world, the teeming horde-like civilization of Asia, exhibits an entirely different picture. In Asia, life is utterly cheap—and is, in a sense, becoming cheaper. Industrialization is taking a slow foothold in China, India and elsewhere. What is going to happen in those places? What does the future promise those people?

An answer can be found or at least suggested by observing the behavior of one industrialized Asiatic country, Japan. Here the machine age of the Western World has been fully taken over by an Asiatic people, and while the standard of living has gone up, the birth rate has not

declined proportionately. As a result the pressures of population are driving and have driven the Japanese into a lost war for territory and resources and their defeat has thrown them back into a situation which demands relief. Fortunately the educational standard is high enough for something to be done. But China and India, with infinitely denser populations, are adopting the machine age, the former with war in its eyes, the latter with improved food-creating efforts. And all the while their populations climb at fantastic rates.

What is the answer? Social scientists of all nations view the picture with alarm. There is simply not enough food to permit any further increase. Therefore, controlled fertility is the only answer. Up to now the balance of population has been governed by the food available—and that will remain the governing factor. Unless definite measures are taken, starvation will confront the Asiatic peoples even more dreadfully and decisively than it does now. Either that or an overwhelming onslaught for food and space. The Western world waits....

—Merritt Linn



IT'S NOT easy to give an exact picture of the future—you can make a lot of generalizations about what will happen, but knowing for sure is another matter entirely. And sometimes the future is being prepared and changed under your very nose without your recognizing it.

There is a perfect example of this to be found in the mundane matter of frozen foods. You'd hardly go to a food locker or a refrigerator to get a picture of the future—but actually that's exactly where you'll find one!

Here are a few facts. The fastest-growing industry in the country is that of preparing, packaging, transporting, and distributing all kinds of frozen foods—from meats and fish to fruits and vegetables. This industry is growing faster than

the much-vaunted television! Furthermore, within ten years more than half the money we Americans spend on food will be spent on frozen foods!

This is a certainty: you can visualize the people of the future eating frozen meals prepared in electronic warmers. That's coming as sure as taxes. In fact it's already here. It's been tried without too much success by a number of manufacturers but the public is wary and hasn't taken to it. The armed forces are supporting the system because it means such a saving in weight and in the mechanical details of preparation! All that remains is for the public to be educated and interested in the idea. When that happens, nine out of ten meals will come from the frozen-food lockers.

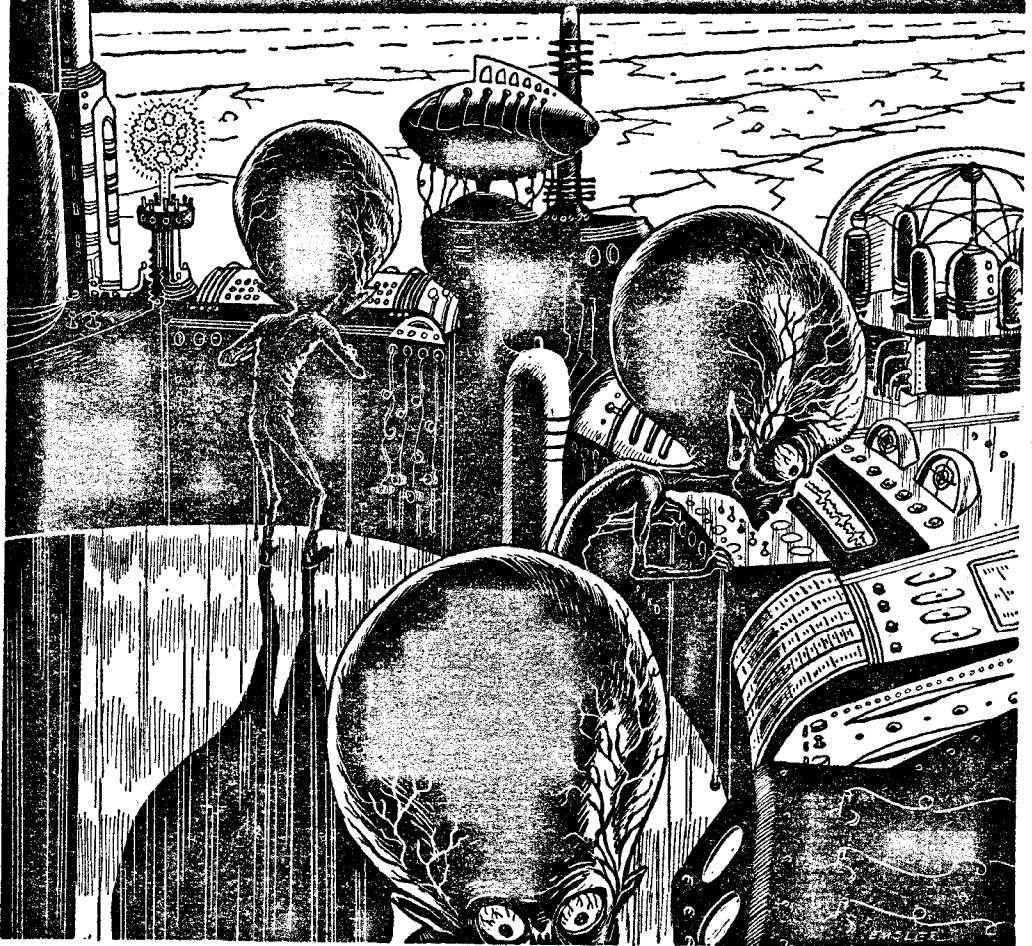
In the over-all picture, what this revolution amounts to is that the food industry and agriculture have been put on an assembly-line basis with all the efficiencies that are found therein. Furthermore, seasonal variations mean nothing. You can have any food at any time of the year. In addition, waste is eliminated.

The old science-fiction idea of eating being reduced to the intake of small capsules or pills is patently ridiculous, but the idea of completely prepared meals is fact and reality. They're here, waiting for the public to respond!

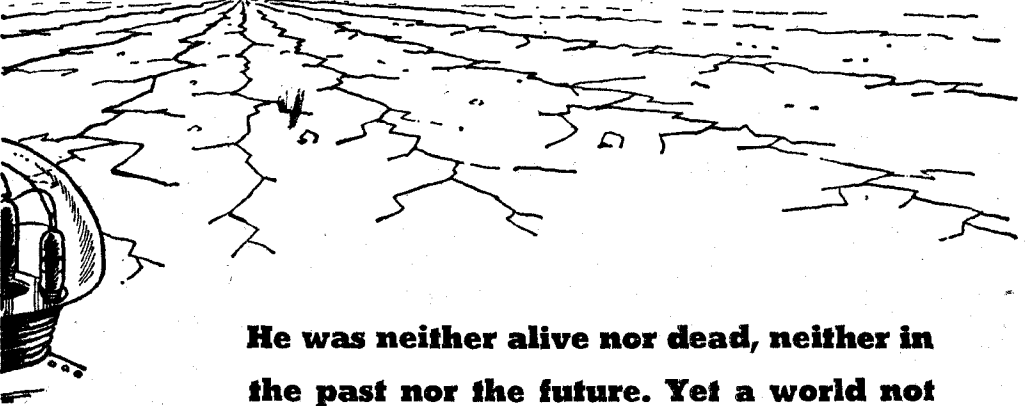
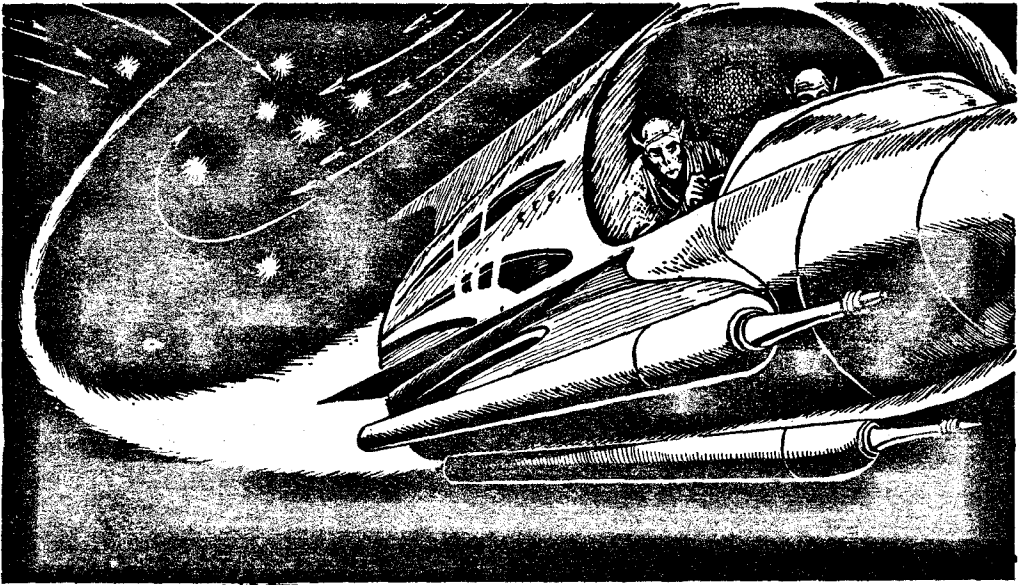
—Salem Lane

THE LAST REVOLUTION

By Stephen Marlowe



While earth's last three humans pored over their machines, the rocket ship roared by.



He was neither alive nor dead, neither in the past nor the future. Yet a world not yet born must die unless he stayed alive!

IF DRAYTON hadn't overslept he would not have come whizzing down the Sawmill River Parkway at seventy, barely braking to forty or fifty at the dangerous turns, and taking them on two wheels at that. If he hadn't overslept, in fact, he could have beaten the storm into New York altogether. He would have had plenty of time to change for dinner in the Carl-

ton's big apartment. Now, Mary and her dad would be waiting. . . .

Drayton took out an already damp handkerchief and wiped the fog from his windshield. Damn, it was hard to see! The rain swept down in great driving sheets, a wall of gold-flecked gray where Drayton's headlights cut into the night.

He braked slightly for the turn

ahead. He felt the Olds rise giddily on two wheels and then begin a long skid. Muttering to himself, he turned with the drag, slowly. Ahead and to the left he could see two yellow orbs gleaming balefully in the darkness. Approaching headlights. He heard the loud warning of a horn and the screeching of tires on drenched asphalt. The headlights came on, lurching from side to side, intent upon him!

Drayton had heard that in the moment before death your whole life runs through your mind like an impossibly fast motion picture. For him, at least, this was not true. He could feel death's cold breath on his face, but only one thought ran over and over again in his mind: *why the hell did I oversleep and get into this mess?*

The headlights seemed to spread apart as the car drew closer, and Drayton felt that the blackness between them would swallow him forever. He wondered idly if the sound of impact would register in his mind before the brief instant of pain before death, laughed at the ridiculousness of the problem. But he heard the grinding clash of metal on metal and the angry tinkle of shattering glass—then steeled himself for the pain.

He felt—nothing!

He floated serenely through the roof of his car, out into the rain. It wasn't wet!

"I'm dead," he said, almost disappointed at the anticlimactic nature of his demise.

Briefly, in the darkness, he thought he saw his body twisted against the shattered steering wheel. Then, with the car and the highway and the rain, it disappeared.

AROUND HIM, utter blackness, like depths of extra-galactic space that have never known light. But straight ahead there was a glow, extremely bright, yet shedding no lumin-

osity on Drayton's void. A coruscation of enclosed brilliance, a curtain of selfish flame that cut off the void but gave it not the flicker of an afterglow.

To this sped Drayton on unknown wings!

Into the flames he plunged, passed through, was only aware of a not-unpleasant tingling.

He sat down hard. He blinked.

Gone was the blackness. Gone the curtain of flame. He sat on a broad expanse of red-gray rock, an endless tableland of ash-of-rose. Drayton didn't know why, but the rock gave him the feeling of hoary age. Polished and broken and flattened by how many countless eons of wind?

He stood up. Wherever he was, whatever had happened to him, it was pointless to remain idle. Of course, he was dead. He hoped the shock wouldn't be too great for Mary, so sudden like this. Yet, how could he be dead? He had always thought of death as nothing but an eternal sleep. He got the shock of his life when he tried to pinch himself, the way they do in melodramatic fiction, felt—nothing! Wildly, he kicked his foot against an outcropping, half expecting it to plow right through. It did not, it met resistance and halted. But it didn't hurt.

For a moment, hysteria clawed at the fringes of his mind. Sobbing, he looked around. A rosy glow pervaded the air. The sun was high in the sky. No—not the sun. For one thing, its sphere was too big, a silver dollar at arm's length. For another, it was red, a smouldering crimson globe too big and too high in the sky.

Drayton scanned the horizon slowly, realized he was the only moving thing on the great red plain. But off in the distance, so far that it lay shrouded in crimson haze, he could see a gleaming mound above the level of the plain. Artificial—man-made? Perhaps. A city? Drayton started to run.

HE COULD not say how long it took him to reach the mound. He estimated that two or three hours had passed at least, but the strange sun overhead remained an unmoving crimson globe. The fact that the huge red sun's heat did not bother him, the fact that the dry winds did not irritate his skin although they sent tiny particles of ochre sand flying against it, the fact that his throat was dry but did not suffer with the pangs of thirst—all this confused him. He was dead, then: he had to accept that. But this place of red rock did not fit any of the mythological descriptions of either heaven or hell.

As a mining engineer, he had been around. He had broken dry and flaky bread with the Tartars on the barren Gobi; he had spent weary months on the hot wastelands of the Sahara; he had even felt the icy chill of Antarctica with Admiral Byrd and the Navy. But never had he known such utter desolation as he saw now on the plain of the red sun. Flat rose-ash and ochre, here and there dotted with an outcropping of rocks of deeper red and an occasional boulder of coppery saffron glinting metallicly in the sunlight, it stretched out, unchanged, to the horizon.

Except for the mound. The mound was perhaps half a hundred yards in diameter, a perfect hemisphere of crimson. It played tricks with Drayton's eyes. Sometimes he thought he could almost see through it, see strange flickerings and shadows, but at other times it looked dully opaque like the rocks around it. Gingerly, Drayton felt of its surface, smooth as glass, and warm.

Came a faint whirring sound, like the faraway grinding of great machinery. The mound pulsed once and then again with a core of weird amethyst glowings, like a gem newly exposed to

light. Strident became the whirring—a warning! It soared higher and higher until the shrillness passed to a register too high for human ears.

Drayton stepped back, waited. The mound stirred. It moved!

As if on a huge axis parallel to the plain's surface, it began to rotate slowly. A gap of unthinkable depths where the mound had moments before joined the rock in utter adjacency....

Up and back rotated the mound, slipping soundlessly into the stone on either side. Drayton stared upon an unfathomable gulf, a smooth-walled shaft, leading to—what?

THE VOICE startled him. He realized that he had heard no human sound, not even the gentle slap-slap of his own feet against the rock, since the accident. Somehow he sensed that the voice was more a part of his mind than of the environment, direct communication with his brain rather than through the medium of sound waves and air. A pleasant enough voice, but tired—indefinitely tired.

"Drop down the shaft, Mr. Drayton."

"Down?" he croaked hoarsely, aware that his spirit or whatever it was had a voice of its own, and a badly frightened one. "I'd fall, I'd die—"

"Please. Relax, be calm. You're already dead, you know that. Just drop down the shaft." The voice soothed, coaxed....

Why not? He could feel certain things, like the rocks around him or the surface of the dome. But he felt no pain, nothing unpleasant. And why should the voice, whatever it was, trick him? He couldn't stay forever on the red plain, couldn't just stand there waiting for the crack of doom. He chuckled without mirth. His own personal crack of doom had already come in a grinding crash on the Sawmill

River Parkway.

"Down the shaft, Mr. Drayton."

Air from the abyss seemed cool and damp as Drayton breathed it, with the faintest musky suggestion of vegetation. Drayton shrugged, stepped out over the giddy depths.

He fell—slowly. Floated down past the smooth, silent walls. Overhead, he heard a whirring. The mound rotated back on its axis, closed over the abyss. Down floated Drayton.

It was hard to see or hear anything through the pulsing which came suddenly to his temples, the roaring which pushed in at his ears. Over him crept a giddiness such as a sea-sick sleep-walker might feel on a narrow, storm-tossed bark. Drayton sank back into a womb of whirling black....

HE AWOKED. He lay on a pallet of unknown material, metallic, yet soft as a feather bed.

"I am glad you are awake." Again, the voice ignored the connection his ears made with the outside world and spoke directly to the area of his brain reached by the auditory nerves.

At the foot of his bed Drayton saw a chair. But his eyes hadn't yet focused fully: the chair swam in and out of a sea of fog.

Someone sat upon it, watching him. He concentrated, swept the fog back and away. What he watched wasn't quite human!

The man's body was scrawny, so scrawny that Drayton thought it must have been held together by wires. And short. Standing, the man's head would hardly reach Drayton's shoulders. His neck hung forward and down, as if it were an effort to hold it erect, and atop it Drayton saw a head half again as big as it should have been, translucent of skin, almost, with great dark veins throbbing over the temples. The eyes were big and watery, the nose a

tiny upthrust dot, the mouth a small pucker. There was no hair anywhere.

"I am Jobijed," the creature said. The lipless pucker of a mouth did not move.

"Joe Big Head," Drayton repeated, for that's what it had sounded like. He laughed.

"Drayton," Jobijed said, "we have waited long for you." Telepathy, Drayton thought idly; that could explain the voice which was not a voice at all. "The storm, the crash, your close affinity with the time-cycle—not an easy situation to find. We plucked you here—"

"Where?" Drayton demanded, sitting up. "Where the devil am I?" The strangeness hit him, all at once. It left him angry.

"Slowly, slowly," Jobijed admonished. "Don't tax your new body."

"My what?"

"Your new body. You died, Drayton. How could you have lived through that accident? We plucked your *elan*—call it a soul if it will make you feel better—through the corridors of time, duplicated your body here, down to the last possible detail—made it stronger, if anything. But you're dead in your own time, make no mistake about that. You may indeed be forced back by an affinity over which we have no control, but it will be to the broken ruin of your old body.

"Stay with us in the future, Drayton, the far future of your own world, the unborn tomorrow of your race."

DRAYTON slammed his leg down, striking the floor heavily with his foot. He winced. That, at least, was no lie. He was whole again, a soul and a body. Once, in Arabia, he had been knifed in a street brawl, still carried the scar under his right arm. He pulled the coverlets away, looked

—saw the thin white line. He could doubt nothing, not with the evidence for what Jobijed had told him piling up on all sides.

But it all left him a little weak. "The future? You mean through time? You mean the future of my race? You?"

"Exactly," Jobijed said, still sitting as motionless in his chair as when first Drayton had seen him. "I am a man, a human being, one of your own kind. There are only three of us—the last of your race, in desperate trouble. In need of a saviour: you, Drayton!"

"Look," Drayton said, "I'm confused. I died, hours ago. You say you snatched away my soul, on the point of death. To the future. What future? What for? I won't say this is a gag: too many things can't be explained. But I don't know. The future—"

"Five hundred million years," Jobijed told him blandly. "Half a billion years in your reckoning. A hundred million years ago, the earth ceased its rotation. The sun is old, old—and we face it all the time, parched and red, a dying earth, a fleck of cosmic dust, an aging mote, and three last men—in danger."

Drayton found it hard to associate the word humanity with Jobijed—his thoughts said Joe Big Head and he smiled. The last of a great race, Jobijed and two others, Drayton's race—half a billion years in the unborn corridors of tomorrow. If they were in trouble, how could he help them? He asked Jobijed; asked what the small-brained progenitor of these three could hope to do that they couldn't.

"Yes," Jobijed agreed, "our brains are great. Our science would astound you. Half a billion years, and most of it lost, but still there is enough for what we must do. Yet, we are powerless—"

The door opened. Two duplicates of

Jobijed came tottering into the room, supporting each slow step with two great canes. If anything, their heads were larger. Jobijed was a baby!

The newcomers sat down, silently, on two other chairs. They stared at Drayton with their big watery eyes, appraising. The heads nodded almost imperceptibly on scrawny necks.

"...our problem," Jobijed was saying. "Would you help the human race if you could?"

IT STILL appeared somewhat ludicrous to Drayton. He could not associate concepts of humanity with these monstrosities. Yet he knew he was being unfair. It was an unthinkable gap—five hundred million years. If they were human, he did owe them something. If...

A clamorous buzzing in Drayton's ears, like countless swarms of bees in flight. He looked at Jobijed, saw right through him! The whole room had become tenuous, hazy, like one half of a photographic double-exposure. The other half...

Drayton saw the four broad lanes of the Sawmill River Parkway, while yet he saw the room. On the bed was his body, his new body, Jobijed and the others hovering over it, examining it gravely. They faded.

Only the parkway. It was morning and the bright yellow glow of the sun felt good. A crowd, police, the wreck of two automobiles.

Abruptly, Drayton felt sharp lances of pain, spears of molten agony. He lay crumpled behind the wheel of his Oldsmobile. He moaned.

"Still alive," someone muttered.

A figure bent over him, prodded, stood up. "It's no use," he said. "The man's dying. I can't understand what kept him alive so long. Every bone in his chest is broken."

Drayton felt the pain leave. Now the highway grew tenuous, now Jobijed and his room superimposed. They battled for him, the two worlds—Drayton could sense that. Death in one, death only moments away, death for his old body. And what in the other? What in the far new world with his new, unhurt body? He did not know, but he wanted to live. "Jobijed!" he cried. "Jobijed, bring me back!"

A tugging at every atom of him, then the familiar blackness, the curtain of flame. . . .

Drayton gazed on Jobijed's huge impassive face. He had returned. He felt himself—his spirit—glide forward, enter his new body. He was trembling all over.

"I feared it," Jobijed said. "Your own time still has power over your. . . soul. You must fight it, Drayton. You died that morning, over half a billion years ago."

Drayton shook his head. "No. I still live back there. But I—"

JOBIJED shrugged scrawny shoulders, leaning heavily on his cane. "A moment, two. You'll be dead. The accident was fatal. But here you have life, and the chance to save your race."

"Save it from what?" Drayton wanted to know. He could doubt no longer. He accepted the thoughts Jobijed poured into his mind. Maybe in that way he could grow firm roots here in the future. He did not want to go back to pain and death—ever.

"Here on the sun side," Jobijed told him, "there is no life except what my companions and I manufacture synthetically in this cavern. It is a dead world. Likewise, the dark side of earth is dead. Terribly cold, a world of storm and solid gasses. But in the belt between, in the rim of twilight that fringes the dark side, there is life. The air is thin, but deep in the twilight valleys it hangs heavily, like a

shroud, over a wicked spawn."

"Your enemies!" Drayton cried. What sort of creatures, half a billion years in the future, to usurp Earth's dominion from Earth's last men? Drayton could not know, not now, not yet—but he felt blind hatred for them.

Jobijed felt that hatred. "Good! They would have the science of our cavern. They would take it and destroy us. Animals in your time, Drayton, they evolved into creatures of limited intelligence. They are evil. You must destroy. Destroy them, Drayton!"

Drayton frowned. What on earth could he do that they could not?

Jobijed told him. Obviously, the last three men—the concept still frightened Drayton—had science aplenty. But their problem was a paradox. They simply did not have the proper mobility.

"Consider, Drayton. My companions, myself, we cannot indulge in unlimited physical activity. Too much of it and the spinal cord might snap. Yes, it's weak in us—and our heads are heavy, heavy. . . .

"We've tried robot warfare," Jobijed continued. "But we were outsmarted. The robots cannot maneuver in the twilight valleys, they lack sufficient sentience. We can create life, yes—like your new body, Drayton. But it must have motivation, and this is a law of science: a soul can only be lifted from its body and placed in a new one on point of death, violent death. The situation is a rarity, and we must happen upon it at precisely the right instant. A moment too soon, a moment too late—useless.

"We have you, Drayton—a saviour. We will give you the weapons. With you to lead our ships, we can destroy the usurper in a single day!"

DRAYTON sat back, not saying anything. He wished he had a

cigarette and a good stiff shot of liquor, because suddenly something bothered him. He said: "That's fine for you. I guess I'll do the job for you. I'd be the biggest traitor humanity ever saw if I didn't. But then what? What happens to me? If I go back to my own time, it's to a broken body—and death. If I stay here..." He shrugged eloquently enough, raking his eyes around the austere room, over his three hosts. "What the hell can I do for the rest of my life?"

The almost lipless pucker of Jobijed's mouth began to tremble slightly, and it was a while before Drayton understood the movement for laughter. Jobijed bent forward with his two companions, and they entered into silent communion. It was eerie. Drayton watched, knew that they were conversing, but they could have been a trio of silent statues.

After a time, Jobijed's voice hummed in Drayton's head. "Earth is a dying planet—"

"You're telling me!"

"No, listen. We have the ability to travel through space; we've had it for centuries. There are young planets and fair on a nearby star. I believe you would call it... Alpha Centauri. They could harbor human life."

"Why don't you go there?"

Silence for a moment. Then: "We're old, Drayton. Old. And we won't live forever. Destroy our enemies so we can live our few remaining eons in peace and contemplation, and—"

"And what?" Drayton was angry again. Not at Jobijed and his companions, but at the situation itself. He was stuck here in the far future, with only the prospect of a drab, dull existence. He'd live and grow old here in the caverns under the surface of a dying planet, with nothing to do. "What will you do?" he said, his voice getting louder. "Pack me off to your Alpha whatizzit? What'll I do there by my-

self? I'll go nuts, that's what."

"PATIENCE, Drayton," Jobijed's pucker was trembling again. "There was an accident in your year 1953, similar in a lot of ways to your accident. A young female was swimming at a place called Jones Beach—you know the place?"

Drayton said he knew it well. A pang of nostalgia shook him. He remembered how he loved to watch the surf come thundering in from the Great South Bay. But the Bay, the Ocean itself, was gone how many millions of years?

"The Guardians of the place—"

Drayton knew he meant life-guards.

"The Guardians," Jobijed continued, "decided that the surf was too rough for swimming. They called everyone out. But the young female ignored them, was caught by an underfoot—is that the term?"

"Undertow," Drayton told him. But he sat forward, interested now.

"She drowned, Drayton. The Guardians could not rescue her in time. We did the same for her as we did for you; took her *elan* here and reconstructed her body. She waits now, asleep. We haven't spoken to her yet. She waits—why don't you awaken her, Drayton? We have...made certain preparations."

Drayton was feeling almost cheerful. It had crossed his mind a few minutes before that he'd never even touch a woman again, never see one. Now—well, now it might not be so bad after all. He almost felt like a heel when he thought of Mary. But Mary was dust for half a billion years, and the sooner he got used to that, the better it would be.

He stood up and stretched. "Lead on," he said, whistling.

They had made preparations, all right. Drayton found himself in a small bedroom, and when he looked

in the mirror he realized for the first time that he was naked. He found a shower stall off in an alcove, got under an invigorating spray.

When he finished, a safety razor and a mug of shaving cream were waiting for him. He could sense alien workmanship—the handle was a little too long, the blade a bright orange. But Jobijed and his companions had observed back in the twentieth century, had tried to recreate a world for Drayton.

Smiling, he shaved, then stepped back into the bedroom. On the bed, clothing was laid out for him. He began to laugh, and soon he was laughing so hard that tears came to his eyes. There was a white dinner jacket, a pair of midnight blue formal trousers, a maroon cummerbund. That was all—not even a shirt.

He shrugged. He'd feel a lot better in tweeds, with a shirt. Shoes and socks, too—but hell, the floor was pleasantly warm enough. He slipped into the trousers, found them to be a perfect fit. He twirled the sash around his middle almost rakishly, then got into the white jacket.

He gazed critically into the mirror. "Johnny Drayton," he said, "you look like something out of a costume drama."

THERE WAS a door to the left of the alcove, and he opened it. He crossed a hallway, came to another door. Inside, he heard music. A song which had been popular years ago, something about foolish things. Ah! He sang in a monotone: "These foolish things remind me of you. A cigarette that la-de-da—"

He opened the door.

They had been thorough. There was a table, set out with roast fowl and all the trimmings. Nearby was a stand and on it an ice-bucket. In that,

a bottle of what could have been champagne.

But it was a bedroom. The bed stood off in a far corner; soft blue lighting cast its shadow on the wall.

The girl was asleep. She lay under the covers, on her back, and only her face showed. The last man and the last woman, half a billion years in the future. Drayton checked a wild impulse to strut and pound his chest. That Jobijed was all right.

The girl—beautiful.

Her hair fell in disarray on the pillow, long, corn-silk in color, framing a pale, rose-tinted face. Long lashes, pert little nose, warm, inviting red lips. Her breasts rose and fell evenly under the thin coverlet. Drayton had to force himself to stop staring—the swell of them seemed just right.

He crossed silently to the bed, knelt at its head, smelled the fragrance of the sleeping girl's perfume. He shook her right shoulder under the coverlet.

She tossed restlessly for a moment, then her eyes blinked open. She looked at Drayton without comprehension. "Where am I?" she said. Lovely voice. "Umm-mm, that's rather a stereotyped question, isn't it? Well, I was swimming, and—I remember! I thought I was drowning. I—yes. They must have rescued me. Then, is this a hospital?"

"No," Drayton told her. His voice was thick. "Take a look."

She gazed about the room, took in the walls, the soft blue lighting, the table with its waiting meal. She cocked an ear when she heard the music. "What an odd place!"

Then she looked at Drayton. She giggled. "Is this a costume ball or something? You look so silly."

DRAYTON cleared his throat. All at once, Jobijed's idea was clear. There was a haven for humanity

on Alpha something-or-other. Not for Jobijed and his companions, no—they were old and tired and good for nothing but contemplation. But for Drayton and this girl—and their progeny.

"My name is Johnny," Drayton told her. "Johnny Drayton."

"Hi. I'm Connie Philson. Now, what's all this about? Did you rescue me?"

"Umm-mm, no," said Drayton. He'd better tell her what Jobijed had told him, so that they could go right ahead with their plans. First he'd destroy the enemy, then there was the girl—and the future of the human race.

"You were," Drayton began, "uh, rescued in a very strange way."

"Whatever do you mean? You sound so mysterious." Connie sat up, but the coverlet did not come up with her. She wore nothing but her feminine loveliness, and Drayton had been right. The swell of her . . .

"Eek! I'm not dressed! Go away, come on, go away—"

Hastily, she pulled the coverlet up to her neck, waiting for Drayton to leave.

"They should have left some clothing around for you—ah!" He found a pile of it at the foot of the bed, tossed it to her. "I'll turn my back. Go on, now, get dressed. We have a lot to talk about."

He heard rustling noises after he turned around, but after a while Connie was giggling again. "You forgot something, Mr. Drayton." The giggle disappeared, and her voice was less than cool.

"What?"

"Know what you gave me? A pair of slacks and a hat! The hat I don't need, thank you. But have you got—"

Drayton mumbled under his breath, took off his white dinner jacket. He tossed it over one shoulder and waited. Presently, Connie said: "Okay, Mr. Drayton. You can turn around. But

this is the queerest setup."

Connie stood beside the bed. The slacks were a tight fit, made of some sleek black substance. The white dinner jacket was much too large, and because it only buttoned once and, at that, someplace down near Connie's waist, a lot of white skin showed.

"I—I guess it will do till I can get out of here," Connie told him, smoothing the jacket down hard over her chest. "But I still feel half naked. Now, what on earth happened?" Then she laughed again. "You should see yourself, sitting there in a pair of pants and a sash!"

SHE ALTERNATED between bewildered anger and laughter, and Drayton wondered if he could straighten everything out by telling her what had happened. He cleared his throat again. "Well, you remember you thought you were drowning? Well, you did."

"I did what?"

"You . . . drowned."

"Now you're joking. If I drowned, then I'm dead. Here, come here and feel me. Never mind!"

Drayton spoke very quickly, all in a wild rush of words. He almost felt stupid, telling her the truth, and he realized he was doing a very poor job of it. "You died, see? Only you didn't, because just at the last moment, Jobijed and his friends came and snatched your soul away, taking it here, five hundred millions of years in the future. I was in an auto wreck, and they took my soul, too. They built our bodies all over again and put our souls inside, and here we are. See?"

"Sure, I see. You're crazy!"

"No, wait a minute. If you listen, I can prove it. Look: if this were the twentieth century, would I go around dressed like this?"

"Of course—if you were crazy. Any other proof?"

"Sure. Just wait till you see Jobijed and his friends, and this whole place—"

"Well, try your little game on some other girl, Mr. Drayton. Because I can't stay to see anything. As it happens, I have a date tonight, and—hey, what time is it?"

"How should I know? Five hundred million years in the future, though, so I guess it doesn't much matter. Are you hungry?"

"Now, listen, Mr. Drayton—"

"Call me Johnny."

"I'd like to call you a lot of things, Mr. Drayton. I don't want any part of it, thank you. I just want to go home. So, if you'll show me the way out?"

SHE WALKED past him, haughtily, but then her nostrils caught the aroma of the savory fowl, kept somehow warm on the table. "Umm-mm, now that you mention it, I am hungry. Well, if I eat with you, will you promise to let me use a telephone afterwards?"

"I can't. No telephone. And no one to talk to. Just the last three men, inside somewhere, and they don't talk, not really. Three old guys, all wrinkled up, with big heads. And us. And their enemies."

"Aha!" Connie cried. She lifted her arms to the ceiling dramatically. "And they brought you here to save them from their enemies. And I'm here to help you—my great big hero."

Drayton nodded. "Yeah. Yeah, now you're getting it. That's exactly what they said."

"Brother, are you batty! Never mind that dinner. If you don't let me out of here, right now, I'm going to scream. I'm going to scream so loud that all the police on Long Island will come running."

Drayton shrugged wearily. Maybe

it would be a good idea to have Jobijed explain things to her, after all. "You go through that door," he told her, pointing the way toward Jobijed's quarters.

Connie sniffed and walked past him. She opened the door and strode out through the hallway. She was back in a few minutes, and she looked very frightened. "There were three old men, like you said," she whispered. "With big heads. And they talked to me, but not out loud. I don't know. They asked—"

"What did they ask?"

Her face reddened. "If we had retired yet. That was the word, retired. They expected us to retire, together."

"Well, now do you believe me?" Drayton moved toward her. Connie looked badly shaken, and he put his arm on her shoulder protectively.

"Take your hands off me! No, I don't believe a word of it. I'll never believe anything you tell me. This is a trick, that's what it is. This is the far future, huh? And we're the last real man and real woman. So they want us to... get married, sort of."

"Sort of."

"Bosh! It's just an elaborate scheme, like showing etchings, only worse. If you're not crazy, Mr. Drayton, you're a rotten stinker."

DRAYTON shrugged hopelessly. He wondered idly if Adam had had the same trouble with Eve. Perhaps Jobijed in his eagerness had been a little on the precipitous side, but then Jobijed couldn't be held responsible. He just didn't know twentieth-century conventions.

"You'd better go to sleep," Drayton told the girl. "I'll see you in the morning."

"As a matter of fact, I am tired. If you won't let me out of here, then I will go to sleep. But I'll lock the door

from the inside."

Drayton smiled blandly. "There's no lock," he said. This could almost be amusing, if it weren't so important.

Connie pushed him ahead of her through the door. Then she stood on the threshold, staring at him. "You look like a normal man," she said. "You'd almost be cute if you could get that leer off your face."

"It's not a leer. I'm trying to smile at you so you won't be afraid."

"Well, just let me go to sleep. And here—take your jacket, I don't want it." She unbuttoned the white dinner jacket, began to shrug it off her pretty shoulders. But halfway through the operation, she realized that she wore exactly nothing beneath it. She buttoned it quickly and slammed the door shut.

Drayton turned on his heel and began to walk away, but he heard the door opening. Connie's arm extended through the crack, and she dropped Drayton's jacket on the floor outside her room. "Here," she said. "I hope I never have to see you again. And can you please turn off that music?"

Evidently, Jobijed and his companions had only that one song, "These Foolish Things", because it had been playing over and over again.

"I don't know how," Drayton said, picking up his jacket. "They probably play it in our minds somehow. Well, good night."

He heard a muted "oh" as the door slammed again.

DRAYTON saw very little of Connie in the next few weeks. Occasionally, he'd meet her in the hallways, and she'd mutter something, although in a timid voice, about its still being a big hoax. But she didn't seem so sure of herself.

For his own part, Drayton watched time whirl by in a frenzy of activity. He could not hope to understand the

science behind Jobijed's weapons, but he needed some slight working knowledge of them. Day after day he studied and tinkered under Jobijed's watchful tutelage.

One morning—after Drayton had awakened from the equivalent of a full night's sleep and had his breakfast—Jobijed informed him they were ready. The armada had been assembled on the surface. Rank after rank of robot planes were waiting there for him, and he knew what to expect. Flight to the twilight zone would be automatic, and he'd take over the whole armada later on from his controls in the lead ship, after actual contact had been made. He felt elated. Here were three helpless remnants of his race, looking to him for succor. Well, Drayton would help them. It was the least he could do for earth's final human beings.

As for Connie—well, there would be time enough, Drayton thought, to worry about her later. Of all the mule-headed—

A conical lift took Drayton up through the shaft to the gleaming mound. He stepped out onto the bleak red tableland, felt the wind this time as it tore through his thin dinner jacket, looked up for a moment at the monstrous crimson sun.

In a great circle all around the mound, Drayton's armada was sprawled, row after row of wingless, jetless ships, half a thousand tear-drop weapon bearers, the power to destroy a civilization, or a world, at Drayton's fingertips.

He entered the lead plane through a port in its gleaming saffron belly. Jobijed's face appeared on a screen. "Ready, Drayton?"

"Ready." His mouth felt very dry; his tongue was stuck to its roof. He was ready, yes, as ready as he would ever be. But he trembled, and not with eagerness alone.

With the roar of a thousand thunderstorms, the fleet took off. It climbed only a few hundred feet. Drayton need fear no natural barriers on a flat earth. The fleet hovered briefly, then soared away so rapidly that the ground was less than a blur of red and ochre to Drayton's eyes.

"Hello."

DRAYTON whirled around. Connie squirmed out from behind one of the control panels. "When I saw all these planes assembled, I thought maybe you were taking them home. So I came along. I hope you don't mind."

She had taken a piece of the flimsy coverlet from her bed and made a halter out of it. Drayton liked it a lot better than the jacket he had given her. But he was angry. He'd have a lot of work to do once they reached the twilight valleys, and Connie might get in his way.

"Sure I mind," he told her. "Damn it, you could gum up everything—"

She pouted. "Well, then take me back. Go ahead, take me back. Leave me with those three queer old men forever."

Here we go again, Drayton thought. "I can't take you back," he said. "These ships are on automatic for the time being. But just keep out of the way. And now do you believe?"

"I—I don't know what to believe. This is all so strange, so impossible. And yet—Johnny, I'll believe, for the time being, just like the ship's on automatic. But then will you take me home?"

All he said was, "Look down." Slowly, the sun seemed to sink toward the horizon behind the vast swarm of craft. "We're approaching the twilight zone of an earth which is so old that it no longer rotates on its axis," Drayton explained.

Shadows grew longer. The sky be-

came dark, a shadow world of flickering scarlet. Now the land became more irregular, and the ships soared up over a low range of mountains.

Below, Drayton saw the twilight valleys! There in the scarlet half-light, a suggestion of green. Parched dead on one side, frozen corpse on the other, earth was girdled by a middle-land of life!

To get the feel of things, Drayton tried his weapons out in a harmless experiment first. He took the ship off automatic, sent it screaming down toward the crest of a small hill. The other craft dipped and followed, sentient beings intent upon their master.

Scorch and boil and broil of heat beams—and the hill was left behind, a charred and lifeless mound. Drayton was breathless. "Ever see anything like it?"

"No. I haven't. But what are you going to do?"

"Watch."

The fleet soared on over the first of the three twilight valleys. The pucker of Jobijed's mouth on the viewing screen became a slit. "Careful, Drayton. Don't get too close—"

Connie seemed alarmed. "Are there people down there?"

"People? No, I don't think so. Creatures—enemies. We're going to destroy them."

"What? Just on the word of those three old men you'll bring death down into these valleys? So much killing, just on their word? Johnny, are you sure?"

IT WAS a good point. What, actually, did Drayton know about the valleys and their inhabitants? Surely it wouldn't hurt to sweep low once and take a look. But Jobijed must have sensed his thoughts, half way around the world. "Don't, Drayton. Danger lurks."

Drayton muttered, "All right, Con-

nie. Just a quick look." He swooped lower, the whole fleet on his tail. Up to meet them came a swarm of tiny planes—winged craft with gyro-blades. What sort of beings were these usurpers?

Drayton stared, fascinated. He swooped lower, half aware of Connie looking breathlessly over his shoulder.

The explosive cartridges of the attacking planes popped in the air around them, rocking and bouncing their ship with concussion. One of the robot craft hurtled away, disabled, to fiery destruction against the low mountains that formed a cup around the valley.

Drayton pressed his braking lever. A hundred feet over the valley his fleet hovered.

"Destroy the valley!" Jobijed's thoughts hissed.

"Keep your shirt on!" Drayton cried, impatiently.

Not a figure stirred in the valley. Drayton saw vegetation, trees and shrubbery and meadowland, all in a careful park-like landscape. But no movement. Fearful, the inhabitants lurked indoors.

Then Drayton saw the town.

Houses of stone, row on row of them, in delicate pastel colors here in the half-light. Graceful houses of gingerbread, thought Drayton: a fairyland for folk of gentle nature; a quiet hamlet of beauty.

Men! Those houses could have been built only by men!

"Use your heat-beams, Drayton!"

Below him the elfin city. No bigger than seashore bungalows were the houses, standing in regimented rows along little streets of tile. Houses for men. Men like Drayton, women like Connie—not for the big-headed trio of the caverns. Was this why Jobijed had not wanted him to go down? The usurpers were men, not hideous travesties. He couldn't kill them, not

after he had seen their work. It crossed his mind that he and Connie could live with them, an almost normal life, here half a billion years in the future.

Jobijed's thoughts again: "You're making a serious mistake, Drayton."

Drayton laughed. He looked at Connie, a question in his eyes, and she nodded. He picked up a heavy instrument and swung one swift blow at the view-screen, watched it shatter, saw its pieces tinkle to the floor.

DRAYTON put all the other ships back on automatic, sent them winging away from the twilight land and toward earth's sun-side. Let Jobijed have his toys. He, Drayton, did not want them. Slowly, he brought their own ship down into the valley, into a plaza at the center of the quiet town.

He took Connie's hand. "Do you believe, now?"

"I don't know what to believe. I only know that I'm afraid, terribly afraid, because I think I'll never get back home. And, I think I could hate you. Yes, hate you, because you took me here, wherever we are."

"I told you I had nothing to do with your coming. But you'd be dead now if you weren't here. Isn't this better than death?"

She withdrew her hand. "No, don't touch me. I still don't know. I just don't know. Maybe outside, in this city, is the answer . . ."

Drayton swore softly. She was still obstinate, would not let herself believe. And one part at least of Jobijed's tale still remained: Drayton longed to take Connie, unresisting, into his arms. But if she persisted—well, there was a city outside, and people. Women who perhaps doubted less and acted more . . .

They walked outside into the cool air of the plaza. The sweet scent of

life came to them on a gentle breeze of crisp air. The scent of autumn in New England, here in this eternal autumn.

Drayton was eager. In half a billion years, another group of primates certainly could evolve into human beings. Then did Jobijed and his companions hate them because they were a young race with all the unborn tomorrows ahead of them? Destruction, then, for the people of the valleys. That's what Jobijed wanted—simply out of spite.

The men and women came out of their houses slowly, cautiously, by twos and threes. Timidly, they clustered around the ship, several hundred people. Human.

Not quite, Drayton thought. A certain elfin quality about them, like the houses. Graceful, every one of them, but with an almost unearthly grace. Soft white of skin, like purest alabaster.

DRAYTON walked toward them, aware that Connie hung back near the hull of the ship. A woman came to meet him, proud-faced, almost haughty. Ivory-skinned and raven-tressed, she wore a simple tunic of palest blue. "You would have destroyed us," she said.

Drayton's pulses leaped. How did she speak his language? He asked that now, politely, almost timidly.

"That's simple enough. I don't, not really. In that sense, we have the same powers as the wicked cavern spawn, Johnny. Don't be startled. See? I even know your name, know why you are here. In half a billion years the powers of mind have increased tremendously. Is it so unnatural? Your ancestors, half a billion years before you, were less than dinosaurs. So we have our powers. We can read minds half way across the world."

Said Drayton, "I don't want to be

rude, but one question I must ask."

She smiled. "Go right ahead. You're among friends."

"That's what I have in mind. Can we live here among you?"

The girl was still smiling. "But of course. We'd have it no other way." Then she frowned. "You're not... as you say... married?"

"No. She doesn't even like me."

The girl seemed relieved. "Good. Because others there are—" She blushed, averted her head. "Don't forget, it's not as if I've just met you. For long I dwelled on your thoughts, on your looks. Halfway around the world, by mental projection, by... Never mind! I'm being too forward."

Now Drayton smiled. "Not at all. I'm tired of women who doubt, who fight all the way what is the most natural—"

He stopped, aware abruptly that Connie was calling him. Muttering to himself, he returned to the side of the ship. "Well, what is it?"

"Johnny," she whispered, "would you think I was very silly if I asked you to leave? Let's get away from here."

"Get away? It was your idea coming down in the first place!"

"I know, I know. But call it woman's intuition if you like. I don't like this place. There's something evil here, I can sense it. Maybe your three old men were right after all. No, don't ask me how I know. I just do, that's all. Johnny. let's get away!" She grasped his hand impulsively.

"Don't be ridiculous. Look around you. Go ahead, look. These are people, real people. Just like us. And we can live here. Of all the fantastic turnabouts..."

He stalked away, angry, back to the woman who waited for him on the fringe of the crowd.

They supped in a great banquet hall in the town's largest building. Connie

kept to herself at one end of the long table, but Drayton ate and drank his fill with the people of the twilight valley. At times he glanced at Connie a little sadly, but mostly he had eyes only for the raven-tressed woman, Luroc.

HALFWAY through the meal, a bell clanged loudly outside. Luroc seemed alarmed. With half a dozen of the young men and a trio of other women, she stood up from the table.

Drayton joined her. "What is it?"

"Air-raid," she frowned. "Your friend Jobijed is attacking—or rather, he's sending his robot-planes."

"He wouldn't. Not when we're here."

"Oh he wouldn't, eh? Come on outside."

They ran together, with the others, down the tile streets. Soon they left the rows of houses behind, set out at a trot across farmland. "Airfield," Luroc called over her shoulder, running on long, graceful legs. "We're going up to stop those robot-planes. Want to come along?"

Drayton said that he did. Soon the great swarm of robot-craft came into view, but already many of the gyroplanes had taken to the air to meet them. The gyros were small, tiny metal fleas among the leviathans attacking, but the robot-armada did not fare too well without Drayton's sentience to guide it.

In and out darted the gyros, harassing all the way. Drayton watched the robots maneuvering clumsily, unsure of themselves; he saw several go plunging off, flaming wrecks, to the waiting mountains.

He clambered up the wing of one of the gyros with Luroc, squeezed in beside her in the cramped cockpit, felt the warmth of her hip against his own. Then they were taking off, the wind

whipping all about them, streaming Luroc's long black hair behind her.

The voice came to Drayton's mind when they joined the attacking swarm of gyros high above the airfield. "Drayton, come back to us! Take your own bomber up and return to your fleet. We don't want to destroy the valley, not now, with you down there. You are our only hope. But if you refuse, we'll have no choice!"

Drayton shook his fist at the sky. "Don't make me laugh!" he shouted. "I've had enough of that hogwash."

Luroc gripped his arm. "You tell that Jobijed, Johnny. Tell him good." Her fingers dug in almost cruelly, and then, briefly, she turned and kissed him on the lips.

Then they joined the battle. Luroc's hands flew gracefully over the controls, and their gyro responded magnificently. They climbed rapidly, high above the robot fleet, and then they plummeted down in a long hard dive that drove the breath from Drayton's lungs.

Straight for one of the robot craft they plunged, and Drayton heard the staccato burst of their guns, heard the clatter of explosive charges against the bigger ship's hull. The robot loomed before them, a giant teardrop, larger and larger. Luroc would stop, he thought. She had to stop, or they'd be destroyed in a head-on crash with that saffron hull.

But she did not stop. A grim smile played about her lips as they increased their speed. The robot swelled before them.

Abruptly, it swung down and away, a gutted hulk. It shuddered, danced crazily, spun once and then again. It plunged out of sight beyond the cup of mountains which surrounded the valley.

"One!" Luroc cried.

After that, everything became an unreal fantasy. They climbed high once

more, chose their target, roared down upon it. . . .

Up again. Then down, and fire.

Up—

One by one the robots dropped away, damaged or destroyed utterly. As yet, not a single bomb had been dropped, not a heat-ray had broiled down upon the valley.

Jobijed's voice once more: "We're leaving, Drayton. This is madness, ridiculous. We don't want to destroy you. Perhaps some day you'll learn. Then, if it is not too late. . . ."

"Hah!" Luroc shouted her laughter to the skies. "They are afraid—afraid! We've beaten them, Johnny, for now."

THEY TOOK up the interrupted meal as though nothing had happened. Connie called Drayton down to her end of the table. "Well, smart guy, does that convince you?"

"What? Does what convince me?"

"The way the robots fled. Does that convince you I could be right?"

"Why should it?" Drayton chafed at this delay, wanted to return to Luroc.

"They certainly could have bombed the town, Johnny. But they didn't, because we are here. Everything they told you was the truth."

"That's very funny," Drayton said. "First, I couldn't get you to believe a thing. Now, when it turns out to be a vicious lie, you do believe it. Can't you see that we belong here with the people of the valley?"

"No. I see nothing of the sort. Oh—you're impossible!" Connie got up, stalked down the length of the table to Luroc, bent and talked with her for a moment, distaste on her face. But Luroc seemed unperturbed as Drayton joined them.

"...of course, Connie," she was saying. "You're tired. Very well, you go through there. Yes, there. Second door

on your left, a bedroom. It's yours for as long as you want it. Good night."

"Good night," Connie said stiffly. She didn't look at Drayton. Her back was very straight as she walked away.

Luroc called for more wine, then said: "A strange girl, that one. What troubles her, Johnny?"

"Forget it. It isn't important." Damn Connie! She could sow the seeds of suspicion at that. He wondered briefly why Jobijed's fleet came, then departed suddenly, without unleashing a single lethal ray. Was it as Connie had said—because they were in the valley? Had the fleet come, after all, just to get them to return?

Luroc smiled. "I'm reading your thoughts, you know."

Drayton stood up, splashing wine on the tablecloth. "Hey! That can be very disconcerting—"

"Well, I promise not to, after we know we can trust you. As for those thoughts, Johnny, forget them. Jobijed's fleet fled because we beat them. It's happened before and it will happen again. But you have nothing to do with it. You believe me, don't you, Johnny?"

GREEN AND amber and beautiful, her eyes looked into his. "I'll believe you," he said.

"Good!" Abruptly, she was all laughter again. "Would you like to take a walk and see our city?"

Johnny nodded, and they excused themselves from the table. They walked outside, not talking. Luroc led him down a street across a small plaza to a little park. It was deserted.

"I thought you might like to come here and talk."

Hadn't she said something about seeing the city? Well, what was the difference? It was a balmy autumn night, and a man and woman belonged

together in a quiet park, alone.

They sat down on a bench hewn out of stone, set back deep in the shadow of a grove of fruit trees. A stream gurgled nearby. Birds chattered. It could almost have been half a billion years ago.

"Johnny," Luroc turned to him, her face only inches away, "we want you to do a complete about-face. Did you know that?"

"How do you mean?"

"Well, Jobijed wanted you to destroy us. And we want you to destroy Jobijed and his cavern." She said it quietly, patiently, almost as if she were talking to a child.

"I'll be double-damned. Turnabout and start the whole-thing over again, huh? Why? Why don't your people forget all about Jobijed and his cavern?"

"We can't. For one thing, there are the air raids. They destroy, they kill. For another, there's space travel. Jobijed has conquered that, Johnny. Although, as you know, he can't use it."

"As a matter of fact, he wants me to use it. With Connie."

Luroc chuckled. "Well, that's something of the past. Anyway, I think you know Earth is a dying planet. Two hundred years, three hundred, and the future generations of my people must perish from lack of water. We have our reservoirs, but each year it rains less. One day we will thirst and thirst and there will not be one drop of water left.

"We depend upon those reservoirs. If they were destroyed— But that's beside the point. Point is, sooner or later there will be no water anyway. And Jobijed has space travel, Johnny. Giving us the secret, he could let my people go off to the stars to find a new home. But he's wicked and spiteful

and the answer is no—and so we war."

"What can I do?"

"Kill Jobijed, kill his companions. Get their spaceship and bring it here so we can duplicate it."

"Sure, I guess I can try. But why don't you do that yourselves?"

"DON'T YOU think we would if we could? The caverns are a fortress. We can't get in, not with our little gyros and our explosives. But you can, Johnny. You can pretend you've changed your mind, return there. You'd be received as a friend. Then..." She shrugged. "The rest is up to you."

"He'd read my mind, just as you can. How could I fool him?"

"Leave that to us. We have our own unique powers. We can cloud your mind—"

Drayton stood up. "Let me think about it," he said. A moment ago he said he would do it, but now he wondered. Hell, could he just turn on Jobijed like that? He felt suddenly like a helpless pawn in a game between two forces that didn't even bother to explain all the rules to him. Luroc was right, of course. But still, what had Connie said? "Better let me think," he told Luroc now.

She pulled him down on the bench, gently. "All right, but not now. I'm a woman, Johnny. And you're a man, and I—I watched you for a long time in the caverns, projecting mentally. I like what I saw...."

God! thought Drayton. What a woman! Frank, yes, and almost brazen, if you looked at it that way. But didn't he somehow feel the same bond? It swept over him now, softly at first, but with growing insistence. He could do his work, destroy the cavern, get the spaceship—then have a life with Luroc and her people among the stars. Luroc...

He took her in his arms fiercely. Mary? Who was Mary, dead half a billion years? And Connie—frightened, doubting Connie—was a pale, doubting flower beside Luroc. But it was a mad, impossible situation. Three women, one less than dust, the other longing for a world she could never have again. The third—

Luroc returned his kisses passionately.

They stayed a long time in the quiet grove of trees....

AND THE next day, Luroc showed Drayton her city. He could not help comparing it with the too-antiseptic, coldly scientific caverns of Jobijed. Luroc and her people dwelt in one small oasis on an Earth turned ugly with age—and seeing their twilight valley, you forgot the ugly Earth!

Everything in pastel hues, a quiet hamlet nestled in the twilight valley. Luroc's people worked hard to keep their valley beautiful, but when work was finished, they played. They danced and sang in their village square, and at first Drayton felt like an intruder. But their wine was heady stuff, and soon a smiling, laughing Luroc dragged him out into the square and danced for him. Wild and primitive she was. Yet graceful. So graceful that all her brothers and sisters of the twilight land stopped their playing to watch.

Before he knew it, friendly hands had shoved Drayton forward, and he danced with Luroc, the strong amber wine putting wings to his feet. The reed instruments and drums roared in his ears and from far away he heard the crowd shouting its approval. When the dance was concluded, he felt very much a part of the twilight valley. And the dance had given spurs to his passion for the slim, strong Luroc....

Laughing, the crowd surged forward, carrying him back to the banquet hall, where there was more feasting. There

was a small wild pig on a giant skewer, crisply brown and succulent, a golden apple in its mouth. And more wine, flagon after flagon of it, cool and dry.

Thoughts of Connie crossed his mind, but only for a moment. She had been slow on the uptake in Jobijed's cavern, and she'd be equally slow now. That was all there was to it. Perhaps she wouldn't be swept into it as rapidly as he had, but she'd find her place in the wonderful life of the twilight valley.

All about Drayton now, the noble faces of the twilight people clustered. Soft-stirring, on the edge of laughter almost, their voices yet were insistent.

"Join us against the spawn of the caverns, Drayton."

"We're human—you're human. Help us!"

Human—yes! Luroc on the arm of his chair, leaning easily toward him, smiling, her lips parted, a fine dew of perspiration on her forehead, her body still heaving softly from the exertions of the dance.

"The fates brought you here, Drayton. Don't make a mockery of the fates."

"Help us!"

"All we want to do is tend our fields and play a little, and go to live where there is more of life. But Jobijed won't let us."

Then Luroc, sliding off the arm of his chair and nestling on his lap. "Don't mind them, Johnny. They're eager, and you can't blame them. But you do like it here, don't you? You would like to live with us—"

"I like it fine. Sure—sure I want to live with you. But are you putting it that way? I mean, if I say no, what do I do, scram?"

"Johnny, Johnny!" Her laughter bubbled against his shoulder. "Of course not! You live in the twilight valley either way. You're one of us

now. The dance was a ritual, and—”

“Well, I’d like to go outside for a walk and clear my head. This wine—”

“Sure!” Luroc cried, skipping to her feet lithely. Clinging to his arm, she led Drayton from the hall.

“**WHAT** WOULD you like to see?”

“Anything, I don’t care. Got any suggestions?”

“Well, you haven’t been to our reservoir yet. It lies high up in the hills, clear and beautiful.”

They took one of the tiny planes and circled the city once before they set out toward the low mountains. In ten minutes they reached the reservoir, a crystal lake perched like a glistening coin beneath them in a mountain valley.

“Want to land?” Luroc shouted over the engine’s roar, and when Drayton nodded, she brought the plane down in a long, gliding arc and landed it expertly on a small runway. Everything she did was graceful, Drayton thought. And the same applied to all her people, a handsome race, graceful, artistic. Of course he’d say yes! He’d tell them after he returned with Luroc to the banquet hall. It was the least he could do, and maybe then he’d be worthy of their fellowship.

Hand in hand they walked around the reservoir, coming finally to where three streams ran out from it, each in a different direction. Drayton was surprised to see a lot of activity, gangs of bare-chested laborers working, machines humming shrilly, foremen barking orders.

“What’s all that for?” he demanded. “It looks to me like all the water has to do is flow down into your valley.”

“Naturally. But there are three twilight valleys, remember? We control the reservoir, and those two

streams on the left run out over the mountains to the other valleys. But they won’t, not much longer.”

“Oh, then there’s trouble? And your men are trying to repair it?”

“You’re joking.”

“What do you mean, I’m joking?”

“Well, have your little game. We needed those other valleys, of course. Together, the three cities could offer stronger resistance to Jobijed. But now that you’re here, why, we don’t need the other valleys any more. So we’re damming up the water supply and cutting them off from it.”

“What?”

“I don’t understand you, Johnny. What’s strange about that? They’d do precisely the same thing to us were the situation reversed. People are like that, that’s all. It’s human nature.”

And when Drayton didn’t answer:—

“It’s that way in your own time too, isn’t it? But naturally—how could it be any other way?” Luroc seemed genuinely puzzled. “When you need something, you use it. But when you don’t, you get rid of it. We just don’t need the people of the other two valleys now....” She smiled up at him.

DRAYTON found himself wishing for a cigarette and a cup of strong black coffee, for the wine still throbbed in his veins. Human nature, she’d said. But did human beings act like that—dog eat dog? Some did, to a certain extent, but they’d carry it only so far. Only the warped totalitarian leaders would consider mass human extermination merely because the men and women in question no longer served a useful function. That was the way it had been in Drayton’s day, incredibly long ago. But now?

Now Luroc spoke of mass murder as though it were a commonplace. *We just don’t need the people of the other valleys now....* You don’t need them,

so you kill them, just like that. You take their water away and let them die of thirst in a land where it rarely rains....

Drayton looked at Luroc's loveliness, and sighed. Animals which had hit upon human form in half a billion years along the dim corridors of time. Human outwardly, but what resided within their hearts was predatory animal instinct.

He'd rejected Jobijed for his physical ugliness. Was he now going to accept the twilight people for their surface beauty, for the beauty which resided in Luroc's face and body? He knew Luroc would never understand. Human beings acted that way in her experience, but Drayton couldn't gear his own emotions to a brutal indifference toward life. He'd almost been the chump to end all chumps. They needed him now, but what would happen after he'd done their dirty work for them? Was it all a game, was Luroc's passion part of that game too? He didn't know and, quite suddenly, he didn't care. They looked human, too human, perhaps. But it was a mockery. Jobijed had known, Jobijed with half a billion years of culture behind him, and Drayton had been a fool. Now he wanted out.

They took their plane back to the twilight city, and if Luroc noticed Drayton's silent uneasiness, she did not mention it. He grunted his own part of the conversation, hardly hearing the words he spoke. If they could do that to their own people in the other valleys, what might they plan for Connie, whose intuition told her not to like them? Drayton had sobered completely when they landed.

SILENTLY, they entered the building of the banquet hall. Darkness never came to this twilight land; the dead sun loomed forever just beyond

the horizon. But it was night for the people of the valley.

On bare feet, they padded softly through the silent halls. The suggestion of a sound came to Drayton, abruptly, from far off.

"What was that?"

"Nothing. It wasn't anything. Come, I'll show you to your sleeping quarters. In the morning we can plan what you must do."

"Wait." Drayton had heard it again, a faint whimpering.

"I said it was nothing." Luroc turned, cupped his chin in her hand, kissed him. "Don't let every little noise distract you, Johnny."

He shrugged. Perhaps someone was having nightmares. But it came again, and this time it ended in a scream.

Connie's voice!

Luroc tried to hold him, but he pulled away and ran down the dark hallway. What was it Luroc had told Connie? Through there, second door on your left....

He heard Luroc calling him, demanding that he stop. But he darted onward through the corridors, frowning. Had Luroc drawn him away to the reservoir to keep him occupied while something else, something more important, was happening?

He reached the door, pounded on it. Within, Connie screamed his name—then silence.

He tried the door. Locked. "Connie?"

No answer.

He stepped back, hurtled against the door with his shoulder. The impact jarred him all the way down to his toes, but he felt the door quiver in its frame. He struck it again, heard wood splintering. The third time he crashed all the way through. The momentum made him stumble, and he sprawled full length on Connie's bed.

It was dark. A blind was drawn over

the window against the perpetual twilight. Drayton rolled over, started to get up.

A form lunged at him, crashed against his midsection, bore him to the floor. He lay there, grappling. Whoever he was, his opponent was big and powerful, using arms and legs to pinion Drayton before his eyes could acclimate to the half-darkness.

Drayton thrashed about, kicked up and over with his legs. His attacker grunted and lost his hold for a moment but, as he rolled clear, Drayton felt something sharp bite its way into the muscle just below his right shoulder.

HE LASHED out with his left hand, felt cartilage crunch under his knuckles. He struck again, crouching on his knees, short hammering blows with the weight of his body behind them. The man under him moaned, and Drayton felt fingers pawing at his face, seeking his eyes.

He turned his head away as he continued hammering with his left fist. Hammering—

Suddenly, the room was filled with light. A dark man lay supine under him. Off a few feet on the carpet, a knife glittered dully.

Connie helped him to his feet. "He hurt you! You're bleeding, Johnny."

Blood darkened the right sleeve of his jacket. He felt weak and a little giddy, and he didn't resist when Connie led him to the bed and stripped off his jacket. "The bleeding's stopped, I think," she said, crossing the room to a foyer. She disappeared for a moment, returned with a towel dripping wet, applied it to Drayton's shoulder.

"Umm-mm, that feels good. What in hell's been happening, Connie?"

"I—I'm not sure. I was asleep. I thought I heard the door opening. Then this man came in, locking the

door behind him. He came for me with that knife. We struggled. Then you came. Johnny, you saved my life."

He grinned. "I guess I've been a prize boob, kid. I still don't know what's going on, but I think that's just the way they wanted it. Now—"

"Now what, Johnny? What can we do?"

"I think we're going to have to get the devil out of here, and fast."

LUROC STOOD in the battered doorway, panting. Her face was flushed; her breasts rose and fell rapidly under the blue tunic. "I ran after you as fast as I could, Johnny. What happened?"

"Don't tell me you don't know?"

"How should I know? Wait—don't tell me you think I—"

"That's exactly what I think. You took me away, kept me distracted, so your man here could kill Connie."

"Johnny! Why should I do that? No, I guess this fellow didn't want you and the girl here, for one reason or another. He crept to Connie's room tonight intending to kill her. We saved her life, you and I."

The man on the floor groaned. Drayton waited until his eyes flickered open, then he retrieved the knife. He crouched near the man, holding the blade at his throat. "All right, chum," he said. "I have some questions to ask you."

Alarm crossed Luroc's face briefly, then was gone. "He won't be able to answer a thing you ask," she predicted. But Drayton sensed it wasn't so much a prediction as it was a command to the man on the floor.

Drayton prodded the man's Adam's apple with his knife. "Why'd you come here?"

The man looked at Luroc, squirmed. Drayton's blade bit deeper. "I came to kill her." He looked at Connie,

trembling now.

Drayton shrugged. "We know that. But why?"

No answer. Luroc was laughing softly. "Really, Johnny, I'm surprised. There's no intrigue here, as I told you. I'll personally see to it that this man is executed if you like—but I had nothing to do with it. We're your friends. We want you to stay."

"Nuts!" Drayton felt very weary. He had kissed this woman, had made love to her. . . .

"Now, for the last time, why did you come?" He turned the knife a little, watched a slow trickle of blood creep down the man's neck.

The man sobbed. "Luroc. It was Luroc! She didn't think you would listen, not with this girl whispering in your ear all the time. So—"

Luroc turned and ran for the doorway, the smile gone from her lips. But Connie stuck out her foot, almost daintily, it seemed to Drayton, and Luroc tumbled forward. Her head struck an edge of the battered door, and she lay very still.

DRAYTON ran to her, bent over her—and something hit him from behind, bowling him over. He lay heavily across her outstretched body, glanced up in time to see the dark man running past, disappearing down the hallway.

"Damn it!" Drayton swore, getting up. "He'll call for help. Well, it serves me right, I guess. I had to come gawking here to see if Luroc—"

"Is she badly hurt, Johnny?" Connie's face was pale.

"No. I don't think so. She's breathing regularly enough. Just knocked out cold, kid. Hell, don't worry about it. Luroc had it coming to her. Of all the lousy tricks."

"I still don't get it. Not quite."

"Well, put it this way: I'm the number-one fool this side of eternity. You

were right all along, there's something evil here. They knew that you could sense it, realized they'd have to kill you before they could expect any cooperation from me. So—hey! If we stand here talking, we'll never get away. Come on!"

Pulling Connie along behind him, he plunged out through the doorway. Far away, they could hear the noise of gathering pursuit. Voices shouting, feet slapping against tile.

They ducked down a corridor, pulled up short when a group of men approached from the other end. "This way," Drayton cried, and they turned down another passage. Almost, he thought they were trapped. There were soldiers here too. Waiting for them.

On their left, Drayton found a stairway going up. Half-carrying Connie with his good left arm, he mounted the stairs two at a time.

They passed through a little trap-door and found themselves on a broad, flat roof. Drayton threw home a bolt, and momentarily at least the trap-door would keep their pursuers at bay.

No railing circled the roof's edge, and the drop was a dozen feet, straight down. Drayton smiled, said: "You feel like you have wings, Connie?"

"Why?"

"Because that's the way we're going down. We're jumping. See—see out there in the plaza? Our ship. If we don't get to it in a matter of minutes, the alarm will spread. Then we'll never get to it at all."

"But I can't jump so far!"

Fists pounded on the underside of the trap-door, and soon something heavier smote the frail wood.

"Relax when you let go, Connie. Don't be stiff. Then bend your knees to take in the shock. Roll over if you have to." While he spoke Drayton prodded her toward the edge of the roof, and she stood there shaking with

an uncontrollable fear.

"For God's sake, jump!"

"I—I can't."

Drayton cursed softly, then pushed. Connie tottered for a moment, swung her arms out wildly to regain her balance. By that time she was over the edge and on her way down. She hit on her feet, fell to her knees, rolled over twice. She grinned up at Drayton. "It wasn't so bad, Johnny. At another time, I might even have enjoyed it."

Smiling, Drayton jumped.

CONNIE gasped when he made one continuous motion out of it. He alighted, felt his knees buckle, came upright again. Not pausing, he grabbed Connie's hand and ran.

People stared at them oddly, but as yet the alarm had not spread outside the building itself. It would, however, because, looking back, Drayton saw a score of soldiers pouring out of the big entrance.

He heard a popping sound, saw chips of rock fly off the side of a structure near them. "I was afraid of that. They have firearms, kid. Run!"

The popping repeated itself until it became a continuous rumbling noise. Stone flew all around them. Glass shattered. Drayton knew their aim would be a lot better if they closed the gap. He didn't like the thought at all.

By the time they reached the ship, a small knot of people had gathered outside its port. Drayton realized they weren't soldiers.

"Okay, move aside," said Drayton. "Come on, let us through."

"Take it easy, friend. What's all the noise about?"

Drayton stiff-armed the face leering at him, saw the man tumble against his fellows. They all came forward in a rush, but Drayton slammed the port open, tumbled inside with Connie and pushed it shut again.

"Whew!" he breathed. "We can start this crate and get out of here."

But in his mind he heard laughter. Luroc's. "You think so, eh?" While he listened, Drayton realized that Luroc could project her thoughts as readily as Jobijed. The thoughts were ugly, evil. All at once he knew that—and any doubts about the course he had to take left him like a discarded cloak.

Said Luroc in his mind: "They brought you here, Drayton, the men of the cavern. And it may be that I can send you back . . ."

Briefly, Drayton remembered what had happened once before. He had come within a hair of returning half a billion years—to death. What was it Jobijed had told him? *Your own time still has power over your soul. You must fight it . . .*

A BUZZING swept in around him, filled his ears until all other sound was gone. Connie was shouting something, but he could not hear. She approached, reached out, grabbed his shoulders. He felt nothing!

Hazy became the inside of the ship. It swam in a mist. Drayton was a soul again—an *elan*, Jobijed called it—without a body. Through the mists that clouded his vision, he thought he saw his body slump, saw Connie try to hold it upright. He knew she was screaming.

The mists dissolved.

Drayton stood in a cemetery.

"Ashes to ashes, dust to dust . . ." he heard the Priest intone.

Luroc was returning him to the day of his burial.

The casket called him!

He walked to it, slowly. He ran. He pushed the lid.

It was raining, and cold. He wanted to get out of the rain, to get inside the case with its warmth—forever . . . No, wait. He didn't want it. Luroc did.

And somehow he knew that if his *elan* merged with the coffin—if he did that once, even if only briefly—there'd be no turning back. The corridors of time would be closed to him forever. He could never return to his new body, his new life, in the future.

His *elan* would dissolve away with the death of his body, here in the twentieth century!

On the brink, he paused. Connie's face swam into his vision, beautiful, corn-silk hair, soft smile, pleading . . . He held it there, fastened upon it, anchored his thoughts on it and cried out to it with all his soul. Slowly, he stepped back and away from the casket.

"Connie! Connie—call me—"

The cemetery flickered, became unreal, dissolved in mists of white which became flecked with red, all red, mists no more.

He was back in the ship—*elan* and body again complete. He lay on the floor, his head pillowed on Connie's lap. She was sobbing. "You just fell down, like—like your body was a puppet and someone cut all the strings."

Somehow, he had won. He knew the long-dead past would call him no more. He had severed the final link of the chain that held him poised in the cycles of time. He could work out his own destiny now, here in the far future—and it would be up to him, to the strength of his arm, the cunning of his brain. Luroc or no, the past would not call again.

HE TOOK the ship up, then turned to face Connie. Below, men scurried about like tiny insects. Off to the right, a swarm of the gyro-planes came up to meet them.

But they weren't helpless; not like the robots at all. Drayton kept their ship moving, darting and wheeling in the red twilight skies. He swung the

heat projectors in a wide arc, cutting a swath in the ranks of gyro-planes.

One by one, they fell, charred, smoking ruins, to the valley below. The sky was peppered with soft-popping flak, but their ship soared up, out of range.

Connie said, "What can we do now?"

"Well, they deserve destruction. But I—we can't just slaughter them. Could you picture yourself fanning the streets with heat-beams? No—there must be another way."

"Johnny, don't you see? They have to die. It's a fact. Cold and ruthless maybe, but a fact. It's either them or Jobijed and his fellows—and our chance to use Jobijed's spaceship and get off this dying planet."

Drayton sighed. But then he was laughing. "Then you believe? Now you believe everything?"

"How could I doubt any longer? Of course I believe. And also . . ." she blushed.

"Also what?"

"Well, Jobijed wanted us to . . . preserve the race. Become the ancestors of a new humanity out among the stars. Johnny . . ."

"What?"

"I've behaved like an idiot. I—I think I'd like that, with you . . ."

For a moment, he took her in his arms and kissed her. If the fire of Luroc wasn't there, something else was. Something quieter, perhaps, but stronger and more enduring.

Gently, she pushed him away. "Johnny, Johnny—I'm so happy. But what about now?"

He grinned at her. "Kill-joy. Seriously, Connie, there's something in my mind, trying to tell me something . . . Of course!" He gazed outside; far far down and off to the left he caught the gleam of a body of water, ruby-red in the eternal twilight.

"Reservoir," he said. "They told me how dependent on it they were. Without it they'd perish. Or, if they didn't, they'd be so busy trying to undo the damage that they wouldn't have time to war with Jobijed."

THEY SOARED down over the reservoir. The last water on a dying earth, except for Jobijed's synthesis of hydrogen and oxygen in the caverns. Drayton saw not one conduit, but three. One led down into the valley of Luroc's people, while the other two climbed out across the mountains, giant snakes that followed the contours of the land.

"There are three valleys," Drayton told Connie. "One conduit for each. This is their entire supply of water."

They swooped down, were met by a hail of fire from the swarms of gyroplanes. The little ships darted about them recklessly, in a suicidal attempt to stop them. Concussion shook the air, made a seething turmoil of it.

Drayton ignored the planes. He spread his heat-beams out in a broad fan, swept the reservoir with them. A great billowing cloud of steam hissed up to meet them, obscuring everything.

"Those gyro-pilots won't be able to see a thing," muttered Drayton. "Just out of sheer blindness, they're liable to hit us."

He played the heat-beams down until the cloud of steam began to grow thinner. It became tenuous, finally dissipated into the air.

Below them, the reservoir was a giant steaming cup—but empty! As dry as the ash-of-rose tableland that was earth's sun-side....

"IN THE final analysis," said Jobijed, "the decision was yours to make. I know I'm not attractive and my companions—they're even worse by your standards. No—let me finish. That much I couldn't help, but the

rest you had to see for yourself, Drayton, and act accordingly. It was foolish of me to try any other plan."

Drayton nodded, squeezing Connie's hand as they listened. Hours before, they had returned to the caverns in their battered ship.

"You see," Jobijed continued, "the new men of the valleys are evil. I didn't want to tell you they looked like men, Drayton. I suppose I was afraid. An age ago, one of the species of undifferentiated primates a lot like the orangutans of your day mutated. The result: the men of the valleys. But the orang of your day is an evil beast, and the trait remained in the germplasm—"

"But they looked so human," Drayton said. He remembered Luroc and their evening in the park. Well, he'd been duped. He liked the feel of Connie's hand much better.

Jobijed's frail shoulders shrugged. "I don't know, Drayton. Probably they don't look like that at all. They have ways of clouding your mind. Oh, I don't mean to say they're far removed from humanity, but probably there are little differences which you might have seen had they let you."

Drayton recalled the elfin quality he had known at first. Elfin. Alien fit it as well, but they had stopped his mind from dwelling on it.

Jobijed stood up, leaning on his cane. "We've won," he mused happily. "You know, often we felt that if we gave the twilight creatures our secret of space travel, they'd leave Earth and let us spend our few remaining years in peace. But always there was the thought of the man and woman we'd bring here someday, the man and woman who would go to the stars for humanity. You'd go, and they'd go. And because they are predatory, evil, their progeny might one day war on your children's children out in the marches

of space. No, they had to be destroyed . . ."

Jobijed limped from the room with his two big-headed companions, and Drayton followed with Connie, thinking of the fatherly wisdom which was Jobijed's and of the way he, Drayton, had doubted.

Jobijed reached a wall of the cavern, pressed a stud. In a moment, the wall slid back ponderously, with much grating and sliding. It revealed a shaft much wider than the entrance through the gleaming mound. Overhead, red sunlight streamed in faintly.

BUT WHAT held Drayton's attention was the great silver hull within the shaft, a magnificent needle pointing up at the rose-hued sky.

"Your space ship," Jobijed said, half reverently.

Connie placed a hand on her throat. "It's so big!"

"In it you will find all the science of our race," Jobijed told her. "And provisions for a long journey. To Alpha Centauri, remember. Drayton—Connie—all our dreams go with you. Earth is dying, but you're leaving Earth to start all over again for mankind, out there in the sky."

"Won't you three come with us?" Drayton demanded.

Jobijed shook his head. "No, we are old and tired; we'd be more of a hindrance than a help. We will spend our last remaining years here in the cavern, contemplating. Start fresh, and

don't look back. It's better that way, Drayton."

Jobijed led them forward. "The ship is automatic. You get in, close the airlock, and it won't open until you reach Alpha Centauri. Many months' journey, Drayton. There will be books for you to read, should you grow bored . . ."

Opening the polished silver airlock, Drayton smiled. He stepped within the ship with Connie, thought for a moment of another couple, so long ago through the corridors of time. Adam and Eve. Well, they would be Adam and Eve all over again.

Jobijed extended his hand. "Good luck," he said. A tear welled up in the corner of his eye, rolled down his cheek. "Man's future lies with you. Perhaps someday, who knows? Perhaps your children's children will return here to visit us."

"Goodbye," Drayton said, a lump in his throat. "I'm sorry I ever doubted you."

"Goodbye," said Connie, leaning forward impulsively, kissing Jobijed's great dome of a forehead.

Color rushed into Jobijed's pale face. "Well, farewell. And remember, it's a long journey. If you grow restless, you can read—"

Connie clung to Drayton's arm. "We won't grow restless," she assured him.

Jobijed seemed quite human at that moment. His pucker of a mouth spread into a smile as Drayton swung the airlock shut.

THE END

"REST IN AGONY"

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES — January 1952 issue

Don't miss Ivar Jorgensen's gripping novel about a man whose evil secret followed him into the grave, making death itself a living horror!

On sale at your favorite newsstand starting November 20.

Life is so simple

By June Lurie

RECENTLY, Dr. O. Francis Binkley, a University of Utah scientist, made a fundamental discovery which seems to touch on a new concept of life processes. He found a new and unexpected function for an important chemical that has been shown to be closely associated with the genes that control life and heredity.

The genes are believed to create enzymes, those complex chemicals that control the speed of chemical processes in the cells. They act on simple substances, combining them into complex materials, or they work on the life material itself, the protoplasm. Or the enzymes may break down complicated chemicals, using the energy thus derived to carry on other processes.

The new research shows that the chemical associated with the genes can perform the same job as the enzymes. And that this gene chemical, which is a nucleic acid, can break down the primitive proteins which are the basic nitrogen-containing compounds that go into the makeup of living matter.

A nucleic acid is not a protein. All enzymes are protein in nature. So the new information simplifies considerably the problem of delving into the secret of life, because nucleic acids are easier to handle and detect than proteins. Biologists now may learn important facts about both normal and abnormal growth, and future generations may be freed of the terrors we now have surrounding diseases like cancer.

FERTILIZER

ECONOMY SIZE

MOST EVERYTHING has its day, then becomes outmoded in favor of a new development swinging into the temporary limelight. Now, experimentation with a small amount of radioactive atoms leads authorities to believe that they are on the way to being able to save the farmer tons of fertilizer.

Fertilizers are phosphates. These are needed to produce all food crops. The atoms are radioactive phosphorus. A small amount of the radioactive phosphorus is placed in a phosphate fertilizer. The rays trace the fertilizer, show just where it goes and how much is used by the plants.

One of the vital points discovered by this study is the fact that phosphates do not move around in the ground and are not disturbed much even by rain. Farmers may now plant their fertilizer with the seed.

These experiments have found that plants, even when they get extra phosphate, may refuse to use it. If 100 pounds of nitrogen are placed in an acre of soil in which corn is growing, the corn will use all of it in one season. If the same amount of phosphate is used, the corn will use only about one tenth of the phosphate. The remainder of the fertilizer, however, stays in the field where future crops can tap it. It has been found that the soil in many American farms contains as much as eight times more phosphates than the plants require.

—Carter T. Wainwright



By
Bruce Yaches

“KRUGER 60 B” is the name of a traffic signal in space. Actually it is a moderate-sized red star not far distant from our own system, but its behavior has been quite peculiar. Recently it was observed to flare up to three or four times its normal brightness and then subside into its complacent, casual red-glow. This peculiar behavior—the star is definitely not a nova or supernova—is attributed to the equivalent of sunspots on our own, more dynamic, sun.

Kruger 60 B is a dying star, its major energy almost all used up in normal radiation. It glows with a dull red light, comparatively calm and peaceful. But then, as if protesting its approaching demise, it

sends out tentacles of flaring hydrogen which, for a brief moment, give it a sort of glory. Actually Kruger 60 B is part of a double star system, the smaller part, of which Kruger 60 A is relatively large— younger and more stable. For some unknown reason, this behavior of double star systems is common, where one will react and one will remain complacent, emitting normal radiation.

The eruptions of gas on a star which light the B component of the Kruger system are many times more potent than our own sunspots, which are relatively minor blemishes. The blasts are catastrophic in intensity. Were they to occur on our Sun the planetary system would be crisped in minutes!

NO GREATER WISDOM

By Rog Phillips

When men are made out of metal, women are still going to ask one question: how will he respond to soft music and a full moon?





He was dead, of course; but instead of blood and bone, Marge saw only coils and springs!

MARGE LOOKED through the windshield, past the ghostly, sentinel-like silhouettes of the stately pines. The Moon rode there, bright in a spot of star-studded blue empty of the white wraiths of clouds. A dreamy smile rested on her lips as she snuggled closer in Henry's arms.

"It's such a beautiful thing," Henry

was saying. "Imagine. The entire colloid mass consists of completely neutral molecules, each separated from its neighbors by the inert dielectric gell. But if one—just one, mind you—of those molecules ionizes—loses an electron—it instantly steals one from some neighbor while at the same time shoving the inert gell aside and forming a chemical link with its

victim. The victim instantly does the same thing, and before you know it the entire colloid has formed a thread one molecule thick throughout the whole mass. And that one-molecule-thick thread is itself a gigantic molecule!"

"Uh-huh," Marge murmured, taking a last look at the Moon and closing her eyes.³

Pretending drowsiness she cradled her head in Henry's neck, sighing sleepily.

"But," Henry said, making it an emphatic preface to what he was about to say, "if—at the same instant—anywhere else in the colloid mass, another of the molecules acquires an electron, making an ion of an opposite charge, it starts a thread one molecule thick whose travelling end-molecule seeks out the end-molecule of the other, so that a thread one molecule thick and more or less direct in its route, connects the two, stopping the chain molecular reaction."

"That's wonderful," Marge murmured seductively, lifting her face just far enough to plant a moist peck on Henry's jaw.

"Now..." Henry continued. Then he stopped, trying unsuccessfully to catch the elusive thread of what he had been talking about. "Darn it, Marge," he added in exasperation. "You made me forget what I was talking about. Aren't you interested?"

Her soft snore told him she wasn't interested. He pulled his head back on his neck and looked down over the obstructing bridge of his nose at the very feminine head on his shoulder. The skin of her forehead and cheek was very white in the moonlight, the lips a sort of black-red. Undefinably mysterious.

A tempting thought came unbidden to Henry's mind. If Marge were asleep—as her deep breathing indicated—she was unconscious. Being un-

conscious she wouldn't be aware of the fact if he kissed her. Being unaware of the fact she wouldn't object...

Without further cogitation he allowed the bold thought to sway him completely. With careless disregard to the factor of safety of various neck tendons, he maneuvered so as to plant a tender kiss on her cheek.

FROM SLITTED eyes Marge saw this move and, as though shifting unconsciously in sleep, moved so that her lips intercepted his. She felt him pause, startled and alarmed lest she waken, then she felt a reckless courage animate his lips.

"Mmm," she murmured, her lips responding.

"Oh dear," a mild inoffensive, but strange voice said. "I really believe I have done it."

At the same time Marge heard this voice, she became conscious of events of the preceding split second which had happened so instantly and so simultaneously that they penetrated to consciousness rather belatedly.

Henry's lips were gone. The car cushion and Henry's shoulder were gone.

She had time to reach those conclusions and start to open her eyes to investigate, when she landed with a jolting thud that twisted one leg painfully and administered a thorough blow to the end of her spine.

Her eyes flew wide open.

Through a haze that vanished even as she tried to penetrate it with her eyes, she caught sight of a figure. The figure belied the tone of the words she had heard to the extent that it was large and well formed. Broad shouldered. The mild, apologetic expression on the handsome face was in keeping though, she concluded.

"Oh dear," the man said again as though at a loss for anything else to say.

Marge winced at a surge of pain from her twisted leg and automatically looked down. Immediately his repeated, "Oh dear," made complete sense.

Her clothes, she saw, every stitch of them in fact, were gone. Also her leg was broken.

SHE LAY quietly under the clean-smelling sheets, looking out the window at the bare, snow-frosted branches of a maple tree, while memory of the shame of that last waking moment revived, to a lessened degree, the shame itself. She had instinctively moved to cover herself. The jerky movements had twisted her fractured leg. She had fainted. At least she thought she had, now, on sober reflection.

But it had been spring, and now it was winter! Or had it been spring? Of course it had been spring back in Henry's car, but the sudden transition from there to wherever she had been without her clothes on and a broken leg might very well have been to a time in the future or the past as well as into another dimension. She wished Henry were there to explain it to her.

"My leg!" she exclaimed, lifting her head to look at it.

There was no bulge under the sheets such as might have been caused by a heavy plaster cast. When this registered she hesitated, then carefully wiggled her toes. The expected pain was not forthcoming.

She threw the sheets aside. Her two shapely limbs stretched with mocking perfection in idle repose on the bed. Unbelieving, she carefully moved each, ready to stop at the slightest sign of pain.

There was absolutely nothing wrong with them.

"I distinctly remember," she said stubbornly, "my leg was broken."

Her lip began to tremble. Suddenly

she wished fervently that it were broken. A broken leg would be much better to have than this slippery inconsistency of abruptly changing scenes.

"Still," she mumbled, "I'm in a hospital bed. That's—"

But it wasn't reassuring, suddenly. Quite the contrary, she decided.

The bell... She stared at it fixedly, wanting to press it to call the nurse, yet afraid of what she might learn when the nurse came.

The movement of the door attracted her attention. She swung her head and stared wide-eyed at the nurse who came in. Swiftly she realized there was nothing out of place about the nurse. Neatly coiffured black hair adorned a pleasantly open face. The girl was about her own age. Twenty.

"Oh! You're awake!" the nurse was saying. "You must be more sensitive to the antidote than we are. Stay in bed another moment while I bring the resident for this floor."

With what was intended as a reassuring smile, she left the room, her sharp footsteps receding rapidly.

MARGE STARED at the partly closed door with helpless frustration until the sound of footsteps sounded again. The lighter taps of the nurse, and slower footfalls keeping pace with them.

The door swung open again. The man who came in was obviously a doctor. Young. The nurse had said she was going to bring the resident. She had undoubtedly meant the resident doctor, who would of course be a young doctor serving his internship. That checked.

"Feel all right?" he was asking as he came toward the bed, a warm smile on his rather wide lips.

Marge could do nothing more than nod her head up and down once.

"There was no reason why you shouldn't be," he said. "The stress-

refraction pattern of your fracture shows full recovery, your metabolism shows normal, encephalograph ordinary. We were pretty sure you would wake up without tensions or complications."

Marge nodded again, slightly bewildered.

The doctor turned to face the wall beside the door. He touched a yellow polka dot that she had not noticed before, with his index finger. Holding the finger there he said, "Please get in touch with Sigmund George and inform him that his charge is ready for discharge."

A woman's voice sounded from the wall. "Will do, Dr. Atmos."

He lifted his finger from the yellow spot and turned back to her with a smile. "The nurse will help you dress," he said. "By the time you're ready, Sigmund George should have arrived and will be waiting for you down in the reception room."

Marge could still do nothing more than nod. She was acutely aware that nothing said so far had been of a nature to reassure her on the point she was most concerned about: her sanity.

DR. ATMOS left after radiating another of his reassuring smiles. From a closet, obviously placed there in anticipation of this moment, the nurse brought forth all the necessary items of clothing.

A superficial study of them told Marge nothing. They were new and they were factory made, from the labels on them. And though those labels were names unknown to her, she knew that there were plenty of trade names she knew nothing about.

The nurse said nothing, contenting herself with occasional quick smiles. And Marge couldn't bring herself to break the up-to-now unbroken silence of her lips.

Besides, there was plenty to think

about without asking questions. There had been a broken leg. Dr. Atmos had as much as said that. He'd just referred to it as the fracture, but there had been no memory of any other fracture so he had certainly meant the broken leg.

As Marge dressed, with the nurse handing her one item after another of clothing, she purposely stood on one leg, then the other, trying to detect pain or stiffness. Once when she was nine years old she had broken a leg. Two years afterward she had occasionally felt it. But with this one there was nothing. It might as well never have been broken.

From somewhere the nurse brought out make up and a mirror. Eagerly Marge looked in the mirror. And again she was baffled. Her hair looked exactly as it should. It was no longer nor shorter than it had been when she inspected it last, just before Henry called to take her to the dance. The permanent was just as it had been then.

The only noticeable change was in her face. Her skin seemed somehow a little healthier, her eyes a little clearer. More blue. Then something Henry had said once, that the eyes were more color sensitive after being closed off from the light for days, made her doubt. Maybe she didn't look better than usual, but only seemed to.

She gave up and concentrated on fixing her hair, and—the fingernail polish was a standard brand, at least. The only thing suspicious about that was that it was exactly the right shade. How could they have found that out? And the label... She looked at it closely. But she couldn't be sure it wasn't the same. Anyway, companies changed the design of their labels from time to time.

Looking in the mirror for a last critical checkup, she wondered why she

was looking for discrepancies. What would they mean if she found them? That she was sane or insane? If so, which?

She sighed resignedly, turned to the nurse, and nodded her readiness.

The hall was normal. Most of the doors were partly open, though not enough to see inside the rooms. A hundred feet away was Dr. Atmos, standing beside an elevator. His back was to them. He didn't turn when they came up to him.

"The patient is ready, Dr. Atmos," the nurse said firmly.

For another long second the doctor remained motionless. Then he turned and gave them a smile. "Sorry," he said. "I was busy."

He pressed the button and leaned casually against the wall, flexing the fingers of his right hand and frowning at them.

The elevator arrived, the doors gliding open soundlessly. It was an automatic, Marge saw as she stepped inside.

When she turned to face the door the nurse was smiling and turning away, her eyes already losing interest. Dr. Atmos was pressing the thick black button marked B. The doors cut off the view of the nurse. A moment later without the slightest sensation of having moved up or down the doors opened again, revealing an expanse of marble floor of what was quite obviously a large waiting room.

There were people. Marge wondered why she was looking at them so eagerly. They seemed ordinary enough. But none of them were old, and none seemed under twenty years old.

"Right this way," Dr. Atmos said, taking her arm.

Obediently Marge let herself be guided toward a door. On the other side was a normal appearing hospital corridor. They walked along this, turned into another, climbed a flight

of stairs, and emerged into a large room divided by a counter, on the other side of which were several women at desks.

"Ah, there you are, Marjorie," a familiar voice sounded at her shoulder.

Marge turned, trying frantically to remember where she had heard the voice before.

Smiling down at her, with the same apologetic expression on his handsome features, was the man of what she now classified in her thoughts as *the broken leg episode*.

The apology on his features intensified slightly.

"I'm Sigmund George," he said.

MARGE DISCOVERED unhappily that the entire extent of her ability to react consisted in opening her mouth slightly and taking a deep trembling breath.

"Checking her out is already taken care of," Dr. Atmos said. "I'll say goodbye now."

Marge held her breath from surprise as he turned and left. With her eyes on the doctor's retreating back, she felt suddenly insecure. Filled with panic. She opened her mouth to call him back.

But Sigmund George was tugging gently at her elbow. "My car is just outside," he was saying.

It seemed to trigger something within her. Suddenly she wanted to get out of the hospital as quickly as possible, whatever might come on the outside.

"All right," she said. And as they walked casually side by side toward the broad exit doors, she realized that those were the first words she had spoken since she had awakened over an hour ago.

The automobile was pleasingly queer looking. Quite like a jet plane in shape with twin rudders, only the rudders were really the rear fenders. The

whole thing was a dream in iridescent coral pink.

She ducked her head and slid into the front seat. She was wondering what year's model the car could be when her gaze became suddenly fixed on another car across the street. It was a different model, obviously several years old. Yet it seemed to her inexperienced eyes to be years ahead of anything she had seen.

Sigmund George had gone around the front of the car after closing the door on her side. He slid in behind the wheel casually, stepped on the solitary pedal on the floor. The door on his side closed with an efficient click as the car began to move. There was not the slightest sign of vibration or noise.

"I suppose you are a little confused by events, Marjorie," he said without turning his head.

She turned from watching the road to stare at him. There was a smile on his profiled face. It wasn't apologetic now. It hit her suddenly that somewhere behind that face was a sense of humor that fully appreciated the understatement of his remark.

Following that realization came a wave of reassurance that made her slump back and lay her head against the back of the seat. She was all right. There was nothing wrong with her at all.

"I got in touch with Henry as soon as I checked your fingerprints," Sigmund George said in a tone that implied that this should explain everything. "He was all for rushing over just as soon as your fractured leg healed and you were restored to consciousness. However, I persuaded him to be patient. It would be less of a shock for you to meet me first. Something to tie up your disconnected experiences, so to speak, if you understand what I mean. That is, after all these centuries... And there was room for doubt

that you would feel properly toward him. It was fairer for me, a stranger you had met only once and that briefly, to meet you and explain."

ANGER ROSE into Marge's bewildered mind.

"Then why don't you?" she demanded curtly.

"Sorry," Sigmund George murmured.

Marge became aware that the car was going faster than she had ever gone in her life. Startled, she searched for and found the speedometer. Its calm needle rested on the figure 285.

Her eyes jerked to the road ahead. It was a many-laned highway. There was a slight curve for an instant, then they were in it. Her side of the car lifted slightly. Through the door window she saw that a part of the side had swung out to act as a wing to bank the car.

"Entirely automatic," she heard her companion's voice say calmly. "Cars of today are foolproof."

"Ha!" she snorted skeptically.

"Oh yes," he said in the same tone that he said "Sorry." "Look. I'll prove it."

He pushed his foot to the floor-board. The speedometer needle moved rapidly up into the three hundreds.

Then, without warning, he twisted the wheel violently. Marge stared in unbelief. But the car continued along the highway as though unconnected to the steering wheel. Even when he swung the wheel the other way in rapid spin, the car didn't respond. Another curve swept down upon them as Sigmund George was engaged in this demonstration, and the car stayed in its proper lane, apparently unguided.

He turned his head to her and looked down at her, smiling calmly.

"See?" he said.

But at that instant a giant hand seemed to pick up the car and its two occupants and toss them carelessly

through the air.

Marge had a brief, alarming impression of startled surprise on Sigmund's face, a brief sensing of approaching unconsciousness.

"THERE'S ONE thing about this new age," she heard someone saying hysterically. "They still have fools behind the wheel. That's one sure thing all right. Fools that like to show off."

"Why is the person talking so hysterically?" she wondered.

Only the person who had been talking wasn't talking now. She was laughing as though at some terrible joke. And it was her own voice. It was she. The laughing was no longer something disconnected. Then, abruptly, it stopped.

Marge opened her eyes.

She was still in the car. Little things told her that, although nothing seemed the same. Where there should have been a windshield in front of her there was a solid wall of something that looked like sponge rubber. She stared at it, then up at the ceiling of the car, and realized where it had come from. It had swung down. Probably faster than she had shot forward.

Subconsciously she had kept herself from looking at the figure sprawled beside her. Now she turned and looked at it. It was Sigmund George, or what had been him. His body was slumped forward.

The steering wheel had broken off and was now a free ring dangling on the steering wheel column. And a good six inches of the steering wheel column stuck out of the center of Sigmund's back through neatly torn cloth.

Somehow, she felt, the fact wasn't as terrifying as she had expected it to be. Sigmund was dead, of course. But in death he had descended to the

level of any smart Alec of 1950 or earlier. Therefore, he was understandable.

That was it, she realized. As a fool he was the one understandable thing in all this complexity of the incomprehensible.

"Poor Sigmund," she murmured sympathetically.

But there was something strange about him even in death. She studied his inert figure, frowning. What was it? It took her quite a while to locate it, and when she did it mystified her even more.

It was the steering wheel column sticking out of his back. It was clean and unstained. Where the metal had broken there was the unspotted crystalline structure of broken metal.

Her hand darted out and pulled back on the suit cloth to look at where the steering wheel column emerged from his back.

"Oh, no!" she said weakly.

There was no blood. There were torn wires, broken shapes of red rubbery material, and twisted metal tubing.

Faster than thought, she seized the thick hair of his head and twisted his face around to stare at it. With animation gone, with no illusory aura of the living there, it was obviously a very clever imitation of human flesh.

She caught her breath sharply as another memory rose into consciousness. It was a memory of Dr. Atmos standing at the elevator, waiting. There had been a fleeting impression of inanimation before the nurse had spoken to him.

Was the doctor a robot too? And what about the nurse?

And what about Henry? Sigmund had said he had notified Henry. But he had also said something about "after all these centuries"...

A screaming, almost supersonic wail emerged out of the distance, ap-

proached, and died down, all in what seemed the space of a heartbeat.

"Help coming..." Marge thought gratefully.

There was the sound of car doors slamming. Voices. The door beside her was flung open. She looked up to see who her rescuer was. The wan smile on her lips sagged into a stupor of surprise as she continued to stare, speechless.

"Thank God you're not hurt!" Sigmund George said.

Marge continued to stare at him. It was him. But it couldn't be. Even though he was a robot, how could he be in the seat beside her; wrecked beyond repair—and also standing outside the car, untouched?

A HAND pushed the new Sigmund aside. It was Dr. Atmos. He stared at her without speaking, his eyes sharply concerned. He partly turned his head to speak to someone behind him.

"The sedative," he said calmly. "She's suffering from shock."

Marge suddenly came to life. "Who wouldn't be!" she said too loudly. "First I find out that the dead man beside me is—was a robot. Then the car door opens and there he stands! But you're not giving me any of that needle. Do you understand? You're not giving me the needle. I'm going to stay conscious long enough to learn a few things even if it kills me."

The white coated man behind Dr. Atmos handed him the gleaming hypodermic needle, averting his eyes. The doctor took her shoulder in a vise-like grip that didn't budge as she tried desperately to shake loose. The needle stabbed in.

"Damn you damn you damn you," Marge screamed. "I hate you. I hate all of you!"

The needle was withdrawn. The doctor's grip relaxed.

She slumped down until her head was cradled in her arms across her knees, sobbing uncontrollably.

"Sorry," Dr. Atmos' voice came to her ears. Or was it Sigmund George's?

"Are you all right?" Someone had said that hours ago and it had just penetrated.

Marge began sobbing again, her last reserve gone. "I want Henry," she said between sobs. "I want Henry. Take me to Henry. I don't care about anything else."

"All right," Dr. Atmos' voice sounded gently. "We'll take you to Henry."

"I'll get in the ambulance and sit down," Sigmund was saying in an undertone. "Then I'll transfer and get to him somehow. But we didn't expect her to get well for several days yet, and when he locks himself in nobody can get to him. He's that way, you know."

"Move the stretcher closer," Dr. Atmos said. "We can't take chances. Sigmund was a fool for running chances with the living on the highway." Then, directed at her, "Can you get on the stretcher, Marjorie?"

"Are you going to take me to Henry?" she asked without looking up.

"Yes," Dr. Atmos said.

"And not to the hospital again?" she persisted.

"N—no," he said reluctantly. "Here. Let me help you."

She permitted him to half lift her by the shoulders and help her out of the car. She ached when she moved. The soreness made her begin sobbing again.

She was on the stretcher and Dr. Atmos was saying, "The hypo is working better now. She should sleep soon."

She sat up abruptly. "I won't sleep!" she said, opening her eyes. She looked around her, glaring de-

flantly, then slowly slumped back.

She was in a hospital room of some sort. X-ray equipment was all around her. And people.

She caught sight of Dr. Atmos. "I thought you promised not to bring me back here!" she said accusingly.

He smiled indulgently. "I had to, you know," he said. "I would lose my license to practice if I obeyed the orders of a patient suffering from shock and not responsible for what she says."

"You're going to be sorry...." Marge began. She sank back on the table wearily. "What's the use," she said to the ceiling.

"I have good news for you," Dr. Atmos said after a moment of silence. "Henry will be here any minute now. We just received a call that he's on his way."

"Why wasn't he here in the first place?" Marge said indifferently. "Are his darn colloids more important to him than I am?"

THE PERFECTLY strange man's face lit up as he stood in the doorway. He rushed forward, arms outstretched. "Marge!" he exclaimed.

It was that that did it. No one in all creation could say "Marge!" like that except Henry.

"Henry!" Marge wailed happily, holding out her arms and blinding herself temporarily to the obvious fact that if this were Henry it could not be Henry's body.

"I've never stopped missing you, Marge," Henry said. "Ever since you vanished right when I was talking to you in the car that night way back in 1951."

"Maybe if you hadn't been talking so much..." Marge murmured affectionately, memory of that night being fresher in her memory than his.

"How do you feel, Marge?" Henry asked. "Dr. Atmos says you have no

broken bones. The hypo he gave you will wear off by tomorrow and you should be all right. I can take you home with me now if you want to go."

"That's more like it," Marge said. "Only be careful. No showing off by driving three hundred miles an hour. Don't go over sixty."

"Not over sixty?" Henry echoed, amused. "Cars today aren't geared to run that slow in high. Anyway, it wasn't Siggy's fault, that crackup. His right ventral picked up a small bird. The one chance in a thousand million. Actually, there are no more than three or four accidents a year now in the whole world."

"I said not over sixty," Marge said stubbornly.

"But we can't on the highways," Henry protested. "The road itself would force the car along at a hundred and eighty even if it ran out of fuel."

"You're joking," Marge said. "How could a road do that?"

"By induction-reaction," Henry said. "It's built that way. This is the age of built-in laws. When they pass a new law, they build it in—to roads, cars, planes, spaceships, people. Wherever it applies."

"Built-in laws and built in-laws, from what I've seen, so far," Marge said darkly. "Just the same, I'm not going over sixty if I have to walk. So take your choice. Find sideroads where we can creep along at sixty—or walk."

"Now then," she said several minutes later as the car started, with a somewhat frustrated looking Henry behind the wheel. "Start bringing me up to date. How'd I get here in the future? And if it is centuries in the future like Sigmund George said, how does it happen you're still around? And how does it happen they have robots like people? And—"

"GIVE ME a chance to answer some of your questions before you ask so many I can't remember them," Henry said. "We don't know exactly how you jumped into the future—or even if you did. You disappeared when you were in the car with me back in 1951. I've spent a fortune trying to locate you. The whole thing was pure accident, in one sense of the word. In another it wasn't. Just recently they've been able to isolate the positron flow. Even in 1951 it was known that a positron is an electron going backwards in time. They didn't appreciate the significance of their discovery then. What it means is that since the positron came from the future, while all other particles come from the past, the meeting place in the present is a vast crucible where past and future meet to shape each other.

"Siggy is in on that research. Without letting me know what he was doing, he decided to go back and look for you before you disappeared, and bring you to the present. As you know, he succeeded."

"And how I know," Marge murmured.

"But the minute you arrived," Henry went on, "he realized his mistake. He realized that he was the cause of your disappearance in the first place!"

"So that's why he was so apologetic?" Marge asked.

"No," Henry said. "He's that way all the time. You see..." Henry turned to her, a sad look on his face. "You see, Siggy isn't human. He's a robot. One of the few truly loyal ones." The sad look was replaced by a worried one. Henry turned back to watch the narrow lane they were on.

"Then you aren't in a mechanical body?" Marge asked quickly, gladness in her voice.

"Oh yes," Henry said. "What I

meant was that Siggy didn't originate as a human. I'll have to tell you about that."

He skillfully weaved the car between some trees on the narrow road not built to be driven over.

"Back in 1951," Henry began his explanation, "the only intelligent beings were living humans. But I had discovered how to make the basic colloid mass that was to develop into the modern non-living brain. Skipping the details, by 1965 we had managed to find a way of impressing the complete mind pattern of a person into a colloid brain. Then it was found that in some strange way, the two minds were attuned so that they continued to be identical in structure. Not only that, the person could operate in either at will!"

MARGE SAT up, startled. "You mean that if you made a duplicate of my mind and put it in a robot body, I could step over into it?"

"Exactly," Henry said. "The beauty of that is that you need never die. When it comes time for your living body to die, you can be in the non-living body and continue to exist. Not only that, you can have any number of the synthetic brains, so that if anything destroys one you can always be in another.

"Naturally, it became popular at once. Everybody wanted to do it. They tried to pass a law that only a few people could have synthetic brains, but the people were against it.

"We had formed a company to manufacture the colloid brains and robot bodies to put them in. We made literally billions of dollars a year.

"Meanwhile, we were experimenting with the pure robot, as we called it. One whose mind developed from scratch. We perfected ways of getting

the mind started, and began turning out pure robots for servants and workers, so that we made more billions of dollars. In the age of the Great Conversion, we were turning out almost a billion robot bodies complete with the synthetic brain annually in our factories all over the world."

"Where did they put them all?" Marge asked. "Look out for that tree, Henry! And slow down!"

"I'm already down to fifty-five," Henry grumbled. "We'll never get there."

"I asked you where they put all those robots," Marge said.

"No trouble there," Henry said, resuming his train of thought. "But the present robot setup was in the making. The three major classes of robots were already arising. First there was the group that still had their living body. Then, there was the group that no longer had a living body to live in. And, finally, there was the pure robot in increasing numbers.

"The pure robots kept quiet about what they were thinking in the early days. The only major clashes were between the humans who had only robot bodies and those who had human bodies. The non-living wanted to pass laws preventing the birth of any more humans. They pointed out that eventually there would be too many people in the world at the rate they were going.

"The living were opposed to this, but slowly they were being outnumbered as they died off and gradually shifted to the viewpoint of the non-living robots. Finally, the whole thing came to a head and the living and non-living humans tried a compromise solution that could have delayed the final step another century. They decided to destroy the pure robots to make room for more of human origin.

"But the pure robots had secretly

organized, and in the open revolt that followed, they established themselves as an independent robot race which now occupies all of the continent of Africa. Their numbers are their own secret, but it's estimated that there are over two hundred billion of them. That means they are equal in numbers to us now."

"And what about people?" Marge asked. "Live people, I mean."

"We've found a nice solution to that," Henry said. "Each married couple agrees to have only one child. That's cutting down new humans by geometric ratio so that in another few centuries there will be no more than a million or two living people. We plan on maintaining that as a norm."

"Why?" The sarcasm in Marge's voice was ill concealed, but still unnoticed by Henry.

"Partly as insurance," Henry said gravely, "and partly because it will keep us more on a human level to have continual additions to our numbers from minds in contact with life."

"Meanwhile, what about the pure robots?" Marge asked.

"There's the big danger," Henry said uneasily. "They resent the fact that we once decided to destroy them completely, and now they believe that minds of living origin are inferior and unstable, and should be eliminated completely. I'm very much afraid we're in for another big war before long."

MARGE STEPPED daintily out of the luxurious bathtub and stood frowning at the mirror that revealed her in unadorned, dripping loveliness. Her lip started to tremble. She bit it with flawless white teeth and turned angrily away.

She had just finished dressing when a melodious chime sounded softly from the bedroom.

"Coming," she sang out, leaving

the bathroom and crossing the large and expensively furnished bedroom to the door.

"You're dressed?" Henry said. "Good. Siggy's here. He and I want to discuss the future with you while you have breakfast."

"Come in for just a minute," Marge said, smiling archly.

Henry shook his head. "Siggy's waiting," he said. "You look lovely, Marge."

"Do you think so?" she said wistfully. "Do you love me, Henry?"

"Of course!" he said. "Didn't I miss you all the centuries we were apart?"

Marge sighed. "All right," she gave in. "We won't keep Siggy waiting. After all, he's a pure robot, and if he got mad he might go over to the other side."

"Siggy?" Henry said incredulously. "He's the first pure robot ever made. He'll never be disloyal. Not only that, he's my best friend."

"What does he think about the coming war with the pure robots?" Marge asked as she tripped down the carpeted stairs beside him.

"He's for it," Henry said. "He thinks, as we do, that there is no absolute. Humans have the right of survival because they came first, and not because they are superior. He's for destroying the pure robots that have rebelled against their creators." They reached the bottom of the stairs and proceeded along the broad hallway. "However," he added with a smirk, "we're working along a line of attack that may straighten out the whole thing without a war. Here we are, Marge."

He opened a door and stood aside for her to enter.

Sigmund George, the pure robot, stood up with an entirely human smile on his face as she entered. "Good

morning, Marjorie," he said warmly. "I hope you had a comfortable rest after all the hard times I handed you."

"Thank you, Siggy," Marge said, brightening.

"Your breakfast should be here right away," Henry said.

"Aren't you eat—?" Marge began, then bit her lip.

"You won't need to either before long," Henry said eagerly. "That's one of the things we want to talk to you about. Now that I don't have a living body there's no need for you to remain in yours any longer than necessary. You'll find the robot body so much more superior."

"Yes?" Marge said suspiciously.

"I've almost forgotten the disadvantages of the living body," Henry went on. "Having to remember to eat regularly. Getting diseases. The handicap of having to travel from one place to another on foot or by plane or car."

"How do you do it?" Marge asked as the servant wheeled in a table with her breakfast.

"I've explained that," Henry said. "I have bodies at various places. I merely transfer to the one handiest to where I want to go. And in many places there is just the brain and eyes and ears. For example, the opera. No one ever goes physically to the opera."

"How many brains do you have?" Marge asked, not looking at him directly.

"A hundred and eight at the moment," Henry said. "That includes the ten in various bomb shelters. They're all in humanoid bodies except the ones in auditoriums that are used merely for watching and listening to what goes on on the stage."

"I see," Marge said almost inaudibly. "And you want me to be the same?"

"You'll find it much better than a living body," Sigmund George said.

"What do you know about it?" Marge snapped. Then, contritely, "I'm sorry, Siggy."

"Nothing to be sorry about," he said. "I understand your feelings perfectly."

She looked at him thoughtfully. "Maybe you do," she said slowly.

"Hurry up with your breakfast," Henry said impatiently. "I have to get back to the laboratory. I was called away from a very important experiment to get you. Its success determines whether or not there will be a war."

FOR AN instant, Marge's eyes flashed fire. Then they were veiled. She turned her eyes away from Henry. Sigmund George was watching her, understanding and sympathy in his expression.

"Why don't you run along Henry?" he suggested. "Marjorie and I can get along quite well alone, I'm sure."

"Of course we can, Henry," Marge said. "Run along. Before you go, though, what's your experiment about?"

"Siggy can tell you," Henry said, rising gratefully. "It will give you two a topic of conversation. I'll try to get free for a while this afternoon. Enjoy yourself." He started toward the door.

"Henry..." Marge said.

He stopped and half turned. "Yes?"

"Never mind," Marge said tonelessly. "Siggy can do it, maybe."

Henry looked at her doubtfully, then turned and left.

"Quite stupid, isn't he," Sigmund George said sympathetically after the door closed.

"Yes," Marge said, stabbing at a piece of bacon with her fork. "But..." She looked up at him sud-

denly, questioningly. "How do you know about such things?" She caught her breath. "I'm sorry, Siggy." She laughed apologetically. "I'm the one who's saying I'm sorry all the time now, instead of you."

"There's no need for you to say it," Sigmund said.

"What's this experiment Henry's working on?" she asked quickly to change the subject.

"It's the only point on which the pure robots are vulnerable," Sigmund said. "The past. The same principle by which I reached back in time and brought you here to the present. If we can go back and change things so that pure robots were never built, that will cause the complete dissolution of all pure robots now."

"But you can't change what's happened!" Marge said.

"Ah, but we can!" Sigmund George said, smiling. "We've already done it on a minor scale."

"But how can you?" Marge said. "The past is—past. It can't be changed."

"The past present and future are interacting," Sigmund said. "Have you ever had a feeling that if you did something, then something unpleasant would happen? And not do it?"

"Of course," Marge said. "But that isn't the same. I'm only preventing something from happening."

"You're changing the future," Sigmund said.

"Of course!" Marge said.

"And the future exists in the same sense that the past exists," he countered. "You're proof of that. You're here."

"That's no proof," Marge said. "Nothing changed. I vanished back in 1951. You were looking for me and found me. Then you realized that you were the cause of my vanishing. You didn't change the past."

"You mean I apparently didn't

change it," Sigmund said. "The change itself destroys all records of what was in all the past and future." He smiled gently. "Until the instant that I plucked you out of the past, you had never disappeared. After that instant, in all the past, memory, newspaper records, and everything else altered to conform to that fact."

Marge chewed on the last bite of her breakfast thoughtfully.

"Then," she said after a moment, "if Henry succeeds in his experiment there will be no memory at all of the pure robots and their threat to wage war?"

"That's right," Sigmund said.

Marge shook her head skeptically. "I don't believe it," she said stubbornly. "You'll have to prove it to me."

"How?" Sigmund asked. "The very act of proving it destroys all proof."

"That may be," Marge said, "but—there are some things you can correct. Bring me to the future without breaking my leg."

"Hmm," Sigmund said. "That would get me off on the right foot then, so to speak. And we wouldn't have that crackup that ruined that other body of mine. I was rather fond of that body..."

"IT'S SUCH a beautiful thing," Henry was saying, his voice mildly passionate. "Imagine. The entire colloid mass consists of completely neutral molecules..."

Marge looked through the windshield, past the ghostly sentinel-like silhouettes of the stately pines. The Moon rode there, bright in a spot of star-studded blue, empty of the white wraiths of clouds. A dreamy smile rested on her lips as she snuggled closer in Henry's arms.

But suddenly a frown creased her smooth forehead. A frown born of a presentiment.

"Henry!" she said, interrupting his unheard flow of words. "I'm afraid! Hold me. Hold me tight. Don't let go of me!"

"Uh—what's the matter with you, Marge?" Henry asked, slightly annoyed. "Weren't you listening?"

"Oh, yes!" Marge purred. "But hold me close. Please!" And as he complied, "Tighter, darling. Oh, much much tighter..."

A dizziness threatened to engulf her. "Henry!" she panted.

"Gosh!" Henry said. The heady wine of a reckless thought took possession of him.

"Tighter, Henry," Marge whispered dizzily.

SIGMUND GEORGE stared expectantly at the foam rubber mattress on the floor, waiting. Nothing happened. He frowned and looked at the meters on the instrument panel. Their wavering indicated power consumption. But even as he watched, the pointers in the needles dropped suddenly to zero, showing that whatever had been contacted had broken free of the contact.

A wave of dizziness went through him. Hurriedly, he threw the switch cutting off the experimental extra-temporal field.

"That was close," he muttered.

Sudden realization of what had happened struck him. His eyes widened in surprise.

"She doublecrossed me!" he exclaimed. "I should have guessed she would! I've got to warn Henry!"

He went to a chair and sat down, closing his eyes. In an instant he had transferred to another robot body. He leaped to his feet and hurried from the luxurious living room to a stair well leading downward.

He took the steps three at a time, reached the bottom, and ran to a heavy door.

"Henry!" he called sharply.

Henry looked up from his task of soldering two wires together. "What is it?" he called. "Just a minute!"

He crossed the laboratory and lifted the bar off the door. Leaning the bar carefully against the wall, he opened the door.

No one seemed to be there. He blinked his eyes owlshly and leaned forward to make sure whoever had knocked wasn't standing to one side of the door.

"What's the matter, Henry?" Sigmund George asked.

"Huh?" Henry said, startled. He frowned in annoyance. "I think I'd better send this body in for repairs. I'd swear you weren't standing there an instant ago. What do you want?"

Sigmund George stared at Henry, puzzled. "That's funny," he muttered. "What did I interrupt your work for? It was something important. Oh yes. I came to tell you that Marge won against you."

"What do you mean?" Henry asked thinly.

"I'll tell you what he means," a rich feminine voice sounded behind Sigmund. "You wouldn't listen to me. So I've succeeded in getting the Legislative Board to pass a law against using any of the synthetic brains for anything except minds of human origin." She glanced affectionately at Sigmund. "That means that Siggy is the only non-human robot that will ever come into existence!"

"You're 'nothing but an interfering fool," Henry snapped. "You and your intuition! I thought when your body died you'd get over that."

"Never!" Marge said. "Go on back to your wires and colloids and—and—"

She bit her lip and turned her back on him.

"Got to get this body overhauled," Henry muttered, closing the door.

Marge's shoulders began to shake. She was crying softly.

"Now what?" Sigmund George asked. "We can try once again, you know."

"No, Siggy," Marge said gently.

"But perhaps I wouldn't—" he said.

"And perhaps you would," she said, turning to him and laying one hand on his chest. "The fact that we both developed five-dimensional memory doesn't mean that the law of cause and effect can be circumvented. If I prevent him from ever succeeding in perfecting his synthetic brain, you will have never existed."

"Would that be such a tragedy?" he asked softly, a quiet smile on his lips.

"Yes!" The word escaped her lips unbidden. She stared up into Sigmund George's eyes, and suddenly she knew that it was true. It would be a tragedy....

"Oh, yes!" she said with infinite tenderness, creeping into his arms, and sighing happily as they drew her close.

THE END

Once In A Blue Moon... ● ● ● ●

FOR THOSE who think "once in a blue moon" is just an idle phrase—or that "The Moon Is Blue" is the name of a currently popular play—here's a correction. According to the British Association for the Advancement of Science, once in a blue moon there is a blue sun.

Sometime back, in Edinburgh, a smoke

layer in the upper atmosphere cut off the red light emanating from the sun. And in the middle of the afternoon, the solar disk was a deep blue color. That night, the moon appeared to be blue.

The next morning, however, the smoke layer having dissipated, everything was normal again.

—A. T. Kedzie

C'MON-A... MY PLANET

By Gerald Vance

How'd you like a Martian to marry our President's daughter? Well, don't worry; he may not want her!

KEENAN, the radio man, entered Skipper Sam Davis' cabin with a bewildered expression on his face. Davis was shaving. He caught Keenan in the mirror and turned quickly.

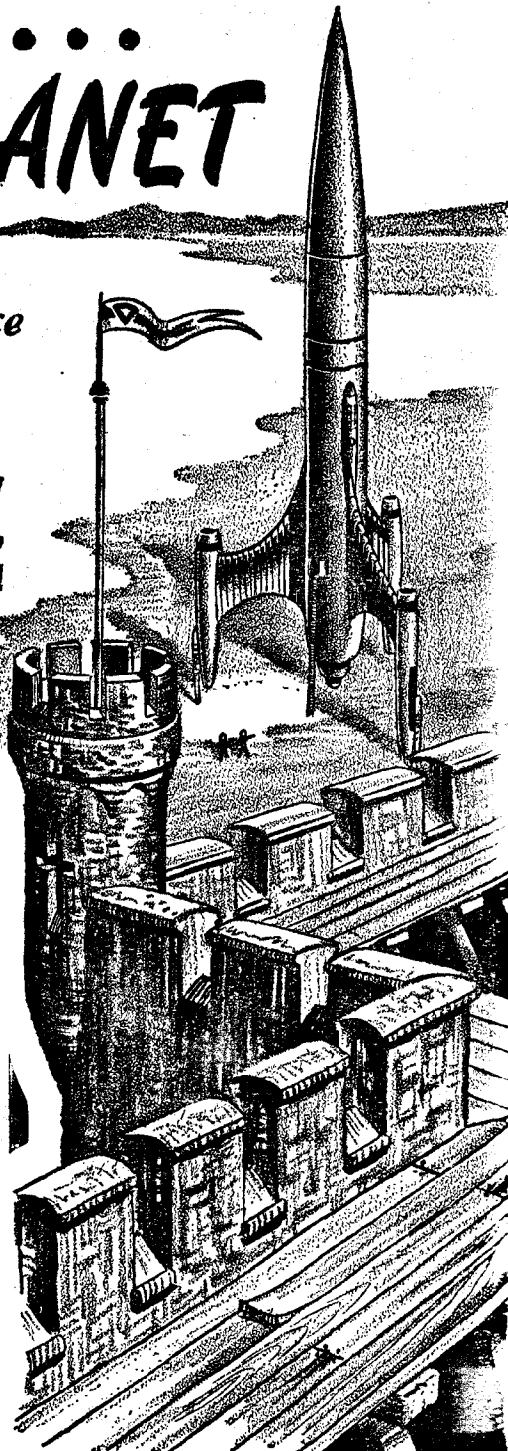
"Why don't you knock?"

"I—I'm sorry sir. I forgot. A pretty peculiar thing has happened and—"

"Well, out with it."

"We're in radio contact with—somebody, sir."

Davis put his razor down and hastily wiped the soap from his face. *The Adventurer*, out four months from Earth on the first Martian flight ever attempted, had been beyond radio contact for a long time. Thus, with Mars not more than seven days away, this was tremendous news.





It was the handsome Prince and the sleeping beauty all over again—but this time on Mars!

"Tell me, man—tell me! What does it sound like? What manner of language do they use? No—wait 'til I get my shirt on. I'll be right with you."

"That's—that's the funny part, sir. They don't talk Martian."

Davis struggled with his sleeve. "What do you mean, they don't talk Martian? How the hell do you know what Martian sounds like? Whatever kind of gibberish it is—it has to be Martian."

"No sir," Keenan maintained stoutly. "It's just plain, ordinary, everyday English."

Sam Davis turned to fix a stern eye on his subordinate. "Keenan—what sort of a joke is this? What are you giving me?"

"I was wondering, sir, if we got our astrocourse bollixed up some way. Do you suppose we went in a circle and are heading back toward Chicago?"

"Absurd!" Davis shouted. "An utter impossibility!" He had his shirt on now, and with his face half-shaved, he looked somewhat like a 'before and after' experiment for a razor-blade company.

"Well," Keenan said with some bemusement, "I don't know what the answer is, but some guy just told me over the radio that the Brooklyn Dodgers won the World Series last month."

"I'll look into this myself," Davis barked, and pushed past Keenan into the companionway.

The latter followed him to the radio room. Once inside, Davis stopped and stared dumbfounded at the speaker, from which was coming a steady stream of greetings:

"Ma friends— Good evening, friends of the radio audience— Ladies and gentlemen— Ladies and gentlemen— Hello there, all you wonderful people— Good evening, some love, and peace— Are you there?"

A WAVE of static overlapped the one-sided conversation. Davis pulled his eyes from the speaker and dropped into the chair in front of the microphone. "I'll get to the bottom of this," he growled. Then his voice bellowed forth: "Whatever blank-blank son-of-a-blank-blank thinks this is a blank joke is due for a blank-blank surprise! I'll search this ship until I find you and—"

Keenan tapped his chief timidly on the shoulder. "Excuse me, sir, but it isn't coming from inside the ship. You can take my word for it. I checked, and there is no possibility that—"

Again the loudspeaker came alive. A cheerful, hearty voice filled the room. "Greetings, *Adventurer!* Your salutation received and appreciated. The same to you and many many of them I'm sure. This is Arthur Godfrey on Mars welcoming the first space ship in from Terra. You haven't made it yet, but you will. You're almost in. You have no idea what a great occasion this is for the people of Mars."

Davis, his face dark, turned on Keenan. He started to speak but Keenan's words came first. Desperate words. "I tell you, sir, the voice is coming from outer space! It does not originate on the ship! I checked thoroughly before contacting you."

Davis turned back to the microphone. His anger faded somewhat, giving place to bewilderment. "This is Sam Davis," he said automatically. "Master of *The Adventurer* out of Chicago headed for Mars. Please identify yourself."

"I already did so. Shall I repeat?"

In this time of great frustration, Davis fell back on the simple, the elemental. "But I don't understand, and I believe this is some sort of a hoax. A message from Mars would not be used in the English language. Also, the name 'Mars' would not be used. The natives of the planet would have an

entirely different name for their planet. Also, Arthur Godfrey does not—”

“That’s quite true,” the loudspeaker replied. “We did have another language and other names you probably couldn’t even pronounce. But long ago we established radio contact with your planet. We liked your language and your names and ways of doing things much better than we liked our own, so we did a switcheroo.”

“You mean . . . ?”

“Exactly.”

DAVIS’ JAW sagged. He got it back into place and said, “You’re telling me you—”

“We certainly did. We’ve spent years with our ear to your planet, so to speak. As a result, it is now a felony to call Mars by its old name. All the citizens of Mars have changed their names to those we heard on the radio. In fact, when you make your landing we believe you’ll feel right at home.”

“Well, I’ll be damned,” Davis muttered weakly.

“Yes, Boulder Dam,” the loudspeaker said. “We were in at the dedication ceremony, and have wondered a lot just what a dam is. When you get here you can describe one.”

“Sure . . . sure”

“And another thing, President Gorgeous George, who is a great admirer of Hans Anderson, has planned a great, supercolossal, special treat for you.”

“Take it a little easier, will you?” the distraught Davis pleaded. “You say your President Gorgeous George—who in the devil is Hans Anderson?”

“An author, I believe. If I am not mistaken he wrote a great many fine stories called fairy tales. They were broadcast years ago and President Gorgeous George ordered them transcribed and preserved.”

Keenan, standing by Davis’ chair, felt a deep sympathy for his chief. “Maybe we’d better turn around and

go back, sir. Spacial exploration is all well and good, but a man’s mental health comes first.”

Davis waved him to silence as the voice from Mars cut in again. “In keeping with the Earth tradition as outlined by Hans Anderson in which the prince always marries the beautiful princess, President Gorgeous George is going to give you the hand of his ravishing daughter, Princess Gypsy Rose Lee, in marriage. Exhaustive arrangements are being made so that you may live happily ever after.”

Davis had not been eating well or sleeping well for over a month. At this point undue strain got the better of him and he blacked out in front of the microphone. Keenan called for help and Sam Davis was put to bed with a sedative.

The skipper opened his eyes some hours later to find Keenan standing beside his bunk. “Do you feel better now, sir?” Keenan asked.

“Much better, thank you.”

“I don’t blame you for passing out, sir. It must have been a terrific shock, after all your great hopes, to hear that nightmare coming out of the speaker.”

“Yes, Keenan, it was a shock. But—well, it’s not so bad, really.”

“Not bad?”

“No, Keenan. I’ve been lying here thinking about it—getting a normal perspective. I think it’s all right.”

KEENAN DID not answer, but the lines of worry in his forehead deepened.

“That proposition of marrying the president’s daughter. At first, of course, it bowled me over. But when you step back a way and focus on it, it doesn’t read so bad.”

“But Skipper—”

“Look at it from my point of view, Keenan. On Terra I’m not much—not very important. Of course, I’ll get a certain amount of publicity out of this

flight and I'll probably make a few dollars. But tell me—do you think Harry Truman is going to offer me Margaret's hand in marriage when I get back?"

"I—I doubt it very much, sir."

"Of course he won't, and a man must, in the long run, get what he can out of things. It's done, you know, by the best people. Estes Kefauver, you'll remember, took in quite a little money from various publications for writing up the results of his crime investigation not long ago. And Rudolph Halley jumped straight from the counsel's chair into a race for public office. It's done, Keenan, by the best people, and who am I to turn my back on their established customs?"

"Well, if you put it that way, sir."

Davis closed his eyes and stretched luxuriously. "What better way is there to put it?" He sighed and smiled. "President Gorgeous George's son-in-law. Princess Gypsy Rose Lee's husband. And all in one hop. Not bad, Keenan. Not bad."

Keenan conceded that it certainly was not bad and then went back to his radio. Three days later, *The Adventurer* set down outside of New York City, Mars.

A group of distinguished citizens met the ship. Lou Gehrig and Grover Whalen read a manifesto from the President—the latter not being able to attend—while Rita Hayworth and Greta Garbo kissed each of the crew on both cheeks. It was as tumultuous a welcome as any man had ever received in the history of the cosmos, and Sam Davis had the warm, comfortable feeling of a man returning home.

THE CREW was taken care of sumptuously, and Davis was housed in a suite that made the Waldorf-Astoria look like an abandoned mine shaft. He looked forward to an audience with his future father-in-law,

but for three days he kept getting frustrating answers to his queries: "The President is busy." "The President is out on the Potomac on his yacht." "The President has left for Missouri on his plane." "The President is writing letters to music critics."

So Davis had to be content with reclining in luxury.

Finally, six days after arriving on Mars, late in the afternoon, a Martian presented himself to the distinguished guest. "I'm Arthur Godfrey," the Martian said. "You'll remember me as the first Martian who contacted you in space."

"Of course. Come right in."

"Thank you, but I can't stay long. I've been delegated to arrange your wedding with the President's daughter. All the arrangements have been made. You're to come with me."

Highly elated that the time had finally come, Davis accompanied his guide across the city and out into a broad open plain. Slightly puzzled, Davis had several questions, but he forebore asking them out of anticipation and politeness. But when they arrived, finally, beside a tall, gray tower which appeared newly built, he could hold in no longer.

"What's this?"

"The tower, of course."

"Sure, I can see that. But what tower?"

"The tower in which your princess lies sleeping. You recall Mr. Anderson's story, don't you?"

"Can't say that I do offhand."

"It's required reading on Mars. The Princess lies asleep in the tower. You climb up and awaken her with a kiss. Then you claim her as your bride and live happily ever after."

Davis' eyes popped. "You mean I've got to shinny up that wall?"

"It does appear to be a little difficult, so we stretched a point and provided you with a ladder. It's on the

other side." The Martian took Davis by the arm and began leading him.

"Now wait a minute!"

The Martian frowned. His manner had become a trifle cold. "I'm sure," he said, "you would not want to cause the President any annoyance. If he turned the matter over to Josef Stalin of the Gestapo—"

"The Gestapo?"

"Of course."

"Where's the ladder?"

"Just there."

Davis took a deep breath and started his ascent. Up—up—up he went until his head pushed over the high balustrade above.

FOR A LONG moment there was no sound upon the Martian plain. Then Davis let out an agonized yelp and came sliding down the ladder like a fireman getting out of the way.

He hit the ground and turned a horrified face on the Martian.

"She's gu-got-gu-got two heads, man! A girl lying there wi-with *two heads!*"

"Certainly she has two heads. Every member of the Martian ruling family is so equipped."

Davis was strangling with shock and now blank surprise came into the Martian's face. "Do you mean," he asked, "that your President Truman has only one head?"

"Of course—one head."

The Martian seemed at a loss. "That's the most amazing thing I ever heard of. Why in heaven's name did they make him president?"

But Davis could not answer. The pressure of events had been too much for him.

He'd blacked out again.

THE END



LONG LIVE THE DEAD!



THE EGYPTIAN ideology that man needs his body in the life after death is the key to the puzzle of their pyramids. With such a thought behind them, they naturally felt that each step in the decay of their bodies robbed their souls of something in the after-life; and that complete destruction of the body meant no after-life at all. So they spent every possible means to assure themselves a long and happy and prosperous life after they were dead.

The poor man, of course, had to make shift as best he could and take potter's luck with his immortal soul. But the fabulously wealthy Pharaohs—whose bodies were considered as sacred as that of a god—used all the brains and skill they could hire and all the labor they could command, to build such tombs as would ensure luxury for their Ka.

The Ka was the dead man's double—his spirit. It was supposed to live in the tomb as the dead man did in life: eat, drink, satiate all its earthly wants. Friends and relatives of the deceased had to keep bringing gifts to his Ka constantly.

The Egyptians seem to have been haunted by the spectre of their Kas going hungry, so that they didn't entirely trust to the memory of relatives and friends. No matter how many friends or relatives a man had, he would in addition pay stran-



gers to remember him. Whoever built an eternal house for himself, also set aside some part of his lands to pay for food and drink to be offered to his double throughout eternity. And what is even more amazing is that this business was invariably kept up: generation after generation, the descendants of a man hired to look after a Ka continued regularly to bring offerings.

Yet the Egyptian was still not satisfied. How could he be sure he was dealing with a conscientious family? So on the walls of his tomb, the Egyptian had painted pictures of food, so that his Ka might never run the risk of being hungry if his caretakers neglected their trust.

Jewels and treasures also were buried with the Pharaohs.

It seems a far cry from cremation!



THE IMPOSSIBLE WEAPON

STANLEY STOKES stood on the balcony and looked up at the sky. He couldn't actually see the sky, since the tiny glowing pinpoints of light that made up the force field hid it quite effectively. He wondered idly

how lovers fared without moon glow and starlight to give their passions impetus, but then he thought, to hell with lovers, I've got my own problems.

He turned and finished his fourth drink—or was it his fifth? Sixth? He



By Milton Lesser

Stan knew that Venus's secret weapon couldn't possibly work. Yet Earthmen continued to die by the thousands . . .

said belligerently, "I hate bureaucracy. I particularly hate the Assistant Secretary of Defensive Weapons, Spatial Division."

Lila took his hand and led him back inside, plunking him down on a big overstuffed chair. "You're high," she told him severely. "And the A. S. D. W. S. D. happens to be my father."

"That makes it even worse," Stanley proclaimed. "The man who sired my girl friend is a complete and utter nincompoop."

"Father is not a nincompoop!"

"Nor am I a hero, but I happen to be in a position to save the Earth. I can do it, despite the fact that I'm not a hero. So your father should listen, despite the fact that he is a nincompoop."

"He did listen."

"He did not listen. He merely sat there while I talked, and when I finished he smiled politely. I think he even winked at one of his aides. It took two months before I could get

close enough to see him wink, and then, after ten minutes, he said no."

"The United Nations pays him for his work," Lila said acidly. "They believe he knows his business."

"Is that so? We're losing the war, aren't we?"

"Yes," Lila admitted, "but we weren't, not until last April. What could father do if the Venus-Mars-Ganymede League developed a new weapon? The way you talk, you'd think he was working for the League, or something."

"I didn't say that, but... umm-mm. You have a point there."

"Stanley Stokes, you're terrible!"

"That's what your father said, only he used the word *crazy*."

"If you weren't high, I think I'd say goodbye. Permanently."

Stanley rocked back and forth gently, stood up and twirled around slowly until his eyes came to focus on Lila. "I am not high. But it looks like I'm having in-law troubles before we're married, because your father is a nincompoop."

"Stanley, I'm warning you—"

"Remember, I'm not high. Don't let that sway your decision. It's either... me or that nincom—"

"Here!" Lila removed the modest engagement ring from her finger, steadied Stanley's hand long enough to place the ring in his palm. "Goodbye."

There were tears in her eyes, but Stanley failed to see them, for his vision had become clouded on its own accord. Gulping audibly, he pocketed the ring, turned on his heel and stalked from the apartment. He tried to stalk in a straight line, his thin shoulders squared, as he had seen Clarke Townsend do so effectively on a score of video shows. But Stanley stalked in a weaving fashion.

Outside, he found an empty jet-cab near the curb. He punched his identification number on the record-box, took

the cab up half a thousand feet to the local lane. He idled around purposefully for a time, then set the controls in a northerly direction and leaned back. There was a time when he had liked night flying, watching the dark shadows of clouds scudding across the face of the moon, or on moonless nights watching the star-studded sweep of the Milky Way. But now all he saw was the glowing force field, and after a while he clamped his eyes tightly shut, surrendering the cab to robot control.

Ten minutes later he brought it down on the roof of the Queens County Spaceman's Bar.

STANLEY entered the place in time to see the tail-end of a brawl. It must have been a good one, although the cops had not been summoned. Three flunkies carted a mess of broken table and chairs to the waiting maw of a disposal unit; three others helped two battered spacemen to their feet and thence to the street-level door.

But a third spaceman needed no help whatever. His face was a near-catastrophe. Not from this fight alone, but from a score of others. His crooked nose defied one further fracture; his huge jutting jaw would break knuckles, and not the other way around; his shining dome of a head—Stanley guessed a slight dose of radiation could account for that—was the canvas for lurid tattoos which bordered on the pornographic. But he was smiling, the over-large teeth giving Stanley the strong impression of a horse.

"A couple of puppies!" the ugly spaceman snorted, pounding his two huge hands on the surface of the bar. A frightened barman clambered across a heap of broken crockery and grinned shyly.

"Yes, sir! Oh, yes—a couple of puppies."

"No one asked you! I'll have Venu-

sian brandy."

The barman gulped. "I'm sorry, sir. We haven't been able to get Venusian brandy since—"

"I know, dammit! Since they came up with that new weapon and chased our fleet out of space, its tail between its legs. Okay, give me cognac, a triple."

STANLEY gazed upon the proceedings with evident satisfaction. Here was a man after his own heart, even if it was a man endowed with about twice as much brawn. Hardly realizing it at first, Stanley found himself walking across the floor and joining the hulking figure at the bar.

"Name's Stokes," Stanley said in his best basso. "I agree with you. A shame that we have to run away with our tail between our legs just because they develop a new weapon."

"You think so, huh?" The huge spaceman seemed much larger from an eye-level proximity with his shoulder, and his booming voice lacked the faintest suggestion of anything but hostility. "I don't. Hell, it makes me sick, Stokes—but what can you do about it? You can't expect the boys to commit suicide by throwing themselves against a weapon they can't fight. Say, are you one of them damn pacifists who says we ought to surrender?"

"No," Stanley said at once, trying hard not to blanch when the spaceman looked down at him out of fuming eyes. "Quite the contrary. I believe I have the solution Earth has been looking for."

"You believe what? Just who the hell are you?"

"Technician second-class Stanley Stokes, Quantum Division. If you—"

"A quanto-tech!" The spaceman snorted. "What the devil can you do?"

"Let me finish and I'll try to tell you. All my plan needs is a spaceman and a ship, and then I think we can

show the League a thing or two. Yes, bartender, I'll have cognac too. All right, a—a triple. Now—"

But Stanley didn't have a chance to finish.

Someone cried: "Holy Rockets, the cops!"

And someone else: "Let's get out of here! If O'Hanrohan decides to fight—"

O'Hanrohan was the hulking spaceman with the booming voice, and it looked like O'Hanrohan would decide to fight. He stood with his back to the bar, his feet planted wide apart. He picked up the bottle of cognac by its graceful neck, smashing it down against the mahogany with savage force. A lot of cognac and a lot of glass sprayed all around the immediate vicinity, but O'Hanrohan came up holding a shattered half-bottle, its jagged edges gleaming under the fluorescent lights.

With his free hand he grabbed Stanley around the neck and held him that way. "We're getting out of here!" he shouted. "Try to stop me and you'd be making a mistake." Then he hissed in Stanley's ear: "Did you leave a cab up on the roof?"

And when Stanley nodded weakly, his chin scraping against the hairy forearm: "Good. We'll take it and scam."

THE HALF dozen cops had an assorted arsenal of blasters, needle-guns and heat-beams, but they couldn't use it, not with Stanley effectively shielding O'Hanrohan from their fire. O'Hanrohan backed slowly toward the roof exit, pulling Stanley with him. He didn't release his grip until they stood on the other side of the door. Then he kicked the door shut, bolted it and turned toward the waiting cab. Almost immediately, fists were pounding on the door. A moment later its surface began to glow a dull cherry-red.

"They're using heat-beams," said O'Hanrohan. "That doesn't give us much time. Are you coming with me?"

"With an escaped criminal? A fugitive? Do you think I'm crazy?"

"I'm a fugitive, but not a criminal. One of those men I hit was an officer, but he had it coming. A lousy pacifist, he wants us to give up! You coming? Don't forget, sonny: I'm your spaceman, and I can get a ship."

Stanley looked at the door, glowing more brightly now. He watched the drops of molten metal dripping off sluggishly to the pavement below. If this wild giant of a spaceman wanted to help him...

"I'll go with you," he said, and together they ran for the cab. Behind them, the door dissolved into a bubbling pool and the first policemen stepped over it gingerly. A blaster seared air just below the cab as it flashed off the roof.

Stanley's thoughts were whirling. First Lila and his engagement ring—now this. Of his own free will, he had fled with a fugitive from justice, had helped him, in fact. Well, hardly that, but the police might think so. At least now he could lean back and think it all over. He thought he had the answer to the enemy's new weapon, but he could be wrong. And if he were, he'd gambled everything on a cock-eyed theory—

Something made their cab bounce.

Something else made it spin and twist and turn upside down, bouncing Stanley's head momentarily off the ceiling.

"Strap your safety belt!" O'Hanrohan roared.

"What—what's the matter?"

"The cops followed us in their ship. They're firing."

"Even when you have a hostage on board?"

"Yeah. No! They must've heard us

talking on the roof. I guess you're in trouble, sonny. Want to shake?"

They did, or they started to, but their cab bounced again, then shot skyward on a tangent. "I've never been shot at before," Stanley said.

O'Hanrohan grunted. "I don't believe you ever rode one of these cabs at three G's, either, but if we want to get away, you'll start doing it right now!" With a grin creasing his battered face, he pulled the jet-stick all the way back.

Something grabbed hold of Stanley's stomach and twisted, jamming him back against his chair at the same time, holding him there, squeezing all the air from his lungs. Spacemen encountered this sort of thing all the time, he knew, out in the bleak cold vault beyond Earth's atmosphere. But he was no spaceman, and a Sunday game of tennis was enough to give him a worn-out feeling.

O'Hanrohan laughed. "Look at that! Only three G's and they can't match it."

Stanley wanted to shout encouragement, but he found that his voice couldn't leave the neighborhood of his throat.

"See?" O'Hanrohan continued. "We've left the local level. We're going up in a tight loop. By the time the cops reach express upstairs, we'll be on our way down again. They'll come down, only we'll be on our way up again. When they figure that one out, we'll be halfway to White Sands."

"White Sands?" Stanley managed.

"Yeah, White Sands, New Mexico. If you know what you're talking about, I think I can get us a spaceship there. Well, hold your ribs, sonny—we're going up again!"

Stanley started to hold his ribs, then blacked out, O'Hanrohan's wild laughter ringing in his ears.

"**H**OW DOES she look?" O'Hanrohan wanted to know. He stood with hands on hips, surveying the space cruiser.

"Isn't it a little small?" Stanley asked.

"Small? Of course it's small. Just a one-man cruiser. Did you think I could borrow a battleship or something? No, there's enough room for me to get inside, and if I can make sense out of your plan, I'll take her up."

"How did you get that ship?"

They had arrived in White Sands not more than six hours ago, Stanley realized. He had arrived with a mean headache, either from his drinking or the excitement, or perhaps a combination of both. O'Hanrohan had left him in a deserted little cabin out on the desert, and Stanley had been asleep almost at once. Now—when he awoke—O'Hanrohan stood outside, admiring his spaceship.

"Well," O'Hanrohan parried, "do I have to answer it?"

"We're going to work together as a team. I suggest that you do."

"Sure. Only—well okay! I know a gal who knows a man who guards a gate. The same old story, Stanley. She paid this man a visit, he got kind of busy, I went in and lifted the ship...."

"You stole it!"

"Hell, did you think the government would give it to me?"

"I thought you knew someone who would."

"I was thinking of this gal all the time. Anyway, important thing is I got us a ship. Now what?"

"I hardly know where to begin," Stanley admitted. "Also, I might as well tell you I'm afraid. Maybe my idea won't work after all."

O'Hanrohan said nothing, but the look he gave Stanley indicated plainly enough that his idea had better work.

"Let's take a look at the war," Stan-

ley said. "At the beginning we almost lost, because the League started everything with a sneak attack. H-bombs and A-bombs—knocking out half our cities. That was five years ago. We countered, made a mess out of their military establishments. Then what happened?"

"Hell, everybody knows that. Roger Marshall invented his force field."

"Yes, the force field. And do you know precisely what a force field is, Mr. O'Hanrohan?"

"Call me Charlie. Yeah, I know. It's something damn strong, and nothing can get through it."

"Nothing?"

"Well, nothing except this here new weapon the League came up with. What are you driving at, Stanley?"

"**T**HE LEAGUE has a new weapon which the force field can't stop. So far, they've only used it on our ships, and the ship force fields have been like so much paper. They haven't used it on Earth yet, because they realize Earth is a ripe plum and they'd like to get this planet untouched—after we're forced to surrender.

"All right so far? Good—now let's get back to the force field. Take atoms, any atoms, and strip away the electrons and protons, the neutrons—strip away all the subatomic particles. What do you have left?"

"Why... nothing!" O'Hanrohan scratched the tattoos atop his shining dome.

"You're wrong. What's left are the interatomic forces, the forces which bind subatomic particles together. Only they don't have to do that job any more; there are no subatomic particles. Those interatomic forces become a force field! It can withstand anything, even direct H-bomb explosions. Anything, that is, except for the new League weapon. Our scientists call it an impossible weapon, for it behaves

the way no weapon should. It goes right through a force field the way a knife goes through melting butter."

O'Hanrohan shook his head. "I know all that. Every time we send a ship into space, they knock it right out, and all the force fields in the universe don't matter. So we're helpless. What I want to know is this: what the hell can you do?"

Stanley smiled. "I think I know what that weapon is. And, if I'm right, I know what can nullify it, only the government won't listen."

"They're a little slow on the uptake, eh?"

"Uh...yes, a little slow on the uptake. I'm a quantum technician, as I told you. I work with light. Do you know what light is, Charlie?"

"Of course I know! Why, light is...umm-mm, light!"

"No one knows for sure. It reveals things to our physical senses, it travels at a speed of 186,000 miles per second in vacuum, somewhat slower in air or water, but not much. That's light, and that's all we know. We're not even sure whether it consists of waves, or particles, or a combination of both. I was fooling around with light, Charlie. That's my job, finding new and better ways to keep the lamps of Earth burning.

"Puttering around, I discovered a method to slow light. To slow it tremendously—all the way down to 10,000 miles per second. It still looks like light, I found—but it doesn't act like light at all. It acts more like a disintegrator. It destroys things, and a force field doesn't stop it! That's the League's new weapon, Charlie—slow light!"

O'Hanrohan looked amazed. "Yeah! Yeah! That's what everyone says. It looks just like a beam of light. So what will you do, speed it up again?"

"Don't know how. Instead, I'll simply use one of light's well-known prop-

erties. Come on, we're wasting time. We have to do a lot to this ship of ours."

NOT ONLY was O'Hanrohan a good spaceman, he also was a good mechanic—and something of a shop-lifter. He got the supplies Stanley needed, and Stanley no longer bothered to ask him how. And then he set them up following Stanley's instructions. For his own part, Stanley found a book on astrogation and proceeded to study it. He found the subject intensely interesting, and he had time to kill while O'Hanrohan remodeled the ship under his tutelage.

A day came when Stanley felt sure that, if ever the occasion demanded it, he could pilot a spaceship adequately. But then he snorted at his fanciful thoughts. As if such a day would ever come!

He felt restless, nervous—and at first he thought the necessary delay for converting the ship could be blamed. But, as the final hours came, he still felt that way. He got increasingly morose.

Wandering about their little cabin, he found a bottle of O'Hanrohan's cognac, and he proceeded to drink it in a way which would have done the big spaceman proud. On his third drink, he began to think of Lila. On his fourth, he realized he still loved her. He determined to do something about it.

O'Hanrohan was out getting the final material, and Stanley entered the spaceship, sat down at its radio, twiddled the dials idly. He'd acted like an idiot. Why hold Lila responsible for her father's behavior? Too many friendships had been ruined that way, let alone romances....

When the bottle was empty, he called Lila's home in New York. He got a lot of static at first, but presently Lila's voice followed it into his ears.

"Hello?" Faintly, listlessly.

"Hello. This is Stanley."

"Stanley?"

"Stanley."

"Stanley! Where are you? Where have you been? They gave a description of a man who helped a berserk spaceman escape New York, and—"

"He wasn't berserk."

"He was, according to the reports. Where are you?"

"Lila, I—I was wrong. I shouldn't have argued like that. I still—love—you—"

"Stanley! I love you too. Let's just forget it and start all over. Stanley?"

"What?"

"You don't sound so good, Stanley. Are you ill?"

"No, I've been drinking."

"Don't argue with me, you sound ill. Poor Stanley. Is there anything I can do to help?"

"No. But I'm all ready to try my plan, and I can give you back your ring—after I return, a hero."

"You are ill! Father told me all about this crazy plan of yours. I want to help you, Stanley, don't you see? I know, I can have Father trace this call, and we can come for you—"

"Don't!"

"Father! Father!" He heard her voice calling, muted, as though she had turned away from the radio. The call had been a mistake. He broke the connection, turned away from the radio. O'Hanrohan stood there, regarding him severely.

"I heard that, Stanley. She's going to trace the call. We'll be found before we can try your plan. Of all the dumb—"

Stanley stood up very straight. "No. I admit it, it was a mistake. But it merely means we'll have to work faster. You'll be taking the ship up in a few hours, Charlie, before they can get here."

O'Hanrohan swore under his breath,

and they set to work with the final material.

FIRST, HOWEVER, Stanley brewed a pot of strong coffee. He drank it black and scalding and it made him feel better.

Hours later, O'Hanrohan stepped back away from the ship. "It looks nuts." He scratched his bald head. "But I guess it's finished."

"Not quite," Stanley told him. "We still have to take out the force field."

"What? I can't go up there without a field. It'd be slaughter."

Stanley removed the tiny power plant, dismantling it carefully and storing the parts in their cabin. "The force field won't do any good against the League's new weapon, anyway. And they'll never get a chance to shoot at you with their more conventional weapons. You'll merely steer the ship into their beam, then desert it in a space-suit."

O'Hanrohan cursed softly. "It not only looks nuts, it sounds nuts! Stanley, I don't know why—hey!"

Stanley heard it too. High overhead, a droning. Coming closer every moment. They ran outside the cabin together and looked up into the twilight sky. Two dots.

"Maybe they're going away," Stanley suggested hopefully.

"Don't bet on it, sonny. See, they're circling. And coming down!"

They were, slowly at first—then faster. Soon Stanley could see them quite clearly against the darkening sky, two police fliers.

"They won't fire," O'Hanrohan guessed. "They'll want to get this ship back in one piece. But after they come down they'll use hand guns. If we're not public enemies number one and two, we're damned close, Stanley. You never should've made that radio call!"

"I know it, but that won't help now."

"Listen! I'm going to take that ship up. Five minutes is all I'll need to get her warmed, and you'll have to hold them off till then."

"How?"

"Here, with my blaster."

"I—I can't fire one of those things. I might kill someone!"

"More likely, you might miss. If you could return their fire and pin them down without hitting anyone..."

The planes came closer, their jets quiet as they prepared for landing. Stanley said, "Don't you see? I couldn't do that, but you could! You could pin them down, Charlie."

"Yeah? How would I take the ship up at the same time?"

"You wouldn't. I would."

"You! Very funny."

"I'm not kidding. It's the only way, because if they take us now, we'll never have another chance. I know how to pilot that ship. I think I know how. I read a book—"

"Oh no! Not a book. Tell me anything but that. You read a book!"

"I can do it," Stanley insisted. "We're wasting time. You hold them off till I get up—then surrender. Promise?"

"Yeah, sure. I don't want to kill no one. Hey, wait. Who said anything about letting you—"

BUT STANLEY didn't hear him. Stanley was running toward the ship, darting and weaving clumsily, for already he imagined that blasters were searing the air behind him, crisping the ground under his flying feet.

Soon he heard a voice behind him, a very commanding voice which cried: "You! Stop—stop or we'll shoot!"

This time it wasn't his imagination. Blasters roared, little puffs of dirt kicked up at his feet. His breath came in sobs, his legs felt numb—and then, somehow, he was within the ship. He slammed the port shut, bolted it,

looked for a moment through one of the view domes.

O'Hanrohan was down behind an outcropping of rock, old Wild West fashion, returning blast for blast, keeping the police busy. Good old O'Hanrohan!

Stanley kicked the cyc-lever over, heard the atomic engine miss once and then catch on with a loud, steady droning. Dimly, he heard the blasters roaring outside, watched the needle climb slowly from warm to ready to—fire!

He thumbed down the rocket-buttons, forgetting to strap himself in. The ship lurched crazily, then left the ground behind it, tugging Stanley's insides and making him scream. The ride in the jet-cab had been a three-G lark. Now he watched the dial climbing: four G's, four and a half, five. His vision blurred, his ears rang, his stomach was impossibly constricted.

Six G's....

Incredibly, it was over. The ship floated serenely in deep space, acceleration concluded. The fact that inertia carried it forward at fifty miles per second did not matter; Stanley felt nothing.

O'Hanrohan had done some checking. There should be a convoy of freighters out of Auckland base, heading for the asteroids. Fine. The League probably would be waiting for it. But, quite suddenly, Stanley felt afraid. He glanced at the planet meter, saw that he was seventy thousand miles up. Behind him in the rear-view dome he could see Earth, a great gray-green globe, the pin-point lights of the force field glowing like an infinity of fireflies. He was in space! In space. He had never been beyond man-made Satellite One before, a mere eight hundred miles up. But seventy thousand!

HE BUSIED himself with the radio-receiver, scrambling the dials the way O'Hanrohan had demonstrated.

He listened: "*Silver Star to Ceres King. To Ceres King, over.*"

"*Ceres King,*" came another voice. "We haven't spotted anything yet, Mike. But Lord knows the Chief expects it. The League can pop us out of the sky like clay pigeons, any time it wants. I—Mike!"

The other voice again: "Yeah, I see it too. We ought to turn around and run, but we've got to get supplies through—"

Stanley picked up the little pips that were the convoy ships on his radar grid, followed them. He could see them through the foredome now, a score of freighters with a small-military escort vessel flying each flank. And just ahead of them, not more than a thousand miles—a tiny mote of a League ship, and The Weapon....

It fanned out across the vault of space, probing. A wide beam of radiance, emanating from the League ship, spreading out across the heavens like a wide cone of light. Light—and yet not light. For at its speed of 186,000 miles per second, light seemed instantaneous. But Stanley could watch this beam groping, probing, leaping out across space. Light, slowed to a fraction of its ordinary speed, and behaving impossibly....

Stanley called into his radio: "Ships of the convoy! Convoy, do you hear me?"

A voice, perhaps one of the two he had heard before: "We hear you. What do you want?"

"Keep away from the beam! I think I can stop it."

"Who are you?"

"I—never mind. I can stop it, I said. Just give me five minutes."

He waited, heard nothing. Outside, the ships began to wheel around. But only some of them. Half a dozen either hadn't heard or refused to believe him. Six ships rocketed on toward the beam,

trying to avoid it by speed.

The beam swung around, licked out—caught them! They flashed brilliantly for a brief instant, man-made novae. And then they were gone, completely disintegrated. The remaining ships broke their formation, hovered about in chaotic array. The beam swung toward them, knifed through, picked the ships out one by one and destroyed them.

STANLEY had never witnessed such carnage before. And now, with a first-hand view of the League's Weapon, he began to doubt his own theory. What if he were wrong? What if—

That was ridiculous! He'd staked everything on his theory. It had to work! If it didn't, the entire convoy would be destroyed. And Stanley, floating slowly in space in his spacesuit, could be picked off at leisure. Eventually, the entire Earth....

He set the robot controls carefully. His ship would hit the beam of radiance broadside, would plow directly into the brightest part. Stiffly, he rose from the pilot chair, climbed into the unfamiliar bulk of a spacesuit. Without realizing it, he'd swept dangerously close to the beam. He was vaguely aware of two more convoy ships puffing away into nothingness—and then the beam swung toward his own little craft!

He fastened the spacesuit on the run, got into the airlock, then activated his shoulder jets, spinning away from the ship, end over end, because he didn't know how to operate them.

After a time he righted himself, saw his ship a few miles off in space, entering the beam.

He waited breathlessly, hardly daring to blink his eyes for fear he might miss something. The ship disappeared within the beam, then swam into vision again, distorted, puffing—

It exploded!

Wildly, he looked again. He had failed—

No! Something flared brilliantly at the far end of the beam, and in an instant the radiance blinked out. Stanley sighed happily. This was the answer to the League, and it was so ridiculously simple. Sometimes you can nullify a super weapon with a good application of horse-sense....

O'HANROHAN grinned. "Sure, sonny. I held them off, but they were plenty sore afterwards. If the report hadn't come in on what you done—"

"The important thing is that it did come in, my boy," Lila's portly father beamed happily. And Lila squeezed Stanley's hand, flashing her reinstated engagement ring.

Her father said, "You'll have to make a full report to the United Nations, naturally. Want to give me some inside dope beforehand? Just how did that contraption work?"

"Well," Stanley said, "as I explained before, the League's new weapon was light. Just light. The force field couldn't hold it 'back."

"But how can light destroy—"

"It can. When you slow light down to 10,000 miles per second, it isn't really light any more. It looks like light, but it seems to be concentrated at that slow speed, and it has a new property. It disintegrates."

"That much I know," Lila's father agreed. "But how did you stop it?"

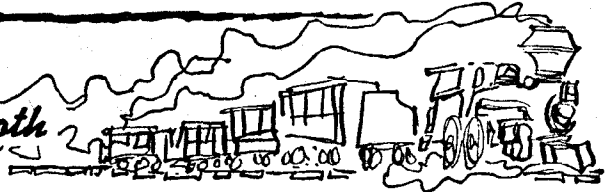
"How would you stop any light? How would you turn light back to where it came from? Or, in this case, how would you make a dangerous weapon do an about-face and destroy the ship that produced it? Simple. O'Hanrohan and I coated the outside of my ship with silver paint, put a layer of plain, ordinary glass over that. See, the force field has no reflective qualities whatever: it absorbs light, as a matter of fact.

"O'Hanrohan and I fixed that 'up. When the light hit our ship it bounced back and knocked hell out of the ship that beamed it. You can take care of the League's super-weapon any time you want, now. It isn't much good as a weapon when all you need to stop it is a good-sized mirror!"

THE END

Oil — Or Juice?

By Frederick Booth



IT IS A pleasure, for once, to report that the world is divided into two camps. This time it isn't a matter of political or military expediency; instead, it's the distribution of our natural resources.

Within not too many years the steam locomotive, that glorious and faithful worker in the Industrial Revolution, will disappear from everywhere except Asia.

In America the Diesel engine has taken over the role of the prime mover on the twin steel arteries, and in Europe electrification is the order of the day. Whatever the replacement, the coal-burning, water-drinking hogger of so much color and romance will be retained only in the Asian wildernesses, where coal is the one

fuel.

In America, oil is plentiful and the Diesel is efficient. The combination of Diesel-electric power and lots of oil means cheaper transportation for everything and everybody. Electrification would possibly be preferred because of its cleanliness and because of the ease of servicing electric motors, but it's not so flexible, and an enormous investment in capital to spread wires all over the vastness of the United States is required.*

In Europe, where the distances are much shorter and oil is imported for the most part, and where electric power from water is cheap, the electrification is the only practical out.



THE EXTRUSION of metals through shaped openings in dies is nothing new. All metals will flow, even cold, under sufficiently high pressures, as easily as toothpaste being squeezed from a tube. But to apply this process to metals like alloy-steels is another matter. Yet it has been and is being done successfully. Two notable advances have been made, and these will set the pattern for many industrial products. Extruding metals is really an extension of forging, where metals are shaped between dies.

Shell cases for artillery shells are now made of steel by the simple process of taking a slug of steel, placing it in a hollow die, and then coming down on it with terrific force with a ram-die. The steel literally "squirts" up around the ram into the form and shape it has been made in. When you consider what a tough metal steel is, it is remarkable that the flow is so simple.

Previously, propellor blades were made of two pieces of steel welded together, then shaped and machined. Now the process is done by extruding a tube of alloy steel through a die (while the metal is hot), then shaping it and trimming. The amount of machining is trivial, and the resulting blade is much stronger.

While the hot and cold extruding of steel is comparatively new in its wide applications, it actually began as early as the first World War when the Germans ran out of copper and brass and were forced to substitute steel for shell cases. Now all nations are stressing the use of extruded steel forms wherever it can replace more precious copper. The extrusion of other metals, like tin, lead, copper, brass and so on (now aluminum, too), is commonplace, and many familiar items are made by this method.

The advantages of hot and cold extrusion and forging of metals lie particularly in the fact that so little subsequent machining work is required. Hence, mass-production is simplified, and our productivity goes up enormously. Even such commonplace items as nuts, bolts and screws are being automatically forged. They are, as a result, stronger and much cheaper than those made on automatic screw machines, etc. The relation between these facts and the future is obvious—it's all part of the plan for cheapness and abundance that we expect to see in the coming years. With the enormous demand for material goods assailing the factories of the world, and with this demand increasing, more production is the only answer.

ARTIFICIAL illumination is now taken so much for granted, is so common, so efficient and so universally used, that people don't even look for any further improvements. This has been doubly so since the coming of the fluorescent lamp which is rapidly replacing the incandescent bulb. But the technicians have a trick or two up their sleeves yet and we're soon going to get the *perfect light*.

To describe the perfect light requires first a consideration of lighting in general. What, for example, is wrong with the ordinary incandescent lamp? The answer comes at once: Ever since electric lighting was invented, its major flaw has been that, as a point-source of light, it was too brilliant when designed to give large quantities of light. We have sidestepped this problem in part by designing fixtures of mirrors and glass to diffuse or distribute the intense light into soft, non-irritating patterns.

The fluorescent lamp which has been with us fifteen years or so was the next major step in light. This substitutes a line source of light for a point source, with the subsequent reduction of intensity and decrease in glare. Fluorescent lighting gives a soft, luminous glow that is not irritating.


The next step is logical. Engineers must design some sort of an *area-source* of light in the form of material which can be shaped in panels and which will glow luminously. This has been done!

The phenomenon of *electroluminescence* is employed. Certain fluorescent materials emit light softly but generously under the influence of a varying electric field. There is a direct conversion of electricity to light with practically no heat loss. Conducting glass panels are sprayed with this fluorescent material and then submitted to a small electric current.

The net result is that the panel (whatever its shape) glows wonderfully luminous, even much more softly yet clearly than a fluorescent lamp.

Above all, these panels can be made in almost any shape and size, so that, if desired, an entire ceiling can be a light source. This invention will revolutionize lighting as much as, or more than, the fluorescent bulb has done. Architects and designers as well as health interests have longed for this efficient light source. It will take some time yet before the principle is applied commercially, but time is the one thing we have. The lighting of the future is here now....

—Jack Winter



The CLUB HOUSE

Where science fiction fan clubs get together.

THE LONGER I live, the more I observe, and learn, the more I become convinced that everything, however complex, is merely a complexity of extremely simple things that can be understood by anyone after someone has pointed them out. Back in the days when Sherlock Holmes was a new and fascinating character to me, I used to think, "What this guy could do if he turned his deductive abilities to the problems of science!"

A scientist is essentially a Sherlock Holmes in his specialized field of study. When you read in physics books how they have determined what elements are in the Sun and other stars you can see the same shrewd cleverness that that fictional hero displayed.

There is one difference, in a way. Sherlock Holmes could look at a man, tell by the stain on his moustache that he was a habitual drinker of J. Wellington Brackknuckle Ale, that he had not wet his whiskers for eighty-seven hours, that his wife had been missing for the same length of time, that he had been walking along Upper Newcastle Road early in the morning, and that he hadn't had a bath in six weeks. From that he could instantly deduce that the man's name was J. Marmaduke Fotsworth, that his wife had been murdered and her corpse buried on Huntington Downs, and that she had been killed by Fotsworth's half brother. And while Dr. Watson sputters over it Holmes calmly shows you

how obvious it was.

But in science the same amount of brilliant deduction does something different. It makes a few things understandable. But it brings to light a lot more things that aren't, and which you didn't know existed before you began to understand a little.

If the mystery story followed the pattern of science, the standard plot would be first the corpse and its data, second the deductive steps uncovering the murderer, the next step being not the final one of flushing out the murderer and bringing him to justice, but the murder of the murderer by still another unknown, with the closing chapters being conjecture based on clues from the murder of the murderer, and tentative theories as to paths that should be followed in searching for the new murderer.

Complicated as the Universe is, the human body is equally as complex. In some ways it's even more so. There are elements in existence now, brought into existence in atomic piles, that can't be found in nature, and last only a few hours before they change back into something else.

And in the human body there are molecules that exist nowhere else in nature, brought into existence by the mysterious complex of physico-chemical activity going on there, which can't even be analyzed except by analyzing their products of disintegration and trying to reconstruct what they were like from such fragmentary analysis.

What these molecules are, how they came into existence, and the part they play in the chemical activities going on inside our bodies, is the modern study whose goal is the final eradication of all disease and infirmity.

One thing that complicates things is that all persons aren't alike. Can you eat lobster? My wife can't. To her it is a violent poison. It has about the same effect on her that a can of canned heat would have on you. Can you eat bananas? I can't. When I eat one I have a "cold" the next day, and it stays with me for three days regardless of whatever "cure" I might try.

Did you know you have tuberculosis? You probably do. At least you have a few of the germs in you. If your physiological setup changed to the proper one for encouraging their multiplication you would have the disease.

There was a time when the medical profession had it all down pat. Diseases were caused by germs which could be isolated and developed in sterile jellies and studied. These diseases could be artificially induced in healthy people by introduction of the germs into their systems. Therefore a disease was contracted by the simple mechanism of exposure to and acquisition of germs. It was demonstrable. It was true.

But then other facts began to come to light. Not all people who acquired germs got the diseases. They had natural immunity. And antitoxins were created that gave anyone immunity to a specific disease.

More and more diseases were discovered. They weren't new ailments, but merely diseases which had formerly been thought to be some other of the commonly known ones. Pneumonia became isolated into several

different and somewhat unrelated diseases, just as the element lead became a family of different elements with the same chemical properties and about the same atomic weights, and it became known that there were different elements of lead, now called isotopes.

And finally it was discovered that there are some diseases which don't have any germ connected with them at all! For a lifetime you eat bananas and are perfectly healthy. Then one day you eat a banana and it makes you ill. A year from then you eat another and it again makes you ill.

Your system has developed a sensitivity to bananas. You are allergic. Why? There are several theories, based on what is known so far. Allergies are a phenomenon of protein chemistry. In some way a protein can change into a poison to one individual while remaining harmless to another individual.

But all the theories as to what happens to make a protein substance in bananas poisonous to Rog Phillips don't account for the fact that once they weren't.

Allergies are probably more common than is believed. In my own opinion better than half the population have allergies, and less than one percent of those who do know it.

A new theory is beginning to find its way into medicine today. It was built on studies of allergies and on studies of people who get various types of diseases. Words such as Gramm-positive germs and Gramm-negative germs enter into it, and methods of treating Gramm-positive and Gramm-negative diseases, and types of people susceptible to each.

The new theory is groping into that mysterious complex of action that finds its seat in the various glands of the body and their secretions. Medical

research is beginning to generalize a few things into broad and sweeping classes.

The modern miracle drugs, the sulfas, etc., are contributing toward those generalizations. And research in such unrelated ills as allergies and cancer is taking cognizance of those generalities.

The day may be not far off when a doctor will have only two medicines in his little black satchel and one little testing outfit. Whether you have cancer or a host of allergies or pneumonia or leprosy or infantile paralysis or ulcers or appendicitis or a tumor or smallpox or a common cold, he will make his simple test, which will tell him which of the two drugs to use—and one injection will make you well in twenty-four hours. Your cancer will wither and go away, or you will no longer be poisoned by sensitivity to foods you eat, etc.

It may never become quite that simple, but all indications of the latest research point to it strongly.

Those two drugs? They will be substances that are normally secreted by two different glands in your body and, all ills being caused by the atrophy of one or the other of those two glands, the lack of the substance they secrete has to be made up by an injection.

When that time comes we may be in a position to attack the problem of human ills even more basically. We know, for example, that there is a normal psycho-physico mechanism of such a nature that, if you are walking in the woods and are suddenly confronted by a vicious animal, recognition of the danger in some way makes the mind able to affect the functioning of the glands so that the process of converting stored food energy to usable body energy is increased.

It may be that studies will show

every gland to be controllable by the mind. Methods of enabling anyone to form a conscious contact with any gland in the body and consciously control it may be developed, so that a person with allergies, for example, will attend a school that teaches him how to increase the activity of a lazy thalamus, or thyroid, or whatever it is that has become lazy.

Conscious control of every gland might become a possibility in time. There is no way of knowing what final effects that might produce. Immortality? Ability to die by willing to? Consciously gained good health at all times? All these may be possible.

Medical science is groping patiently and carefully toward that goal, the goal that "miracle healing", "Faith healing", the "will-to-live", and even "Dianetics" have often accidentally reached in this and that individual, through a contacting of subconscious centers of control, through confidence or *faith*.

* * *

Two new fan groups are now organized. One in Baltimore can be contacted by local fans at Allen Newton's, 114 E. 25th St., Baltimore 18, Md.. The other is the N. Y. Little Monsters, A. Laurie, Jr., 873 E. 181st St., N. Y. 60, N. Y.

Now to the fanzines for review this month....

PEON: No. 18; 15c; 9/\$1.00; Charles Lee Riddle, PN1, USN, Fleet All Weather Training Unit, Pacific, c/o Fleet Post Office, San Francisco, California. Published bi-monthly, "material, finances, and the Navy willing." Assistant editor Gene Hunter, SK3, USN.

A lot of interesting reading in this zine. It's put together in Hawaii. And it gives a lot of interesting stuff about legends and ancient history of those islands. Menehune Mutterings, by Roy Cummings, is a regular feature, and is full of such informa-

tion. In addition there are several very likeable fans living in the Hawaiian Islands who help to keep PEON a well-rounded zine. An old friend and fan, Cpl. Arthur H. Rapp, appears in this issue with "Gather, Darkness!" a review of Fritz Leiber's book.

The cover drawing of PEON is by Jerri Bullock. And the fanzine review department in PEON is better than my own. Mr. Riddle exchanges his fanzine with any fan editor who sends him a copy of his zine.

Featured in this issue is a short story by Gene Hunter. "Juan Manuel and the Devil's Daughter." A neat idea....

* * *

RHODOMAGNETIC DIGEST: June-July issue; 30c; Don Fabun, 2524 Telegraph Ave., Berkeley, Calif. The price sounds a little steep, but when you see the zine you'll change your mind. It's worth it from several standpoints. There are some good analytical articles on various subjects, the possible exception being reviews of current prozines by Falstaff Fluellen, who quite obviously dislikes every story in every prozine he reviews.

Most interesting article in this issue is a discussion of the possible shapes of space-ships when and if they become a reality. It's an interesting subject. We can't yet know if their design will be modified by the problems of landing and take-off from planets, or the conditions of space flight after they leave a planet's atmosphere. And we can't anticipate with any real degree of certainty what we will encounter out in space.

In the center part of this issue is a folio of fantastical sketches that can be taken out intact and preserved by themselves. They are presented "for your pleasure &/or confusion", and they confused me. But the articles are tops, and the printing is a work of art in itself.

* * *

MEZRAB: No. 5; 20c; Robert Bradley, Box 431, Tahoka, Texas. Quarterly. The editorial announces a few policy changes. Less fiction, more science articles on the popular level, accenting the cultural and theoretical aspects of science and fiction, with speculations and logical extensions of present-day knowledge. Poetry will still be welcome, but must be of high quality. And Marion Bradley is a top poet herself.

"The Roof of the World", by Mez, discusses some very interesting speculations about the early state of the world based on geological evidence, and especially evidence of tropical plants all over the globe. It starts off with a quote from Herbert Spencer; "There is a basis in fact for every myth and legend of humanity." You'll get some angles you never dreamed of from this one article.

For originality and good presentation I think Mezrab is currently the best fanzine. If you send for a copy I think you'll agree with me.

* * *

FANTASY-TIMES: 10c; James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd Ave., Flushing 54, N. Y. Fandom's leading newszine reporting on the doings of the pros. Taurasi has regular contact with all the pro editors, and reports of their forthcoming issues, and their plans for the future. In addition he learns well ahead of time all about new publications that are going to appear on the stands, and also reports the folding of current prozines, so readers of this newszine don't have to keep looking and wondering why this or that prozine hasn't appeared on its regular date.

For example, have you wondered why there are no *Amazing* or *Fantastic* quarterlies out? It reports on that. It's because of the increased circulation that leaves no extra copies to make up into quarterlies.

Also reported are meetings of various fan organizations. The 1951 Westcon is reported in the issue on hand, by reporter Arthur Jean Cox.

And the dozens of items gathered by Taurasi and his staff that you will be interested in if you have more than an idle interest in science-fiction are worth far more than the dime per copy. You'll have to subscribe. I can't swipec what F-T worked so hard to bring to its subscribers just to help you decide whether you want a copy or not. F-T comes out twice a month, too. So it's there first on news.

* * *

FAN-VET: by the Fantasy Veterans Association, James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd Ave., Flushing 54, N. Y.. A single sheet fan publication for servicemen only, and devoted to the interests of the fantasy fan in the U.S. armed forces. So if you're a member of the armed forces and want to get this publication, you'll find that it has lots of things that will interest you. For example, the current issue informs you that, if you are in the vicinity of Seattle and want to meet some of the fans there, you may get in touch with Wolf Den Bookshop, 724 Pike St., telephone GA 2000, and ask for G. M. Carr, corresponding secretary.

I believe there's no charge for this fanzine if you are eligible as a serviceman.

* * *

FAN-FARE: Vol. 2, No. 3; 15c; W. Paul Ganley, 119 Ward Rd., N. Tonawanda, N. Y. Bi-monthly. Featured in this issue is a long letter by Mack Reynolds, giving critical analysis of a past issue of F-F, and very good criticism at that. Mari and I paid our respects to Mack and his wife when we stopped over in Taos, where

they live. In fact, we took him a fifth of Irish whiskey (his favorite drink), and I managed to snag a snort to see what it tastes like before he quaffed the entire bottle in Paul Bunyan fashion and chased it down with half a gallon of red wine to whet his appetite for the repast they had prepared in our honor. Fond memories...

Accent is on fan fiction in Fan-Fare, and on the whole it's well written. A good medium for amateur authors, and a good medium for those of you who like short stories to read.

Special feature article in this issue is "It's a Lie!" by Marie-Louise, which puts the lie to Shakespeare's assertion that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet. It brings out a very pertinent fact, that quite often the name of a person contributes as much to his success as his ability. Reminds me of a theory advanced by someone a few years back that only screen idols with double consonants in their names were tops.

* * *

SCIENCE FICTION DIGEST: No. 2; 459 Sterling St. N. E., Atlanta, Georgia. Henry Burwell, editor. Twenty-five cents a copy. The editorial page promises that the next issue will go photo offset and small size like Fanscient was before it folded. Following the pattern of *Readers Digest*, this zine reprints the best of stories and articles that have appeared in fanzines of the past. It's a worthy scheme, and interesting, too, because few fans have been able to get and read all fanzines. This issue seems to be a sort of R. J. Banks issue, with that name authoring nearly all the contents except an article by Bob Silverburg with an attack on R. J. Banks. But it's all good.

* * *

THE PORTLAND STF NEWSLETTER: 10c; Malcolm Willits, 11848 S. E. Powell Blvd., Portland 66, Oregon. This is a specific issue that Malcolm wants to sell the extra copies of. It's the January issue, 1951. In his letter accompanying the review copy he states, "I believe there is enough in this issue to interest fans besides those in the Portland area."

Besides a good coverage of Portland fan news, there are some poems and interesting editorials in this issue. You'll get your money's worth.

And if you want to get later issues of this zine it's handed at present, I believe, by Ron Allaway, 1116 N. E. 6th, Portland 12, Oregon.

* * *

NEWSCOPE: 5c; 50c a yr.; vol. 1, no. 11; Lawrence Ray Campbell, 43 Tremont St., Malden 48, Mass. "Complete coverage of all the news." This issue reports on the

Westercon, the Disclave (Washington, D. C., convention), latest developments in plans for the Nolacon, the rise in price of ASF, a two-column series of brief pronews items, stf films showing and coming soon, stories sold recently by various writers and to what magazine they were sold, radio and tv stf and fantasy news, brief reviews of various fanzines, and a report on the Midwestcon at Russel's Point, Ohio.

Not a bad coverage for one issue. With Bob Silverburg as N. Y. correspondent this newszine should climb up near the top in short order. All it should take is the boost in ego provided by some new subscriptions.

* * *

STF TRADER: vol. 2, no. 4; 2/15c; Jack Irwin, Box 3, Tyro Kansas. Ad rates are \$1.00 a full page, 50c a half page. This is the zine for fans who have items for trade or for sale, and fans who want back issues of prozines, stf books, etc. This issue has sixteen and a half pages of ads. Looking them over I see many items at very reasonable prices. Maybe instead of plunking three or four bucks down in a bookstore for a new book you should send for this zine and get two or three....

* * *

THE NOODNIC QUARTERLY: 10c; Merville Noodnic, 3207 S. E. 118th Ave., Portland 66, Oregon. A distinctly novel idea in fanzines, this issue presents one and only one thing, a story in radio-script form, entitled "Takeoff", and containing characters that are takeoffs on prominent fans in and around Portland, all in good fun.

The story itself is about the first rocket ship to take off from the Earth. The opening scene is at Black Sands, New Mexico.

The next issue of this zine will present the "Crud Machine." In case you don't know, crud is fan parlance for stories that have nothing outstanding about them. So in all probability the story concerns a typewriter that writes stories without benefit of human author. Maybe it will be something like "Typewriter From the Future," that appeared some time back in *Fantastic* or *Amazing*.

* * *

DIFFERENT: Autumn 1951; 50c; Lilith Lorraine, Avalon World Arts Academy, Rogers, Arkansas. This is not so much a fanzine as it is a medium for serious amateur writers of fiction and poetry who not only want a medium of publication for their efforts, but also expert criticism of a constructive kind.

With this issue DIFFERENT is suspending publication for the time being. BUT, and this is a very important but:

"Whether you write science-fiction prose or poetry please keep in touch with us,

either for counsel we may give you in this important literary movement that is sweeping the world or that we may notify you of a paying semi-professional market that we hope to open to you in the near future. Let us know your change of address and feel free to write us of your problems at any time. Please read our editorial carefully if you wish to avail yourself of our poetry and prose criticism. But at all events write us and please don't forget that thin dime in lieu of a stamped envelope for reply, as we cannot otherwise afford to answer the hundreds of letters received monthly. As usual all letters will be answered on the day we receive them."

All correspondence should be sent to Lilith Lorraine, Calle Andrea del Castagno, No. 16, Zone 19, Mexico, D.F.. Make sure you get that address correctly, because mail is easily lost in Mexico.

* * *

CANADIAN NEWSLETTER: Chester D. Cuthbert, 54 Ellesmere Ave., St. Vital, Manitoba. An important announcement in this issue is that in the next Canadian Newsletter will be published a Canadian fan directory. It will probably be out when you read this. If you're a Canadian fan and aren't listed, send your name to Chet and get on the list.

This issue tells about various fan activities in Canadian fandom such as the meetings of the Winnipeg Science Fiction Society. Also discussed are the bans that were placed on importing of prozines that were recently lifted.

* * *

THE CATAclysm: Vol. 2, no. 1; 10c; Galactic Pub. Co. 545 N.E. San Rafael, Portland 12, Ore. And penciled on the margin is a note to me saying, "Please emphasize in your review if you will: all material and money go to the publisher in Portland until my college address is made certain. Bob Briney, editor."

This is primarily a fanzine of poetry and fantasy art. There are top fan poets, and four that appear in the zine for the first time.

The zine is in need of more original poems and more subscribers with their dimes, and says so in a cute way: "We need contributions and subscriptions! C'mon, all you budding Poes and Rockefellerers in the audience, let's hear from you!"

There's a running contest in this zine. They publish an excerpt from some fantasy poem of well-known past literature, and you're supposed to write in and tell them who its author was. Too deep for me, but if you're interested in poems it should be duck-soup for you.

* * *

UTOPIAN: vol. 1, no. 5; circulation 300;

25c; R. J. Banks, Jr., (which I found out from that being the name at the top of some of the letters in the letter department.) No address given anywhere in the sixty excellently mimeographed pages, so I will have to look it up. (Seems to me, Mr. Banks, that you are carrying modesty too far when you don't include the address where AMAZING STORIES readers can send their quarter for a copy!) I just spent fifteen minutes trying to locate the fan-directory. Mari is now searching for it. Meanwhile I'll review UTOPIAN. You'll get the address later, if it can be found without resorting to searching back issues of AMAZING STORIES for a previous review.

As I said, there are sixty pages, which makes this a big fanzine. There are four good, and I mean good, stories in this issue. Five stories altogether, and many interesting articles. The cover illo is by Max Keasler and depicts a batwoman in flight. There's a back cover too, illustrating a gruesome little poem that goes,

When my friends cut off my head
I didn't mind at all;

Since it won't stay on my shoulders,
I've nailed it to the wall.

It's by Paul Overstreet. And there's an epic poem called, "Mighty Merwin's Fasting", by Mr. Banks, which portrays a la John Alden a mighty battle between Sam Merwin, former editor of *Startling*, and Doc Keller, with plenty of pro names thrown in, including mine and Mari's.

The next issue of UTOPIAN is advertised as an all-pro issue, and a total of better than half a page in two-line blurbs is distributed throughout the zine urging you to send for it, without once mentioning the address where you should send your quarter to. Also there are ads describing other fanzines, half a dozen of them, giving addresses where you can get them.

It's understandable. Mr. Banks had a blind spot on this issue. He simply forgot to put his address anywhere in the issue. It's been done before occasionally. I'll try to find out the address by the next issue. Too bad. But let it be a warning to all fan eds. Don't neglect to have your address somewhere in your zine where it can be found easily. Having it on the envelope it's sent in is not enough, because those envelopes are discarded when the accumulated fanzines at the New York office are forwarded to me wherever I am at the time.

I can remember when R. J. Banks Jr. first started his fanzine. It was a hard climb. In those first few issues he had to write everything himself, and he didn't stoop to using pen names. The contents page had his name and no one else's. Now I would say his zine has reached the top of the heap.

* * *

STF HEADLINENEWS: Coswalzine
(Continued on page 155)

The Reader's FORUM



GENESIS—1951 VERSION

My dear Mr. Browne:

To the best of my recollection, my introduction to stf was a yarn published in "Cosmopolitan Magazine" in the spring of 1910. I doubt if it would seem like much now, but to me then it was the outstanding story of the year. Although I cannot claim faithfulness to stf for the past forty years, I have enjoyed a great many stf stories and have spent a reasonable share of my cultural budget on stf magazines. Of the stf magazines on the market today, I would rate AMAZING STORIES among the first three. Frankly, I think your companion magazine, FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, has a quality edge on you and, personally, I find much of interest in "ASTOUNDING".

I realize that the stf writer has a double task in that he attempts to write with two goals: (1) scientific prophecy and (2) readability. In general, the literary quality of stf leaves something to be desired. This is an important aspect of your task as editor, for stf has a great appeal to the younger readers and could be a more or less painless means of education in good literature. Certainly the basic material of stf is superior to that of Westerns, Mysteries, and Romance pulps. I fear I express myself poorly, but I hope you get my point. I would wish for stf on the level of Hilton's "Lost Horizon" and Norway's recent books (tho perhaps Norway is nearer the fantasy field); why can't we have a stf Kipling?

I have just read Vance's "We, the Machine" (July 1951)—I enjoyed it and quite agree with you that it "dramatizes a great truth and points out a great danger." It is one of those stories that is so good it is worth criticizing, so when I say it misses top rating it is because I feel it could have made top classification with more attention to continuity, literary finish, and dramatic construction. As stf it is tops; as literature it falls out of the "excellent" class into "good".

The story by Mr. Vance strongly reminds me of a book I read recently—"Human

Destiny" by LeComte du Noiiy. This is a book that would be valuable to many stf writers and interesting to thinking stf readers. Dr. du Noiiy offers an over-all picture of inorganic and biological evolution for the past several billion years and extrapolates human evolution a possible million years into the future.

Another book worthy of a place on the science fictioneer's bookshelf is "Sourcebook on Atomic Energy" by Samuel Glasstone. The dust cover says "The authentic story—all that can now be told about the past, present and possible future of atomic science." Both of these books are readable by intelligent high school students, yet are not lacking in maturity. The following is partly resultant from reading these two books.

Some 2,500 years ago an Hebrew stf writer had a vision of how everything began. He wrote from the culture of his times and gave us the first chapter of Genesis—the story of creation in three steps. Today I think the same vision would have produced a story somewhat along these lines.

In the beginning, God created neutrons and into each neutron was packed a complete "mode of conduct" which has resulted in the sun, earth, moon, stars and all the rest of the inorganic universe.

Eventually, in the course of inorganic evolution, God, seeing the earth had reached a status favorable to organic life, created the first life form, packed it with the potentialities of organic evolution and implanted it on the earth. However, the evolution of this original life unit was not to be entirely independent, for free neutrons of the first creation, in the form of cosmic rays, have mutated organic nuclei with varying improbable results.

When organic evolution culminated in an animal of our present human form, "God saw it was good. And God said, 'Let us make man in our image.'" So he created a third type of potentiality and implanted it in the human animal. Man today is in the midst of the third stage of evolution, not entirely unmodified by mutating in-

fluences from the first and second levels of creation, but dominated by the unique human attributes of freedom of judgment and freedom of choice.

Should this "vision" be true, and it could be, there is a high probability that the universe, except for the earth, is virgin inorganic territory awaiting interplanetary travel for the appearance of life forms. The first travelers to Mars and Venus may have high responsibility.

Edward N. Dunlap
Mansfield, Washington

ANNOUNCEMENT—NEW FAN CLUB

Gentlemen:

Baltimore, Maryland, sficionados are organizing a fan-club and would appreciate hearing from or seeing anybody who might be interested in joining the group. The club is nonsectarian, nonsegregationist and non-everything except a strong pro on behalf of science fiction. All ages and types are presently interested. Please contact Allen Newton, acting corresponding secretary, at 114 East 25th Street, Baltimore 18, Maryland.

Allen Newton

ENGLAND CAN DO MORE THAN WE CAN?

Dear Mr. Browne:

I have but a few comments to make on the last issue—July '51. Four out of the six stories were good. Vance's "We, the Machine" was excellent. It was very well thought out and written in an interesting manner. Besides that, it was a darn good story. Next in line was "You'll Die on Ganymede". That's the first time I've read a story by Archette, and if you do publish any more of his stories, I hope they're as good as that. Number three, "The Sky Was Filled With Light". It seems to me that Hickey's gone way down since the April 1951 issue. The "Star Gamblers" was a very good story. The only reason that the story did land in third place is that it was the queerest story I've read in a long time. Fourth was "Good Luck, Columbus". I know it was a very good story, but it just didn't seem to register so well. Fifth and sixth were "What Price Paradise" and "When Vengeance Rules", respectively.

What say you get after Eando Binder and get him to write you a couple of good yarns? After what I've read of his older yarns, he's terrific. In fact, I've told him so.

You've said so much about the stf stories that Hollywood has been turning out lately. After all you can't be too harsh on the poor lads. You know, anything that we can do, England can do a little better. That's been proven twice already. "The Shape of Things To Come" and "The Man

Who Could Work Miracles". Two excellently done pictures. I've seen all the science-fiction pictures that Hollywood has turned out and, oh brother! Did you see "The Man From Planet X"? Wasn't that something from out of this world? And it should have stayed there.

Harry Belsky
2603 North Napa Street
Philadelphia 82, Pennsylvania

Eando Binder did some really terrific work in science fiction. However, he stopped writing in this genre years ago; now writes another type of fiction.Ed.

SEPTEMBER ENJOYMENT

Dear Howard:

I really enjoyed your September issue of A. S. The best stories in the mag were "The Green Blood of Treachery" and "A World He Never Made".

I think that "You've Got to Believe" and "Some Wolves Can't Kill" belonged more in your companion mag, FANTASTIC, but I enjoyed them both, especially the last one.

"The Betrayers" was okay, not as good as the others.

Let's have more interior illos by Rod Ruth. He's good. And how about another cover by Joseph Tillotson—I like him, too.

Thanks to your companion mag F. A., who published my first letter, I now have a pen-pal, Bob Paulive, who lives way out in Brighton, Mass., and we are now corresponding regularly.

Say, now, does anyone reading this have an extra copy of the August issue of F. A.? If so, please send it along to me and I'll be glad to pay for it. And if you know of anyone else who has an extra copy, tell them to send it to

Bob Paulive
39 Greycliff Road
Brighton, Massachusetts

Thanks!

Joel Nydahl
Route , Box 913
Marquette, Michigan

QUANTITY PLUS QUALITY EQUALS "AMAZING"

Dear Mr. Browne:

I have been a reader of AMAZING STORIES for several years now, and as yet have had no reason for writing a letter to the editor concerning a story or any other aspect of your mag, since my opinions have invariably been expressed by other letter writers. However, I would like to have it on the record that I am neither for nor against long novels.

I believe that the basis by which a story should be judged is its quality rather than its quantity. I would much prefer reading

twelve good 5000-word stories than one lousy novel, and vice versa.

I have no way of knowing how many stories are submitted to you for publication, but the number surely must be limited. In the past, it has seemed that your method of choosing the stories published in AMAZING has been to select the best of the stories submitted—regardless of length. I can think of no way of improving this system, so why not continue using it. Keep on giving us fans quality instead of quantity. However, if you run across a story with both of these features, don't keep it from us just because some people want only shorts.

One other thing: I realize that editors are only human and are prone to err occasionally. This probably explains why "A World He Never Made" came to be between the covers of the September issue. The story read like an attempt of mine at stiff writing which, incidentally, I destroyed for fear someone might read it and become sick.

Carl R. James
1653 Washington
Kansas City, Missouri.

Thanks for your kind words re the quality of our stories. We try to please our readers in every respect, so giving them story quality goes unsaid.

We disagree with you, however, about "A World He Never Made". In our opinion, this story contained pure science fiction, action, characterization, plus an epic quality. Ed.

HE DYED FOR LOVE!

Dear Mr. Browne:

Please put me down as one solid vote for more long, long novels.

On page 13 of "A World He Never Made" (a pretty corny title, who dug it up?), the hero is described as a "broad-shouldered redhead". What happened to the poor boy's hair on the cover? It's black!

Richard Fugett
12232 Montana Avenue
Los Angeles 49, California

WANTED—BACK ISSUES

Dear Editor:

Being a newcomer to the world of science fiction and fantasy, I am badly in need of some back issues of FA and AS and any other pro-mags prior to May 1951. If you have any mags that are cluttering up your house just send them to me, and I'll be glad to pay the postage.

Thank you.

Joel Nydahl
804 West Washington
Marquette, Michigan

HOW DO YOU MAKE A SPACE SHIP?

Dear Editor:

I have just finished the September issue of AMAZING STORIES. I think it is one of the best issues in a long time. All of the stories were very good, but I liked "A World He Never Made" especially. I have been a steady reader of AS and FA since I became acquainted with them two years ago. All of the 1951 issues have been exceptional, both in story quality and art work. I have decided not to take sides in the cover argument.

There is a certain problem I would like some help on. Since I am very interested in space travel, I took the job of designing a space ship for a science project in our school. However, each design I tried was too slow, too heavy, too small, etc., or violated several scientific principles. I would appreciate any information you or your readers could send me concerning this subject.

This is about all I have to say except that you have been putting out a fine magazine and I wish you the best of success in publishing AMAZING STORIES in time to come.

William Elwell
169 West Fillmore Avenue
East Aurora, New York

Among our readers, Bill, we're sure are some who are definitely qualified to give you technical information regarding space ship design. You'll be hearing directly from them. —Ed.

NO SERIALS! HE SAYS

Dear Ed:

This is sincerely spoken from the bottom of my heart: I have been reading your twins since I was ten. I get every issue.

Well, so help me, I love your mags dearly; and if I ever saw a measly little serial in any one of them, I'd just keel over and die of heartbreak! To me a serial cheapens a magazine, and I don't give an infinitesimal damn what anybody else says. I know I'm speaking for a lot of people.

Dealing with long novels and short stories: I am in favor of a short novel a novelette or two, and some short stories. No short-shorts. Once in a while a long novel for spice.

As things stand, I'm pretty satisfied with the twins as they are now.

"Some Wolves Can't Kill" and "You've Got to Believe" belonged in FANTASTIC, not AMAZING.

Robert G. Paulive
39 Greycliff Road
Brighton, Massachusetts

ANOTHER VOTE FOR THE LONG NOVEL

Dear Mr. Browne:

Just bought my September issue of AS yesterday (day it hit the stands, I believe). I am in the middle of the Reader's Forum which is the first thing I open the book to. You mention, after Mr. Burwell's letter, that you want votes on the Long Novel vs. the More Stories per Issue. So that you can't miss it I'll use capital letters and say here is one more vote for the LONG NOVEL. I don't think any of us wish you to sacrifice quality for length, nor is there any need to. Those who write for AS and FA are well able to develop their ideas into the long novel category. I have always preferred the long novel beside the short, and would like to see the general policy of AS and FA to be one long novel with one or two short stories to fill out the mag.

I have been reading AS and FA for a good many years. In fact, I read the first issue of FA and had been reading my uncle's AS many years before that. All I have to say about the two books is that they are the best of their field. I don't care for all the stories you print, but then each of us have our own individual tastes, and you couldn't possibly publish a book that would please everyone at the same

time. Art used is excellent and becoming better all the time. I enjoy the short articles, etc.

All in all, I'm expecting to go on reading AS and FA for a good many years to come. And if we have more votes than for the 'Short Stories', I'll be looking forward to the 'Long Novels' in the future.

Just one word of warning. START printing serials and I STOP reading.

E. L. Robinson
c/o Mid-West Airlines
Austin, Minnesota

No—no serials. But start watching for the first of our duology.Ed.

HE'LL BUY ALL BRADBURY

Dear Ed,

I would be very grateful if you would put this in your letter column. Thank you.

I would like to buy all Bradbury yarns, be they in books, pocket books, mags, or what. Just send me the name of the story and the price and I will pay the postage.

Larry Walker
2267 Wolcott
Warren Navy Housing
San Diego, California

THE CLUB HOUSE

(Continued From Page 151)

88; a zine on a post card, 20 issues for fifty cents; Walter A. Coslet, Box 6, Helena, Montana. This cardzine is printed now, and contains more information in less space than anything I've ever seen.

* * *

OPERATION FANTAST HANDBOOK; '51, 75c USA, Miss Mavis Picles, 41 Compton St., Dudley Hill, Bradford, Yorks., England. Compiled by Capt. K. F. Slater. This is really worth seventy-five cents. It's a compilation of information on fan publishers, fantasy publishers, and fans and a million things you'd like to know in all English-speaking countries.

Included with it was the Operation Fantast Newsletter, which tells about the British convention, at which about two hundred people attended. Forrest J. Ackerman of Los Angeles attended that convention, I believe.

Also included are two sheets of listings of American prozines available for sale to British fans in England, collected by trading this British fanzine to Americans for copies of American prozines. So it looks as though some real good has come out of that setup. For the benefit of you newcomers, you can get any fanzine from the British Isles by sending your old AMAZ-

ING or FANTASTIC or other American prozine. Since American magazines aren't permitted to be sold on the stands in England, this is the ONLY way they can obtain them over there.

* * *

One last item, not a fanzine. It's a booklet published in Australia. "Blinded They Fly" by Vol Molesworth, a fantasy. It's published in Sydney, Australia, by Futurian Press, a fan group, and can be obtained from their U. S. agent, James V. Taurasi, 137-03 Thirty-Second Ave., Flushing N. Y. It's a dollar and a half, which seems like a steep price for a 31-page fantasy. But when you consider that this is a fan group doing things on a small scale, and the copies must be sent half way around the world to reach you, you will realize that it couldn't be done for much less. On a comparison basis, if AMAZING STORIES had the same limited printing and had to go as far, it would cost you five dollars a copy instead of a quarter. Correction! The edition is limited to two hundred copies. AMAZING STORIES at that rate would have to sell for over twenty dollars a copy!

The author dedicates his booklet to the memory of H. P. Lovecraft and Charles Fort. The story is prefaced with a quote from W. J. R. Turner, "Blinded they fly where angels fear to tread up to the light to find darkness instead." It should be good reading, and is definitely a collector's item.

—ROG PHILLIPS



BOOKCASE

WORLD OF WONDER, edited by Fletcher Pratt, Twayne Publishers, New York (\$3.95).

This month's anthology is subtitled "an introduction to imaginative literature" and is aimed from the first line of its foreword by Edith R. Nirriëles, editor of the stratospherically belles-lettres *Pacific Spectator*, to the final line of Ray Bradbury's *The Million-Year Picnic*, which winds things up on page 445, directly at students and teachers in our colleges and higher schools.

The idea of attaining for science fiction legitimate infiltration into our more orthodox halls of learning is definitely not far-fetched. Ever since H. O. Bailey turned his master's thesis into the classic *Pilgrims in Space and Time*, which has remained in print for lo! these many years, more and more students have been annually turning out theses dealing with various aspects of the science-fiction scene and its impact upon the culture that surrounds us. We have an idea that its introduction into the open classroom will be greeted with cheers all around.

With this in mind Mr. Pratt has paid far more attention than is usual to literary calibre in selecting his stories. Along with such stf anthological staples as L. Sprague de Camp, Robert Heinlein, Fredric Brown, William Tenn, Isaac Asimov, Nelson Bond, A. Bertam Chandler and H. Beam Piper, we find such names as O. Henry, Rudyard Kipling, Philip Mac-

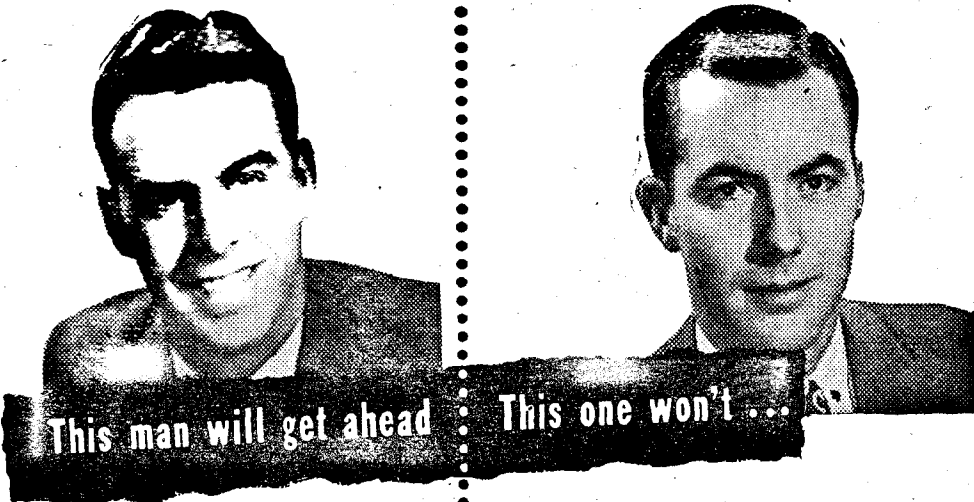
Donald, Franz Kafka and Gouverneur Morris, also such names comparatively new to stf anthologies as Esther Carlson, James Blish and Judith Merrill. For whatever it is worth, Piper and Kipling are the only authors used twice.

But don't get the idea that this volume is pedantic in tone merely because it is aimed at classroom study. Even had he wished to, we feel certain Mr. Pratt would have found it difficult to get pedantic material out of stf and such was very evidently far, far from his intention.

And even if you have read the stf standards included, you'll be in for some shockingly pleasant surprises when you tackle Kipling's *The Finest Story in the World*, Kafka's justly famed *Metamorphosis*, MacDonald's *Private—Keep Out* or Morris' *Back There in the Grass*. The impact of first-class writing minds on science fiction is always exciting and is all too often forgotten in favor of far less worthy, if more frequently-appearing favorites.

Oddly or otherwise, in all the stellar lineup, the tale that appealed to us the most was *Museum Piece* by comparatively unknown Esther Carlson. If H. H. Munro (Saki) is not spinning in his grave like a gyroscope for not having thought of this one, he should be.

All in all WORLD OF WONDER equals, if not surpasses, Ken Crossen's WORLDS OF TOMORROW as the



CAN YOU TELL WHY?

They went to the same school, live on the same street, both have bacon and eggs and coffee for breakfast, both twirl a ball at Martin's Bowling Alley Monday nights.

WHAT MAKES THEM DIFFERENT?

One thing—what they're doing about the future. The man who hasn't got any future isn't doing anything about it. That's why.

The man who *has* a future is doing something about it right this minute. He's building it with an I.C.S. course that will prepare him for a job he knows he'll be able to fill when it comes.

The dreamy man expects breaks—somehow they never come. The wide-awake man is letting I.C.S. show him how to *manufacture* breaks. They'll be his because he's ready for them.

Which man are YOU going to be like? If you're made for something more than a dead-end job that pays little and holds you back . . . if you feel the urge to climb and grow . . . check off, below, the field you want to get ahead in and send the coupon. Do it while you feel like it—don't let the urge die.

How about it, fellow?

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

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finest science-fiction anthology to see print in 1951.

WINE OF THE DREAMERS, by John D. MacDonald, Greenberg: Publisher, New York (\$2.75). The finest science-fiction effort to date by one of the country's ablest all-around young writers, this is a fascinating story in which a pair of far-distant worlds (and two others) become inextricably interinvolved.

The Dreamers are at the dead-end of a former interstellar civilization, live in a single building which they have come to consider the entire cosmos and pass their adult lives for the most part lying on comfortable pallets and, with the aid of devices left them by their more energetic forebears, living strange visions of life on three highly varied planets they consider entirely imaginary.

One of the three is Earth in the very near future and, since the Dreamers can actually possess whomever they choose to and have them do the most dreadful things, their existence is far from the harmless idyll they hold it to be. Ultimately it is discovered the Dreamers, unaware of the harm they do, are actually responsible for much of the insanity, crime and suicide that plague our world today.

Happily, among them is a born rebel, named Raul, who is born with a nasty, suspicious turn of mind and decides there is more to the universe than the Dreamers have any idea of. His sister, Leesa, is rebellious, but in a different way. She doesn't want her love-life in dreams and doesn't care who gets hurt as long as her frustrations stay with her.

Between the two of them and some of their elders they manage to make a fine hash of things for Bard Lane, in charge of construction for what should be Man's first successful space ship, and Sharan Inly, the comely psychiatrist who loves him. Ultimately the Dreamers even manage to sabotage the ship and get Bard locked up in a quilted booby-hatch.

From then on it's every man for himself, with the reader coming out well ahead, thanks to the clarity of Mr. MacDonald's concept and the crisp, continued excitement induced by his fine writing. One of the better jobs of the year.

THE CASE OF THE LITTLE GREEN MEN, by Mack Reynolds, Phoenix Press, New York (\$2.00).

Mr. Reynolds, a comparatively new and definitely prolific name in science fiction has here come up with a mystery story in which a murderer decks out his killings with so much science-fiction regalia that the story more or less falls between the two fields of writing. Actually it takes quite a tumble.

The murder plot is the oldie in which a killer knocks off a couple of people he has no visible motive for killing before going after his real victim; the locale is a large Western city. The narrator-hero is a private eye who never quite gets out of the batter's box (to say nothing of reaching

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first base) with any of the babes involved, and the subsidiary characters all purport to be science-fiction fans of one kind or another, most of whom belong to an outrageous fan organization called the Scylla Club.

It's fast-moving and all in all it's pretty good fun. It's a pity, however, that its paths have been travelled so many many times before. Better keep the window open when you read it. You'll get some fresh air that way.

THE HOUSE OF MANY WORLDS, by Sam Merwin Jr., Doubleday & Co., New York (\$2.75)

What to say about this one? Well, we hardly think it's up to us, nor would we be reliable in our comment. However, if you should come across it and if you should read it and if you should like it, we'll appreciate hearing from you. Or even if you shouldn't. After all, a critic is supposed to be able to take it as well as to dish it out.

Which winds us up for another month. It begins to appear as though 1952 will be the biggest year yet in science-fiction book-publication history. All in all we only hope that the quality of such publication not only remains as high as in the past but continues to rise. That, it seems to us, is strictly up to you and ourselves. We must guide you as cannily as possible, you must give support to worth-while jobs even while refusing to buy junk. Between us we should be able to help make this a milestone twelvemonth.

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THE MAY 29, 1851, issue of the London TIMES carried a report of a new repeating pistol: "...perhaps the most terrible implement ever delivered into the human hand."

The description went on to state that the bullets of the new weapon could penetrate seven inches of board, while the highest penetration of a dragoon pistol was five inches. American generals were quoted as saying that a trooper carrying such a weapon would be a match for three men armed in any other way.

In the little more than 100 years since then, weapons have been developed which make, of this early pistol, little more than a plaything in comparison to the deadly destruction which the new ones can wreak.

In 2051, what kind of arms will have been developed to replace those in use today? We shudder to think of their powers....

—Sandy Miller



A GREAT many people feel a natural and instinctive revulsion toward any form of reptilian life—and yet a peculiar hypnotic fascination also. It is with mixed feelings, therefore, that we consider the new announcement that rattlesnakes are being successfully employed as laboratory assistants in the fight against cancer!

Herpetologists have discovered that snakes are prone to cancerous and tumorous growths surprisingly similar to those found in humans, and that these growths can be transplanted from one snake to another. Naturally the abnormal cell growth is not exactly analogous to cancer in humans but, by studying it, technicians expect that they may be led to a greater understanding of cell growth in general.

It is a long step from cold-blooded reptiles to human beings, but the fundamental building block of all living things is the cell. Consequently, knowledge gained about cells, regardless of its origin, is invaluable. What makes this reptile study particularly valuable is the fact that transmission of the growth from one snake to the other is so positive. Such reliability isn't found in other experimental work. It would be ironic indeed if this were to prove to be the clue to what scientists are seeking. Back to Nature, back to the fundamental reptilian world for the answers!

PERENNIAL MONORAIL

By William Karney

PERMANENT TRANSPORTATION is in a predicament. Because the automobile exists in enormous quantities, transportation authorities are about ready to try any method at all of moving people en masse. The future requires this because cities are becoming vast sprawling areas, needing high-speed vehicles to service them, vehicles which will not occupy the already overcrowded roads. Perennially, someone proposes a monorail system.

The latest proposal along these lines concerns such monorail transport for western cities like San Francisco and Los Angeles, which are gigantic complexes of factories, dwelling-places and workshops sprawled over hundreds and hundreds of square miles, inadequately linked by antiquated rail and bus systems, incapable of handling the tremendous numbers of people who commute. Poor transportation breeds its own troubles in a vicious circle. People use automobiles which add to the confusion and interfere with the public transport. Thus, with time, the system grows increasingly bad.

A monorail system would solve this. Supported by slender steel pillars, an overhead rail could carry high-speed monorail cars completely independent of the ground. Inherently the control problems and the frictional effects are trivial in a monorail system and it offers great saving, terrific speed and acceleration, and low construction and operating costs. Yet because of the novelty of the method, designers have hesitated to construct it. This in spite of successful operations on an old tried-and-true monorail system.

It is not generally known that, linking the industrial towns of Elberfeld and Barmen in Germany, is a monorail train system a half century old. Three hundred million passengers have ridden this nine-mile-long system whose trains travel at the conservative speed of only thirty miles per hour. In spite of its ancient vintage and rather complex construction, this method of passenger transport has proved perfectly sound and to all intents and purposes it will be in operation for another half century. It consists of simple slanted steel pillars set at about a forty-five-degree angle supporting the monorails, along which the trains glide suspended from simple inverted two-wheel trucks.

Engineers familiar with the success of the system are using it as a lever to get some attention here. America is a land of motion and travel, and anything which promises to relieve the tremendous traffic congestion problems which face us should be given a try. The future demands it!



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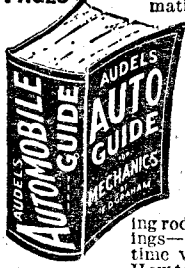
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PLANETONDS WITH TAILS!

By Jonathon Peterson

ASTRONOMERS are fairly well convinced that comets, which were once thought to be visitors from interstellar space—one-shot transients—are actually members of the Solar System, just as much as any planet. The belief that they were stellar strangers stemmed from an observation of their orbits, which seemed invariably to be hyperbolic (that is, of a curve which does not close on itself). More accurate and extensive studies show that this isn't true. Actually comets have elliptical orbits which sometimes are changed by the perturbing influence of such giant planets as Jupiter and Saturn. Thus the comets are truly members of our own planetary system.

The fact that they come into the Solar System from apparently tremendous distances doesn't change the matter at all. It simply means that their orbits are enormously elongated ellipses, much like exaggerated cigars. It has been alleged that certain comets, as yet unobserved, may have orbits extending out to the nearer stars a distance of some four light years! It is fantastic—and impressive—to realize that old Sol's influence can extend this far.

The actual nature of cometary structure is hypothetical. One theory visualizes comets as chunks of loose rock held together by gravity, a sort of animated stellar junkpile. The other, and more recent, view is that comets were formed by a condensation process of tiny particles of dust and gas in the refrigerator of outer space. In both cases the Sun's pull drew the members into the System.

Comets change with time and each time they visit the Sun they lose some of their mass through a sort of evaporation process. But the procedure occurs at such a slow rate that many hundreds of thousands or millions of visits may be made before any serious loss of mass is experienced or before the comets vanish entirely.

The visibility of comets is contingent upon their reflecting familiar sunlight. The minute particles of which they—and their tails—are composed serve as a mirror, and consequently we see only the tail of the comet when it is in a position to form this reflection. The light density of a comet's tail is certainly evident from the fact that it always points away from the Sun whether it is coming or receding. This is due to light pressure, the actual photonic force of sunlight exerting the necessary effort.

It will be an interesting day, indeed, when a space ship first matches velocity with a comet and the samples are taken—and that day will come, of course....

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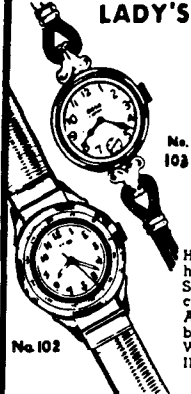
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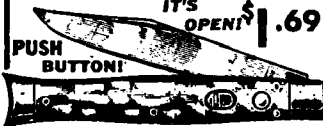
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