

# NEBULA

BI-MONTHLY

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## SCIENCE FICTION

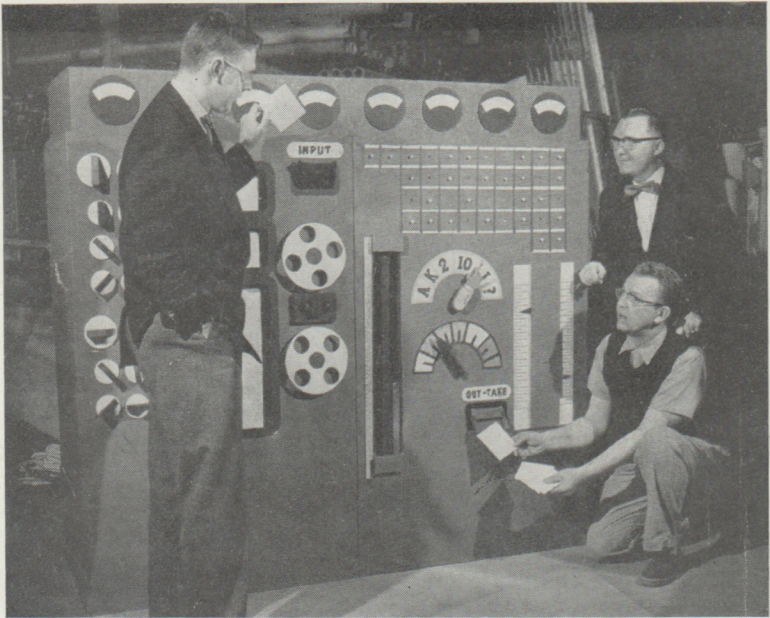
NUMBER 17



STARK

VOTED BRITAIN'S TOP SCIENCE-FICTION MAGAZINE

**It goes in here . . .**



**. . . and comes out there !**

One of the high spots of the 2nd Southeastern Science Fiction Conference held in Charlotte, North Carolina, March 3 and 4, was the demonstration of CARSCIAC, an automatic computer designed by George L. Cole. Shown are Mr Cole (kneeling, center), Robert A. Madle (right), conference chairman, and Al Alexander, editor of sponsoring Carolina Science Fiction Society's club publication, *Transuranic*.

CARSCIAC stands for Cole's Amazing Reasoning and Sensory Codifier, Including Abstruse Cerebrations. Among the many claims made for this creation are creative thought, science fiction writing, teleportation, and mass torturing of conference attendees. Mr Cole, who does not hold an electronics degree and has never met Norbert Wiener, shyly admits it's really a hoax. Perhaps not a brand-new idea, but certainly a successful program at the conference. It's already scheduled for two more appearances, including the World Convention in New York this fall.

# NEBULA

## SCIENCE FICTION

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Edited by PETER HAMILTON

Issue Number Seventeen

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All characters and events in these stories are entirely fictitious. Any resemblance to persons living or dead is purely coincidental.

# Look here . . .

In the last edition of NEBULA I announced that a novelette by that well-known author Arthur Sellings, was scheduled to appear in the present number, but owing to the fact that this story made its appearance in book form in March, I have decided to postpone its appearance in the magazine indefinitely, replacing it in this number by a shorter story "Cry Wolf" by the same author.

This decision was taken with some regret on my part as the story concerned was a particularly good one and it had already been paid for and set up ready for printing, but I know how infuriating it can be to buy a magazine only to find that a considerable portion of its contents consist of stories you have read before. Any reprinted material to be used in future editions of NEBULA will consist of short stories which I feel will have been missed by a significant proportion of readers and which are of a really outstanding nature for one reason or another.

In this way, NEBULA readers—unlike the readers of some other British science fiction magazines—are protected from buying material they have read before. After all, we have the whole of time and space to draw upon in our stories and a vast field of talent to write them, and it seems hardly necessary to use the same idea by the same authors over and over again while only succeeding in disappointing our readers. I am sure you will agree.

Other stories in this issue include another of his fascinating future tense novels by Kenneth Bulmer, who wrote one of our most successful stories last year, the unforgettable "Sunset." His latest story "Project Pseudoman" deals in an imaginative and interesting manner with the manufacture of the first artificial man and the human reactions, both on the physical and psychological level, to such a staggering step in world development.

Our novelette is by an author who has not appeared in NEBULA since its second issue three-and-a-half years ago but who has been making a very big name for himself in British science fiction writing in the meantime. I speak, of course, of John Brunner, and I am sure that, if he maintains the originality and descriptive effect he has employed in "By the Name of Man," he will appear regularly and often in NEBULA.

Besides "Cry Wolf" which I mentioned above, and which I think you will agree is a delightfully unpredictable and thought-provoking short story, we have a spine-chilling yarn of the hard reality of deep space peopled with real characters as only that master of science fiction, E. C. Tubb, can draw them. I am pleased to be able to tell you, incidentally, that although Mr Tubb is editing his own science fiction magazine at the moment, his stories will continue to appear regularly in NEBULA.

*Peter Hamilton*

# By The Name Of Man

*He was adviser, protector and god of his people. A rival god was more than he could cope with, however*

*Illustrated by Harry Turner*

It was raining.

Lattimer turned over on his back and wished for a yielding plasti-foam mattress instead of this coarse hard mat of packed leaves. But he had wished for that every morning for three years, and it wasn't getting him one.

For a few minutes he lay and listened to the steady beat of the rain thundering across the roof. The clock on the wall was an importation from Earth, and kept Greenwich time, but he had grown used to the mental gymnastics of compensation and preferred it to the complex self-adjusting models that they used at the port. His subconscious calculated that it lacked fifteen minutes of rising time, give or take a minute.

He turned over and buried his face in the pillow. Somehow the fifteen minutes went in a flash, and there came a soft tapping at the door.

He threw the blanket aside and stood up, rubbing his eyes. After pulling on a robe, he went to answer.

The native bowed ceremoniously, and a light, dulled by the heavy veil of overcast, gleamed on his rain-slicked fur. It wasn't really fur, of course—it only served to trap his body oils and keep his sensitive skin dry in the unceasing wetness. Even after three years, Lattimer had to wait until the native straightened before he could recognise him and make the formal acknowledgment.

"Is it a good day?" he asked.

"It is a good day," said the native. His head came up and Lattimer identified him as Ris. He folded his forelimb webs back against the bone, revealing the basket of food he had protected under them. "I bring the offering. Is it well?"

"It is well," said Lattimer. It was, this time. His mouth watered at the sight of the paplet and broomak the basket held.

The native lowered it to the floor inside the entrance and retreated, bowing again. Lattimer waited for him to retire properly—it was unseemly for Ris to see him take the basket up—but he appeared strangely hesitant. Risking—as he always had to do—being found wrong, he said, "The audience today will be when the shadow of the time-tree reaches the fifth mark."

Ris bowed again, but still did not turn and leave. This implied trouble of some kind, thought Lattimer. He cast around in his mind for a possible explanation, but was forced to give it up. He said, "Ris may speak that which he wishes."

Ris's webs spread and re-folded in a gesture of nervousness. It was rare for the freedom of speech to be given except in full audience—but it was a signal honour, all the same. He said, "May it please you, there is the question of the human in the forest."

Lattimer froze into startled immobility. This was impossible! There wasn't another man within two hundred miles, except the maintenance crew across the ridge, and they did not venture alone from their own colony. He kept his face carefully mask-like while he answered with an affected air of boredom. "What of him?"

"He has remained in one place by himself for a day and part of a day—so long as it would take the time-tree's shadow to reach from the first to the fourth mark. We cannot understand his words, and he will not leave his place."

God almighty, thought Lattimer—and the concept brought a wry smile to his eyes, though it got no further—a man out alone in the forest. Where the hell did he come from? More important—what was he doing?

Aloud, he said, "You have bought him offerings?"

"Assuredly. Even such as we have brought to you."

He wouldn't starve, then. "There is no need to do more," he added aloud, his mind working furiously. He didn't dare disrupt the standard cycle of an audience day. First there was the audience itself, and he had gathered prior word that there was a long case to hear. Then he had told Chief Miglaun that he wished to survey the new plantings of curra and paplet in the paddies to the west of the village. Then there was the fact that this made the fourth rain in three days, and the levee

surrounding those fields was none too strong. He couldn't get away before nightfall, in all likelihood, and the natives wouldn't stir out into the forest once it was dark.

But equally, he couldn't leave a man out there. Maybe, if the stranger was carrying a radio pack, he could contact him, but as far as locating him went, it would be chancy homing in the forest on a weak signal. The static build-up would be partially released by this rain, but the prospect was far from good.

Well, if the worst came to the worst, he reasoned, he could postpone the inspection of the fields on the grounds that his brother wished to confer with him.

"I thank you, Ris," he said. "Your concern for my brother is well-meant, though of course needless. Perhaps I shall visit him this day."

Seal-black, moving with the sinuous grace of a seal, Ris retreated down the hill towards the village. Lattimer closed the door and stood leaning against it. Now what in hell was he in for? Wasn't it bad enough just being here and running the place——?

He picked up the basket and transferred its contents to the food-cupboard. Absently, he selected the best of the paplets and dropped it in the cleaner to be readier for his breakfast. Then he put on his best breeches and slicker, and a pair of thigh boots—the mud would be somewhere around knee-level after this rain. He combed his beard, wishing that someone would invent an everlasting razor-blade, or better yet, a depilatory which didn't make his face sore, and trimmed off a few untidy wisps of hair behind his ears. All the time his mind was working over the problem of who the stranger might be.

In the middle of breakfast he got up from his chair and tried the locator on his radio. The rain had only discharged part of the static from the overcast, and sighting was bad, but he got some sort of blip from a spot almost five miles off in the forest—on a rough line to the spaceport and not far from the pegging-ground where he'd split the last jume. It was very faint, but it looked sufficiently like the emanation from a tired personal beacon to make him sure of his estimate.

That was bad. There was nothing on the communicating band—only the continuous weather call from the port, dimmed by the mountains. Either the stranger hadn't got a talkie, or he was tired of trying to get an answer—or he was afraid of getting an answer.

If his last guess was right, he was headed for a whole load of trouble.

He glanced at the clock and saw with a start that he was already a minute late for audience. He shut off the locator and made for the door, only to stop, face about and come back hastily for his blaster. It would

never do to attend an audience without his power-symbol. And it was a measure of his agitation that he had forgotten.

The audience was held in the centre of the village near the time-tree which had been one of his first jobs when he arrived. He had got tired of having no standard of time by which to arrange his meetings with the natives, though they weren't worried by it. So he had installed a tree and put rings around it, designing them carefully so that the faint, dim shadow cast by the big bright blur that was the sun would intersect them at easily identifiable times. It was a chancy, fallible system but it was rare for the sun to be so blotted out by the overcast that it was quite impossible for a shadow to be detected. And it had the great point of complete non-mechanism in its favour.

He arrived, walking slowly as soon as he came in sight, to find the elders of the village already assembled. Ris, he noticed, was receiving glances of envy from his neighbours. He must have spread the word that he had been granted free speech with Lattimer at rising time.

Lattimer hid his smile and took his place on a small dais before the council square with the slow dignity befitting a man. He said, "Let Chief Miglaun stand forth."

In the front row of squatting natives, the chief slid forward lithely. He said, "May it please you, we have two disputes among us."

"I will hear them," nodded Lattimer. He frowned with the effort of concentration. It was a difficult task keeping his mind on the petty squabbles of these people when there was a man loose in the forest. It was not what the natives might do that worried him—it was what the man might do. He could upset quite a lot of things, not least himself.

The first case proved easily resolvable. He had in fact settled an identical dispute some months before, but the natives had not yet reached the stage of judging by precedent. For them, life was still one long today.

When the parties had stated their claims in the matter of the disputed land-trade, he gave judgment without hesitation.

The second case was the one he had expected for some weeks. One of the chief's egg-sibs was involved, which made it inevitable that it would in time be passed out of the tribal jurisdiction to the court of final appeal—that was himself. Nonetheless, the chief had put up a steady fight to have it resolved in favour of his sib, and Lattimer thought he detected a slight air of displeasure in the attitude of the elders. He gave himself up to the tangles of the law with almost heart-felt relief. The necessity for passing judgment meant that he had no chance to make up his mind about the stranger—yet.



Have to do something about old Miglaun, he reflected. It's bad for tribal discipline to find fault with their chief, but if he tries to drag in nepotism I'll have to depose him.

The case dragged on. The rain lightened and let up. The shadow, faint though it was, of the time-tree reached the sixth and final mark and began to drift back. While he listened to the evidence, Lattimer made his decision. This was going to be tough on Miglaun, but it was his own fault. He had got himself the chieftaincy by a bit of sharp practice in the first place, and the flurry of electing a new one would give Lattimer a respite from the proposed tour of inspection. That meant he could slip out into the forest, taking a couple of non-partisans—say Ris and Flaok, the two Awakeners, who could not meddle in politics because of their religious office. They would be able to put him in touch with the stranger easily enough.

He stood up from his chair. Instantly the natives stopped their wrangling and looked at him expectantly.

He mustered an expression of disdain and contempt. "You will find a new chief," he said shortly. "Chief Miglaun has tried to sway my judgement from the path of justice with fair words on behalf of his egg-sib, thinking that I will pay more heed to his sayings than to those of a common member of the clan. Be it known that this is not so. In my ears have the words of an honest commoner more weight than those of a partial chief. This case may be re-stated when Miglaun no longer has the garb of chieftaincy to colour his evidence. I have spoken."

A wonderful idea in theory, thought Lattimer wryly. He wished it could be more genuinely applied. Then he looked tensely around the circle of elders to see if his words had met with approval. They would be carried out regardless, of course—he had "spoken"—but it was as well to keep the goodwill of the elders. With a faint stirring of relief he noticed that they all relaxed together. That was what they wanted, then.

He added. "The audience is adjourned until there is a new chief. Ris!"

The senior Awakener shuffled forward through the crowd.

"I desire that you and Flaokh, whom I have debarred from chieftaincy in view of your high office in my service, shall accompany me now that I go to confer with my brother in the forest. Is it well?"

"It is well," said Ris, his webs furling and unfurling as if he was trying to convey his surprise and delight simultaneously.

It took Lattimer only a few minutes to check that the blip he had caught on the locator was still in the same place, and to make sure that the drizzle of the rain had not damped the magazine of his blaster. His



best clothes would have to do for this trip—the election of the chief might go through smoothly for once, one never knew, and he might have to re-commence the audience at short notice.

Then there came a hesitant tapping at the door again, and he opened it and went out to find Ris and Flaokh waiting on the stoep. He said, “Is it well?”

“It is well,” the Awakeners replied in chorus.

“Then come with me.”

He set a brisk but not undignified pace with which the natives had little trouble in keeping up. The path they were to take led them past the fields he had intended to survey, and he noted with a slight frown that the *levcc* was not doing so well as he had hoped. The incessant rain had pulped the tough bark of the stanchions into softness, and that meant a new working party out here tomorrow. He couldn't spare them today, of course. In some ways it was a pity at times like this that he had insisted on all adult members of the tribe attending audiences and elections and taking part in tribal affairs, but it would set a useful precedent at later stages of their development.

Beside him, the two natives kept silence, except for the splashing of

their feet in the wet earth. He hoped devoutly that he wouldn't have to ask them for guidance—the ability of one man to talk to another across miles of country was one of the deepest-rooted of their articles of faith. Unfortunately, since the stranger either had no talkie or was using none, he had to rely on the only too fallible locator trace.

After a while he condescended to relax a little, and said, "Whom do the people say shall be the next chief?"

Ris, flapping his webs, answered. "It will be most likely Chinsel. People remember the commendation you gave him for his planning of the paddies. It was even as you said: his work was of a standard that would not have shamed a man."

Lattimer considered. It was good to find that they were coming to recognise administrative ability, and it was quite true that Chinsel had shown a remarkable intuitive grasp of engineering requirements in his design for the levee. Of course, it had had to be strengthened three times in as many months, but that was to be expected, and certainly it was praiseworthy to succeed as well as that with no more than hints by way of guidance from Lattimer.

Ris appeared to think he had been over-bold in comparing Chinsel to a man, even in view of his privileged position. He fell behind slightly, and allowed Flaokh to come up beside Lattimer. The party continued in silence.

In the light gravity the man had the advantage of making fast time where the ground was firm, but where it had melted into mud the natives made that up, and they took barely an hour to reach the spot at which the blip had shown. Lattimer mentally crossed his fingers. If the man had moved, he would have a *lot* of difficulty explaining why he could not find him.

They crossed the pegging-ground where the monstrous carcass of the last jume to come marauding through this part of the country lay stretched out on its wooden frame. Beneath it the little pottery jars which caught the valuable secretions from its five major glands were almost full, and he made a mental note to have them collected. The natives' metabolism had not yet come under serious study, and the existence of a natural source of antibiotics for them was not to be overlooked. The forty-foot bulk of the monster had shrunk slightly, but it would take another month for its flesh to become soft enough for the natives to carve it up and bury it.

They skirted the body. On the far side of the clearing a faint trail showed between the trees, and Lattimer followed it optimistically. As it turned out, he was correct in his choice. Only a few yards further on

three baskets of offerings lay untouched at the mouth of a friendly-palm, whose matted leaves formed a sort of vegetable cavern ten feet deep.

The natives drew back in awe and hesitation. Lattimer told them to come forward and not to be afraid. He raised his voice and called in the native language, "Come forth, brother!"

There was a cautious stirring at the mouth of the palm, and a man looked out from between the leaves. At the sight of the natives he drew back, cursing.

"Is the human angry?" demanded Ris anxiously. "Have we offended him? We have brought him only such gifts as you have accepted."

Latimer motioned him to silence. "I shall now speak to him in the human tongue," he said quietly. "I shall find the reason for my brother's displeasure."

*Brother*, he thought. *Egg-sib* was the only translation of its exact meaning—but somehow, though he accepted the precise semantic equivalent mentally when thinking of the monosexual natives, he still clung to the human aspect when he referred to another man.

The two natives shied at mention of the holy language, and scuttered to the edge of the clearing. "*Allo!*" said Lattimer in International. "*Kis é tu? O é amik!*"

Again the face appeared. It was dirty. It bore a ten-day-old beard that was matted and untidy. Its eyes were tired and inflamed. Lattimer was profoundly glad that Ris and Flaokh had never seen any down-and-outs from whom they might have drawn conclusions about this specimen of man.

He saw Lattimer, and instantly a blaster was poking through the gap in the foliage. The natives saw the power-symbol and rejoiced aloud, keenly.

"*Ne tir!*" said Latimer sharply. "*Keské tu fas, ne tir!*" He searched the orther's face for some sign of understanding. Apparently he didn't speak International, though it was the safest bet. He tried English, and repeated, "Don't shoot! Whatever you do, don't shoot!"

"So you do talk human," said the stranger sullenly. He lowered the blaster and stepped to the mouth of the cavern. Lattimer looked him up and down.

"You've had a rough time of it," he said evenly. "What was the trouble?"

The stranger appeared to be considering. Then he holstered the blaster reluctantly. His clothes were badly torn—Lattimer guessed he had stumbled into a zareba bush somewhere—and his arms and legs were marked with its scratches. He said, "What are those things? Pets?"

Lattimer hid his surprise. "They're my Awakeners," he said. "A couple of senior officials from my village. It's only five miles back that way. I can offer you food and clothes and a bath. And something for those scratches of yours."

The other did not appear to have heard the last part of the statement. He was gazing incredulously at the natives. At length he laughed briefly. "Senior officials, you call them! They look like a couple of performing seals to me."

"They do, don't they?" agreed Lattimer. "By the way, my name's Lattimer. I'm a Resident, as you must have guessed."

"Can't see anyone dropping in on this place for more than a quick look-see," said the other. "Name's—Tomson. Jim Tomson."

Lattimer failed to comment on the hesitation. "You can't stay here," he said reasonably. "I'm afraid it'll be some time before the next car from the port looks in on my place, but I can let you have a guide to the foot of the ridge, if you like, and the next Resident along will see you through the rest of the way. How come you're here, anyway?"

Tomson hesitated again. "Came with a group of prospectors," he said finally. "I mislaid the rest of the party. I expect there'll be a search out for me."

"I suppose so," said Lattimer calmly. He turned and made for the narrow path back through the forest. After a pause, Tomson fell into step with him.

He said nothing until they reached the pegging-ground. Then the sight of the monstrous carcass of the jume made him catch his breath, and he asked with an edge of fear on his voice, "Is that thing—dangerous?"

"It was," said Lattimer. He gave quick directions to Ris to pick up the jars beneath the frame and replace them with new ones.

"Are there—many of those things?" Tomson added.

"Not around here. That was the first we'd had in nearly four months," said Lattimer casually. "They're a bit of a problem further south. They're so mindless they don't object to a blaster and tough enough to take any kind of a bullet without noticing. The natives catch them in dead-falls and starve them to death—they have a faster metabolism than most creatures on the planet. Takes about three days to finish them."

With commendable sense, Flaokh had thrown the stale offerings out of one of the baskets nearby and packed the jars full of jume secretion in soft moss. He announced their readiness to Lattimer, and the party set out again. Tomson cast awed glances over his shoulder as they left the pegging-ground.

"I was lucky I didn't meet one of those things while I was out here," he ventured. "Or I wouldn't have lasted long." He tried a chuckle which died on him.

Lattimer turned an unsmiling face to him. "It's nothing to joke about," he said soberly. "A jume is very careless about the way it kills people. It tends to break them up and leave them to die. Human beings interfere with its digestion."

Tomson turned his eyes firmly to the trail ahead.

They left Ris and Flaokh at the village, and continued up towards the Residency, which stood on the only piece of fairly high ground within miles. It was common to find such a spot chosen—perhaps the natives subconsciously assumed when building them that the men from beyond the sky wanted to be as near home as possible. Here Lattimer fetched out his first-aid kit, swabbed the scratches on Tomson's arms and legs with surgical spirit, and spread them with a tissue regenerant.

He realised as he returned the kit to the cupboard that the long walk had made him uncommonly hungry. He asked the other curiously, "How did you manage for food?"

"I had my emergency pack," said Tomson. He gestured at it, lying across a chair along with the little personal radio beacon which had guided Lattimer to his refuge.

"But that can't have lasted you long." Lattimer was taking paplets, broomak and chirrits from the food store. "Why didn't you take the offerings the natives brought? Or didn't you see them?"

"Offerings?" Tomson stared. Then he gestured at the fruits Lattimer had set out on the table. "You mean you eat this stuff? Is it safe?"

Lattimer needed absolutely no more confirmation of his suspicions. Any prospector who turned himself loose on the country without learning the local vegetation was doomed to a very short career. Ergo, Tomson was no prospector. He kept his face carefully calm as he said, "Certainly. They taste quite good, too."

Apprehensively, Tomson helped himself to a chirrit. When he bit it, he grimaced at the sharp flavour, but after a few mouthfuls he nodded in appreciation.

He ate as if he was half-starved.

Across the table, Lattimer kept up a careful front, trying not to let it appear that he was watching the other. Not a prospector . . . That made it a better than even chance that Tomson—or whatever his real name was—was running away from someone.

After a while, the latter finished his food and glanced around. "Got a drink?" he asked.

"Surely," said Lattimer. He reached for the faucet of the rain-purifier. "That's one thing we're never short of."

"Ach, I didn't mean water," said Tomson. "A real drink."

Lattimer twisted back in his chair. "No," he answered politely. "No alcohol. The bacteria here don't ferment in the same way as terrestrial ones."

Tomson pulled a wry face. "Well, guess I'll have to take your word for it. No tobacco either, I suppose."

"Won't grow and won't keep. Only wet-belt stuff will take to the climate. I don't use it, anyway."

"Pity." Tomson tilted back his chair and nodded out of the window at the village. "What is this place, anyway?"

"My village," said Lattimer without a trace of conceit. "I told you—I'm a Resident."

"Government agent?" said Tomson. There was something about the way he said it. Something—deliberately casual.

"In a way," Lattimer told him, shrugging. "I have a charter, but I don't tangle with the Service boys. Too much red tape. I'm here to keep the natives respectful."

He phrased it with care. Maybe Tomson would take it the wrong way.

He did. "Then all these animals—they're what they call Venu-sians?" he said. "This village—they built it?"

Lattimer nodded.

"I thought they were savages," Tomson went on. "It doesn't look too bad from what I saw of it. Do you have a lot of trouble keeping them in line?"

"I haven't up to now," said Lattimer pointedly.

Tomson missed the point. He looked the Resident over with narrow eyes, as if assessing his toughness. He seemed to form a favourable opinion—favourable as far as Lattimer was concerned.

"How long before this car from the port which you mentioned?" he inquired.

"Going on two years," said Lattimer quietly. "I'm due for relief in twenty-two months from now."

He rose and began to throw paplet hulls into the dispenser. "Of course, as I said, I can arrange for guides to get you back to the port."

Tomson shuddered elaborately. "If you don't mind," he said, "I'd rather not face that forest again just yet."

"As you like," said Lattimer. "I'd be glad of some human company." He stressed the last word but one very slightly. "But if you

plan to stay long, you'll have to learn the native language."

"Don't these seals talk English?"

Lattimer looked at him levelly. "They're forbidden to learn any human language," he said. "They might overhear things."

Tomson grinned lopsidedly. "I get," he said softly. "It might make them less respectful."

"Exactly," answered Lattimer. Heaven above, what had he done to deserve this?

There was a quiet knock at the door. Tomson started and tensed himself as Lattimer went to open. He found Flaokh waiting.

"Do you wish to continue your audience today?" the junior Awakener inquired politely, "or do you wish to confer further with your egg-sib?"

Lattimer checked the time. "I shall be present in the village when the shadow passes the third mark," he said. "As a mark of your respect, my brother"—same word, but he would never reconcile himself to the meaning of egg-sib in a human connection—"has announced that he will also be present."

Floakh withdrew with the appropriate ceremony, and Lattimer turned to his involuntary visitor. "We'll have to go down to the village," he said. "I adjourned an audience this morning and told them to elect a new chief—the last one was trying to use his position to get favours for his relatives. It'll mean you coming with me, of course. They thought you were displeased when you didn't take their offerings in the forest, so you'll have to present yourself and show them you mean no harm."

Tomson stared unashamedly. Then he guffawed. "Sort of token of goodwill?" he asked. "All right—you know the ropes. Keep 'em happy at all costs, sort of thing."

"Not that exactly," said Lattimer. "By the way, I shall address you as——" he gave the native word for egg-sib. "To them, all men are as brothers. They haven't got a word for 'brother,' of course—they're hermaphroditic, like snails—but that is the nearest equivalent. It means 'born of the same egg'."

Tomson laughed again. "I'd have hated to share an egg with anybody. All right. I'll look wise if you talk to me—is that the idea?"

"That's the idea," said Lattimer, forcing a smile.

For the next few days he refrained carefully from using the communication band of the radio. Tomson might have taken it the wrong way. If the port knew of the latter's presence on Venus, it was ten to



one that they had assumed him dead in the forest.

Fortunately, of course, for the first few weeks at any rate, until he felt sure of himself, Tomson would remain on his best behaviour, and Lattimer managed to make the best of that time. What he would do when the other man started to make a nuisance of himself, he didn't know and hardly cared to think about. The risk of making an open break with him was too great to be contemplated. But he was walking a most horrible dangerous tight-rope.

It isn't easy for a man to be a god.

In the hope of putting off the inevitable, Lattimer took Tomson out and showed him his achievements—the drainage system, the levees around the paddy fields, the native pottery and housing designs. But Tomson remained steadily uninterested. He was content to let time go by in the life of comfort and relaxation which the constant care of the natives provided for him.

Almost three months went by before Lattimer's nerves began to tremble under the strain, and he broached the subject of the other's departure. At the first and second delicate mentions of it, Tomson brushed it aside, but at the third Lattimer was a little clumsy.

It was almost nightfall, and the rain had started again. After three years its drumming meant little to Lattimer, except to make him worried as always for the strength of the levees, but it still had a grating effect on Tomson. He snapped at Lattimer harshly, and then seemed to read a second meaning into the Resident's words.

He sat down slowly at the table. "You know," he said softly.

It was no good bandying words by this time. "Yes, I know," said Lattimer levelly. "You're no prospector, Jim. You're on the run from someone—at a guess, you stowed away on a Venus ship because Earth was considerably too hot for you. I've known it since you came here."

Tomson stared unblinkingly at him. "Why didn't you turn me in?" he said.

"And risk having you start a fight with me—or with the Service when they came to pick you up? Do you think I'm that crazy?"

"Spell it out," said Tomson coldly. "It's beginning to make a pattern—and a mighty dirty pattern at that. You're scared of these black inhuman savages, aren't you? Why?"

Tiredly—he had had another long and complex case to solve at audience, and Chinsel was proving as difficult a chief as Miglaun had been—tiredly Lattimer said, "No, I'm not afraid of them. I'm afraid of myself."

"Obviously," sneered Tomson. "I've been here three months now,

and I've seen that these natives are getting to think they're very smart. *Very* smart. They'll be setting up to rival men next. You're coddling them, when what they need is someone to take a strong line with them—teach them who is master. You even let them argue with you—I've heard you do it!"

Lattimer folded his hands to stop them trembling. "They are smart," he said with an effort. "They figure their ideas out for themselves. They understand things like soil preservation and rotation of crops. Given another thirty to fifty years, and they'll be at the fertiliser level. They can work stone, they have fire—metal-working is only a few steps away. They're smart, all right."

"All the more reason to keep them down," said Tomson. "I know what I'd do if I were in your position. I'd keep them respectful, all right."

"Not for long," said Lattimer. He thought of other ways of solving the problem, but there remained only one that might work—and an appeal to a man like this would probably be wasted. Still, he had to try.

"You'd have learnt this tomorrow or the next day," he said. "It's worship day."

"What does that mean?" demanded Tomson.

"You and I are gods," said Lattimer soberly.

Tomson suddenly began to grin. "You mean that?" he said incredulously. "These creatures think we're gods? Well, isn't that just too sweet?"

"It's no joke," said Lattimer shortly. "It sure as hell is no joke at all. Have you ever tried to be infallible? To be just, merciful, humane, on top of giving advice on every kind of subject from civil engineering to agrobiolgy? It isn't easy."

Tomson wasn't listening. He was grinning widely as if he had just been struck by a wonderful idea. "Well, isn't that just perfect?" he said. "Boy, what a set-up! I'm a god!"

Lattimer looked at him calmly. "Yes. Up to now you've behaved more or less like one, too—at any rate you've been polite and careful. Keep it that way. We're the only driving force in these people's lives. Their only motive for good behaviour is to please the supernatural beings who came on wings of fire from beyond the sky. We can't afford to be wrong, Jim—or we'd lose Venus."

"Lose Venus? To a bunch of performing seals?"

Lattimer nodded. "We depend on them—for food, for a labour supply. We need their co-operation. If once we fail from the role

they've assigned to us, we can expect organised opposition."

Tomson hefted his blaster. "What can they do against human weapons?" he demanded. "We've got everything they haven't."

"You've seen a jume," answered Lattimer. "The natives have known how to deal with creatures bigger, faster and more dangerous than men for centuries. We, on the other hand, lost the whole of two expeditions through the jumes."

Tomson cut him short. "This is idiotic!" he declared. "I know what I'd do if I had a lot of savages calling me a god. I'd get some profit out of it. You're more a slave than a master."

"Not at all," said Lattimer. "I'm simply having to live and act like a human being instead of an animal for the first time in my life. I'm having to keep my temper—to observe all the virtues——"

"Including chastity," said Tomson sourly. "Or doesn't it worry you?"

Lattimer half rose, his face murderous. As he fought to control himself, Tomson gestured significantly with his blaster. "I've—already killed a man," he said quietly. "They can't do any more to me for killing two."

The Resident sank back into his seat. "Your threats don't bother me," he said. "I'm going to give you a choice. I'm prepared to keep you here until I'm relieved—what you do then is up to you. You haven't done me any wrong—yet. And, as I told you, I don't much like to tangle with the Service. They're one of my major liabilities in this job—they have a point of view too much like yours. But if you do one single thing to make this tribe distrust human beings—if you try to make capital for yourself out of your position—I'll either burn you down or turn you in."

He stared at the other man. "Is that fair enough?"

Tomson laughed and nodded.

It rained all that night and went on the next day. It was the longest single rain he could remember in three years and the natives weren't interested enough in the past to recall a precedent. It was bad for the levees that held back the swamp-water from the reclaimed paddies, and those were spreading by degrees. He went out the following morning on a tour of inspection with Chinsel, and discussed strengthening them again. The rain welled wetly down his neck, and added to his miseries, but fortunately Chinsel was more co-operative than usual today, since his own reputation was largely founded on the building of the levees.

On his return to the village, Lattimer held a full audience and announced the postponement of worship day. He implied carefully that the gods were being kind to their people and thinking of their safety before their homage. The gesture was met with appreciative web-spreadings.

Instead of the ceremony, then, the following day—which was mercifully dry again—was passed by the adult members of the clan in packing tough young saplings and interwoven reed hurdles into the sodden earth of the dams to reinforce them. When night fell, Lattimer carried out a final survey and decided, regretfully, that it would have to do. He hoped that the rain would hold off long enough for the drainage system to clear the water down to a safe level.

But it set in again.

He was soaked and uncomfortable when he got back to the Residency, but the worry for the villagers' safety had displaced Tomson from his mind.

Now, though, he had to find the man engaged in trying to teach one of the younglings to fetch a stick. He sat in the partial shelter of the overhand of the stoep and tossed the piece of wood out into the muddy court. Obediently, but not understanding the reason for the action, the child was bringing it back to him.

Lattimer paused in the concealment of a clump of trees some way from the house. Tomson did it again. He cuffed the child when it did not run fast enough for his amusement. The poor beast was patently dropping with weariness.

Lattimer summed up the situation narrow-eyed. Then he drew his blaster. "I'll burn you where you stand if you make a move," he called in English. Then to the child he added, "Go home."

It scampered off as fast as its tired legs would carry it.

When it was out of sight, Lattimer walked slowly up to Tomson where he waited on the stoep. He kept his blaster aligned on the other's belly. When he came within speaking distance, he said, "What was the idea of that, Tomson?"

"I got bored," said Tomson softly. "So what?"

Latimer reversed his blaster and hit Tomson in the face, twice with the rubber of the butt. The other staggered back, cursing, his hands clutching his cheeks.

"I warned you," said Latimer. "That was for the beating you gave the kid. I'm going to turn you in."

Tomson mastered his pain and surprise. He dropped his hands again. "Seals have pups, not kids," he said. "So you think you're

going to turn me in. You wouldn't leave your faithful followers on worship day, would you?"

"I'm not going," said Lattimer. "I'll call the Service." "Well, isn't that interesting?" said Tomson. He backed before the muzzle of the weapon and went through the open door. He seemed strangely unconcerned at the threat.

As soon as Lattimer came inside, he realised where the other's confidence lay. The radio was scattered in shreds across the floor.

He lowered the blaster. "All right, Tomson," he said. "You've won one point. I should have blasted you earlier. You can think yourself lucky that I daren't start a fight where the natives can see you, or I'd give you the biggest beating you ever had. But worship day is tomorrow, and it's quite true that I can't leave now. However, I'm better off than you. You can't leave at all. You can't face the forest—especially not when another jume has been reported from the foot of the ridge." He added this lie with a perfectly straight face.

"But the day after worship day," he finished, "you will be back at the port and ready to be psyched. Clear?"

Tomson grinned insultingly. "As mud," he said blandly. "You're a bloody good liar, Lattimer."

"I'm not lying," said Lattimer, holstering his blaster. "By the day after tomorrow at latest, you will be ready for psyching."

He said it with a calm certainty that took the bluster out of Tomson's attitude and left him sullenly undecided.

They could not avoid each other in the narrow confines of the Residency. But avoidance was no part of Lattimer's plan. He kept Tomson carefully in sight for the remainder of the evening, and when the other had bunked down for the night he stealthily filched his blaster and stored the few remaining charges in his own ammunition belt, which he wore for the rest of the night. Now that the other had shown himself completely unreliable, there was no doubt left in his mind as to what he would have to do.

But it was a long time before he fell asleep.

Sharply, at rising time, Ris and Flaokh came together—worship day awakening was an honour not to be partitioned. He tried fiercely to conceal the tiredness consequent on his lack of sleep, and as he concentrated on acknowledging their greeting in the formal manner, he became aware that the rain was pelting down anew, and that the early chants of worship day were keening up from the village. The native music was odd to human ears, but he had learned to detect the sombre grandeur of the ritual songs. Besides, ritual was the only occasion on

which the entire tribe sang together.

Across the room, Tomson opened his eyes.

"You'd better get up," said Lattimer. "There isn't much time before the ceremony opens."

"You want me to come out and sit in the rain with a lot of seals staring at me?" said Tomson scornfully. "No, thank you! I'm staying right here."

He listened. "God, what a foul row!" he added. "What is it?"

"That's the morning hymn," said Lattimer. "I told you to get up!"

Tomson tutted gently. "It'd look awfully strange if you brought me down at the point of a gun, wouldn't it?" he said. "Have fun!"

"All right," said Lattimer calmly. He took a coil of the natives' tough fibre rope from a hook on the wall. "If you aren't coming now, I'll have to make sure you don't come at all." With a swift motion he twitched the light blanket from Tomson's body, and as the other sat up with a startled cry, he struck him on the temple with the butt of his blaster.

He bound and gagged the unconscious man with scientific thoroughness, leaving himself barely time to dress before the Awakeners returned to usher him down to the council square. He would be hungry before the day was out, not having had time to eat his breakfast, but his own discomfort weighed lightly against the risk of leaving Tomson free. He managed to shield the unconscious body from the view of the natives when he let himself out to prevent them noticing him and wondering.

He took his place on the dais as for an audience without making any mention of Tomson's failure to appear. Let them reflect that the ways of gods were not those of themselves, he thought grimly. The ceremony began.

It was complex and highly symbolic, with the interminable ritual of the primitive. And always, there was the keening sound of the natives singing, singing . . .

The service wound on its slow way, each member of the clan making his personal devotion to the living god, and the rain thundered across the ground. Lattimer noticed anxious glances being exchanged between Chinsel and the elders, and the latter redoubled the volume of the song. This was without a doubt the biggest rain on record. He composed himself and went on trying to be a god, while his stomach growled in hunger and the water soaked into his clothes.

The ritual was barely halfway through—Chinsel had just risen to make formal acknowledgement of the tribe's debt to man—when he heard a sound which he had been subconsciously fearing he would hear ever



since he took his place that morning. It filled him with sick horror.

He turned to see what he knew must be there. Tomson. And drunk.

The first-aid kit, thought Lattimer desperately. He remembered where I kept it. There was surgical spirit in the kit. He must have taken that!

The other man weaved an unsteady path down the track from the Residency, waving his uncharged blaster. He was shouting in the native tongue, the accent bad, but the meaning of his words unmistakable. "Stop this row! Stop it! You're driving me mad!"

Lattimer rose to his feet. The song died spasmodically away, while the elders looked for some proof that this was no more than a bad dream—that their gods had not failed them.

Lattimer wondered frantically how he was going to solve this one. In a few seconds, Tomson had undone three years' careful patient work; the clan would have to be wiped out to prevent the rumours spreading. How Tomson had managed to work free worried him, but he forced himself to disregard that while there was still a chance to answer the major question. But the Service would not come now—

He was reaching slowly for his blaster to burn the drunkard down, when in the near-silence left by the cessation of the song he made out a sound which he could never have believed he would be glad to hear. It was a lurching, grinding, splashing sound, distinguished from the noise of the rain by its sheer volume.

The levees had broken!

Above its noise he shouted, "My brother has come to warn us that the village is in danger! Stop the worship! The homage of my people is not to be placed above their safety!"

He confirmed the words by leaping from the dais and running towards Tomson. His blaster stuck in its sodden holster, but he wrenched it free. "All right!" he said softly, barely to be heard above the rush of water. "I've got you out of this one, Tomson—but that was your very last chance." He brought the weapon up under the other's chin, hoping that the blow would pass unnoticed by the crowd behind him, and Tomson folded tidily at the knees and waist.

"Ris! Floakh!" shouted Lattimer.

The two Awakeners came running.

"My brother ran so fast to warn us of the levee breaking that he can go no further," he improvised hastily. "Take him to the Residency and place him on my bed. Then let all the clan gather there. The village will probably be destroyed."

He turned and watched the black figures rushing from the square to salvage a few precious belongings before the levee wall finally crumbled and drowned the whole low ground of the village.

It took barely ten minutes for the flood to finish its work.

Lattimer stood at the door looking out over the already subsiding waters. Three years' work—gone in a day, he thought. All the carefully reclaimed paddies of paplet, all the curra and most of the chirrits—all the houses except the Residency, and that lives only because it is a temple and is built on high ground. Another symbol in the complex of human deity; the temple becomes the sanctuary in time of trouble.

Beside him the natives watched the disaster. Some of them moaned quietly, but most of them sat in silence.

He turned at a slight noise and found Tomson sitting up. "What happened?" the man asked hoarsely.

Lattimer crossed the room to him, shoving the assembled natives aside. "You did your damndest to wreck all I've managed to do here," he answered in English. "You tried to destroy what the natives looked



to us for. If the floods hadn't stepped in, you and I would be dead."

Tomson tried his sneering grin again. His face was stiff, but his self-confidence made it half-successful. "You're a pretty smart guy, aren't you?" he said. "But it's still more than eighteen months before your relief calls for you, and I've still got my chance to have some fun out of being a god."

Lattimer shook his head. "I warned you," he said, "but you didn't believe me. You're going to be psyched, as I said."

There was a roar from outside, and the natives scrambled hastily to their feet to bow to the occupants of a mud-sled which came skidding and sliding across the sodden soil at the edge of the forest and approached the door of the Residency. They wore the familiar uniform of the Service.

Tomson, stark terror gleamed in his eyes, stammered, "How did you call them?"

"You smashed the radio," said Lattimer. "I couldn't tell them I postponed worship day. I couldn't tell them whether the worship day service was correct, or whether the natives had started to suspect. If they ever do that, we shall strike. We may not be omnipotent or omniscient, but to the natives we must appear to be both. Goodbye, Jim."

For the third time he hit the other man inconspicuously to keep him quiet, and turned to face the lieutenant in command of the visiting party.

"My people," said Lattimer, "the time has come for me to go from among you."

He looked around. Chinsel, in the front rank of the elders, was glowing with pride as one whose work in designing levees has been commended twice in his life by a man.

For a few seconds Lattimer was silent, remembering. Ris was not there—nor was the former chief, Miglaun. The flood had taken its toll, as had the years. But the new paplet paddies were bigger than the old ones; the new levees were stronger, the village more numerous.

"But another has come who was with you before. He it was who warned you of the levee breaking in the time of the Greatest Rain. You knew me as Lattimer; you will know him as Tomson, my brother. Do for him as you have done for me. I have spoken."

He turned to the man who sat beside him on the dais as the song of welcome went up from the assembled tribe. He spoke almost under his breath.

"Good luck, Jim. But you won't really need it, I don't think. Did they tell you my story?"

Tomson nodded. "That's why I asked to come back here," he said. "They offered me a village further south a month ago, but I said I'd hold on."

Latimer smiled reminiscently. "Psyching is quite a technique," he said. "I killed a woman once—I must have been more primitive than these people here. But psyching isn't enough by itself, unless you get the chance to show it's worked. This job gives you that chance. There's no other task which makes a man pay so much attention as trying to be perfect. And nothing makes a man mend his habits faster than having someone look up to him. You won't have any trouble from these people here—they're a good bunch. But watch yourself—that's the danger."

They shook hands. Then Lattimer turned and went across the fields to the waiting mud-sled, and Tomson spoke his first words of command to the people whose god he was.

Not a god, really. No. But a very much better man.

JOHN BRUNNER

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## *Normal Service . . .*

Owing to circumstances beyond our control, the appearance of this issue of "Nebula" has been delayed by about two months from its scheduled date of publication, which was May, 1956.

We apologise to readers for any inconvenience caused by this delay and are pleased to state that we anticipate a return to regular bi-monthly publication from the current number.

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# Storm Warning

*How will mankind behave on the very last day of all?*

It was the last day, the very last day. The end of a long, long trail stretching from primeval tree-tops to tomorrow's new sun in the sky. The final act of the monkey who learned how to set fire to himself.

Clocks ticked away remaining minutes while the world went about its futile business. The masses were happily unaware of their coming dissolution in self-created hellfire.

Nobody had told them, nobody had given so much as a hint. Matters of major public interest had been suppressed on the pretext that it was not to the public interest to reveal them. Or that the ultimate in insecurity must be hushed for reasons of security.

Deep within a heavily guarded building sat a conference of hard-faced, paunchy men. Indisputable patriots, wealthy, educated, confident that they knew better than anyone else. Of course they knew better. Individually and collectively they had snatched more golden bananas than had any other monkeys in the brick-and-mortar jungle. Isn't that cleverness?

With them was one and only one of a different type. A thin-featured sensitive individual with long, nervous fingers. He hadn't gone through life with an eye to the main chance, nor had he ever asked the eternal question of, "What's in it for me?" He had substituted noseyness for acquisitiveness and had devoted himself to the pursuit of facts rather than the pursuit of percentages. He was a marmoset among apes. The company viewed him with open respect and hidden contempt.

This odd man out was doing the speaking, his manner strained. "Our confidential reports have told you that the latest model creates an area of total destruction eighty miles in diameter. You will have to drop at least twelve of them to wipe out all organised resistance."

"We intend to drop twenty," informed a tall, white-haired man with heavy jowls. "And we shall have another twenty ready in reserve."

"Twenty? Perhaps forty?" The other was visibly appalled.

"You are a scientist," reminded the white-haired man. "As such you know little or nothing of military matters, but surely your own intelligence must tell you that the knock-out has to be complete. Absolute and complete!"

"But——"

"One small surviving section could retaliate even if ineffectively." The white-haired man made a masterful gesture. "We intend to put them down and out without a single chance to hit back. It's the enemy or us and that is that. And it is our patriotic duty to see that the foe goes down—for keeps."

"Hear, hear!" said somebody.

"But twenty bombs will have overlapping areas of destruction. Nobody can foretell the culminative effect if they're dropped together. What with that and the simultaneous impacts upon one part of Earth's crust, the upheaval in the atmosphere, the risk of precipitating a chain-reaction, no scientist would dare to estimate the possible consequences of such a——"

"Scientists are not called upon to dare," interrupted the white-haired man. "They devise the tools that we must use. It is we, the leaders, who do all the daring. Anyway, the challenge stands and we must take it up. We cannot back out without losing prestige."

"So countless millions must die to preserve the self-esteem of the few? What is prestige? Can you eat it? Can you drink it? Can you wear it or spend it? Will it give you further lease of life when on your deathbeds? What is prestige really worth to anyone?"

"I've neither the time nor desire to answer stupid questions from you," snapped the other. "We stand upon the verge of five-minute war. This is a grave emergency. It is your duty to obey orders."

"It is also my duty to warn you of the consequences of folly."

"Folly?" The white-haired man's eyes blazed. He motioned to two guards standing by the door. "Take him away. I will deal with him later."

Waiting until the objector had gone, he said to the rest, "The ultimatum expires at midnight. We have agreed that the enemy will strike in advance of it. We have accepted the report of our intelligence service that the foe is likely to try to sweep us out of existence not later than eleven o'clock. So our blow will be delivered at nine. Is that settled?"

"Yes," they chorused.

"Has anybody any further suggestions to offer?"

Nobody had.

"Nine then," he said. "I'll send out the signal making nine o'clock the zero hour."

In a fortified headquarters seven hundred miles away and three hundred feet below ground the enemy held consultation. They were a cold-eyed, pot-bellied bunch full of patriotism and dividends. Their favourite form of relaxation was to watch marching troops from a grandstand and sigh, "Ah, if only I were young again!" while mentally thanking God they were not.

One of them, beak-nosed and beady-eyed, said "The ultimatum means that we must put up or shut up. If we shut up we lose face. Therefore we must put up—with a vengeance!"

"Meaning we'd better be first," commented another. "Way things are today you've got to be first in the queue or first in the grave."

"Obviously. The ultimatum runs out at midnight. The opposition will draw its own conclusions when no reply has come by eleven. They'll be ready to strike by that time because they dare not leave it to the last minute. So we'll destroy them at nine."

"Well," remarked the second speaker, "nobody will lose face in this set-up. We'll keep ours and they'll no longer have any face to lose."

The beak-nosed one said, "They'll get what's coming because they've asked for it. They created the situation. It is now our patriotic duty to ensure victory." He glanced around. "Any comments?"

"What about today's suggestion that a plebiscite be held on both sides?"

"Bah! You could expect that from a prissy neutral. The opinions of the masses aren't worth a hoot, especially in view of the fact that every imbecile on the other side can be trusted to vote as he's told. Nonentities have no minds of their own. If they had, they wouldn't be where they are, namely, in the gutter." He paused to enjoy the bloated feeling of his own ego. "In this country *we* are the minds. The common herd has said so."

Another put in uneasily, "I heard a rumour this morning that the head of the scientific warfare department is worried about multiple blasting. He thinks it might start something that can't be stopped."

"A twittering theorist," scoffed the first speaker. "We have checked on the matter. Other experts hold the contrary opinion. If they can't agree it's evident that they don't *know*. This crisis leaves no room for indecision. The issue before us is that of survival and we must act

accordingly."

"So nine is the deadline? We can't make it earlier?"

"We could—but not with full strength. If we're going to hit at all it must be with every ounce we've got."

"Using how many hell-bombs?"

"Thirty at first drop."

The other pursed his lips, emitted a low whistle, said "If that isn't enough they'll throw one or two back. Are you sure it is enough?"

"More than adequate. The enemy's area is bigger than ours but it will be covered thoroughly, completely, from border to border. Our onslaught won't leave a living soul to spit at us."

"The rest of the world will have the jumping jitters tomorrow," prophesied a voice.

"Let it. War is war and they've got to get used to it." He consulted his watch. "Ten to five now. A little more than four hours to go. Better take up your posts, gentlemen. I'll signal our commanders to make their strike at nine."

In a thousand cities, ten thousand towns, uncountable villages, life went on while small clocks ticked and big ones chimed the quarters. Cars purred along roads, trolleys clattered through streets, locomotives thundered along rails and over bridges, aeroplanes hummed above the clouds. Video-screens showed shadow-plays, juke boxes blared their tin-can syn-copation, telephones shrilled, typewriters rattled. The toys of the one time scratchers in the trees.

At ten minutes to five armies of housewives hastened home from shopping. Stenographers speeded up their typing with one anticipatory eye upon the clock. Office boys licked stamps and dreamed about monkeys in ten gallon hats with six-shooters at their hips. Kids home from school made monkey-raids on larders, neither knowing nor caring that this was to be their last guzzle.

In the biggest square of the world's largest city a stone monkey squatted on a stone horse and pointed a stone sword at the impassive skies. At two and one-fifth seconds past the stroke of nine the monkey and the horse were to become no more than a pale wraith lost within the corona of a strange star. They had never been less than that.

At two and one-fifth seconds past the stroke of nine a new sun would bloom in all its searing ferocity, a gigantic sphere of frenzied atoms that would shrivel the lichens in the deserts of Mars and evaporate the oceans of Venus. A new sun compounded of stone monkeys and blood monkeys, locomotives and baked beans, empty bottles and teddy-bears, one-billion

codfish and one billion Bibles, screams and prayers and chewing-gum and rosaries.

That was to be the inevitable price of blind belief. Almost every monkey believed that the official line is the only correct line. That whatever appeared in print must therefore be true. That the rich are being rewarded for their virtues and the poor punished for their sins. That wisdom is the monopoly of age and folly the monopoly of youth. That authority must never, never, be questioned. That discipline is a very good thing for the low but not for the high. And so on.

For countless centuries they had lived by what they had learned or believed, worthless or otherwise. Now they were to pass from the face of Creation because of what they had never learned and the new sun was to be the only real light they had ever shed upon eternal darkness.

They had never learned to jerk down the pants of self-opinionated leaders. They had never taught a brasshat that his brasshattery exists only by their grace and kind permission. They had never learned how to make civil servants remain servants and be civil. They had never so much as attempted to solve the problem of how to watch the watchers.

They had never insisted on doing their own individual thinking or asserted their right to define their own individual duties. They had never defended the person against the State. They had never summoned up the gumption to reaffirm that the assassin is Society's answer to the tyrant.

They were a monkey-horde, thinking money-thoughts, playing with monkey-toys, pandering to monkey-tabus and appeasing monkey-bullies.

So no other monkey bothered to tell them what was planned, what might happen, what in fact was going to happen. Among them existed a small minority higher than the apes, a tiny development of civilised minds, but these too were doomed along with the rest. The innocent were to be swept into limbo by the tide of the guilty.

There was only one warning and that was not recognised as such. Not even the one who gave it knew what he had done. He was unconsciously prophetic and in due course his forecast became part of the new sun.

He ran a crummy supper-bar in the back street of a slum. At ten minutes to five he swabbed the counter, cleaned the cooking-pans, washed the wire baskets. Halfway through he hung a notice on the door where it dangled lopsidedly.

Passers-by gave the notice no more than a casual glance. While the clock ticked on he picked pieces of potato from a chipping machine and gave not a single thought to the warning on the door.

It said: FRYING TONIGHT.

ERIC FRANK RUSSELL

# Cry Wolf

*He had made a hobby of practical joking in a world of unamused officialdom. Was he to get the last laugh also?*

*Illustrated by D. McKeown*

Bree, the desk sergeant, a look of patient suffering on his face, was on the phone as Yardley came in. He heaved a sigh of relief. "Hold on," he barked into the mouthpiece, covered it with one hand and made a flapping motion next to his temple with the other.

"Sounds like you know who," he told Yardley. "Says he's seen a foreigner downtown. Though why that's something to get all steamed up about——"

"A foreigner?"

"Well, an *alien*, he said."

"Ah—that's different. Now I do know who. Okay, I'll take it."

A familiar voice was still squawking away as he took over the phone.

"Hell, Sammy," Yardley said. "What's the trouble this time?"

"I didn't say my name," said the voice at the other end. "My name doesn't matter. This is an emergency."

"The name doesn't matter when it's Sammy Legg."

An impatient sigh. "All right, so this is Legg. I know this must sound like one of my gags, but it isn't. I swear. Look——"

"Look nothing. This is Yardley, the one who pulled you in last time. Do you want to go on?"

"Ah, I thought that was you, Lieutenant, and I'm glad. That dumb cluck before didn't seem to grasp what I was saying."

"Don't make disparaging remarks about a member of the Force," Yardley told him primly, "or I'll pull you in again."



"Aw, don't give me that," Sammy said pleadingly. "Look, this is important. The real McCoy."

Yardley sighed heavily. "Okay, Sammy, where's the space ship?"

"There's isn't any space ship. I——"

"No space ship, Sammy? What's the matter—you slipping?"

"Aw, quit ribbing. There's no space ship, no nothing. Except what I'm going to tell you——"

"Well, isn't that how it always is?"

"All right, have your laugh. But then listen."

"I'm listening. You ought to know the penalties by now. This will be a second offence, remember."

"I know. But this isn't an offence—and it isn't a gag. I was downtown, see, just mooning around the warehouse district by the river. I suddenly saw this guy materialise—out of thin air. I was in the shadows, so he didn't spot me. But *he* was in a moonlit patch, and I could see *him*—as clear as daylight. He just turned up. One second he wasn't there, the next he was. Just like that.

"He seemed to fiddle with something in his pocket, then he looked around and made off. I've been tailing him since then."

"Uh huh," Yardley said. "How many horns has he got? And what's the line in shiny overalls this season?"

He could feel Sammy wince at the other end. He was referring to Sammy's greatest exploit, when he'd turned up in a field out of town in what had afterwards proved to be a caravan trailer covered with sheet metal. A trucking gardener had found it by the light of dawn, and out had stepped Sammy dressed as a space traveller. It had all been very realistic. The "ship" had even been smoking gently. For forty-eight hours Sammy had kept the pretence going, warding off enquiries about his "ship" with artfully-conveyed hints that it was dangerous to go over while it was "cooling down."

He'd really hit the headlines with that one. He'd started the whole works running—the military, the flurries of professors. Then he'd disappeared, and the truth came out. But they'd never been able to pin it on him, so well had he been disguised, fake antennae and all. It was on a less ambitious hoax, when he'd started a panic that the City Reservoir was radioactive, that they'd run him in. He'd had to pay a stiff fine.

"I've told you," Sammy countered. "It's nothing like that. There's nothing unusual about this guy. He's black-haired and wearing a dark blue business suit. The only thing was that he was pretty tall. About

seven foot, I'd say. At first, that is."

"*At first?*" Yardley gagged. Sammy was evidently warming up.

"Yes, when he came to Union Street he got cautious. He peered out of the shadows, saw people, and ducked back again. When he came out of the shadows again he was under six foot."

"Just like that, eh?"

"I swear it."

"And the dark blue suit just shrank along with him, I suppose? Or is he slopping along now in a suit several sizes too big for him?"

"The suit still fits him," said Sammy frigidly. "And don't ask me how he did it. And he's not slopping along anywhere. At the moment he's in an eating-place on Union Street."

"Eating? Come, come, Sammy, you really are slipping. They eat capsules, don't they?"

The voice at the other end started to rave. Then it calmed. "Look, so this is Sammy Legg. So I've rung the bell on a false alarm before. But does this one sound like one of my gags? I haven't got it pat enough, have I? He looks normal. He doesn't eat capsules. Wouldn't I have arranged it better than that?" He sounded as if his professional pride was wounded.

"Course you would, Sammy," said Yardley soothingly. "But for two things. First, you're skinned to the bone after that fine, so props are out. Second, the whole science of your crazy hobby depends upon the unexpected. You said so yourself. It's got to the point now that if a real space traveller landed, people would think first that it was Sammy Legg. You've sold enough smooth stories, so a wild one like that is on the ball. Now, why don't you tell your black-haired friend to go home—that's if there is a black-haired man—and you go home too and forget all about it? What do you say?"

"But there *is* a black-haired man, I tell you. And he's no friend of mine, or yours either. A guy just doesn't materialise like that out of nowhere, and pass himself off as one of us, for any good purpose. He——"

"Ah, the flesh-creeping act now, is it? At least that's to pattern. So he's going to set up a death ray machine and kill us all off in the wink of an eye? Now see here, Legg, come off it. You've cried wolf too many times before."

Sammy clutched at the straw eagerly.

"That's right. But don't forget there *was* a wolf in the end. I've considered the fable, naturally. Nobody's ever realised that that boy



was a useful citizen. If he hadn't kept on crying wolf, people might have forgotten there was a danger from wolves. He kept them on their toes. It was just his bad luck that when the wolf *did* come was the one time they didn't listen. That boy's been wronged by history. He was a martyr."

Yardley grinned. "So when the wolf eats you what do you want? A public memorial?"

"I don't care. All I want right now is for you to get down here. I'm speaking from a call box outside the Graham Grill, junction of Union and Grant. Are you coming or not?"

Yardley sighed. For all that Legg got in the Force's hair, and in the hair of a lot of people, he couldn't help liking him. At least, he was something out of the common run in this mass-produced age.

"Well, are you?" Sammy demanded. "He can't stay in there much longer."

"No, I'm not."

Sammy seemed to consider for a moment, then said levelly, "Then you and your precious force are a bunch of no-good, yellow-bellied miscegenated sons of——" and he went into a flow of carefully-measured obscenities.

Yardley cut across him resignedly. "Okay, if that's the way you want it, I'll be right down."

"Thank you," said Sammy.

Yardley was puzzled as he sped downtown in a squad car. This didn't fit in with Sammy Legg at all. It rang as false as a dud coin. Sammy always managed his gags with more care, more *panache*. For a moment he found himself wondering whether there might be something in it after all. But he caught himself up with a start on that line. He remembered something he still might have in an inside pocket. He delved into it; he had.

He brought out Sammy's pamphlet, the one Sammy had presented him with when he'd pulled him in. He had skipped through it and then forgotten it. Now he uncreased it. It was called *The Aesthetics of The Practical Joke in a Mechanised Society* by Samuel Legg, printed by the author. It didn't add that the printing had been done on Sammy's old-fashioned hand press, the one he used to produce the handbills, fake newspapers and other such phony documents as he needed for his enterprises.

Yardley read the beginning of the pamphlet:

"The practical joke, so-called, is an art form as old and respectable as any other. The ancient Greek drama abounds in practical jokes. The Bible contains several examples, including Samson, one of the greatest, if most tragic, practical jokers of all time. Lob, Til Eulenspiegel, Robin Hood—the names spring to the memory. But the practical joke has never received the scholarly recognition that it deserves. This is not surprising when it is considered that the practical joke is always directed against authority, against pomposity of all kinds. It will only be recognised when men have reached a higher standard of tolerance and culture. When that time is reached, if ever, the practical joke will perhaps die out. But it will have gained recognition, it will have achieved its purpose of broadening men's minds, of de-mechanising their attitude toward the universe.

"In this year of grace 1963 conditions might seem highly unpropitious for the exercise of the practical joke. The world is too highly organised, too mechanical. But let me assure my readers that this is not so. The more complex and mechanised a society, the more opportunities there are for bigger and better hoaxes. That is why the small joke, itching powder, booby traps and the like, are rightly considered as

fit only for small minds. In a primitive society the small joke suffices, but it is out-dated now.

"De Quincey once wrote an essay, *On Murder Considered As One Of The Fine Arts*. The present pamphlet, the result of many years' practical research, endeavours to do the same for a much less drastic, and probably more beneficial, form of human achievement. *Contents*: Archetypal Forms of The Practical Joke. The Hoax Purposive. The Hoax Anonymous, its Defects Considered. The Hoax Scholastic, with Special Reference to The Piltdown Skull and The Chatterton Forgeries. Physiognomy of The Straight Face . . ."

Yardley put the pamphlet back in his pocket with a sigh. It was typical. Straight-faced and scholarly, it was itself one practical joke. What made a man act like that? Just what bug crept under the skin and at what age? It wasn't as if Sammy was a rich man. Yet some of those elaborate hoaxes he'd pulled must have cost him plenty. He must have a misguided sense of dedication. Yardley suddenly found himself feeling sorry for him.

He put that thought right out of his head as the squad car pulled into Union Street. He also had a sense of dedication, hadn't he?

The car halted at the corner of Grant Street, and Yardley jumped out. There was the call box. But he couldn't see Sammy. He felt sudden annoyance. This was all wrong. He had expected to see a crowd milling around, stirred up by some wild story. As it was, the corner was deserted.

He peered about, thinking that Sammy might be hiding, watching for their arrival. But there was no sign of him.

"Okay, Sid," he told the driver. "Back to the station. False alarm."

As the car wheeled round, Yardley's feelings were a mixture of annoyance, puzzlement and—strangely—disappointment. That fine obviously hadn't cured Sammy. It seemed only to have knocked the stuffing out of him. This latest effort was pretty pitiful.

The car hadn't gone more than a couple of hundred yards, though, before Yardley called out to the driver to stop. He had caught a tell-tale flash of gold in the crowds at the busier junction of Union and Main. He'd know that mop of curly blond hair anywhere. He jumped out. "Come on, Sammy," he said quietly, taking him by the arm.

Sammy looked almost surprised. "What—?"

"Save it for the judge tomorrow," said Yardley, "I'm booking you."

Sammy shrugged and climbed quietly into the back of the car.

"Where's the alien?" Yardley asked him caustically as they sped stationward.

"The alien?" Sammy said vaguely. "Oh—he just went off."

"What, back into the crannies of that unbalanced brain of yours?"

Sammy smiled feebly.

Yardley regarded him sadly. "Sammy, my boy. I'm disappointed in you."

Sammy only smiled again, not very happily. Even his gold-capped eye tooth, momentarily revealed, seemed to lack lustre.

"A-ah," said Bree as Yardley brought Sammy in. "What's the charge?"

"Let me see," said Yardley. "Uttering obscene libels. Obstructing the police. Causing a public mischief." He looked gloatingly at Sammy, then said to Bree, "That ought to add up to a few years, oughtn't it?"

"Ten or fifteen," agreed Bree solemnly.

"At least fifteen, with Judge Danvers sitting. Personally, I think that——" His words trailed away at sight of Sammy. The hop-haired joker was definitely not entering into the spirit of things. His shoulders slumped, a bewildered expression on his face, the erstwhile bold-front specialist was a pitiful sight.

Yardley gave Bree a meaningful look, then shook his head sadly.

"All right, Sammy," he sighed. "On your way. I'm not booking you this time, but—so help me!—if it happens again I'll—I'll——" He broke off. There was no pleasure in it. "Just beat it, will you?"

"Thank you," Sammy mumbled, and left. Yardley turned to Bree. "The judge would have had him certified. Somehow I wouldn't like that to happen to Sammy. But it's pretty obvious he's gone round the bend at last."

Bree nodded sage agreement.

Yardley was sipping coffee five minutes later when the phone went. His ears pricked up only slightly at the mention of Grant Street by Bree. Then they pricked up rather more.

"A body, you say?" said Bree, making a note. Catching Yardley's eye, he clamped a hand over the mouthpiece and said quickly, "Grant Street. Junction with Union. Small callbox. Having quite a time tonight. Patrolman just found a stiff there." He returned to the phone.

Yardley felt a sudden disquiet. "Is the body black-haired?" he

heard himself saying to Bree. Had there *really* been a stranger? Not an alien, but just a stranger—and Sammy had really gone off his head and murdered him? Was *that* why he had acted so strangely?

Bree repeated the question to the patrolman, listened for a moment, then turned back to Yardley. "No, definitely not black. Blond."

Yardley expelled breath in a sigh of relief—then a fantastic but alarming thought made him catch it back again. "Let me take it," he said urgently, grabbing at the phone.

"O-kay," Bree said in an aggrieved tone. But Yardley didn't hear him. He spoke quickly into the phone. "Blond hair, you say? A big mop of blond hair?"

"That's right," said the patrolman. "You know him?"

"I hope not. Where exactly is the body." •

"Just back of this call box. There's a waste lot with a wall and——"

"Any identification?"

"I haven't looked. I thought I'd better leave that to Homicide."

"You're sure it's homicide, then? Is there blood or sign of a weapon?"

"No-o, I didn't see any, anyway. I didn't look too closely. I just felt him to make sure he was dead, and he felt——" the patrolman gave an audible shudder—"he felt all limp, like—like there wasn't any bones left inside him. He was all cold and flabby."

"Cold? You sure?"

"Positive."

Yardley had placed the voice. It was Judson, a rookie. "All right, son," he said gently, though he was having some difficulty in controlling his own voice. "Just do one thing, will you? Take a look at his teeth, top front, and let me know what they look like. I'll hang on."

"Oh, I noticed his teeth. Couldn't help but. His lips were drawn back. The two big ones in front are gold."

Then it *was* so, Yardley thought dazedly. It was straining coincidence to think that there could be two people like that at the same spot on the same evening. Normally, at least.

"You still there?" came Judson's voice from the other end of the phone.

Yardley pulled himself together. "Yeah, I'm still here. I'll put it through to Homicide right away." He rang off and turned to Bree.

"That body," he said slowly, "was the body of Sammy Legg."

Bree looked startled. "But it can't be! He only left here five minutes ago."

Yardley nodded grimly. "That's right. And nobody could get down to Grant Street and get bumped off all in five minutes. The body was cold, anyway."

"Then it *is* a mistake. That *can't* be Legg's body. How about papers?"

"That hasn't been checked yet."

"Well then," said Bree, shrugging. "Homicide will soon do that." He plugged through and passed the details on. Then he turned back to Yardley. "What gives? What's all the mystery about?"

"There's no mystery. I'll bet a month's pay that *is* Sammy Legg's body."

"Aw, come off it." Bree suddenly saw that he was in dead earnest. "Then who was it walked out of here?"

"The alien Sammy claimed he saw."

Bree laughed hoarsely. A squad car started up outside, its siren screamed away into the distance.

"It's too much of a piece," said Yardley. "Sammy *would* have thought up something better than this if it was a hoax. But this body turning up, the funny way the person we thought was Sammy behaved——"

"So the *alien*——" Bree pronounced the word disbelievingly—"murdered Sammy, then—wait, what do you mean 'the person we thought was Sammy'?"

"Only that if this creature, wherever it came from, could change its size, why not its shape, too? That's it—it knew how we looked and how we dressed before it came. When it arrived and saw that it was a bit out of scale, it changed down, just as Sammy said. Then it went for a meal—perhaps to get acclimatised to our ways. Then—yes, it must have realised somehow that it had been followed, so it croaked poor Sammy by some hellish means of death-dealing. Then perhaps it thought that Sammy had been following it because Sammy had spotted that it wasn't normal, that there was something wrong in the pattern it had taken. So—having a model in hand in the person of the dead Sammy, it promptly copied him, then made off, not knowing that we were already on our way down to pick up Sammy."

"Go away," said Bree. "You've been listening to too many of Sammy's stories."

"So have you. So you automatically think that something fantastic



happening is one of Sammy's hoaxes."

"If you're so sure, then why don't you get back to Grant Street yourself?"

Yardley smiled thinly. "Because I am sure. And because I think we're going to be very busy right here in a very short time."

Bree looked puzzled. "Ho do you mean?"

"If I'm right, then we're going to have a nice little game to play. A game of Find the Alien. As Sammy said to me on the phone, anybody who was innocent of sinister intentions wouldn't go to such lengths as this to stay incognito."

"Okay," said Bree airily. "So what's bad about that? We just put out a call for someone answering Sammy Legg's description, and——" He broke off as the thought impinged.

"Exactly. He knows now that we know about Sammy's call. A thousand to one he's already changed again into a different-looking body. He's the perfect wolf in sheep's clothing." He suddenly laughed hoarsely. "Ha, that's rich! I was talking to Sammy about crying wolf. But there are two fables about wolves. And they're both coming true."

Bree shook himself like a dog coming out of water. "Bah, this is just one more of Sammy's tricks—the whole thing. You wait and see. The body is probably a dummy."

The walls seemed suddenly to fall about Yardley's ears. Of course! That rookie cop had said the body was limp, hadn't he? Limp and cold. You couldn't blame a rookie—but how about himself? He had swallowed it hook, line and sinker. The funny way Sammy had acted was all part of the hoax.

"I'm going down there," he said, trying to avoid the mocking look in Bree's eyes. Then the phone went.

They both made a grab for it. Bree won. But Yardley craned his ear to it.

"Homicide reporting," came the voice at the other end. Yardley steeled himself for the pay-off. "Identity of body—Samuel Adolphus Legg. Age thirty-two. Cause of death not immediately apparent——"

Bree spluttered. "But, but . . . are you sure it's a *body*?"

There was a pause at the other end, followed by what seemed to Yardley some pretty incoherent swearing. But the next words were quite clear: "Of course it's a body. What the heck d'ya think it is? A dummy?"

# Wrath Of The Gods

*Castaway on an inhospitable planet, his only concern was to keep alive. This was to be easier than he had anticipated, however*

*Illustrated by Arthur Thomson*

"I'm sorry." The Captain looked determined and pitying at once. "I'm sorry, there is nothing I can do, you know the regulations."

"Yes" said Hendricks. "Be calm" he told himself "don't show it, there's nothing you can do."

Poor devil, the Captain was thinking, but maybe there is a slim chance of survival— He said: "We'll put you down on Gathos, it's a fair world, as worlds go—"

"I don't feel sick" said Hendricks, guardedly "do you suppose—"

"No." The Captain's mouth tightened. "Don't make it tough on yourself, Hendricks, even if you are alright, the rules stand."

Hendricks nodded, fumbling for a cigarette, trying to stop his hands trembling. Gathos, a fair world the Captain had said, but it was marked "Unsuitable for Colonists" which meant bugs, or climate or jungles or the whole lot. "Look," he said, keeping his voice steady, "you remember the story of the condemned man. How long, doctor? What, what—" he stuttered a little—"what will happen to me?"

The Captain lit a cigarette and his hand was not steady. "I don't know, Hendricks, no one knows. We only know that after a time a man changes—he, I don't know, but the rules say he must go within twelve days." He almost shouted "for God's sake, don't look at me like that" but restrained himself. "I'm sorry, Hendricks, truly sorry, we'll give you arms, stores, everything we can spare—"

"Thanks." Hendricks rose but did not hold out his hand because he

couldn't take the pity in the other's eyes. He saluted smartly, staring woodenly above the Captain's head, then turned and left the room.

"Good luck, Hendricks." The Captain's voice sounded thick and unreal; he sat staring before him long after Hendricks had gone.

There were certain laws in space a man must not break and one of them was something that man had never deeply considered until he had challenged the stars—radiation, cosmic energy. Plastocoyne kept it out, but if it got in——"

Hendricks had been out on a routine hull inspection after emergence from Hyper-drive. Some unknown factor had cracked the Plastocoyne skin of his space suit, no air had got out but radiation had got in. The internal gauges were reading forty degrees above danger point when they brought him in.

There was no record of what happened to a man when radiation got him, only a few vague and crazy stories, but the regulations were specific and failure to comply invoked the death penalty.

*"The Exposee shall be deposited within twelve days after exposure on a planet unsuitable for colonists, or, it being impossible to follow this procedure, EXPOSEE SHALL BE HUMANELY DESTROYED AND HIS REMAINS CONSIGNED TO SPACE."*

The Captain found himself sweating, God, what did become of an exposee?

They dropped him in the moderate zone beside a small stream, where it was only ten degrees hotter than Death Valley and the jungle steamed in the heat and writhed on the edge of a sandy clearing.

They never looked back at the figure standing by the pile of equipment and stores. They erased him from their memories, they had to, it was that or crack.

Hendricks looked at the stores, at the gifts the crew had left him and tried to remember their faces but already they seemed like dream faces he had never really known.

He sat down and put his head in his hands. Ten days ago he had been a normal member of the crew, now he had two days, forty-eight hours, before——? Perhaps he would mutate into a monster, develop some virulent and filthy disease, go insane. Surely they could issue some warning for such as himself. But not to know——

Something that was grey, creeping, and stank, slid out of the jungle

and looked at him with red, diamond-shaped eyes. He shot it and the thing leapt eight feet in the air and landed on its back, clawing and gurgling. He put away the weapon, his mouth tight, while he had intelligence and the use of his limbs, he was going to survive.

He shook his fist at the sky. "To hell with you" he said. He turned and looked about him, about eight miles away colossal pink mountains thrust their jagged peaks at the sky. Surely, if he could make it through the jungle, there would be caves? Somewhere he could hole-up until whatever happened to an exposee overtook him.

He made a clumsy pack of all the equipment he considered necessary and buried the rest. He did not like the look of the jungle which was purple, spotted and looked alive. High round the jagged peaks of the mountains, black dots, swooped, dived and rode the winds. He did not like the look of these either, but he shouldered his pack and went grimly forward.

He hacked his way, knife in one hand, weapon in the other, through the miles of jungle. The journey took him twenty-eight unresting hours and he arrived at the base of the huge cliffs, barely capable of standing. He was filthy, sweat-soaked, bleeding from countless scratches, puffy with stings, one of which almost closed one eye, and covered in string-like obscenities which made terrestrial leeches look like beginners. He had been lucky, there had been things in the jungle which he heard but did not see: colossi which shook the ground so much in their movements that he found it difficult to stand as they passed by.

It took another four hours before he found a cave which he thought might be able to reach. The climb took him, in his present state of weakness, nearly forty minutes. When he got there it was occupied by what looked like a cross between a bat and a dragon fly with formidable rows of serrated teeth and an eighteen foot, transparent, wing-spread. His piston functioned almost before he caught sight of the creature and minus one wing, it went spinning down to the jungle below, hissing and spluttering like a cauldron.

Hendricks cleaned out the cave with his heat pistol. He had no wish to become a repast for the recent tenant's host of parasites; he had acquired enough of his own on the journey. Somewhere, he found enough energy to erect a small barrier across the cave entrance, objects that would be noisy if displaced. He arranged concentrates and weapons close to hand and lay down. He had learned that on Gathos there was no problem about water; it rained heavily one hour in every three. A deluge that reduced the eye-searing rays of the white sun to a murky greenish twilight.

He slept and when he awoke it was night. In the jungle, things thudded, shrieked, hissed and rended the foliage. In the air, shining things danced and swooped above the jungle like phantoms. Some of the lights, he thought, sleepily, were fire-flies, but others, he decided uneasily, were eyes. He had no wish to attract the attention of flying things which had eyes six inches across, so he moved with some caution. He shivered a little and tried to figure. Maybe he had slept twelve hours, call it ten, that meant another ten hours before——

He found a cigarette, one cigarette in forty hours was not bad, was it? He had only twenty with him but there were nearly two hundred at the buried dump. He could always go back for them, if he survived and could use his limbs, or had a mouth to hold a cigarette in. He had almost convinced himself that he was going to be a mutation, something with the genes run crazy and a head too big to be supported by his body.

He forced his mind into more rational channels. Exposees must be dumped on worlds unsuitable for colonists. It could be that the occupied worlds couldn't take what an exposee became. On the other hand, maybe, humanity didn't want exposees to survive. The dumping might just be a sop to the moralist groups which were extremely powerful on the occupied worlds. Come to think of it, if a world was unsuitable for colonists—less than 70% chance of continued survival with every scientific and medical aid—it was worse for a single exposee. That was the answer he decided, humane elimination was the kindest but no civilised order would sanction legal murder, except in extremities; the dumping was a conscience salve. "I hope" he thought savagely, "they sleep good and easy, nights."

Ten to eight hours, he thought, and wondered if he would become delirious. He lit another cigarette, thinking he was wise to enjoy them while he was able. Outside, Gathos was having a storm. It was a planet that did nothing on a small scale, and the storm looked like an atomic war. Lightning chopped eighty blackened circles out of the jungle which were overgrown again within the hour. The continuous thunder shook the mountains and the floor of the cave. Despite it he abruptly became exhausted and grinding out his cigarette, sighed and fell asleep.

When he awoke, it was still dark but the storm was over. He felt curiously weak and detached. "This is it" he thought but was strangely calm and indifferent. He wondered if his body glowed, did exposure make it glow? It required too much effort to lift his hand to find out. The hours passed and he lay there dreaming; day came, and he was still letting his mind wander.



There was no name for the creature that dragged itself over the lip of the cave and crouched there, tensing. It had darting, slate-coloured eyes, a body heavy with green armour, a furry face, and mouth that sneered over two long, curved fangs. Hendricks saw it but did not reach for a weapon; he studied it absently and detachedly, almost with scientific interest. He almost divined the method of attack, the creature would leap, sink the fangs into its victim and use the backswept claws on the rear feet to disembowel. It would and, no doubt, did, overcome creatures twice its size.

A sudden realisation of his danger shook him momentarily out of his lethargy. This thing was not here to provide a study in alien carnivores—it was here to eat him. He clawed for the gun which wasn't where he thought it was and creaked something unintelligible which he thought was "scram."

Then, as if in obedience to his half-formed command, the creature shuddered, shifted uneasily on its taloned feet and the slate-coloured eyes darted from side to side as if seeking a way of escape. Then with incredible swiftness, it turned and slithered away over the lip of the cave.

Hendricks was so overcome with amazement that he fought his weakness and crawled to the mouth of the cave. The creature was leaping from ledge to ledge with the agility of a goat and it was frightened; twice it lost its footing and nearly fell. The man shook himself and a number of the string-like leeches fell from his clothes. He watched them wriggle obscenely away from him as if he were too dangerous to be near. "Guess I'm a kind of poison," he said to himself dazedly. He had no time to think further because a blackness rose from the floor of the cave and he fell into it without realising that this was not sleep but unconsciousness.

The return to awareness seemed hardly worth it; his body was dry, burning and sandy. He had a feeling that his skin was made of paper and would tear at the slightest movement. A lot of hammers seemed to be pounding behind his eyes which, he had almost convinced himself, had gone rusty in their sockets.

After a long period of unbearable effort, he reached the water bottle. He drank and drank and the moisture burst through his dry skin and ran down his body painfully, like acid. At the back of his mind was something hard, something which kept saying "I won't die, damn you, I won't die."

An hour later, he was lying weak, but completely conscious. He was lying in a pool of sweat and his clothing steamed. He nibbled the concentrates, drank vast quantities of water and felt his strength slowly returning; finally he managed to sit up with his back to the wall of the cave.

He was curious, but not alarmed, something had happened to him, but what? He looked at his hands, they were filthy but unchanged, he felt his head but it seemed normal enough, yet something must have happened. A race did not exile or eliminate its own kind because they had radiation fever, or whatever comparatively slight illness it was he had suffered.

He pulled the metal water bottle to him, rubbed it with his sleeve, and studied his reflection. Nothing had changed, save that he was filthy and had grown a stubbly uneven beard. There must be something wrong, there must. After much effort he found his auto-shave but it was a worse job still removing the growing, like shaving damp seaweed. The

operation left him sore and ill-tempered. Of course, the atomic hot-spot that powered the shaver would last for years, but how long would the blades stand up to it? How could a guy keep clean when the temperature was around 190 degrees? He wished his beard would stop growing from now on.

He washed his face and studied his reflection. "I'm no damn different" he said. "What the hell's the idea?" he asked the bit of sky visible from the cave mouth.

In the next few days he gained strength quickly. He smoked all his cigarettes and began to think of the two hundred buried eight miles away. It might as well be eight hundred miles; despite his growing strength it would be a long time before he could make that journey. He cursed and blasted the eight miles of jungle which lay between the cigarettes and the cave.

He gained strength quickly, however, and soon his body began to crave for exercise. It was not long before he found the strength to climb down the cliff face, the next day he did it twice and on the journey he walked around a bit.

Perhaps it had been waiting for him or maybe it just happened along at that moment. It came at him, a mass of spines, armour, teeth and the blurring motion of numerous legs, too fast for him to react. Ten feet away, while he was still fumbling for the gun, it slithered to a halt. He had a sudden impression of indecision, quivering spines and fright. The creature turned, hissed and shot back into the jungle.

Hendricks stood there, shivering from reaction and it was then he noticed something else. There was a path through the jungle, dead straight, blackened, as if someone had blasted a path with an incendiary cannon. It was about four feet wide and on each side the vegetation was blackened and stunted. For some reason he was unable to explain to himself, Hendricks was frightened.

He went back to the cave fast, so fast he sustained a deep cut on his leg which required surgical attention, but received only part of his shirt in the form of a crude bandage. He sat down, shivering, and started to clean himself up to steady his nerves. He ran his hand over his chin and was surprised to find it smooth; it must be at least ten earth days since he last shaved. He took off the blood-soaked bandage which was now useless. Why the hell can't you stop bleeding he thought, savagely, stop, damn you, stop——

It stopped.

It took five minutes for him to absorb that, then he said tentatively



and aloud. "Heal." It was not instantaneous but it was swift enough for him to watch. It left no scar, only a thin red line beneath the surface of the skin showed where the wound had been. He shivered all over, it was not his body which had undergone a change but something inside, something that frightened him because the implications were too big for him to grasp.

Cautiously he began to experiment. "I wish" he said "it was not so hot."

There was no change in the temperature.

You fool, he told himself, who do you think you are, a fairy god-mother?

He frowned, trying to recall all he had read about extra-sensory perception. Perhaps it was a matter of adjustment. He concentrated on the subject of wishing himself at all times comfortable.

It happened so gradually that he barely noticed it, but suddenly the breeze was cool and fresh and he was no longer sweating. He gagged mentally and studied the small thermometer almost crazily; it still read 190 degrees Fahrenheit.

After that it was a question of trial and error. He tried telepathy, but he was a little hazy as to how a telepath operated. Theoretically, time and space presented no barrier, but the knowledge did not help him. He concentrated on projecting his thoughts; "Is anybody there?" varied with "can anyone hear me?"

Apparently nobody was and nobody could. He decided that he was not a telepath.

He worked up a sweat which had nothing to do with the temperature, over pre-cognition, levitation and other paranormal phenomena also without result.

What the hell had he got, then? He had mind control over his body. instant adjustment, what else? Exposure had altered his metabolism, probably arresting the cellular deterioration which by the gradual slowing of the renewal processes lead to old age. Adaption to environment by mental control was not new, authenticated instances were known to many of the ancient religions. There was something else, something which he was groping for but eluded him. An old line leapt suddenly unbidden into his mind "in his mind foreknowledge of death." He had no foreknowledge of death, he knew he was not going to die—ever. He began to form a theory, he did not know if it stood the tests of investigation but it satisfied him. It was assumed that man had risen from the

apes but had he? Was it not equally reasonable to assume that man's progress was like a temperature chart, a series of heights and depths and that man was just climbing to the heights again. Again there was an assumption that man had originated on Earth, perhaps on the other hand man had been dumped on a primitive world, descended to barbarism and climbed again to the stars. Somewhere in the climb man had lost the ancient knowledges, became conditioned to accept certain happenings as inevitable. Conditioning there was the key, man was mentally conditioned to accept death, therefore he died. The exposure to cosmic radiation somehow altered the cellular structure of the brain, completely erasing the conditioning of millions of generations, removing completely the barriers between conscious and unconscious mind. With it came renewed or mutated metabolism plus what amounted to fingertip control over the body. Hendricks became lost in his theory but a noise beyond the cave continually disturbed him.

"Damn" he muttered, irritably.

A huge leathery thing kept flying past the cave mouth uttering croaking noises. He tried to ignore it but the monotonous croaking finally distracted him completely.

"Oh, drop dead!" he snarled.

The creature screamed, soared as if shot, then dropped, lifelessly into the jungle. To Hendricks there seemed a sudden impossible silence, he put his hands over his face and shivered.

"Oh, my God," he said, "that, too."

He did not want to think about the matter but he had to. The curse, the evil eye, mythology was full of such stories, there was even reference to it in one of the major surviving religions; the cursing of a fig tree and its subsequent withering. That blackened pathway through the jungle, he had done that, blasted and cursed it into lifelessness for want of a cigarette. Thought then, had substance, invisible but as effective as solar energy and men in their known history had half remembered and in a few recorded instances learned to use it to a minor degree. Half remembered legends of man's fall from high estate came to his mind, perhaps he had been conditioned by wise rulers because of these mental powers. Conditioned to limitations of life, conditioned to construct artifacts to achieve what might have been accomplished by the machinery of the mind. There would come a time when men would once again reach that high estate after the laborious climb from the depths, but they were not ready for it yet, men still had a long way to go. He under-

stood now how wise the rulers were, who knew, knew what happened to people like himself who had accidentally discovered the easy way.

He was immortal, mankind had not advanced sufficiently to accept immortals into their midst without the disrupture of society and the collapse of their economy.

To them I am a God he thought and suddenly hated himself. It was like a child with a disrupter pistol, supreme power yet neither the experience nor the wisdom to use it. One of the Gods with only the wrath of the Gods, no more. He might loose his temper, curse, and one of his fellow-beings might drop dead in front of him. No, mankind was not ready for him yet and he was not ready for mankind.

One day they would come for him, men who had learned the wise use of their powers, who had gained them in the rough climb of evolution. It would be a long wait, but he had a lot to learn, and—what was a few hundred years to an immortal?

PHILIP E. HIGH

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# Into The Empty Dark

*Somewhere in the million miles of surrounding emptiness a man was calling for help. Was it possible to ignore him?*

*Illustrated by Harry Turner*

Captain John Strackland woke from a dream in which he chased butterflies across green meadows to stare into the face of Holton a few inches above his own. Beyond the engineer the latticed struts and metallic fabric of the too-familiar ship served but to accentuate the nostalgia of his dream. He blinked, wet his lips and was immediately alert.

"Trouble?"

"No." Holton looked anxious. "At least I don't think so. Not us anyway."

John relaxed a little.

"Sparks is getting something on the radio," said Holton. "He said to let you know."

"On the radio?"

"Yes."

It could have been a joke, space-happy men do strange things, but John knew his crew too well to accept the obvious explanation. But they were half-way between Earth and Mars, two months from home and well beyond the radio-range of either planet. The radio should have remained silent until they approached landing, when it would have been used to call the tugs to come and relieve them of their cargo,

restock them with food, fuel, water, air and a return load. Holton supplied the answer.

"Sparks thinks that maybe it's another ship." He stepped back as John left the bunk. "We were playing chess and he stepped into the control room for his lucky piece, you know the thing he carries. He didn't come back, so I went after him. He was sitting in front of the radio adjusting the knobs. He said that the attention light was on and he was trying to find out why."

"He thought it important enough for me to be woken?"

"I guess so," said Holton. "He said to call you."

"Very well." John looked pointedly at the door. "I'll join you when I'm ready."

Discipline was lax on space ships, it had to be if the three-men crews were to operate in harmony, but the Captain was still the Captain and it was his job to make the others remember that. Sleep was more valued in space than anywhere else. With slightly less than earth-normal gravity imparted by spin, with no physical labour and nothing to do to pass the time, sleep offered an escape from absolute monotony.

And it wasn't easy to get to sleep.

John zippered his coverall, laved his face with a wet towel, and rinsed his mouth. He stared into the mirror, brushing his thick, greying hair, forcing himself to forget the problem Holton had brought him. There was no emergency, he could relax, there was nothing he could do until he learned more data.

Sparks supplied it.

"Static," he said. He stared up at John, his head disfigured by earphones, and his hands moved delicately over the vernier controls. "A wash of static and a very faint signal." He tensed. "Something coming now."

"Can't we get it over the speakers?"

"Amplification steps up the noise," said Sparks, but he tripped a switch just the same. "Hear it?"

John heard it. A rushing roar of jumbled sound like the distant murmur of a dozen Niagaras. The crackle and pop and splutter of radio-noise which had originated when the universe was born. The tiny sounds of new-born atoms and dying suns, the louder sounds of spacial storms and electro-magnetic currents, the roaring thunder of broadcasted radiation.

And something else.

It was weak and faint and it faded almost to nothing only to return,

still weak, but still fighting the overwhelming noise. It was a jumble, a voiceless cry, a thin thread of man-made sound in the wilderness of natural violence.

"A ship," said Sparks. "That's all it could be." He cut off the speaker and tilted his head as if to listen. "Coming in faint but on the regular band." He looked at John.

"Have you transmitted to him?"

"Yes, sent our identification signal so as to activate his receivers as his did ours." He adjusted more controls. "It keeps fading. That ship is either a long way away or the radio is operating on minimum power."

"How do you figure that?" said Holton. "Background noise?"

"That's right."

"It doesn't apply. If they were having trouble with their pile the same thing would happen." He scowled at the radio. "How is it they activated our radio with such a weak signal?"

"Pulse signals are always stronger than voice modulation," said Sparks. "If they had a Morse key we'd be reading them by now." He fell silent then, leaning forward, switched on the speaker again. The wash of background noise seemed louder than before.

"It could be a lonely radio-man trying to scare up some conversation," said Holton slowly. He looked at John as if for confirmation. John remained silent.

"Well," said Holton stubbornly. "It could be that."

"Sure," said Sparks. "I suppose it could." He listened for a moment. "Never mind the power-drain in sending out a continuous activating pulse-signal. Never mind the Regs and forget the fact that, in twenty years of interplanetary flight, no one ship has ever spoken to another."

He didn't elaborate and he didn't need to. Ships, once they had left the vicinity of a planet, were lost in the immensity of space. No two ships followed the same route and they were still few enough to cause comment when landing. A man, crossing the Antarctic on foot, shouting as he went to attract attention, would have a better chance of getting a reply than one ship had of contacting another. It was a possibility so remote that no one in their right mind would even consider it.

But apparently it had happened.

"Can you step up the power?" suggested Holton. "Wouldn't that bring him in clearer?"

"Sure, but it would bring in the noise too." Sparks looked impatient. "The signal-noise ratio is all to hell for reception. To get one we have to take the other and there's no way of cutting it out. If there was we'd have had ship to planet radio long ago. Ship to ship radio too." He cut out the speaker. "All we can do is to sit and hope that he comes nearer or steps up his transmission. Either will increase his signal.

"You'll listen for it," said Holton eagerly. "You'll be waiting."

"Not so fast," said John. He was the Captain and he gave the orders. "We still aren't certain that it is a ship. We are getting something, yes, but it could be a freak-broadcast. We could have picked up a ship to planet conversation or a message beamed from one of the satellites. It could even be natural noise which we are translating, by a trick of sound association, into indistinguishable words. We can't be sure."

"I'm sure," said Holton. "That's another ship, I know it is."

Sparks didn't say anything. He switched on the speaker. The rush of noise came again, crackling, popping, roaring but, over and in it, mixed and almost lost in the natural noise, came that thin, wavering thread of almost recognisable sound.

"All right," said John. "We'll sweat it out." He fumbled in the pockets of his coverall, found cigarettes, lit one. "But there's no need for us all to wait like this. Make some coffee, Holton. We'll take it easy until we can be sure."

"Coffee?" Holton hesitated, listening to the sound from the radio. "You want coffee, Sparks?"

"Might as well." The radio-man slipped the earphones from his head and rubbed his ears. "This thing may take a little time."

It took an hour.

John and Holton were sipping coffee, smoking, and making an attempt to play chess when Sparks called them. He shouted from the control room and, before the echoes of his voice had died away, both men were standing behind him.

"It's coming," said Sparks. "Listen."

The noise was as loud as before but this time, when he turned on the speaker, the mumble of man-made sound was stronger. It faded and rushed and mumbled but it was there. And it was from a ship.

"... freighter X119 calling, come in please ... X119 ... come in ... freighter ... calling ... please ..."

"Freighter X104 calling. Sparks spoke clearly into the microphone.

"We are receiving you. We are receiving you. Can you hear us?"

" . . . freighter X119 calling, come in please. Freighter X119 call . . ." The voice wavered, blurred, then reverted to an indistinguishable whisper.

"He isn't getting us," said Holton. "Try again, Sparks."

"Give him time," said John. "We don't know how far away he is. The time-lag may be pretty high." He looked at Sparks. "Did you time it?"

"Sure." The radio-man leaned towards his instruments. "Fifteen seconds as yet . . . twenty . . . twenty-five . . . thirty." He shook his head, threw a switch and picked up the microphone. "Freighter X104 calling Freighter X119. We are receiving you. We are receiving you. Come in please. Come in."

"Thirty seconds," said John thoughtfully. "Almost three million miles."

"Not necessarily," said Sparks. "He would have to reply and our signal may have been lost."

"Three million isn't so much," said Holton. "We can radio in from that distance."

"Sure, but the satellite stations have the equipment to sort the signal from the noise." Sparks lifted his earphones, rubbed his ears, settled the headset back again. "Those satellite installations are really something, they have a mass of equipment bigger than this ship and all the power they need. They don't have to worry about weight."

It was true and they all knew it. Weight, on the freighters, was cut to a minimum. Radio was necessary only for a brief interval during the end of each trip and elaborate and expensive installations weren't essential. Ship radios relied more on the power of the big installations for successful operation than on their own strength. The saved weight was added to the pay-load.

The wash of noise from the speaker faded a little and the thin, wavering voice became recognisable again. It repeated the same message over and over, the words flat and emotionless as if dictated by a machine.

"They didn't hear us," said John. "Try again."

He listened as Sparks spoke into the microphone, his eyes on the sweep hand of the chronometer. Ten seconds . . . fifteen . . . twenty . . . twenty-five . . . thirty.

"No soap." Sparks tripped a couple of switches, operated one in a series of jerks, and reached for the microphone. "Maybe the pulse



signal will make him up. I'm betting he hasn't switched on his receiver, if we are getting his signal he should be getting ours." John nodded, still looking at the chronometer.

At eighteen seconds the voice altered.

"... you can hear me? You are receiving me?" The sound of laughter and a sudden fading as if the radio-man had turned away and was shouting to someone. "Did you here that? I've contacted someone!" The voice strengthened. "You're coming in weak but clear. Man! Am I glad to hear you!"

"Stand by for time-check," said Sparks. "Use the activating signal. Respond immediately. Now!" He threw a switch, waited a moment, threw another and then a third. He sat staring at his panel, waiting for the red light to flash, his lips moving as he silently counted off the seconds. The light flashed, he reached for the switches and spoke into the microphone. "Seventeen seconds as near as makes no difference. You agree?" The seconds crawled by as they waited for the answer.

"Sure, seventeen on the nose." The voice chuckled. "About 1,500,000 miles, I'm as good as home." Laughter came again, thin, high-pitched, verging on hysteria. The laughter of a man who had been too near the breaking point for too long. John frowned and picked up the microphone.

"Captain John Strackland speaking," he said. "Are you in trouble? Repeat, are you in trouble?"

"Trouble?" The voice became serious. "We're wrecked. We've been wrecked for a long time, days, weeks, a long time. I've been calling for help, calling and calling and never getting an answer until now. Thank God you heard me! Thank God for his..."

The voice rattled on, the words tumbling over each other in a sudden rush of prayer and thanksgiving. It was a soul laid bare, a child weeping his gratitude for deliverance. John waited until the spate of words had died a little.

"Calm yourself." He deliberately made his voice hard and official. "What is your situation? Repeat, what is your situation?"

"Lousy." The voice gulped and became normal. "We were hit by a meteor, a small one, but it jammed the controls and fired the main drive. The blast wasn't even and we were driven at top acceleration off-course. Lawson, our engineer, went back to see if he could fix things. He was still trying when the fuel blew and shot the forequarter into space like a damn cannon ball. We've been travelling ever since."

"I understand." John hoped that the utter lack of emotion in his

voice would reassure the other. "So your engineer is dead. What of your Captain? Or are you the Captain?"

"I'm Roper, the radio-man. Captain Whalen is dead."

"Is he? Then who were you talking to a while ago?"

"Was I talking to him?" The voice sounded infinitely weary. "Maybe I was, I wouldn't know. But he's dead all right. He was hurt pretty badly in the explosion, lost a lot of blood and couldn't move. I did what I could for him but it wasn't much."

"And yourself? Are you hurt?"

"Left arm's busted. I strapped it up." Desperation crept into the voice. "What sort of talk is this? Why all the questions? Do you get a kick out of it or something?"

"Calm yourself?" snapped John. "Emotion will serve no useful purpose." He moistened his lips, acutely conscious of the way Sparks and Holton were staring at him. "Now this is for the record. I have your identification number and the names of the crew. I want your course at time of accident, the time of accident, your port of departure, port of destination, cargo and all other relevant details."

"Are you joking?" The voice said something obscene. "To hell with the record! You know my number and can find out the rest. I don't know the details, all I know is that I've been cooped up in this coffin long enough. I'm operating on emergency power, the air is getting bad, I haven't slept for weeks and the Captain is beginning to stink. And you ask me about details!" The hysteria was back and the voice sounded ugly. "What are you, a machine? There's only one thing important now and that is to get me out of here. Do you understand? Get me out of here!"

It seemed a perfectly natural request.

"We've got to rescue him," said Holton. He put down the pot of coffee, stared at John, then tilted his head to catch what Sparks was saying. The radio-man had sat before his set for two hours and all the time he had sent his voice out into space to provide a measure of comfort to his opposite number adrift somewhere in the void.

John hoped that it would help.

He poured coffee, tasted it, added sugar, tasted it again then set it down. From a crumpled package he took a cigarette and lit it from the butt of the one he had been smoking.

"We've got to rescue him," said Holton again. "Haven't we?"

"How?" John looked up from the papers before him. They were covered with scribbled calculations. "Go on," he said as the engineer hesitated. "Tell me how."

"Well, couldn't we put on the suits and go out to him? We could take a spare, put him in it, and fetch him back." He didn't sound too convinced of his own argument. "Or we could blast the ship towards his and make the transfer from hull to hull."

"Sounds nice," said John. He raised his voice. "Coffee, Sparks."

"Bring it in here," called the radio-man. "I'm busy."

"No." John halted Holton's instinctive gesture. "Come in here, Sparks," he shouted. "That's an order." He listened to the radio-man say something over the set, frowned, then looked up as Sparks entered the living quarters. "Take a break," he said mildly. "You've been talking to Roper for two hours now, almost three since first contact. A few minutes radio silence won't hurt him."

"You think not?" Sparks poured coffee and helped himself to a cigarette. "Maybe if you were in his shoes you wouldn't say that."

"Maybe." John ignored the discourtesy, in space it was the big things which mattered. "Holton thinks that we should rescue him."

"Was there ever any doubt?" Sparks set down his cup and looked at John. "Now look, I know that you've the reputation for being a martinet, but there are limits even to what you will do. We just can't leave Roper out there."

"Out where?" John looked at the tip of his cigarette, feeling anger stir within him and trying to fight it down.

"Out there, of course," Sparks gestured to the hull and the universe beyond it. "Roper's a human being, John, one of us. We can't do anything but rescue him."

"You haven't answered my question, Sparks," said John evenly. He looked at Holton. "And before both of you begin to get the idea that I'm a discipline-happy martinet, let me say now that nothing would make me happier than to rescue Roper from his living hell. But how?"

"Go after him, of course," said Sparks immediately. "How else?"

"Go where, Sparks?" John stared at the radio-man. "From the information you've gathered from Roper I've managed to resolve a few figures. His ship was on the Venus-Earth run when the accident happened. We know the approximate time of the accident, the approximate time the main drive was on full blast, but we can only guess at the velocity imparted to the wrecked forequarter by the detonation of the fuel. Owing to the relative positions of the planets the wrecked portion

of the ship has come somewhere in our vicinity. Now, for Roper to still be alive, the wreck must be travelling at a fairly high velocity. "Agreed?"

"I guess so," said Holton. "I hadn't thought about it."

"Then think about it now. Even assuming that the accident happened shortly after we left Earth, two months ago, and that triangulation has thrown us together, Roper must still be travelling pretty fast. But that isn't all."

John reached for a clean sheet of paper. "Roper came into radio-range with a seventeen second time-lag; eight and a half seconds either way, which puts him approximately 1,500,000 miles away." He drew a circle on the sheet of paper. "Imagine this circle to represent a sphere 3,000,000 miles in diameter. We are at the centre. Now Roper could have entered the sphere at any point and could be travelling in any direction. As a sphere has an infinite number of points he could be travelling one of an infinite number of courses." He threw down the pencil and reached for his coffee. "Rescue, in such circumstances, isn't as simple as I could wish."

"You don't have to be so damn smug about it," said Sparks savagely. "When I think of Roper . . ." He dragged at his cigarette then shook his head. "Sorry, I shouldn't have said that. I guess that you're just made different to other people."

"I try to be logical," said John evenly. "Emotion in this, as in every other circumstances, is wasted effort." He picked up his coffee, swallowed it, put down the empty cup. "Did you get the rate of time-lag drop, Sparks?"

"I did." The radio-man inhaled and made an expression as if the smoke tasted bad. "Three seconds since first contact. A second an hour."

"That means he is approaching at a relative speed of 93,000 miles an hour," said Holton. He didn't look happy about it.

"We could pick up that speed," said Sparks. "That's nothing to worry about." He glanced towards the control room. "I should be contacting him again, he must be going crazy waiting to hear a human voice." He rose from where he sat on the edge of the table. "I think I'll swap gossip with him, it's the least we can do."

"Hold it, Sparks," said John. He hesitated, searching for words. "Look, I wouldn't like you to get too entangled with Roper. Emotionally I mean. I realise that you have much in common and that you mean well, but it may not be such a good idea for you to remain in contact

so long.”

“Why not?” Sparks looked defiant. “Afraid of the power-drain?”

“No, I’m thinking of Roper.”

“So am I,” said Sparks. The cigarette crumpled in his hand.

“I . . .”

“Don’t say it!” John rose from his chair and stared at the other man. “Use your brains instead of your emotions for a change. How do you think Roper must feel about all this? He can speak to us and we can speak to him and he expects to be rescued. Well, we will rescue him—if we can. But don’t raise his hopes only to crush them again. Don’t talk of all the good times you’ll have on Mars when we land. Don’t hurt him more than you have to.”

“I don’t see it that way,” said Sparks. “I’m trying to take his mind off what he’s going through. A friendly voice never hurt no one.”

“It hasn’t always helped them either. Roper was half-crazy when we made contact. He was talking to a dead man. Now, thanks to you, he’s back to normal. I hate to think of what he’d feel if we let him down.”

“John’s right, Sparks,” said Holton. “It would be like offering a kid some candy and then snatching it away.”

“All right,” said Sparks. “So I won’t make any promises, but I’m going to talk to him anyway. I can let him know that we haven’t forgotten him.”

“You can do that,” said John. “But be careful.”

He sighed as Sparks returned to his radio, Holton with him, and stared down at the sheets of paper spread over the table. Sparks was wrong, John could imagine only too well what Roper must be going through. He closed his eyes, imagining the dim glow of the emergency lights, the thickness of the stale air, the sweat of condensation on the walls, the ugly smears where blood had splattered and dried. He could visualise the row of illuminated dials on the radio, staring with their unwinking machine-eyes into the dim blueness. He could hear the rushing noise from the speakers and the cheerful voice of Sparks. And he could smell the taint in the air and know of the limp and rotting body just to hand.

He could imagine it all too well.

He opened his eyes and the scribbled papers sprang into view, the bright lights, the soft hum of the fans and the drone of conversation from the control room. His mouth still held the imagined taste of the wreck and he reached for the coffee, filling his cup to the brim and



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adding sugar until it tasted like syrup.

He lit a fresh cigarette and, picking up his pencil, stared at his papers.

This way? His pencil traced a chord across the circle ahead of the centre. This way? Another chord to the rear. Or this way? Or this? Lines marred the surface of the paper but they all added up to the same thing. An infinite number of possible directions. The only fact they had to go on was that, somewhere within a 3,000,000 mile radius, a wrecked space ship was heading toward them at a speed of 93,000 miles an hour. Not directly towards them, nothing as simple as that, but merely in their general direction. Or perhaps they were moving towards it? That too was possible. Anything was possible. Anything but the fact that they could locate it by anything but the purest luck.

Sparks was telling a smoking room story when John entered the control room. Holton sat beside the radio, his forehead furrowed in thought. Both men were smoking and the air was heavy with tobacco fumes. Smoking in the control room was against Regulations but John didn't mention it. There were times when a Captain had to shut his

eyes. He took the microphone.

"Captain Strackland speaking," he said. "How are you, Roper?"

"Fine!" The voice from the speaker sounded as if Roper were telling the truth. "It's funny how much a man can stand when he knows that he doesn't have to stand it for long."

John looked at Sparks, who shrugged and shook his head.

"About your power," said John. "How are your batteries?"

"Getting damn low," said Roper cheerfully. "I'm sitting in the dark now to conserve energy, but what the hell? They'll last long enough."

"Yes," said John. "Is your televue working?"

"No."

"But you have a direct vision port, haven't you?"

"Sure, but I can't use it. The explosion strained the fabric and the shutter's stuck." Roper laughed again. "I tell you I'm sitting in this wreck like a pea in a pod. But why all the questions?"

"We may have a little trouble locating you," said John carefully. "I was hoping that you would be able to signal us in some way."

"I am," said Roper. "I'm radioing you, aren't I? What's that but a signal? I . . ." His voice faded, died, and when it returned it was heavy with thought. "I forgot that," he said. "Me, a radio-man, and I forgot it. Of course, you can't get a fix on me, can you? You can hear me but you don't know where I am. I'm just a voice shouting out of the dark, a sound in the fog, a vibration in the ether." He laughed. a brittle sound without humour. "And I can't tell you where I am. I don't know and there's no way of finding out. Even if I could see outside I couldn't tell you. There are no landmarks in space."

"We'll find you," said Sparks. He snatched the microphone and almost shouted into it. "We'll find you. You just keep on sending, that's all." He turned to face John, opened his mouth, then closed it as Holton reached over and switched off the radio.

"Now talk," said the engineer. "You got a plan?"

"We can take the suits and go outside," said Sparks. "Two of us can go. We can kick off in opposite directions and travel a good way out. We can listen in and take a fix and triangulate on him that way."

"No, we can't," said John. "For one thing, the suit radios are too weak to pick up his signal. For another we haven't got the equipment to take a fix anyway." He looked at Sparks. "But there might be another way," he said thoughtfully. "That forequarter can't be very big, but there's just a chance that it will occlude the stars." John

stepped to the control panel and activated the televiue. An external image, stationary because of the coleostat, shone on the screen. Against the blackness of space the stars looked like thickly-sprinkled diamonds.

"That's right," said Holton. "If we can spot something blotting them out we can trace it and find where it is."

"Then what are we waiting for?" Sparks was impatient. "Let's get the suits and go outside. Roper's running out of time." He stepped towards the suit-locker then halted as John gripped his arm.

"Take it easy," said John. "First we must cut spin. Then remember that space is big and the ship we're looking for very small. "The best time to go outside will be when it is close to us." He gestured towards the radio. "Stand by and let me know the second the time-lag begins to rise. When that happens he will be going away from us. Then we'll start looking."

"Would it hurt to cut spin now and start looking?"

"You heard what I said, Sparks," snapped John. "We'll do it my way."

He walked away before the radio-man could argue.

Three hours later the time-lag began to rise. It had fallen to just under eleven seconds, the wreck was a million miles away, then it began to rise. Roper had come as near to them as he was going to. John cut spin, fighting the nausea of free fall, the sickness he hated, and watched as Sparks and Holton donned suits and went outside. He contacted them on the radio, switched on to three-way reception, and listened to Roper's voice.

He didn't listen long.

The radio-man was sick, physically and mentally, and he attempted to disguise it with a running commentary of artificial cheerfulness which John found distasteful. A man shouldn't lie to himself while waiting for death.

For Roper was going to die.

John knew it, had known it all along and, if they had used their intelligence, so did the others. It wasn't just a question of not being able to locate the wreck though that, in itself, was a possibility so remote as to be unthinkable. It was a question of unmatched velocities, restricted fuel and the fact that, in order to save weight, no ship carried a computer.

There was no need for one, any more than there was need for a powerful radio or a five-man crew. The course was set at port of departure, computed by the big installations on the satellites given, and



corrected if necessary, by radio. Once on-course the ship stayed that way and, aside from the hundred million to one chance which had befallen Roper, nothing would shift it. On arrival course corrections could be made if necessary, the three million mile radio range left plenty of scope for that and, again, the satellite computers relayed the information.

Even if they located the wreck John knew that he dared not go after it.

Not with its velocity of 93,000 miles an hour and its off-course direction. It would take a lot of fuel to increase their velocity sufficiently to overtake the wreck. More fuel to decelerate to match velocities. Still more fuel to decelerate back to their old speed so that they wouldn't overshoot their destination. And that was without counting the fuel necessary to alter course. Unlimited fuel was one thing; a good computer was another and both were essential for spacial navigation. John had neither.

He sighed as he stood before the televue and looked at the screen. He liked the stars, so cold, so bright, so distant. He liked to think of them as the parts of a well-ordered machine. To him they were shining symbols of law and order and clear-cut logic. He frowned as one of them blinked, then another, then a third. Stars did not blink, not in space, and his hands, as he reached for a rule, trembled a little.

He had spotted the wreck.

He laid the rule on the screen, its edge along the stars which had blinked, and watched the points of light below. They blinked out, one after the other, to flare back into immediate life. The interval between the blinks was short, the area covered small, the angle was, therefore, acute. The wreck must have passed above the ship almost at right angles, bisecting the upper half of the theoretical sphere, its course slightly slanted from above the plane on which the ship travelled.

The tremor of his hands increased as he reached for paper and pencil. The radio time-lag had given the distance of the wreck. The screen had given a line of direction. It was simple mathematics to determine the flight course. John marked the screen, timed the interval between two blinks, made a calculation and sat back. After a few minutes he repeated the measurements and repeated them a third time later on. The wreck was travelling at a relative velocity of 93,000 miles an hour, on a line which would cut the plane of the ship in seventy-five minutes, at an angle of eighty degrees to the right of their longitudinal axis. In other words the wreck was ahead, to the right, and dropping

down on a long slope which would take it eventually below the plane of the ecliptic.

Heading into the empty dark.

Even knowing the flight path John knew that he could never overtake it, not in time. He would have to build up velocity—by which time the wreck would have moved on. He would have to accelerate—which took fuel he couldn't spare. He would have to change course and hunt blind for a piece of wreckage smaller than his ship. He might find it, would find it, but it would take time and Roper was running out of time.

And he had three other lives to consider.

He sat thinking about it, his pencil making doodles on the paper before him, sweat beading his forehead with unaccustomed moisture. Then he reached out, changed the setting of the televue so as to show a different portion of the universe, and stepped to the radio. Sickness clawed at his stomach half-way there, and he doubled, his magnetic boots grating on the floor as he fought the age-old fear of falling. Recovered, he leaned towards the microphone.

"Sparks, Holton, come in now."

"Come in?" Sparks sounded defiant. "So soon?"

"You heard me." John dabbed at his forehead, his stomach craving for gravity. "I'm putting on spin."

He tripped the switches, against regulations, and listened to Roper's voice. It seemed fainter, more distant, more overlaid by noise.

"... batteries getting weak I guess, hope you can still hear me. Look up that blonde I told you about, Sparks, she may remember me ..."

John turned as footsteps clanged on the floor plates. Sparks fumbled with his helmet, threw it back, stared at the Captain.

"You giving up so soon?"

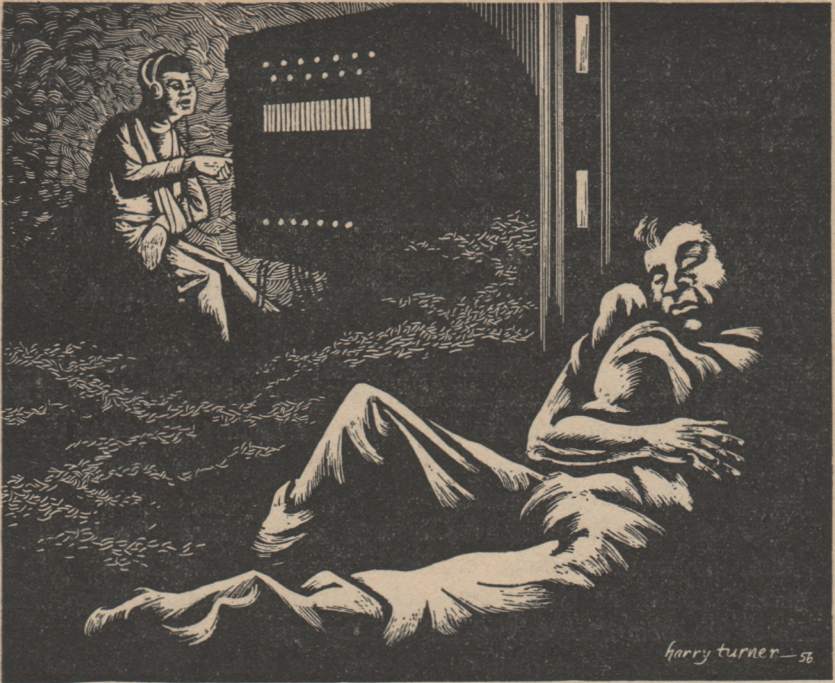
"I'm putting spin on the ship."

"Why, can't you stand a little sickness?" Sparks glanced towards the radio. "He's standing a damn sight more than that."

"Maybe." John didn't want to argue with the radio-man. He wouldn't have understood, he was too emotionally involved with the thin, fading voice from the radio. Holton might but John didn't want to put it to the test. He waited until both men were out of their suits, had towed them back in the locker, and returned to the control room. Then he fired the perimeter rockets which spun the ship.

Stomach ease came with the return of gravity.

Holton came and stood before the screen. Sparks sat at the radio.



Neither man spoke. In the silence the thin voice from the speaker wavered as it became distorted by noise.

“ . . . that was McGillcuddy. I guess he’ll never get that money I owe him now.” A silence then. “Don’t forget that address, Sparks. I wouldn’t like the old lady to think I’d passed on without leaving word. She would worry about me else, think that I’d forgotten her . . .”

“I won’t forget,” said Sparks, speaking above the babble of sound. “You hear me, Roper, I won’t forget.”

“ . . . used to let me play late when the nights were bright and I could see the stars. Just heard you, Sparks, glad that you won’t forget. Try not to keep her waiting too long.” The voice faded, died, and the natural noise seemed to fill the control room with the roar of victorious waters.

“Roper!” Sparks gripped the microphone until his knuckles showed white. “Don’t fade out, Roper. Speak to me!”

Silence and then, too soon for an answer, “. . . for God’s sake don’t leave me. For pity’s sake don’t leave me here to die like this. Not with a rotting body stinking the air. Not in the dark all alone with no

hope and nothing to see and the batteries dying and the air turning bad. Please God don't let me die like this. Save me, O Lord, and I'll serve thee for the rest of my life. Save me, Sparks, and I'll do anything you want, anything. Please God don't let me die. Don't leave me, for God's sake, don't . . ."

John switched off the radio.

"That's enough," he said curtly as Sparks jumped to his feet. "There's nothing we can do."

"But I can comfort him!" Sparks reached for the switches. "You can't let him die alone."

"Leave it!" John pushed the younger man away from the set. "Roper has broken, you can tell that. What comfort can you give him now? Or do you just want to listen in to the ravings of a dying man?" John stepped forward. "Is that it? Is that what you want? Something to boast about back home?"

He was being unfair and he knew it but it worked. Sparks glared at him, his mouth working, his hands clenched at his sides. Then, without a word, he turned and walked from the control room. The slam of his cabin door echoed through the ship.

"He's young," said Holton. "He got too close. You warned him about it but he got too close." He looked down at a crumpled sheet of paper in his hand. It was the sheet on which John had made his calculations. Holton held it out. "You'd better get rid of this," he said. "Sparks wouldn't understand."

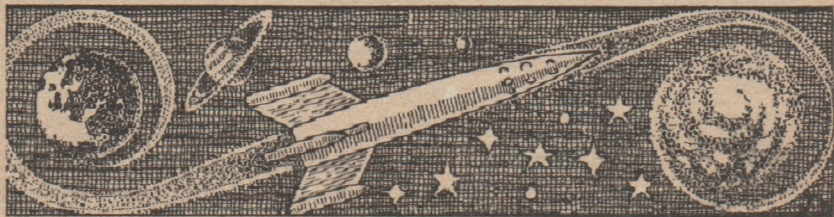
"Do you?"

"I'm an engineer," said Holton. "I understand." He looked at the sheet of paper and screwed it into a ball. "I'll get rid of it for you." He hesitated. "Don't worry about Sparks. He'll get over it."

"Yes," said John dully. "He'll get over it."

He wished that he could say the same for himself.

E. C. TUBB



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*The attainment of a far-reaching scientific achievement is never easy.  
In this instance deep-seated human prejudice also played its part*

The day Bruce Thornton became certain that he was the most hated person on Project Pseudoman he felt very pleased with himself. The feeling did not last out the day. It had taken considerable time and inexhaustible patience to marshal one thousand men and women into active hatred of him—he thought he must have been born with the galley proofs of “How to Win Friends and Influence People” in his mouth.

He sat relaxed at his desk, watching the frenzied flicker of the bell hammer and ignoring the telephone's clamour. Let 'em ring. Taking time answering displayed his arrogance and contempt of other people's feelings. Which was a pity, really—the phone girl on the manual board was interestingly female.

After a while he picked up the receiver; but did not answer immediately. More ego puncturing. Thornton's thin face, wrinkled in places that would cause a sixty-year-old to feel sorry for him, betrayed no feelings beyond a drooping boredom. He said at last: "Well, what is it?"

"Doctor Thornton. A call from Workshop Three."

He waited.

"I'm putting you through, sir."

Thornton did not reply. The receiver clucked, then a gruff voice said: "Doctor Thornton. Trouble again. Jackson just threw a wrench into the moulder. Can you come over right away?"

"I'm busy right now," Thornton said, stretching his free arm lazily. "I'll be over in a few minutes." He paused deliberately, letting the consequences of Jackson's spasm of wrecking sink like acid into his mind. Then he said with a calculated shade of contempt: "That's Bamforth speaking, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir."

"I thought so." Thornton hung up, smiling at the subtly upsetting psychological implications of that last simple remark. His smile disappeared. By the time he had finished thinking that this business of prodding people, of general stirring it up, could become too damn easy, conditioning your reactions like a drug, his face had resumed its habitual semi-sneering mask.

And his hate campaign wasn't working.

Jackson. The fair-haired, intense, dedicated-to-science youngster. A pity about Jackson: Thornton had been confident that the youngster hated his guts with as much fanaticism as he believed in Project Pseudoman. If Thornton had been doing his job efficiently Jackson should never have needed to throw that wrench into the moulder. He stood up when he had wasted enough time and left his austere office, went out of the Admin Block and made his leisurely way through the midday bustle towards the sprawled concrete monstrosity of Workshop Three.

Bamforth met him and led him silently, his neck red, over to the moulder. Thornton looked superciliously at the mess.

"The boy made a good job of it." Thornton poked disdainfully

at twisted armoured cables leading from the pressurised cookers. They ended among the moulding paddles, which were distorted and buckled, with the wrench jammed in tight somewhere beneath in the pit. "How long before you get it running again?"

"Impossible to say," Bamforth said. "Sir."

"You must have some idea. You don't draw your salary for knowing nothing."

Bamforth's hand constricted on the tank edge. "I'd estimate three weeks, at a minimum. We'll have to cut all that stuff out and replace. It's difficult to get at."

"Three weeks." Thornton was genuinely disturbed. "Hell, that's a long time. Lord knows what the Director will have to say."

He stared at the silent machines clustered under dimmed lights, their operators taking the midday break, trying to evaluate his next move and wondering just how much longer the Project's morale would last out. Bamforth hated him so much that there was no danger of a crack-up from the works foreman: but the system had broken down with Jackson and Thornton had to admit uneasily that he had thought that Jackson was safe.

Bamforth was fidgeting by the tank now, obviously hoping that Thornton, having seen the damage for himself, would leave the foreman in peace. Thornton debated whether to needle the man again or not, decided against it and said abruptly: "What happened to Jackson?"

"Security took him across to Doctor Lattimer's office, sir."

"Lattimer? How did he get into this?"

There was a wary look in Bamforth's eyes. He moistened his lips with a hesitant tongue, and finally said: "I thought it best to let Psycho know at once, sir. It was obviously a case for them."

"You thought!" Thornton stared coldly at the works foreman, seeing only a cog in a machine that was running out of gear and going to hell with frightening rapidity. "Was this before or after you phoned me?"

"Before, sir."

"I see. You didn't think to check with me and receive your orders from the proper quarter?"

Bamforth looked miserable. "Jackson's a good kid, sir. We all like him. For him to do a thing like this meant that he must have been under more of a strain than we realised. I thought it best that Psycho should——"

"You mean you thought that Doctor Lattimer would feel sorry for

Jackson, treat him as an interesting case and forget all about punishment for this damage."

"No, sir! That is, I——"

"All right, Bamforth. Don't try to deny it. You'll only end up by telling more lies. The best thing you can do is to get this moulder back into operation as fast as you can." Thornton glanced at his watch. "And I mean inside three weeks. You know as well as I that we have a test run scheduled for a fortnight—and if the electronics and microbiology boys have to wait for you to produce a skin there'll be hell to pay. I'll see Lattimer myself."

He stalked off, keeping his back stiff until he had passed out of sight of Bamforth. Then he relaxed, feeling that familiar, nauseating sensation that everything was crowded in on himself, a rat race of worry and worry piled on worry until he felt like screaming aloud to break the vicious cycle. He didn't like to dwell on his own reactions if his personal campaign of inwardly-directed hate from the workers should misfire. The Project had run into so much trouble from hysterical and temporarily psycho personnel that everything was continually in a state of flux and the Government were turning an increasingly penetrating eye on what went on under the security blanket of Project Pseudoman.

General Spenby had been known to declare that robots were good enough for him. The mechanicals had done a darned good job for three hundred years and were still capable of increased modification and efficiency, so why try to produce something completely different? The Government should take a stand on the robot question. Keep robots in use and outlaw any other kind of research—which meant the immediate closing down of Project Pseudoman. General Spenby, considered Thornton, should still be using a coal fire in his office and be denied the use of the abundance of atomic power. He grinned at the conception and wondered whether the sentence was too harsh.

He had crossed the open space before the Admin block now and ducked down a passageway between soaring concrete walls and went through a glass doorway marked PSYCH WING. It was cool in the corridor, and the nurse in starched cap at the reception desk was equally cool.

"Doctor Lattimer, Doctor Thornton?" the girl said in reply to his brusque enquiry. "I'll see if he's in."

Thornton waited. He forced himself to remain quite calm, and ironed out a tremble that threatened to start in his fingers and engulf his entire body. The nurse looked back at him from the switchboard



with a brilliant smile painted across her face. If he touched that smile, Thornton was confident that it would shatter into a thousand icy fragments.

"I'm sorry, Doctor Thornton. Doctor Lattimer's busy right now with a patient."

"I know. That is what I wish to talk to him about. Please tell Doctor Lattimer, nurse, that I must see him immediately."

"Very good, sir."

The nurse transmitted that information, then swung back, still smiling. She said: "Doctor Lattimer regrets——"

Thornton didn't wait to hear the rest of it. He went through the swing doors and along the passage until he reached Lattimer's office. Inside he saw that Lattimer still had all his various diplomas festooning the walls and the big overstuffed leather chair still exuded that phoney air of competence and security—trust me, boy, I'm a big-time psychiatrist. He smiled crookedly.

Lattimer was waiting, his sparse grey hair dishevelled as usual and his fat face thrusting forward on his short neck as though he were forever straining to hear a whisper. He dangled his pince-nez on their moire ribbon backwards and forwards and stood four-square, like a school-teacher about to chastise a recalcitrant pupil.

"What is the meaning of this, Doctor Thornton? I thought Miss Barons told you I was engaged?"

"She did." Thornton, in other circumstances, would have admired the old boy's guts. After all, Thornton was the third in command of Project Pseudoman, Assistant Deputy Director, whilst Lattimer was only the Project psychiatrist. He said pleasantly and yet underlying his words with a definite edge of authority: "I wanted to talk to you about Jackson. I fail to see why you should instruct your receptionist to turn me away."

Lattimer flushed and caught his pince-nez in one hand. He adjusted them deliberately. "I was trying to ascertain from Jackson just why he threw that wrench into the moulding vats. He's under dope no—that new complex of scopomaline Hauwenheizer derived in Vienna—and you've completely interrupted his subconscious flow——"

"Well, don't just stand there, Lattimer. Let's get straight in and carry on." Thornton hustled the old psychiatrist through the doorway into the inner room where Jackson lay, breathing shallowly on the leather couch. Lattimer shrugged, and then switched on the spot, illuminated Jackson's face. The man was completely under, relaxed, face smoothed

of wrinkles, an almost babyish cast over his features. Thornton raised an eyebrow at the old doctor and gestured impatiently. Lattimer hesitated for the barest fraction of a second and then, as if deciding that work of this kind was more important than squabbling, dropped on to the stool and looked steadily at Jackson.

"You are sleeping quietly, Jackson." Lattimer said in his soapy voice. "You are thinking of your work and the achievements already behind us here at Project Pseudoman." Jackson's lax face twitched convulsively at the mention of Pseudoman and was quiet again, receptive, blank, somehow appearing almost indecent to Thornton standing quietly watching.

"The skin must be finished very soon now, Jackson, very soon, so that the others—your friends and colleagues—may place it around the wonders of their own creation. And you want it to be completed, don't you, want it very much. So you work overtime, and are pleased when things run smoothly. You are full of the scientific fervour and grandeur of this thing you are helping to create——"

Thornton felt that the word "thing" was an unhappy choice. Jackson's reactions confirmed that view.

The young engineer's face twitched again, as though his skin was endowed with some pseudo-life of its own. He squirmed. His tongue fell loosely from his lips and spittle drooled down his chin. He gargled for words.

"Thing. Creating a thing. No!" Jackson coughed then and the doctor leaned forward and very gently freed the flaccid tongue from his teeth. Jackson rolled his head feebly.

"No. Don' wanna create thing. No good for us. For any of us. Robots all right, they'll do as told." Then shockingly, brutally, explosively. "*Frankenstein!*"

"Not that, surely, Jackson," Lattimer said smoothly, as though the filthy word had not been used. Thornton grimaced. Psychiatrists must be very accustomed to obscenity. "Project Pseudoman is only for the ultimate good of all mankind. You know that, you know that the same controls as are used for the robots will be increased and strengthened. There is no danger. Nothing to fear."

"Nothing to fear." Jackson said it like a little child repeating a mathematical table by rote. "There is fear. We control the robots. They obey us. But what we are creating here—how can we control that? How to tell them when they are abroad? How?" The words trailed off.

Lattimer looked upwards at Thornton. His face was highlighted by the spot, his grey hair lined with gold.

"Well, Doctor Thornton. Perhaps you would like to tell this poor tortured boy that. How are we to control what we are creating?"

"Get hold of yourself, Lattimer. Otherwise you'll be going schizo like the rest." Thornton made his remark harsh and hateful. Lattimer reacted correctly. His face whitened and his old back straightened. He stood up slowly and switched off the spot, turning to leave the room.

Angrily, Thornton flicked the spot on again, sending the pitiless light into Jackson's eyes. He leaned closer, ignoring Lattimer, breathing heavily somewhere to his rear.

"Jackson," Thornton said penetratingly. "We can control them quite easily. They can never harm humanity. They are our creations, made to do our will and that will is only for good. You need never fear them, they can never equal a man."

Jackson rolled his head, his cheeks gathering a slow flush of blood under the pallid skin. "Stop them," he whispered. "Before it is too late . . . wrench . . . that's it . . . before they're ever born . . . born? . . . brewed . . . that's it." His voice rose and cracked. "Before the filthy things are brewed!"

"Listen to me, Jackson." Thornton wiped a hand impatiently across his forehead. Why in hell should he be sweating now? This was just a simple job of psychiatry, a job of indoctrination, nothing more. Even as he thought that, he was laughing at himself. This was no simple job at all. This was the kernel, the basis, the whole bitter frustration of the thing. This was why he was here, on Project Pseudoman, this was what stole his sleep at nights and turned his food into bitter mush.

"Jackson," he said harshly, trying to control his emotions and hearing that damnable tremble in his voice. "Jackson. *Pseudomen cannot harm you!* You've got to believe that! They are your friends, to work beside you, take the drudgery of heavy work from your shoulders, release your brain for the delicate, finer things of life . . ."

Shockingly, Jackson interrupted him. The implications of that Thornton could not investigate just now; but they loomed horrifyingly vast upon his mental horizon.

Jackson mumbled: "Robots can do that. Why must we go on making Pseudomen? Why? They are evil, evil, evil . . ."

Lattimer said: "He's completely under now. Gone where you can't reach him to torture him."

Thornton stood up. He shook his head. His neck was aching and little blue fishes were darting into his vision from all angles. and his eyes were stinging abominably.

"I'll trouble you for an explanation of your attitude later, Doctor

Lattimer," he said dully. He walked to the door like a man drugged "Meanwhile, as soon as Jackson has recovered, I'll trouble you to have him transferred to the cell block. We have to go through the legal formalities. He will be charged with wilful destruction of Government property."

"As you say, sir." Lattimer was red-faced now, insulted and ready to fight back like a bantam at anything at all Thornton might say. Wisely, he chose to say nothing. He went out of the cool dimness of the office and past the icy disapproval of the nurse into the sun and bustle of the mid-day shift going back on duty. Somewhere a whistle blew and the sound echoed in his head like the mocking laughter of Gods, deriding him with the hopelessness of his attempts to make men want to create men to rival them for the Earth.

He sighed and went to eat.

Project Pseudoman spread its concrete and glass maze over a small valley, hemmed in by low hills and engulfing and using the brown pebbled stream that tinkled through the centre of the green valley floor. Air travel was not allowed within the valley cup and bored but efficient guards patrolled the wired perimeter. Security—on the flimsiest of pretexts thought Thornton—was enforced with crushing discipline. The world must not know of the existence of Pseudomen until they were in production, until they were capable of performing the functions of a human being, until they were perfected.

On the following Wednesday, Thornton, walking energetically towards the cell block, was possessed of his usual wonder of just when pseudoman would be a reality rather than an idea. The trial had been set back a fortnight because of Jackson's wrecking spree—and there had been other bouts of sabotage. The whole projected creaked. Government inspectors included friendly General Spenny, were due the following morning and Abernathy, the Assistant Director, had been acidly uncomplimentary to Thornton. He could still hear the high-pitched voice and squirmed mentally at its incisive destruction of his plans and methods of operation.

The Assistant Director, considered Thornton, should come into closer contact with the Project personnel; then, perhaps, he would better appreciate the strain, the tension and unease that pervaded the whole site. And the test of the latest Pseudoman, the model that was to prove completely

successful—loomed frighteningly near. That it would be a disaster if morale did not improve Thornton was gloomily certain. The devil of it was, the technicians and scientists wanted a success, consciously they worked to that end; but what deep and murky motives lurked in their subconscious minds ready to pounce the instant concentration was let down? He knew only that he did not know enough about the aspect of the matter and cursed his lack of foresight accordingly.

The cell block struck him with its chill as he went in and through with a guard to Jackson's cubicle. It was a different sort of chill from the grateful coolness in other buildings. He licked his lips and went in as the guard swung the steel door back.

Jackson looked ghastly. His fair hair was plastered across his forehead and his eyes were sunken pits of blue-rimmed misery in the yellow skin stretched across his bones. His fingers twitched constantly.

Thornton felt revolted at the sight. He made himself sit down on the three-legged stool just inside the door and keep that revulsion from showing on his face

"Cigarette, Jackson?"

"Thanks." Jackson took the cigarette and began shredding it. Little shreds of tobacco spilled across the concrete floor. Thornton did not say anything.

"Why did I do it?" Jackson burst out suddenly. "Am I going mad? Why? In God's name, why?"

"I don't think anybody knows the answer to that. I'm hoping to find out, though. With your help."

"Of course I'll help you. What's going to happen to me? I've been told I am to be charged with destroying——"

"Don't worry about that for a bit, Jackson. You didn't want to do anything to delay the project. You are heart and soul in this job—and yet you deliberately smashed the moulders, went down to the floor for that purpose—and put us back a fortnight."

Jackson let out a little sob. "I can't understand what got into me? It's crazy! I have just as much stake in projection Pseudoman as the next guy. And I don't believe all this guff handed out by the truemens cliques."

Thornton came alert. His eyes narrowed a trifle as he evaluated what Jackson had just said. He had to make this tortured boy help him in finding the root causes of the psychotic waves of destruction that swept the project—find the causes, when he had to admit that the basic cause was as plain as an atomic bomb and as potentially explosive.

"Surely you don't believe that," he said easily, keeping one eye on

Jackson. "That stuff's for the kids."

"That's what we all say, although the cliques push out their propaganda all the time. Pseudoman will cause all truemen to die off, according to the truemen cliques." Jackson was breathing more rapidly now and the cigarette was a broken mess on the floor. Thornton prodded him along with casual, artless questions.

"You come to work, find a pamphlet under your microscope. Go to lunch, a pamphlet stuck round your glass. Yeah—they even leave pamphlets in the toilet!" Jackson giggled loosely, still very much under the influence of the doubts that had obsessed his mind since his act of sabotage.

Thornton said: "They're pretty naive, these pamphlets. Full of semantic overtones and errors of fact." He had never seen one of these pamphlets: had never heard of their existence until now. "How long you been finding them around, Jackson?"

"Oh, coupla weeks," Jackson forgot that, went back to his fears. "Can you tell me what is going to happen to me? What are they going to do?"

Thornton stood up, his mind already set on his next course of action. "Don't you worry about that, Jackson. You'll have a little holiday—get away from it. We won't be charging you with anything. Got to keep you top-line workers fit and a holiday's just the thing."

"What about the team——"

"Now don't you worry about them. I imagine Carmody can handle your end of things until you're okay to come back. And we want you back, Jackson. You're a good worker," He meant that, too.

"Thanks, sir. I'll—I'm sorry about——"

"Forget it. Just relax."

Thornton went out and the steel door clanged behind him like the end of a chapter. Jackson had been right about the team. The small group of men charged with the final preparation of the first Pseudoman to come off the line, the new model, they just had to be firing on all jets. If one of them cracked, just when the test was being made, with all the Government big boys around—Thornton shut his mind to that and went rapidly across the compound to his scooter.

He rang his office from a corner call-box and instructed his robot secretary to find Danial X. Magister and have him go to Doctor Thornton's office. Thornton was smiling very wryly as he came out of the box. Daniel X. Magister—the X. was there because Daniel felt the importance of a middle initial and the lack of having been provided with

one—might be the very man for this job. The sun seemed appreciably warmer as he scooted back along the avenue of concrete and grass to the Admin Block. He parked his scooter and, as regulations demanded, pocketed the plug, and went up to his office.

The thought of the team was preying on his mind. Assuming that everything went smoothly, in a month's time—give or take a day—Pseudoman Number One would roll off the assembly line. Thornton chuckled, surprising himself. Pseudoman Number One would *walk* off the end of the line. In that act was tied up the work of a thousand people, a considerable number of billions of pounds, and the future of a whole industry and the social life of a planet. Not to mention his own job. That team had to work smoothly. Even if he personally lambasted each member of it.

That meant he had to conquer the irrational acts of sabotage performed by men who consciously desired the same ends as he did. The puzzle was not so much why they did the things they did as how to stop them. He pushed open his door and went in.

Daniel X. Magister jumped up from the chair where he had been reading a comic paper. His red, cherubic face with the childish blue eyes seemed to exist around the cigar stub, damp and dead between his teeth. The day Thornton saw that cigar either burning or longer than an inch and a half he had promised to buy Daniel a drink. He hadn't told Daniel that, though. The guy was no fool.

"What do you know of the truemen cliques, Daniel?"

Daniel shifted his big feet on the rug and rubbed a large and ring-bedecked hand round his neck. "I've heard of them, boss," he offered cautiously.

"Well?"

"They don't like these Soodomen. Yell bloody murder that we're all gonna be wiped out in Armageddon or something similar. Ain't of no account, though, boss."

"I want you to find out all you can, bring me in some of their leaflets. You'll find them all over."

"Leaflets? I don't get you, boss."

"The next time you take a bath have a look round, you might find subversive propaganda quite near."

Daniel finished scratching his neck and began to unwrap a stick of chewing gum. Thornton watched fascinatedly. He knew what was going to happen. Daniel wadded the gum up, rolled his cigar stub to one side of his mouth, inserted the gum and methodically began to chew it. The cigar jumped up and down in severe metronomic rhythm.

Thornton winced.

"I gotcha, boss. These subversives gotta be eliminated."

"Just bring me the evidence. That's all. And if you can tail one of 'em, find out where the stuff is printed, find out who's the big man—well, that will be helpful."

Daniel X. Magister grunted, bent down and retrieved his comic book and thrust it into a pocket where the ugly shape of a gun bulged his trousers. He went out with the swift walk of a practised hunter. Thornton shook his head, wondering whether he was right in believing the old one about means and ends being justified. Daniel was a very clever security man and just how much of his dumbness was an act even Thornton couldn't say. At least, the big lug really did enjoy his comic books. And—he was one person on the site who didn't hate Thornton's guts.

Thornton went to his window and punched the stud to allow fresh air in, the slats each revolved along their axes, and he let the scents of the Admin Block's flower beds rise up to him. There was always such a lot to do, and never enough time—he paced impatiently back to his desk and the picture of young Jackson as he had been in the cell block rose before him startingly. He wiped a tissue across his face and dumped the wrecked paper into the disposer. What was so bad about Jackson that the guy kept coming back to haunt him? Sitting at his desk, Thornton found concentration difficult. He cursed flatly and decided to face the issue. He had one answer to the problem that was worrying him; he felt a strong certainty that he could stop the welling of destructive subconscious urges from the higher echelons of scientists—but he doubted whether he had the guts to put that cure into operation.

He stood up quickly and threw his ball-point viciously at his blotting pad. Even as the pen stuck and quivered he saw the connection between unnecessary blotting paper and ball-points and the hanging on of old-fashioned habits in the face of new discoveries and ways of life.

His step was firm and assured as he went out and across the gravel paths between the flower beds. He had made up his mind. If he was wrong—well, the outer planets always needed men and he'd been possessed of a hankering to see the rings of Saturn close up ever since he could remember. He took deep breaths and walked rapidly, like a man about to challenge some physical obstacle.

If the challenge was only physical there was gathered here on the Project more brainpower than perhaps had ever congregated before, brilliance that had delved into the inner secrets of life itself and dredged up age-old problems and fitted neat shiny new theories to order. Only—someone had missed out on the psycho side. And he'd been stuck with



it. It struck him as funny and he smiled a little, walking through the sunlight, head high, so that hostile eyes watching would never guess the turmoil going on inside his mind.

That team had better get the Psuedóman operating at one hundred percent efficiency—Thornton's fists gripped at his sides—or else he'd take each individual man of it apart and find out what made a man tick, let alone a Pseudoman.

Between the long humped hippopotamus shape of Shed Twenty where the little river ran out free from the Project and the high wired gate giving egress from the confusion of buildings, a two storied house with a red-tiled roof had been built. It looked completely out of place; quaint, unreal, as though a fairy-story book had been dropped on a factory floor.

The small gilt letters on the wooden plaque formed one word. DIRECTOR.

While he was waiting to be admitted, Thornton's mind was running round and round his decision, worrying the problem like a puppy at a ball of wool, trying to find the flaws he felt must be there. He had found none when the door opened and a speaker said: "Doctor Thornton, this is a pleasure. I'm up in the gym. Come on up."

Thornton climbed the stairs and found the Director stripped naked lying on a liquid-filled rubber mattress. The rubber slapped up and down against the Director's body with a slithering smacking sound, like a thousand new-born babies being slapped into the world. The Director was fat. There wasn't a hair on his body. He reminded Thornton of a capsized liner surging sluggishly to the swells.

"Well, Bruce." The words came incisively enough, even if they were cut short regularly as the Director's body bounced. "Jackson and his wrench. Trouble. You tell me what . . . we're going to . . . do about it."

"It's not just Jackson, Sam," Thornton said slowly. "He happened to do most damage. There have been ten cases of sabotage since then. In every case the people involved have sworn they didn't want to do it, that they'd give all they have for the Project, that—well you know."

"Security guards . . . no good?"

Thornton laughed harshly. "One guard was nabbed just as he was about to smash a brain—that would have set us back a year."

The Director switched off his massage bath and swung his feet to the floor. He glowered at Thornton.

"A brain! Good God, Bruce, I hadn't heard—this is serious."

"Happened yesterday—my report's somewhere on your desk, I suppose. As it hadn't damaged anything there wasn't any need to get excited—and I wanted to see you."

"Well?"

"Saw the A.D. and he's plenty worried. I want your permission to carry out a course of operation that will ensure that at least we have the final team trouble free. He passed the buck along to you."

"The A.D.s all right, Bruce. Just because you and I happen to have been life-long friends—and that's a laugh, come to think of it—we've still got to do our jobs."

"I know. That's why I want to make sure that the final six men who handle the first Pseudoman off the line won't suddenly go psycho and smash its head in or something equally clever. Bamforth reckons he can get a new skin ready in time—there have been delays all round. The micro-biology boys have their goo all ready and the electronics people have the skeleton completed. The brain——"

"What d'you want to do?"

Thornton carried on speaking quite smoothly; but he had a wry inner amusement. Old Sam didn't miss much.

"Clear up these chaps' subconscious—or, rather, to carry out a bit of id purging. Let them really believe there is no danger from the Pseudomen. They say there is no danger and believe that with their upper brain; but what their unconscious, their inheritance of racial fear of the unknown, has to say is another thing again."

"Id Purging." The Director heaved his gross body off the rubber bath and waddled across to a wall rack. He hung himself across it and punched the stud. His arms and legs began to vibrate. "Id Purging," he said again, his voice trembling with the movement of his body. "What's that in layman's English?"

"You're no layman, Sam. Come off it!"

"I've gotta tell the damn commission something when they arrive. Well, then, what words do you suggest I use when they enquire what you mean by Id Purging?"

Thornton hadn't considered that side of the question. He had been too busy coming to terms with his own conscience to worry about what others might say.

"Well—you could call it clearing the subconscious mind of harmful thought, a sort of spring-cleaning of outmoded ideas. That ought to appeal to the commission."

"Hah! That old crow Spenby's on it. I don't like him—that's flat. He rants on against our Pseudomen; but he's already put in a claim for

fifty per cent of the first production batch for Space Force tests.”

“The damned old hypocrite! Anyway, he shouldn’t have much to say about our own psychological methods; it’s a question outside his field.”

“Yes. You could be right.” The Director switched off the vibrator and waddled across the room to stand before Thornton. He looked very thoughtful, and more grave than Thornton remembered in years. “All right, then. Providing we cook up something that’ll fob off the commission tomorrow, you can go ahead with your—your Id Purging. But But I don’t like it. I’m only agreeing because I rely on you, Bruce. If we’re caught out and the deal flops—it’ll be the mines on Pluto for us.”

“Don’t be so romantic, Sam. You’ve been reading too many comic strips. You don’t want to be like Daniel X., do you?”

The Director chuckled, a lightening of his features which relieved Thornton immeasurably. He’d been dreading the outcome of this interview; now that he’d surmounted the first obstacle, the actual performance of the so-called Id Purging seemed of minor importance.

“Magister is a useful bod, Bruce. Leave him and his books to get along—at least that’s one field where micro-film didn’t catch on.”

“Not yet, it hasn’t,” Thornton replied, thinking about his forthcoming battle with men’s minds. “All right, Sam. Thanks for understanding. I’ll begin right away and check with you after the meeting—no, sorry, better make that before.”

“Do that, Bruce. And for God’s sake, don’t slip up. It’ll mean our scalps.”

“I’m thinking of Project Pseudoman.”

Thornton let himself out and walked away from the picturesque red-roofed building, sunk in thought. He had a free hand now. It was up to him to condition the team’s minds so that the six men would finish the Pseudoman, put it—him—into full working order and thus prove to everyone that the irrational fears they harboured were groundless. The only flaw there was that the fears were not irrational—they stemmed from mankind’s heritage of hatred and fear of anything, anyone, who threatened his possession of this planet. The wrecking bouts in which they indulged could be likened to homeostasis—compensation for threats to the personality, the life-line of the race. He sighed and looked at his watch. Time to eat, yet he was not in the least hungry. He decided to see Lattimer.

Lattimer proved unresponsive. He was talking with his chief assistant, they had charts and reports scattered over the desk, and Thornton caught the almost visible wave of hostility that greeted his entrance. He

kept a smooth smile on his face. Lattimer could be very awkward at a later stage in the game.

Thornton finished what he had to say and, as he turned to leave, let fly a parting shot. "The authority you exercise over the Project's personnel, as regards their psychological welfare, will not be interfered with. However, these new steps which I am inaugurating are outside your jurisdiction, they come under the heading of Project Progress for which I alone am responsible." As he finished the pompous rigmarole he felt very much like exchanging that responsibility he talked about so glibly for a simple atomicist's job on a cyclotron. He let the door latch click behind him. Lattimer and his assistant hadn't said a word after that last bombshell.

It was up to him now. Sam was relying on him. Project Pseudoman depended on the correctness of his assumptions. And there was also the little matter of the sanity of six men. Six brilliant and gifted men. Thornton's responsibility rested very heavily indeed upon his shoulders.

By the following morning—the day when the commission of inspection was expected—Thornton had rounded up all the supplies he needed to carry out the first stage of the Id Purgings. He decided to inaugurate the initial stages at once, and finalise the conditions with Sam just prior to the meeting. His robot secretary announced: "Carl Rothman."

Rothman was short and chunky, habitually wore a half-length leather jacket and sported a fair crew-cut. What he didn't know about the electronic organisation of a Pseudoman could be printed in large letters on a postage stamp.

"Sit down, Rothman, have a cigarette." Thornton made it easy and friendly, wrinkling his face up into what he hoped was an honest-looking smile. Rothman wasn't fooled. The fruits of Thornton's abortive hate campaign came home now. He quelled a moment of panic at the idea that they might ruin his latest plan.

"No, thanks, sir. You wanted to see me?"

"Yes, Rothman. You are the acknowledged expert on Pseudoman electronics and you're vital to the successful trial we hope to run in about a month's time. Do you want that trial to be a success?"

Rothman flushed easily, like most fair-skinned people. His mouth set angrily.

"Are you accusing me of wanting to perform sabotage?"

"Not at all, not at all. Just give me a straight answer to the question."

"Yes. Of course I want a success."

"Good." Thornton sat back in his chair and tried to look as though

he had the benevolent welfare of his men at heart, like Lattimer. "Well, Rothman, the position is that we have to make sure that nothing does go wrong at the trial. I'm asking you to volunteer for a session of instruction, indoctrination, learning—call it what you like—which will probably prove unpleasant but which will nevertheless ensure that when the test comes you won't go psycho."

"If you think I'd crack like Jackson——"

"Jackson didn't crack, Rothman. Jackson was as safe as you are. Safer, I'd say. You won't even know why your ripping up your circuits when you do it." Thornton's voice hardened. "Nobody is safe any more, Rothman. *Nobody*. Understand?"

"That doesn't make sense——"

"It makes good sense." Thornton put candour and friendliness into his voice. "Look here, Rothman. We know you don't like me; but don't let that interfere with what we're trying to do here. We're creating life! Do you want to foul-up that concept by stubborn clinging onto the idea that you hate me? When that first Pseudoman comes off the line—you'll be there to assist in the birth." Thornton paused and looked steadily at Rothman. "Suppose you went psycho right that minute?"

"Don't!" Rothman's voice shrilled suddenly, startlingly and Thornton let out a sigh of relief. He'd found the weak chink. Rothman said dully, his head hanging: "That's what's been torturing me these past weeks. To do something like that—not wanting to—but doing it anyhow! I saw Jackson just before he went down to the floor and threw that wrench. God, he looked awful. And I never guessed—none of us did, of course. Then, when we heard—well, I've been scared stiff almost to go into the lab."

"And, too," Thornton jabbed gently. "I suppose you've been pumped full of truman propaganda. Oh, yes," he went on at Rothman's guilty start. "Every little helps. Well now, my lad, we can help you. I promise you that if you agree to take this—er course—you'll be in no danger of doing anything you don't want to do."

Rothman looked up and the expression on his face made Thornton feel abysmally ashamed of himself. There was hope there, and eagerness, and a pathetic helplessness that was all the more terrible by contrast with the man's confidently arrogant bearing before his inner fears had been scattered carelessly into the open. Thornton swallowed and said: "I'll help you conquer this, Rothman, so help me!"

"How long does it take, sir?"

"About a week. A relief will be arranged, although you're not absolutely vital until the last week before the trial, I know. I've

checked.”

“What about the team——”

“They’re all in on this. You’ll be fitter and more sure of yourself for the week immediately before the test run than you’ve ever been before.” Thornton did not add that Rothman was the first of the team he had approached. Not that it mattered. He’d have each one of them agree even if he had to—steady, boy! he warned himself. You’ll be going psycho yourself, soon, at this rate. He felt oppressed and rose, talking to Rothman to cover his own agitation.

“This will be unpleasant up to a point. You’ll be filled with shots so you don’t catch anything, and you’ll have a medical first. There’s no pain, nothing like that, just an experience that you’d rather not undergo unless you have to—as, indeed, you have—something like going out on a snowy night without an overcoat and being caught in a blizzard. Unpleasant. But not dangerous. You’ll be indoors the whole time, of course—perhaps the blizzard analogy was a trifle too fierce. Like the first plunge into icy water, if you’re not a keen swimmer.

“I want you to sign a statement that you know what you’re doing—just in case of eventualities, you know.”

“That’ll be all right.” Rothman stood up and faced Thornton. He was breathing deeply. “You just said that I didn’t like you—well that’s okay by me. But if you’ve got hold of some method to help us guys who’ve been going, or are about to go, psycho—then I’ll string along with you. Do your damndest!”

“That’s the spirit——” Thornton began and was cut off by the telephone. He had already decided how long he would ignore it, when he remembered that there was no need any longer for his private hate campaign, and picked up the receiver.

The Director’s heavy voice blasted at him.

“Bruce! Those confounded commission fools aren’t coming today after all—and here I’ve togged myself up in a suit that’s cutting me in half!”

Thornton burst out laughing. He just couldn’t help it. He knew Sam and his suits.

“Well,” he said sobering down at the ominous silence at the other end of the line. “That’s a relief. We can get on with some work now. Did they say when they would be here?”

“Yes. They’re combining this inspection and the one to have a grandstand view of the final trial Making a gala day of it. Listen, Bruce. Get on with your hocus-pocus and get me some results, quick, see? There’s something brewing that I’m not in on, and I don’t like it.

Spenny was awfully polite to me—he rang—and you are aware that he knows what I think of him and his ideas on the use of Pseudoman. I don't like it, Bruce, I don't like it."

"I'll do all I can, Sam," Thornton said soberly. He hadn't missed the underlying gravity in the Director's voice that nullified completely the casualness of his words.

Thornton turned back to Rothman. The electronics man had been standing by the window, politely looking out with his back to Thornton. Maybe he was getting somewhere, it was at least a hope; but he had to obviate the results of a whole lot of deliberate antagonism he had aroused.

"Rothman? Right—well, you and I can get started now. We'll have you through your course and back to work feeling like a cadet to the Space Force."

Rothman grinned, his square face splitting engagingly and showed Thornton what he had been missing. Too few people had smiled at him recently.

"Never did go for that Space Patrol stuff, sir. Give me good old Earth any day."

Thornton didn't argue. He thrust the form his robot secretary had prepared under Rothman's hand and almost guided the pen with his eyes. He put the form in a drawer and locked it. "Come on, Rothman. You don't know what your in for."

By the time Thornton had processed the last of the six-man team he had to admit he hadn't known what he was in for, either. He felt just as much a wreck as any one of the six men sitting, lying, hunched-up, sprawled laxly, in ever changing postures in the little cells. He'd had the tight-mouthed assistance of selected personnel from the hospital out of reach of Lattimer, men who, although they might not like the Deputy Assistant Director, nevertheless obeyed orders.

Working a little hesitantly with the methods that he inaugurated as each successive obstacle came up, they had done a good job. After the six-man team had been through anti-disease procedure and their bodies suitably protected, the hospital personnel had taken over and kept the experiment running smoothly. Only Sam and Thornton, apart from the medical men, knew that this six-cell block existed.

Six cells, each containing a man, naked, cold, hungry beaten and in the last stages of despair and misery.

Even Thornton, although he knew the origin of the hunger and the psychosomatic beatings, winced as he stared through the observation port. These men had been injected with a depressant drug, a chemical

which worked subtly upon their minds, took the zest out of life, made them weak and undecided and wiped their mature experiences away leaving brains like waiting, receptive blackboards for the chalk of the master.

And Thornton was that master.

He knew how they felt. Inadequate, hopeless, torn by depressing bouts of almost pathological severity. Worked on by cold and damp—against which their physiques had been protected—subjected to psychosomatic beatings, deprived of food, left in the dark as to their future, these men had reached the lowest ebb a human organism could sink to and still remain a man. If he pushed them very much further, Thornton knew they would cease to be men. The time to purge their Ids had arrived. Shockingly, Thornton felt like a plumber.

It was all so cold and calculated. He looked down the list of names, selected Carmody as the first. If it worked well enough here, then Jackson would not be needed. If it didn't work, and Thornton had to face that eventuality, then there was Jackson waiting in the background. Carmody's cell of sweating concrete struck through to Thornton's bones as he went in. He shivered.—Carmody looked at him with lack-lustre eyes and his mouth drooled idiotically. But the man was in complete command of his mind, that, Thornton knew.

"You've been here now for six months, Carmody," Thornton said. It was frighteningly easy to believe that. It felt like six years to Thornton, instead of three days. Drugs could work so many wonders—Carmody might believe he had been in his state of misery for sixty years. Thornton said: "You know that the Pseudomen are controlled very fully by we men. You know that we'd never allow androids to assume equal responsibilities alongside mankind. You know that they are in no way a threat to us. They can't harm us. We have the whip hand." On and on. Drumming the information into Carmody—and the other five—driving out the racial fears of fifty thousand years.

It was not an easy task. It took Thornton longer than the week he had promised. He kept at the suffering men, hammering at them, promising the earth to man—if only these men would create artificial men to aid them. It took time.

Thornton found the Director swimming in the pool behind the red-roofed house. Thankfully he stripped off and allowed the sun to burn along his back. Sam swam puffing to the board and hooked a fat hand round the rail.

"Well, Bruce. How're your guinea pigs going?"

"It frightens me, Sam. There they lie, blank, uncaring, listening to



me telling them what I believe. Sucking it in like children taking gruel."

"If it'll ensure the success——"

"Oh, it'll be a success all right. I'm spring-cleaning their minds so thoroughly they'll see daylight through their ears. But am I doing right? Suppose these racial fears we've inherited from our cavemen grandads really are genuine? Suppose the race unconsciously knows what's cooking—suppose the pseudomen do take over from us?"

The Director sluiced water away from his eyes—having no eyebrows was a handicap—and glared at Thornton. What he saw appeared to cause him anxiety. He heaved himself out of the water and splashed beside Thornton.

"You think you'll crack up, Bruce?" he enquired gently.

"No. That is—hell, Sam, *I don't know!*"

"Naturally, how could you. For what it's worth, I don't think you will. We have a different outlook on this problem from the men on the benches and in the labs. The A.D. was up to see me yesterday," he said inconsequentially. "About sex. I think he's on to your little game—I felt we might have told him at the beginning."

"You know what Abernathy's like, Sam. He'd have hollered blue murder. I know I was right there, at least."

"Doesn't that make you feel that you were right all along the line?"

Thornton grimaced. Sam was working his damned psychological nonsense again. He said harshly: "The two decisions have nothing in common. If I'm wrong about the androids—sorry, pseudomen. I might be the cause of starting the thing that will cause the extinction of mankind——"

"Don't be so blasted big-headed!"—Sam sat up and jabbed a finger at Thornton. "*You'll* be responsible for the downfall of the human race! So that's why you carry on and don't threaten to go psycho! You're so full of the idea that you will gain such importance by being instrumental in killing off humanity that you're going right ahead with the pseudomen, laughing up your goddam sleeve!

"Oh no, Sam! That's not right! It can't be!"

"All right, Bruce. Let's not dig down beneath the mud we needn't shift. I don't think the pseudomen will be any danger to man—neither do you. What our reasons are that short-circuit our personal race-inheritance of danger I don't know. That theory I just advanced might fit a paranoiac—I don't think it fits us."

"I should hope not—if it did—well——"

"Take it easy, Bruce. Come on in—have a swim."

"I'd still like to know what makes us so sure . . ."

The Director stood up on the board and his dive raised a tidal wave round the pool's rim. Thornton grinned and cut the water cleanly, churned after the fat man, flung a challenge and was decisively beaten back to the board.

"You'll learn to swim one day, Bruce," The Director spouted water and grinned. "You're too skinny."

Before Thornton could answer cuttingly enough the robot arm shot out from the side of the diving board and a voice from its speaker said: "Call for you, sir. General Spenby."

"Oh, crabs take the man," The Director took the phone from the robot arm and growled into the speaker. After a minute he hung up and his face was ugly as he turned back to Thornton. "Wants to know when the trial will be—can we urge it forward. Interested in pseudomen designed to withstand high acceleration—I suppose it's just occurred to the idiot that if you can put a competent brain into a hundred pounds weight of body, that might be more efficient in a ship than his current thousand pounds of robot brain. Bah!"

"I don't like the idea of pseudomen being used for war purposes, Sam," Thornton said slowly, flickering his toes in the water. "That negates all our purposes, our beliefs."

"We'll deal with Spenby when the time comes—what now?" as the robot screeched again. This time the call was for Thornton. He took it with foreboding. It was the chief medical orderly. Lattimer and Abernathy, the A.D. had insisted on entering the cell block and had seen the six men. The two had been outraged, were on their way over to the Director now.

"We can have a showdown, at any rate," was Sam's reaction. The sunshine glittered from the water in the pool and scents of summer perfumed the air. All Thornton could see was a naked miserable man in a cold lamp cell and smell the aura of suffocation and decay. Lattimer and Abernathy wasted no time getting across to the Director's little house.

"I would like to know, Doctor Thornton, why you saw fit to carry out your—your infamous experiments without receiving permission from me." His voice was high and imperious and raised the usual irritation along Thornton's spine.

Abernathy might be all right, as Sam said, but he was a pain in the neck to his subordinates.

"You should be publicly flayed and expelled from the Project!" Lattimer stormed before Thornton could reply to the A.D. "Your conduct towards these poor men in disgraceful! I cannot accept responsibility for

the state of their minds when they are released.”

“You were absolved from any responsibility,” began Thornton, but Lattimer bumbled on, red faced and almost incoherent.

“I’ve given instructions for them to be released immediately, acting under the authority of Doctor Abernathy, and I intend to press for a full enquiry. You’ll be smashed, Thornton—and about time too!”

“You’ve done what!” Thornton was furious. “You blundering doddering fool! Here——” he leaped across to the robot phone still sticking out on its arm from the diving board and fumbled a connection through to the hospital. As soon as the medical orderly came on he said: “This is Doctor Thornton here. On instructions from the Director ——” he cocked an eye at Sam who nodded imperceptibly, face impassive, “——you will immediately cease to obey whatever orders Doctor Lattimer has given. Those men must not be released from their cells! That’s vital! Lord knows what damage may be done to their minds. Get moving! Sharp!”

“This is outrageous!” Abernathy, his thin face white with anger, almost shook a fist at Thornton. “By what right do you——”

“It’s all right, Alistair,” Sam cut in quietly. “I can explain all this. But first, I’d like to apologise for not letting you in on this project from the beginning. I felt that you would understand better if you saw some of the results first.”

Alistair Abernathy breathed whitely, his fragile hands clenched. By his side, Doctor Lattimer thrust his fat face forward on his thick neck. Thornton groaned inwardly. It had to come out like this! If only they’d——

“Acting on my authority, Alistair,” Sam said deliberately, “Doctor Thornton set up the conditions as you have seen to condition these men’s minds so that there would be danger of their going psycho when the final test comes off. I accept full authority should anyone wish to investigate. But I don’t think they will. Here, at Project Pseudomen, we are responsible only to the ultimate goal towards which we are working. I think that is understood. Therefore this experiment is being conducted perfectly correctly. Now, Alistair,” he said with a change of tone. “Let’s talk this thing over and see what we’re really getting at.”

“What are you trying to do?”

“Doctor Thornton calls it Id Purgung. Clearing out the subconscious urges which cause men to go psycho and smash the pseudomen and the wherewithal to make them without consciously wishing to do so. That has been our most serious problem here, as you know. I think we’ve got it licked.”

"Id Purgin!" Lattimer broke in contemptuously. "I'd call it Brain——"

The phone chopped his words off. Thornton answered. His face went rigid with shock. His hands trembled so that he fumbled the phone back half off the hook. The lines in his face drew down and multiplied and sheer agony glared from his eyes. They were all looking at him. He swallowed; but could not speak.

Lattimer said: "With those men in that condition I say again that I cannot be responsible for what they may do. Depression such as that brings a pathological condition that may lead to——"

"Shut up! Thornton snapped it viciously. "I don't know what you two did there. But, by God, I know you're the cause of this tragedy!"

"What's happened?" The Director's voice was sharp.

"Carmody has just killed himself."

Beside them the water made chuckling plopping sounds. Thornton shivered suddenly. The Director plunged headfirst into the pool and struck out in a white smother of foam for the house and clothes. Thornton began to dress hurriedly, fumbling with his clothes. Flinging them on over his wet body, not looking at Lattimer and Abernathy, not caring about anything now except the desire to know, to see, to sink himself in the horror of what had happened.

By the time he had reached his parked scooter he was running open-mouthed. He tried to start the engine before he remembered and hauled the plug from his pocket. He was profoundly grateful, out of all proportion, for the fact that he had come on the scooter. He was under halfway back to the hospital when Sam passed him in his runabout in a great blarney wash of noise. The other two must be following on somehow.

Thornton had no time now to notice if the cell block struck cold or hot. He went in through leaving doors whirling and fetched up panting beside Sam who was standing looking down at Carmody's body. The technician's thin, naked body with the bony rib cage outlined in blue shadows looked indecent, like a child's doll flung on a garbage heap. There was a thin trickle of blood from Carmody's wrists and a pocket knife shot a ruddy gleam evilly as the fluros fell upon it.

"How in hell did that get here?" raged Thornton. He swung on the chief medical orderly. "Come on man, how did that pocket knife get in here? Quick!"

"I don't know sir, honest, I don't! I came along on the regular inspection just after you'd phoned to countermand the A.D.'s orders and found Carmody like this—he died before we could do a thing."

Thornton saw the pathetic tourniquets on the arms, and shuddered. The Director hadn't moved. Now he swung his great naked head and glowered at the orderly. The man disappeared.

"Well, Bruce?" The Director rumbled. "What now?"

"I'm sorry, Sam. My God, I'm sorry! I wish I'd never started the whole mess. But—anyone who knows anything about this sort of thing would know that a man in Carmody's condition would seek suicide as a way out. Someone put the knife here!"

"Who?"

It was difficult to put it into words. Thornton hadn't considered that hatred would go that far. "The A.D. and Lattimer are the only people besides ourselves and the orderlies who have been here. I'd say Lattimer!"

"I was afraid you'd say that. But what proof have we?" The Director turned as movement came along the corridor outside. "Say nothing for the moment. I know that Jackson can be brought into condition to handle the test—his ordeal in his cell could be compared to this, I suppose."

"Yes. Poor Carmody was the only expendable one of the team at this date. And—I'd guess that whoever did this, Lattimer or one of the guards—was acting in one of the psycho fits that have been plaguing us." He clung to that belief. It was more comforting that the thought that this treacherous thing had been done out of hatred for him. The murderer—for that was the term—had been blindly reacting to the racial hatred of anything threatening its lifeline. He smoothed out his face and wiped sweat away as men trooped into the cell.

Lattimer and Abernathy stood to one side—and Thornton tried not to believe that he saw triumph shining covertly from the psychiatrist's eyes. Daniel X. Magister appeared, in charge of a camera. He performed his police duties quietly and swiftly. Just before he went out he caught Thornton's eye and whispered: "Information on them truemen, boss."

"It can wait," Thornton snapped.

Magister went out and orderlies wrapped the pitiful body and carried it away.

Abernathy said: "I wish to make a formal charge, Director, against Doctor Thornton. I charge him with murder."

"Hold it, Alistair," Sam said gruffly. "We don't know all the facts in the case yet."

"We know that Doctor Thornton caused these men to be incarcerated and tortured here. If one chooses this way out, then Doctor Thornton is

morally the murderer."

"Who put the knife here?" Sam shot it pat, like that, without the flicker of a muscle on his great face.

"Who? Does that matter?"

"Of course it does. Use your head, Alistair. The man who afforded Carmody the opportunity to cut his wrists is the man we want—not Doctor Thornton." Sam bulked huge in the dim cell. He said implacably: "This experiment goes on. We cannot afford to allow this tragedy to undermine our resolution."

Lattimer began to say something and stopped as the Director's baleful glare focussed on him. Thornton swallowed.

He said: "I can begin to bring these men out of their conditioning tomorrow. By the next day they will be fit and will have forgotten about their ordeal—post-hypnosis can take care of that even if it can't deal with our other troubles."

"I suppose," Lattimer sneered. "That you're suggesting that psychiatry is of no use in this emergency?"

"It hasn't been, has it?" Thornton slashed at him. "And I'd advise you, Doctor Lattimer, to keep out of my way."

"Bruce," snapped the Director.

"Sorry, sir." Thornton looked away from Lattimer and wished he could see under the man's waistcoat pockets beneath the heavy gold chain whether his pocket knife was missing. He couldn't afford another open blow-up—that must wait until the first pseudoman had walked from the line.

The air of tension mounting in the cell was broken as the Director walked ponderously to the door. The others followed him and he motioned Thornton to hang back.

"I've gone along with you, Bruce. But heaven help you if you're wrong. Because I won't!"

Thornton came into the bar and read over Daniel X. Magister's shoulder.

*"Will Hannibal beat Scipio? Will Carthage make it game, set and match over Rome? Read next week's thrilling instalment, 'The Battle of Zama' in Living History Comics, half-a-guinea at all newsagents."*

"Whose side is your money on, Daniel?" asked Thornton flopping onto a stool. He ordered a scotch, neat, and turned back to stare broodingly at the security man.

"This guy Hannibal's sure some general—and he's got elephants, too. Still, his soldiers are only working for money——"

"Like the Project, Daniel, the Romans had more than money at stake. What did you want to see me about?"

"These here truemen cliques." Magister nodded to a secluded corner and they transferred their drinks. As early as this in the evening the bar was nearly empty and they could talk quietly in complete safety. Magister brought out a roll of papers and spread them out before Thornton.

"This is the stuff, is it?" Thornton said, flipping through the pile of badly printed pamphlets. "Well?"

"The guy who's printing them is assistant to Doctor Lattimer, the head-shrinker. He's got a press set up in the cellar of Lattimer's laboratory. Oh—and he's a new-religionist. Spouts about pseudomen's souls. Says that as they are made by men they can't have souls and therefore should be exterminated as unfit to share the earth with men."

"I see." Thornton felt very tired. This sort of thing he had clearly forseen when they'd first begun the experiments so long ago to create life. Most of the answers he had found then had proved to be wrong, distorted, changing as they'd grown older. Now he wished he knew just what was the rights and wrongs of the situation. "Lattimer," he said slowly.

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"He's in it, although he keeps mighty tight and clear of outward connection. I had a hell of a game finding the press—nearly got caught when Lattimer came in roaring drunk last night."

"How's that? Lattimer drunk?" Thornton breathed bitterly. "Perhaps he's trying to drown his sorrows."

"I wouldn't know. But, in my opinion for what it's worth, he was the guy who dropped that pocket-knife."

"He, too. But we've orders not to mention it. Not until after the test tomorrow, and we don't want internal dissensions to foul up the showing we make."

"Like these here Romans, huh?"

"Sure. Listen, Daniel. Whatever Lattimer's done I don't think he's done in one of these attacks of psycho madness the men have been getting. We've got to act as though he's not responsible for his actions. So we keep an eye on him and wait until tomorrow's big fuss is all over. It's not people's hatreds we're fighting, Daniel, it's the basic fears of a race."

"I suppose if a trick-cyclist lasts long enough he gets to be as bad as his patients, huh?"

"Something like that. It just makes the homeostasis in his case worse."

"Oh, sure," Magister said. Thornton chuckled, then. Daniel X. loved big words—when he knew what they meant.

"I want you to be around tomorrow, down by the end of the line. Just in case. We can't afford to have anything go wrong. The team is working beautifully—that Id Purging was completely successful—and the trouble I anticipate will come from Lattimer."

"I'll watch him boss. Just you watch yourself."

Thornton thought about that remark all night, trying to sleep, and by the time the dawn of the test-day came around he felt less like facing life than he ever had. Even if the test was one hundred per cent successful—as it had to be—what would that solve? He had always in mind the reactions of the people who had not been conditioned—you couldn't get round to all the world and Id Purge the lot, could you?

He drank some tomato juice and went to see Sam.

The Director sat on a creaking crate watching the team finalising the connections to the pseudoman. Thornton nodded "Good morning" and stood laxly watching the techs work.

The Pseudoman was six foot tall, with wide shoulders and supple body. He had handsome brown hair and a smiling mouth. Under the closed lids Thornton knew he had blue eyes. Behind the smooth forehead lay the artificial brain, under the skin that had been moulded in the



vats ran an intricate network of electro-micro-biological construction that had been grown rather than constructed. If life was to exist in that magnificent body, then it would be artificial life, created and brought into being by the hand of man.

"Is it impious?" he murmured and shot a quick look at Sam to see whether the Director had heard. Sam did not move. Would the wrath of God fall on man because he had dared to supersede some of God's authority? Were the hell fires being banked up for them right now?

"This is a scientific experiment, Bruce," Sam said quietly, jolting Thornton out of the chaos into which his thoughts had been falling. "I wouldn't worry about the morals of it yet—they'll take care of themselves."

"I know," Thornton said. "But how? I've always said that we create life every time a child is born. A man and a woman create a new spark. What is the difference then, if we create that spark in our test tubes? It's only a difference in method, not of result."

"That's what we say, Bruce, and that's what we're stuck with. I'm going to welcome the Government outing now. Is my suit decent?"

"Like a sack."

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"Good. Don't let our artificial friend here run away until I'm back, will you?"

"That's not fun—— okay, Sam. I'll remember."

"Good boy. Remember—we're not affected."

The Director waddled out and Thornton watched him go reflectively. No time at all seemed to have elapsed before he was back, beaming at the congregation of notables trooping in behind him. They filled the hall with their chatter and Thornton saw some women there, M.P.s he supposed. Generals and Admirals and politicians. They took their seats facing the table where the Pseudoman lay surrounded by apparatus. Sam stood up and stillness gradually grew until the only sound was the beating of his blood in his ears.

Thornton saw General Spenby, in the front row, greedy eyes fixed on the Pseudoman. No doubt the gallant general saw him crouched in the cramped confines of a space ship, with an extra load of fuel exploding behind him. Sam began to speak.

"Ladies and Gentlemen. You have been asked here to witness what might well be the greatest single effort of humanity since the world began. Today, we are going to create life."

In the buzz that followed, Thornton found himself smiling at the drama in that. They'd created life before, plenty of times, in the labs. Just that today they were creating a man.

The Director gestured gravely to the team and the techs began. He went on speaking. "I must ask you all to remain seated whilst the process is taking shape. Questions will be welcomed afterwards."

A tall, gaunt, shallow-faced man who might have doubled for Lincoln stood up. He said harshly: "I demand to know by what right you defy God? Who are we that we should stain our hands with the base desires of the Devil?"

Sam looked incredulous. Thornton saw Spenby go red and then the general clambered to his feet and roared at the tall fanatic. "Questions afterwards, if you please, Doctor Musson."

At the name, Thornton knew that he was looking at the chief protagonist of robots, the man whose fortune was tied up in them—and also the man who had become a religious crank of the worst sort—and was suffering under the responsibility of his ancestors having introduced the personal robot. No doubt they'd get around to the question of souls pretty soon. He felt tired of the whole thing. The techs were busy now, their equipment humming merrily. Thornton's job was outside the scope of this science, he had to care for the men who made the miracles, not the miracles themselves. He knew he had the harder task.

A tech nodded at the Director. Jackson was there, white-faced but efficient. Rothman, leather coat creased, stood back, triumphantly. Complete silence dropped like a curtain. Thornton's palms were sweating and he rubbed them down his trousers.

The Pseudoman was the centre of attention.

In that pool of expectant quiet, Thornton took his eyes away from the flaccid lump of man-made tissue on the lab table and stared covertly at Lattimer. The psychiatrist was standing like a man watching a snake, hypnotised, powerless, altogether revolting. His eyes appeared lost in their sockets. A shadow half hidden behind him revealed Magister, quietly watchful, prepared, ready to pounce. Reluctantly, Thornton looked away, back to the table where the other drama was being played out.

What fantastic occurrence the array of watching Government people expected, Thornton didn't know. Personally, he was expecting a slow rise and fall of the Pseudoman's breast and the opening of the brilliant blue eyes. That, as far as he could make out from the scientists, would be a major victory. They might get the pseudoman to stand up; but he would have to be taught to walk. Thornton's attention was brought back

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sharply as Rothman made a quick adjustment to the power input, then Jackson did something with a knife and a concentrated *aah!* rolled upwards from the crowd like a million soda-water syphons.

The Pseudoman opened his eyes. He breathed. He bent in the middle, rolled sideways and stood up firmly, feet planted apart on the concrete floor. His leonine head moved slowly from side to side. He was drooling.

That lick of spittle, was to Thornton the strongest proof of this thing's humanity, it lifted the pseudoman out completely from the cold world of electronics and science and robotics. This they had created was a *man*.

And then a woman screamed.

It took Thornton ten seconds to understand that. He knew the discussions about sex that had taken place and was aware that it had been decided long ago that Pseudomen were to be sexless. But, for a tough, healthy appearing man, to be entirely sexless must be a jolt—Thornton looked at Sam.

The Director raised a hand and the rising tide of questions broke and died.

"I must ask you all to remain quiet. The whole trial has been a success. Remember, this first Pseudoman, although pre-fed with data, has only the knowledge which we have given him—apart from that, he's like a new-born child."

"Impious!" Came Musson's hoarse shout.

Other cries rose, drowning Sam's requests for silence. Musson ran down between the chairs and General Spenby tried to seize him. Lattimer started as if pierced by a pin and began to run towards the Pseudoman. Magister leaped after him.

Thornton stood, watching the uproar, hearing the waves of sound from shouting people echo in the hall. This thing must sort itself out. What happened now would set the precedent for the future—he felt that strongly. Whether he had been right or wrong to force this experiment to a successful conclusion by Id Purging he hadn't known—but now he would find out. He felt detached, apart from this debacle. Here they were, witnesses at the greatest step made by mankind in his history, and still the old conflicts, the old hates and desires and self-interest blinded them to what was going on.

*Man created life!*

Didn't that mean anything to these squabbling fools each rushing after his own petty ends? Surely, on this one occasion, history could be proved wrong and man could rise above his own nature? Thornton

laughed harshly, sardonically, hopelessly. He just didn't care.

Lattimer was almost up to the Pseudoman now and the techs had stepped forward to protect their baby. They were free from the homeostasis that urged Lattimer to a course of destruction. Lattimer was red faced. He breathed in jerky gasps that rattled distinctly through the noise. His hand grasped at his coat, abruptly. He was down. Stumbling on his knees. He lay, drained of movement, twisted, pitiful.

General Spenby had caught Doctor Musson. With utter loss of dignity the two men struggled together until they were parted by guards. Government representatives were shouting "Shame!" as though this thing was an *opera bouffe* in the House.

Sam looked around the hall, motioned to Magister and came over to Thornton. The three men stood quietly, watching normal man's reactions to the birth of his own creation.

Lattimer was carried away. "He won't do any more kipper-box printing of propoganda." Magister hesitated, and then said quickly: "How long before these Soodomen come into production, boss?"

"No idea, Daniel. Why?"

"I'd kinda like to get a maid for my old mother."

What was

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Sam gripped Thornton's arm savagely. "D'you hear that, Bruce! D'you hear that! Daniel is our yardstick, man and we never realised. These techs are all semi-psycho all the time. This is the first reaction from an outsider—albeit an unrepresentative specimen."

For the first time in a long while Thornton smiled—and meant it.

"Pseudomen have no sex, Sam. They can't have children. They'll always be dependent on us—always. That's why."

Sam looked at Thornton and then they stared at the naked body of the artificial man. This shambles in the hall might be the way the world would react—this might be the microcosm for future events—but Thornton felt convinced that he had been right, that the world would accept Pseudomen.

The artificial man looked straight at him. Blue eyes opened wide. Drops of moisture formed. The perfect mouth pouted and the lips pushed out.

The first Pseudoman was bawling like a new-born baby.

KENNETH BULMER

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## THE NEXT ISSUE . . .

"Nebula" No. 18 will be on sale at your bookstall or newsagent in September, 1956, and this issue, marking as it does the completion of the fourth year of publication for the magazine, has an especially outstanding line up of science-fiction stories for your enjoyment.

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*New Hard-Cover Science-Fiction Reviewed by*  
KENNETH F. SLATER

As I write this the Convention is only four days away, and I'm about three days behind the deadline our editor set me. Due, I'm afraid, to the fact that two of the books I should be reviewing only reached me yesterday. One of these two is Arthur Sellings's collection *TIME TRANSFER* (Michael Joseph, 12/6, 240pp.). Mr. Sellings is a British author of the post-'50 s-f school, and while he may not have reached any great fame so far, he can claim quite a number of competently written short stories which have appeared in mags ranging from *G.S.F.* to *Imagination*. *TIME TRANSFER* includes the title story and fifteen other tales; ranging from the latent horror of "Jukebox" — suppose improved recording methods recorded everything, including the consciousness?—to the amusing incident of the alien invasion which was cancelled when the scouts misinterpreted a pin-table saloon as a "CONTROL ROOM." Man's relationship with his robot creations is expertly handled from a novel viewpoint in "THE PROXIES," a story which is on the borderline of humour; whilst a similar relationship in *A START IN LIFE* verges on the pathetic. There are one or two stories in the book which I cannot recall reading before; possibly

they are new, or have been published outside the normal magazine field. And, regrettably, there are two which I was not happy to meet again. But the average is high, and I can recommend fourteen out of the sixteen; the ones I don't like only occupy about a dozen pages.

The other collection I have here is Eric Frank Russell's *DEEP SPACE* (Eyre & Spottiswoode, 12/6, 249pp.). Slightly over a fifth of the book is occupied by *FIRST PERSON SINGULAR*, an "Adam and Eve" story published, if I remember correctly, in *T.W.S.* about the end of 1950; there was a spate of this type of story around then and this one did not perhaps receive the applause it deserved. It is an excellent treatment, though not a novel one. Appropriately enough, the final story in the book is *SECOND GENESIS*, which gives the opposite side of the coin and a novel treatment of the theme. In between come *THE WITNESS* (sympathetic alien story), *LAST BLAST* (alien invasion, and who is to say that co-operation with the aliens is wrong—especially when you give them just enough . . . ?), and five more of Mr. Russell's excellent works of science fiction.

The other five titles I have on hand include one "popular" treat-

ment of rocketry and space flight, **SPACE SHIPS AND SPACE TRAVEL** by Frank Ross, Jr. (Museum Press, 12/6). Frankly, I do not see that Mr. Ross has added anything to the field except another book. For that matter, I do not see how he could—so little for “popular” consumption has been released. The work is competently written, well illustrated with photographs, covers the field briefly but well—history covering both the start of the dream, and the actual early developments in the field; recent developments, including “space medicine”; the problems that man is likely to meet, and the efforts being made to counter such problems in advance. I cannot judge the technical accuracy of the book, but apart from the doubtful wording of such chapter headings as “Man and the Space World,” it seems to me to be of an excellent standard for layman reading. But unless your library is lacking in books of this nature, there is not much point in buying a copy.

Museum Press have also contributed a science fiction novel—J. T. McIntosh's **ONE IN THREE HUNDRED**. This is perhaps the best story from the typewriter of Scotland's leading s-f author; the magazine reader will recall that it appeared as three novelets in *F. & S.F.*; the form has been preserved in the book. Earth is threatened by an increase in the sun's output. A slight increase, astronomically speaking, but sufficient to render the earth uninhabitable. The Mars colony may survive, but to ship Earth's population to Mars is an impossible task—hence, 1 in 300 is the chance; little ships with a lieutenant in charge, and ten

people as passenger/crews. The first part of the book deals with just one lieutenant and his selection of his party from the township of Simsville. A moving, human story in itself. The second part covers the flight of the ship, when it develops that the chance is not one in 300, but something nearer 1 in a thousand. Problems doubtless foreseen but not masterable in the time available have been hidden, just so those lucky enough to get an extension of life may at least get away with safety—from human interference, anyway. Finally, on Mars, comes the problem of settling down, when it is discovered that some of the choices made have resulted in what Mr. McIntosh aptly describes as “One Too Many.” A fine novel, and worthy of a place in your collection even if you have already enjoyed the story in magazine form.

**PURSUIT THROUGH TIME**, by Jonathan Burke (Ward Lock, 10/6, 187pp.), is, needless to say, a time-travel story, and is a fair example of the better work on this theme. Like any time-travel story, it possesses paradoxical elements. But to the reader willing to accept the basic paradox of time-travel yarns, it is somewhat too complex to precis with any hope of doing it justice. So I'll not attempt that—I'll just say it is a neat tale, with plenty of action, some romance, and a clean solution which ties up all the loose ends. Nothing to rave over, but Mr. Burke's workmanship makes it a very readable story.

From Michael Joseph comes C. M. Kornbluth's novel, **CHRISTMAS EVE** (10/6, 207 pp.). This was the second of the late arrivals, and I've not been



able to give the book a fair reading. I like to take a book, a glass or cup of some liquor appropriate to the time and season, a comfortable chair, cigarettes or pipe . . . and a few hours. I lack the hours. However, I'll be reading it again when I get the time . . . it's well worth it. The story opens in an invaded but still at war America that makes Britain at its very worst rationing period of the last war a comparative paradise of freedom. We meet Billy Justin, veteran of the Korean campaign, who has elected "Farm" from the "Fight or Farm" choice with which American manpower is faced; and get to know him just before the U.S. surrenders unconditionally to the combined U.S.S.R. and Chinese Peoples' Republic forces.

We follow Justin through the various phases of realisation of defeat; the realisation that the Reds are trying to be honourable; that things don't work out as bad in fact as they are in expectation; that the Russians are human, and subject to the follies and foibles of humans. But that it is DEFEAT—and not freedom! We find Justin getting entangled—not exactly willingly—in a rather peculiar underground set-up; he discovers that, apart from the "underground," there are other things moving, and he has to take over a heavy responsibility from a man driven insane. All told with a grim reality that is divorced from the Kornbluth of the short-story, but which still exhibits the excellence of the Kornbluth writing. Yes, indeed, I shall read this one again—and I recommend it as worth your attention.

A few quick notes on some others: A PRIVATE VOL-

CANO: Lance Sieveking (Ward Lock, 10/6, 254pp.), is a long and amusing story, told in a somewhat jovial avuncular style, about the discovery of "volcanium," which will turn any "element having an atomic weight somewhere between 16 and 197" into gold. Despite the technical (?) explanations given in chapter 8, this is not science-fiction; at least, not what I'd call science-fiction. It is a good story, nevertheless, and if you like good borderline yarns, here is one. BURN WITCH BURN: Abraham Merritt (Neville Spearman, 11/6) is a reprint (despite what the publisher may say) of one of the best novels of one of the best of the "old masters" of fantasy fiction. Not, I'd say, for the s-f reader, but a definite must for the weird and fantasy enthusiast.

### New and used Science Fiction Pocket Books and Magazines . . .

Fahrenheit 451:

Ray Bradbury (U.S.A.) 3/3

Planet of the Dreamers:

J. D. McDonald (U.S.A.) 2/6

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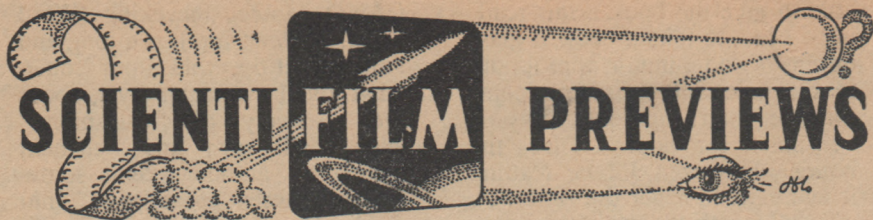
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# SCIENTIFILM PREVIEWES

News and advance Film Reviews Direct from Hollywood's  
FORREST J. ACKERMAN

**FORBIDDEN PLANET**: I have to pan it. Sorry as can be, because for the same amount of money M.G.M. could have filmed *Slan* or *Day of the Triffids* or *One in 300*. Instead they squandered more than a million dollars on a spectacle that I greatly fear will prove to be a spectacular flop. In that event the Studio will probably recoil from science fiction like a snail with salt sprinkled on its eyestalks, and great scientifilm potentials will be lost in the Limbo of Unmade Things. The alternative is perhaps even more depressing: that by some fluke of fate the film will not be a dud but a hit, and then M.G.M. will be convinced that it has the formula for successful sci-filmaking, and go on making more monstrosities like **FORBIDDEN PLANET**.

Not since the "sneak" of Bradbury's *It Came from Outer Space* has a preview been shrouded in such secrecy. As red herrings to throw scientifilm sniffers off the trail, M.G.M. even previewed a couple of other pictures the same evening as **FORBIDDEN PLANET**. But I tracked it down and saw all 100 minutes of it. About 10 days later, when I was officially invited to the Studio to see the version edited as it will be shown to the public, perhaps 5

minutes had been deleted from it—but they still could have incinerated half the celluloid and had too slowly paced a picture.

As Ray Bradbury, who sat directly behind me, said: "Plot, plot, who's got the plot?"

As H. G. Wells might have said: "The Shape of Things: Too Calm."

The sorrowful fact is, the damn thing is just *dull*. And I know that it's not just that I'm getting old and blasé about science fiction and scientifilms after 30 years of reading and seeing same, because a few weeks later I participated in a dinner-and-theater party with A. E. van Vogt, Evelyn Gold, Ib (son of Lauritz) Melchior, E. Mayne Hull, Frank Quattrocchi, Ed. M. Clinton, jr., and about 20 other s.f. enthusiasts, for the local opening of *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, and I was just about as pleased with the picture as I had been about 6 months before when I reported to you on the preview of it. A somewhat unnecessary prolog and epilog has now been tacked on, but not tackily, smoothly enough that it didn't ruin the story. Concensus of opinion was that the extra ending didn't add anything to the picture, but it didn't spoil it.

**FORBIDDEN PLANET**, besides being boring, has too much

about it that's ridiculous. We open up about 250 years in the future on a faster-than-light ship that's doing about 7LY's (light-years per second), and the sci-fi mind can well imagine the fantastic technology implicit in such a feat. Yet when the deep-spacers who man this Pegasus of the void set down on Altair-4 and are confronted with a tinker-toyman called (close your ears) Roddy the Robot, they are flabbergasted. "Amazing! What a creation! How ever did you construct him?" they babble in unison like undergraduates at a college for cretins. "Oh, just something I tinkered together in my spare time," super-scientist Morbius (Walter Pidgeon) modestly explains. An automaton of this nature in the inventively advanced culture the background of this picture implies, would be about as astounding a sight, I should think, as a ballpoint pen in present-day European or American society. Can you imagine a delegation of fans calling on Editor Hamilton at his *Nebula* offices and exclaiming, "Oh! Ah! Hoo-ha! A portable typewriter. Why, you must be a *genius* to own an unbelievable machine like that." (Not, of course, to imply that Peter Hamilton is *not* a genius. After all, it must take some kind of a genius to offer you a column like this, issue after issue, in the face of all opposition, when in place of Ackerman you could be reading two more pages of Willis.

Nevertheless, despite the disparagement cast on FORBIDDEN PLANET, you will not want to miss it for several reasons. One, the 50 minutes of weird, alien "electronic tonalities" that constitute the music score. Created by sci-fi fans,

Louis and Bebe (Mr. and Mrs.) Barron, this new sound will probably be around for a number of scientifilms to come. Geo Pal called me the day after first hearing the "electones," and enthusiastically discussed their future possibilities. Pal has taken an option on THE TIME MACHINE, and has an original screenplay on ATLANTIS developed for him by David Duncan. Duncan's *Dark Dominion* has been bought for filmization.

Other reasons for seeing F. P. are its magnificent machinery and enthralling architecture (visible during 10-15 minutes of the whole), and the wholly horrifying, satisfying manifestation of the Monster. Walt Disney has done devilishly well in animating evil incarnate at the climax of the film. His and other special effects are magnificent and unforgettable, most of the rest of FORBIDDEN PLANET best quickly forgotten.

So much, if not too much, for F. P. On the more satisfying side, whilst it is not on a par with *Breaking the Sound Barrier*, nevertheless *On the Threshold of Space* is well worth seeing. This was the verdict of a mixed company of fans and pros who recently went together (about 20 strong) to see a pre-showing of the picture starting at exactly midnite. Rocketsled experiments and gondola ascension to 100,000 feet are graphically portrayed in technicolor and cinemascop, and even though a commentator's voice says at the end of the picture "This is *not* science fiction, it is fact," you know that only a few short years ago it would have been, and there are considerable elements of interest to the s.f. fan.



WALTER WILLIS writes for you

One wet day in Connemara, as I was fanning some smouldering twigs in the forlorn hope of cooking tea, a profound thought struck me. "The trouble with the Simple Life," I remarked to our distinguished guest, Bea Mahaffey, who was holding an umbrella over the camp fire . . . which we later rechristened the gamp fire . . . "The trouble with the Simple Life is that it's so darned complicated." It's true, you know. All this talk about the complexity of modern life is so much balderdash. A flick of the finger and you have heat, light and the Third: what could be more simple? Whereas in the old days, what with oil lamps and charcoal and countless other fiddling nuisances, life was so complex that it took you all your time just to continue to exist.

Obviously this trend must continue, and the better machines we have the simpler they will be, like the electric motor and the jet engine. Why, then, must some s-f authors persist in mucking about with mechanisms that are already perfectly simple and efficient? I am referring, of course, to doors. The ordinary simple door we have nowadays is not good enough for s-f authors. Ho, no. Their characters must make their entrances through apertures that dilate, slide, or dissolve or do

something else ostentatiously superscientific—anything but just swing open on unpretentious hinges. They never seem to give a thought to the masses of electronic gear these useless refinements would involve, the expense and difficulty of installation and maintenance, and the embarrassment that would be caused when something went wrong, which it's bound to do with all that complicated machinery. Wait until they're locked in the laboratory from Monday to Saturday, and they'll wish they'd kept the simple dependable door, with only one moving part and nothing to go wrong.

And, of course, their characters, with their doors worked by photo-electric cells instead of handles, are laying themselves open to other troubles than purely physical ones. Why, a whole thesis could be written on the importance of the old-fashioned door in the emotional life of humanity, an emotional life that would be thwarted and embittered by handing door-opening over to robots. Consider, for instance, just one consequence of installing the new-fangled dissolving or dilating door in your home. *How would you slam it?* Just imagine what would happen if all the psychic disturbance at present dissipated in door-slamming

were bottled up and vented on your fellow-men. No wonder the future societies imagined by these authors are generally neurotic and heading for a bad end. They're suffering from an ailment which I diagnose as slamnesia, an unconscious urge to slam doors, frustrated by having forgotten what they are.

If van Vogt wants to use this idea for a novel, I could suggest a very good title.

*ALPHA*, No. 13: *Jan Jansen & Dave Vendelmans*, 229 Berchemlet, Borgerhout, Belgium. Subscription 1/- per issue to British agent, *Ron Bennett*, 7 Southway, Arthur's Avenue, Harrogate, Yorks. As I've said before, one of the snags of reviewing fan magazines is that some of the best and most amusing are too esoteric to appeal to a newcomer. The subscribers and the editor have known each other for a long time, and naturally they have evolved their own family jokes, just as a longstanding radio programme has its own frames of reference. But to a person who, as it were, comes in in the middle, it is bound to be a little frustrating, which has made me feel guilty about recommending some of what I consider to be the best magazines.\* So it's with pleasure that I note the growth of a new trend in recent fan writing. Fan-mags started by being exclusively devoted to amateur science, then to science fiction and then to fandom itself, each step in their evolution being the subject of bitter controversy. Now some of them seem to be progressing through the ultra-esotericism of the "fannish" fanzine and coming out on the other side. A common cultural matrix for s-f fandom

having been securely established, fan writers are beginning to write about the outside world from the vantage of that viewpoint. The prime exponent of this style has been Bob Shaw, an unacknowledged pioneer in so many fields, and there is a prime example of his work in this Alpha. It is an account of a fogbound voyage from Liverpool to Belfast which is not only funny in the peculiarly wacky way we think of as "fannish," but is completely comprehensible to an outsider and enjoyable to anyone who happens to share that sense of humour.

*RETRIBUTION*, No. 1; *John Berry*, 1 Knockeden Crescent, Belfast & *Arthur Thomson*, 17 Brockham House, Brockham Drive, London, S.W.2. Send 2½d stamp for free sample issue. This is an even more startling variant of the trend mentioned above. This magazine might in some ways be even more attractive to the outsider than to the experienced fan, and for a most unusual reason. It is an entirely new phenomenon in fandom, a magazine primarily devoted to the exploits of an imaginary character, like *The Saint* or *Dock Savage* or *The Shadow*. In this case it is a farcical fan detective called *Goon Bleary*, an alter ego of nova fan *John Berry* and a cross between *Mike Harmer* and a sort of *Pekinese Drummond*. His adventures are embellished by the cartoons of the equally brilliant fan artist, *Arthur Thomson* of *Hyphen*, some of whose work you've also been seeing in *Nebula*. The other characters in the *Goon Bleary* stories are well-known fans . . . or at least they have their names.



# GUIDED MISSIVES

## Letters to the Editor

Dear Ed.: Why is there no Artist's Award for 1955, or any other year for that matter? Surely the cover does a lot to sell the magazine, and the interiors are no liability. All it would require would be an extra line and a few words on your present story Ballot Form. Readers could also give a percentage vote for the cover, the totals from which when compared at the end of the year would give you the "cover of the year."

JOHN J. GREENGRASS,  
Coventry.

*\* Well, what do other readers think? I am quite prepared to adopt John's suggestion if a reasonable number of you consider it would be worth while.*

Dear Ed.: NEBULA No. 15 appeared here on 7th March. The cover is your best yet, beating that on No. 13, which was excellent. The back cover is also excellent but not in my opinion as good as that on No. 13. Hunter's illustrations were excellent. Turner was also good. At present NEBULA is easily the handsomest magazine on the market, beating all the others easily. I like the black print on the spine, but keep red and blue on the cover.

Here are my votes on the

stories:—

- (1) "The Green Hills of Earth"—one of the finest science fiction stories ever written and well worth re-printing.
- (2) "Investment"—Smooth, slick and good.
- (3) "Sounds in the Dawn"—Very good — another sequel, *please*. Incidentally, Shaw's style is now vastly improved from 1954, don't you think?
- (4) "In Loving Memory" — I would not have been surprised to find this one in an American S-F magazine. It was eventless but the twist at the end made it well worth reading.
- (5) "Birthday Star"—I feel that this kind of thing has been done quite competently before.
- (6) "The Artifact"—One of these stories where the author poses an interesting question but fails to answer it.

NIGEL A. JACKSON,  
Melbourne, Australia.

*\* Thanks for your detailed comments on NEBULA No. 15, Nigel. I don't know what my "Guided Missives" column would be like without you! Why don't other readers follow Nigel's good example?*

Dear Ed.: After having read the latest edition of NEBULA (No. 15) my preference quite definitely goes to James White, author of "In Loving Memory." I did not appreciate any of the other stories and give my reasons hereunder. I am simply offering my opinion for what it is worth.

"Sounds in the Dawn" was far too gruesome for my liking. "The Green Hills of Earth" could be the story of any adventurous songster, while "The Artifact" was merely grotesquely absurd. The idea in "Birthday Star" was good, but too much was made of the dialogue between mother and child. "Investment" resembled any other "big business" financial and economic story except that it was transferred to a space setting.

My preference is for a narrative combining sound scientific knowledge or hypotheses with adventurous imagination — in effect just such a story as James White's "In Loving Memory."

DESMOND TENISON,  
Bromley, Kent.

*\* Thanks for the letter, Desmond. I am glad to see you enjoyed "In Loving Memory." However, as far as I can see your list of qualifications for a good science-fiction story seem to fit "Investment" and "Green Hills" just as well.*

Dear Sir: I am the Skipper of the "Boston Belle" fishing boat and I would like to thank you for your magazine, which is very much read and admired by all of us here with the fishing fleets. You publish a fine magazine with fine stories.

H. BANGAY,  
Bedford.

## ONE GUINEA PRIZE

To the reader whose Ballot Form (below) is first opened at the NEBULA publishing office.

All you have to do, both to win this attractive prize and to help your favourite author win the 1956 Author's Award, is to number the stories in this issue in the order of your preference on the Ballot Form below and post it to "Nebula," 159, Crownpoint Road, Glasgow, S.E., immediately.

**By The Name of Man**

**Storm Warning**

**Cry Wolf**

**Wrath of The Gods**

**Into The Empty Dark**

**Project Pseudoman**

*Name and Address*

Mr V. H. Child of London, S.E. 18 wins the One Guinea Prize offered in NEBULA No. 15. The final result of the Poll on the stories in that issue was:—

1. INVESTMENT  
By E. C. Tubb 22.1%
2. GREEN HILLS OF EARTH  
By Robert A. Heinlein 21.0%
3. IN LOVING MEMORY  
By James White 16.5%
3. SOUNDS IN THE DAWN  
By Bob Shaw 16.5%
5. BIRTHDAY STAR  
By David Irish 15.6%
6. THE ARTIFACT  
By Christopher Lyster 8.3%

The result of the Poll on the stories in this issue will appear in NEBULA No. 19.

## BACK NUMBERS . . .

Ensure many extra hours of reading pleasure by sending today for back issues of NEBULA

Limited quantities of all numbers from No. 6 to No. 16 are available at 2/- or 30c each post free, or the entire 11 available issues can be had for £1 or \$3.00 post free

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# NEBULA

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GLASGOW, S.E.

\* *Glad to get your letter, Mr. Bangay. I am pleased to see that NEBULA is bringing enjoyment to such a deserving section of the population.*

Dear Ed.: Further to the letter from Joy Goodwin in NEBULA No. 14, I would like to say that I have seldom read so much nonsense on one page.

There can be no serious comparison of the capabilities of men and women when it comes to enduring physical stress, as can be proved by the absence of women test pilots, soldiers (in the true sense of the word), and miners, as well as a whole host of other jobs which females find too dirty or too nasty to do.

The human male has always been physically stronger, more imaginative, and has a greater creative and scientific ability. His decisions under stress are not perpetually coloured by emotionalism as are a female's. If this was not so we might have women prime ministers, lawyers, bankers and business executives.

Women have their own place in the scheme of things, an important part of which is the bearing and rearing of children, and when they step outside of it they become merely the feeble imitators of men.

I challenge Miss Goodwin to disprove the facts in this letter—from a scientific and unemotional point of view, if possible.

J. DONALDSON,  
Glasgow.

\* *NEBULA remains impartial, but I don't suppose many of our readers will be able to follow suit after reading this letter.*



Dear Ed.: When one devotes so much of one's time to the reading and appreciation of science-fiction as I do, it's pretty easy to become a bit "jaded" (although that isn't really the word). I sometimes feel that "everything's been done . . . to death!" Then, like a breath of fresh air, comes a slim package across the big wet . . . NEBULA.

It's difficult to express just what it is about NEBULA I like so well. Perhaps it's the feeling of "newness" I get from so many of your stories. It is as if back in some remote time science-fiction was born twins. One twin strapping rocket tubes to its back and immediately blasting off to strange worlds of robots, telepaths and wild and woolly aliens and the other . . . well, to heck with the attempt at "writing" . . . British sci-fi, the other twin, can do the very same things and obtain the very same results, but somehow it's just another brand of reading altogether.

I've been with you since your first issue, and I hope to be around for a good many more. After a few hours with NEBULA and I can turn back to the roaring tide of Yank fiction very refreshed and once again restored in faith. Keep up the wonderful magazine you've been publishing thus far, and you'll never get any gripes from this precinct.

WALT HASSETT,  
Binghamton,  
N.Y., U.S.A.

\* *Very glad to hear from you, Walt, and pleased also to see that my policy of publishing as great a range of different materials as is available to me is appreciated. Of course, it goes much further than that, as*

*I also select the stories in each individual issue of NEBULA to contrast with one another as far as possible, thus giving the reader a magazine full of original or "different" stories, no two of which are similar in style or content.*

*Nothing but the best, you know . . .*

Dear Ed.: I am so glad that Ted Tubb won the 1955 award. He deserves it, as he has written some very outstanding stories lately.

In this issue Sydney Bounds' novel was very good and not what I would call "space opera."

I define space opera as the crudest of crude space stories, and you can read plenty of those if you know where to look for them.

P. BUCKLE,  
Leeds.

\* *My apologies to Sydney Bounds . . .*

Dear Ed.: The list of the year's top authors provides very interesting reading and strengthens the interest of us all in the personality and style of each NEBULA author.

I don't suppose it would be possible to publish a "Top Ten" Authors each year instead of merely the names of the top three—this would make it even more interesting for your readers, but perhaps the authors themselves would not like it.

CHARLES SIMPSON,  
Stirling.

\* *Well, what do the authors have to say?*

Dear Ed.: I thought No. 14 was the best issue yet, but No. 15 beats it by far. It's the best issue you've had yet. In fact, I just wasn't sure which story I liked best, they were all so good, though in different ways, which I suppose both reader and editor want from their magazine.

My story rating—if you'd like one from "down under":—

1. Birthday Star.
2. The Green Hills of Earth.
3. Sounds in the Dawn.
4. In Loving Memory.
5. Investment.
6. The Artifact.

It's no slight to Tedd Tubb that he's fifth—his stories are most always first class. It's just that the others are so good.

Robert Heinlein's "Green Hills" may be an old-timer—I've read it before—but it's still out in front with the best yarns. Bob

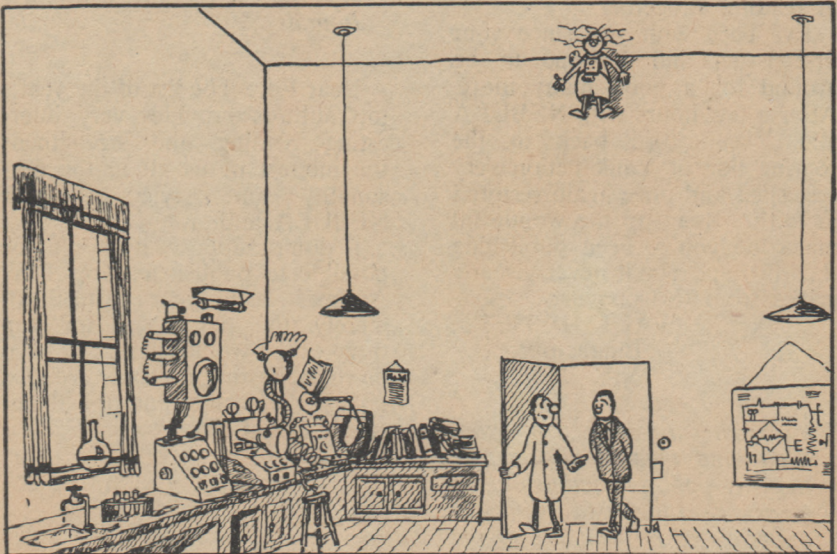
Shaw's "Sounds in the Dawn" is a taut, interesting, well-written piece. And I commend Harry Turner's illos—they're tops.

But the best part of this issue is the note of hope in all the stories except "The Artifact," which for me is the only one that comes a long way behind. "Birthday Star" has caught the family spirit with a good idea and grand writing.

And the cover is NEBULA's best to date. Thanks for all the improvements. Keep up that high standard.

R. L. GEORGE,  
Wellington,  
New Zealand.

*\* Thanks for the letter, Mr. George, more ratings from our large readership "down under" would be welcome . . .*



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NEBULA SCIENCE FICTION — No. 17

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NUMBER 17



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