

SHADOW WORLD

Clifford D. Simak

Anyone who has kept up with the latest developments in the study of the origins of Life on earth is aware of the controversy between those who say that life was an incredible accident that could never happen again, and those who say that, considering the almost-infinite variety of chances for matter to combine and evolve, it seems inevitable that life of some sort --probably including intelligent varieties -- would appear on many of the millions of planets with suitable environmental conditions that (probably) exist in the galaxy.

I opt for the latter "those." With Clifford Simak -- and a very sizable number of "respectable" scientists, too -- I believe that life is not a unique, earthbound experiment, but rather that it is semi-universal, and that it can take semi-endless forms. In following that belief, Simak has described a possible type of humanoid on the verdant planet of a distant star, and has shown it performing in a thoroughly believable, immensely advanced, and slightly silly civilization -- which we never even see! Read on, no questions, please, and find out how he does it.

I rolled out early to put in an hour or so of work on my sector model before Greasy got breakfast slopped together. When I came out of my tent, Benny, my Shadow, was waiting for me. Some of the other Shadows also were standing around, waiting for their humans, and the whole thing, if one stopped to think of it, was absolutely crazy. Except that no one ever stopped to think of it; we were used to it by now. Greasy had the cookshack stove fired up and smoke was curling from the chimney. I could hear him singing lustily amid the clatter of his pans. This was noisy time. During the entire morning, he was noisy and obnoxious, but toward the middle of the afternoon, he turned mousy quiet. That was when he began to take a really dangerous chance and hit the peeper.

There were laws which made it very rough on anyone who had a peeper. Mack Baldwin, the project superintendent, would have raised merry hell if he had known that Greasy had one. But I was the only one who knew it. I had found out by accident and not even Greasy knew I knew and I had kept my mouth shut. I said hello to Benny, but he didn't answer me. He never answered me; he had no mouth to answer with. I don't suppose he even heard me, for he had no ears. Those Shadows were a screwy lot. They had no mouths and they had no ears and they hadn't any noses.

But they did have an eye, placed in the middle of the face, about where the nose would have been if they'd had noses. And that eye made up for the lack of ears and mouth and nose.

It was about three inches in diameter and strictly speaking, it wasn't built exactly like an eye; it had no iris or no pupil, but was a pool of light and shadow that kept shifting all around so it never looked the same. Sometimes it looked like a bowl of goop that was slightly on the spoiled side, and at other times it was hard and shining like a camera lens, and there were other times when it looked sad and lonely, like a mournful hound dog's eyes.

They were a weird lot for sure, those Shadows. They looked mostly like a rag doll before any one had gotten around to painting in the features. They were humanoid and they were strong and active and I had suspected from the very first that they weren't stupid. There was some division of opinion on that latter point and a lot of the boys still thought of them as howling savages. Except they didn't howl--they had no mouths to howl with. No mouths to howl or eat with, no nose to smell or breathe with, and no ears to hear with.

Just on bare statistics, one would have put them down as plain impossible, but they got along all right. They got along just fine.

They wore no clothes. On the point of modesty, there was no need of any. They were as bare of sexual characteristics as they were of facial features. They

were just a gang of rag dolls with massive eyes in the middle of their faces. But they did wear what might have been a decoration or a simple piece of jewelry or a badge of Shadowhood. They wore a narrow belt, from which was hung a bag or sack in which they carried a collection of trinkets that jingled when they walked. No one had ever seen what was in those sacks. Cross straps from the belt ran over the shoulders, making the whole business into a simple harness, and at the juncture of the straps upon their chest was mounted a huge jewel. Intricately carved, the jewel sparkled like a diamond, and it might have been a diamond, but no one knew if it was or not. No one ever got close enough to see. Make a motion toward that jewel and the Shadow disappeared. That's right. Disappeared.

I said hello to Benny and he naturally didn't answer and I walked around the table and began working on the model. Benny stood close behind me and watched me as I worked. He seemed to have a lot of interest in that model. He had a lot of interest in everything I did. He went everywhere I went. He was, after all, my Shadow.

There was a poem that started out: / have a little shadow ... I had thought about it often, but couldn't recall who the poet was or how the rest of it went. It was an old, old poem and I remembered I had read it when I was a kid. I could close my eyes and see the picture that went with the words, the brightly colored picture of a kid in his pajamas, going up a stairs with a candle in his hand and the shadow of him on the wall beyond the stairs. I took some satisfaction in Benny's interest in the sector model, although I was aware his interest probably didn't mean a thing. He might have been just as interested if I'd been counting beans.

I was proud of that model and I spent more time on it than I had any right to. I had my name, Robert Emmett Drake, spelled out in full on the plaster base and the whole thing was a bit more ambitious than I originally had intended. I had let my enthusiasm run away with me and that was not too hard to understand. It wasn't every day that a conservationist got a chance to engineer from scratch an absolutely virgin Earth-type planet. The layout was only one small sector of the initial project, but it included almost all the factors involved in the entire tract and I had put in the works -- the dams and roads, the power sites and the mill sites, the timber management and the water-conservation features and all the rest of it.

I had just settled down to work when a commotion broke out down at the cookshack. I could hear Greasy cussing and the sound of thudding whacks. The door of the shack burst open and a Shadow came bounding out with Greasy just a leap behind him. Greasy had a frying pan and he was using it effectively, with a nifty backhand technique that was beautiful to see. He was laying it on the Shadow with every leap he took and he was yelling maledictions that were enough to curl one's hair.

The Shadow legged it across the camp with Greasy close behind. Watching them, I thought how it was a funny thing that a Shadow would up and disappear if you made a motion toward its jewel, but would stay and take the kind of treatment Greasy was handing out with that frying pan.

When they came abreast of my model table, Greasy gave up the chase. He was not in the best of condition.

He stood beside the table and put both fists belligerently on his hips, so that the frying pan, which he still clutched, stood out at a right angle from his body.

"I won't allow that stinker in the shack," he told me, wheezing and gasping. "It's bad enough to have him hanging around outside and looking in the windows. It's bad enough falling over him every time I turn around. I will not have him snooping in the kitchen; he's got his fingers into everything he sees. If I was Mack, I'd put the lug on all of them. I'd run them so fast, so far, that it would take them--"

"Mack's got other things to worry about," I told him rather sharply. "The project is way behind schedule, with all the breakdowns we've been having." "Sabotage," Greasy corrected me. "That's what it is. You can bet your bottom

dollar on that. It's them Shadows, I tell you, sabotaging the machines. If it was left to me, I'd run them clear out of the country."

"It's their country," I protested. "They were here before we came."

"It's a big planet," Greasy said. "There are other parts of it they could live in."

"But they have got a right here. This planet is their home."

"They ain't got no homes," said Greasy.

He turned around abruptly and walked back toward the shack. His Shadow, which had been standing off to one side all the time, hurried to catch up with him. It didn't look as if it had minded the pounding he had given it. But you could never tell what a Shadow was thinking. Their thoughts don't show on them. What Greasy had said about their not having any homes was a bit unfair. What he meant, of course, was that they had no village, that they were just a sort of carefree bunch of gypsies, but to me the planet was their home and they had a right to go any place they wanted on it and use any part of it they wished. It should make no difference that they settled down on no particular spot, that they had no villages and possibly no shelters or that they raised no crops.

Come to think of it, there was no reason why they should raise crops, for they had no mouths to eat with, and if they didn't eat, how could they keep on living and if ...

You see how it went. That was the reason it didn't pay to think too much about the Shadows. Once you started trying to get them figured out, you got all tangled up.

I sneaked a quick look sidewise to see how Benny might be taking this business of Greasy beating up his pal, but Benny was just the same as ever. He was all rag doll.

Men began to drift out of the tents and the Shadows galloped over to rejoin their humans, and everywhere a man might go, his Shadow tagged behind him. The project center lay there on its hilltop, and from where I stood beside my sector table, I could see it laid out like a blueprint come to life. Over there, the beginning of the excavation for the administration building, and there the gleaming stakes for the shopping center, and beyond the shopping center, the ragged, first-turned furrows that in time would become a street flanked by neat rows of houses.

It didn't look much like a brave beginning on a brand-new world, but in a little while it would. It would even now, if we'd not run into so much hard luck. And whether that hard luck could be traced to the Shadows or to something else, it was a thing that must be faced and somehow straightened out.

For this was important. Here was a world on which Man would not repeat the ancient, sad mistakes that he had made on Earth. On this, one of the few Earth-like planets found so far, Man would not waste the valuable resources which he had let go down the drain on the old home planet. He'd make planned use of the water and the soil, of the timber and the minerals, and he'd be careful to put back as much as he took out. This planet would not be robbed and gutted as Earth had been. It would be used intelligently and operated like a well-run business.

I felt good, just standing there, looking out across the valley and the plains toward the distant mountains, thinking what a fine home this would be for mankind.

The camp was becoming lively now. Out in front of the tents, the men were washing up for breakfast and there was a lot of friendly shouting and a fair amount of horseplay. I heard considerable cussing down in the equipment pool and I knew exactly what was going on. The machines, or at least a part of them, had gone daffy again and half the morning would be wasted getting them repaired. It certainly was a funny deal, I thought, how those machines got out of kilter every blessed night.

After a while, Greasy rang the breakfast bell and everyone dropped everything and made a dash for it and their Shadows hustled along behind them.

I was closer to the cookshack than most of them and I am no slouch at sprinting, so I got one of the better seats at the big outdoor table. My place was just outside the cook-shack door, where I'd get first whack at seconds when Greasy lugged them out. I went past Greasy on the run and he was grumbling and muttering the way he always was at chow, although sometimes I thought that was just a pose to hide his satisfaction at knowing his cooking still was fit to eat.

I got a seat next to Mack, and a second later Rick Thorne, one of the equipment operators, grabbed the place on the other side of me. Across from me was Stan Carr, a biologist, and just down the table, on the other side, was Judson Knight, our ecologist.

We wasted no time in small talk; we dived into the wheat cakes and the side pork and the fried potatoes. There is nothing in all the Universe like the morning air of Stella IV to hone an edge on the appetite.

Finally we had enough of the edge off so we would waste time being civil.

"It's the same old story again this morning," Thorne said bitterly to Mack.

"More than half the equipment is all gummed up. It'll take hours to get it moving."

He morosely shoveled food into his mouth and chewed with unnecessary savagery. He shot an angry glance at Carr across the table. "Why don't you get it figured out?" he asked.

"Me?" said Carr, in some astonishment. "Why should I be the one to get it figured out? I don't know anything about machines and I don't want to know. They're stupid contraptions at best."

"You know what I mean," said Thorne. "The machines are not to blame. They don't gum up themselves. It's the Shadows and you're a biologist and them Shadows are your business and --"

"I have other things to do," said Carr. "I have this earthworm problem to work out, and as soon as that is done, Bob here wants me to run some habit-patterns on a dozen different rodents."

"I wish you would," I said. "I have a hunch some of those little rascals may cause us a lot of trouble once we try our hand at crops. I'd like to know ahead of time what makes the critters tick."

That was the way it went, I thought. No matter how many factors you might consider, there were always more of them, popping up from under rocks and bushes. It seemed somehow that a man never quite got through the list.

"It wouldn't be so bad," Thorne complained, "if the Shadows would leave us alone and let us fix the damage after they've done their dirty work. But not them. They breathe down our necks while we're making the repairs, and they've got their faces buried in those engines clear up to their shoulders, and every time you move, you bump into one of them. Someday," he said fiercely, "I'm going to take a monkey wrench and clear some space around me."

"They're worried about what you're doing to their machines," said Carr. "The Shadows have taken over those machines just like they've adopted us."

"That's what you think," Thorne said.

"Maybe they're trying to find out about the machines," Carr declared. "Maybe they gum them up so that, when you go to fix them, they can look things over. They haven't missed a single part of any machine so far. You were telling me the other day it's a different thing wrong every time."

Knight said, solemn as an owl: "I've been doing a lot of thinking about this situation."

"Oh, you have," said Thorne, and the way he said it, you could see he figured that what Knight might think would cut no ice.

"I've been seeking out some motive," Knight told him. "Because if the Shadows are the ones who are doing it, they'd have to have a motive. Don't you think so, Mack?"

"Yeah, I guess so," said Mack.

"For some reason," Knight went on, "those Shadows seem to like us. They showed up as soon as we set down and they've stayed with us ever since. The way they act, they'd like us to stay on and maybe they're wrecking the machines so

we'll have to stay."

"Or drive us away," Thorne answered.

"That's all right," said Carr, "but why should they want us to stay? What exactly is it they like about us? If we could only get that one on the line, we might be able to do some bargaining with them."

"Well, I wouldn't know," Knight admitted. "There might be a lot of different reasons."

"Name just three of them," Thorne challenged him nastily.

"Gladly," said Knight, and he said it as if he were slipping a knife into the left side of Thorne's gizzard. "They may be getting something from us, only don't ask me what it is. Or they may be building us up to put the bite on us for something that's important. Or they may be figuring on reforming us, although just what's in us they object to, I can't faintly imagine. Or they may worship us. Or maybe it's just love."

"Is that all?" asked Thorne.

"Just a start," said Knight. "They may be studying us and they may need some time to get us puzzled out. They may be prodding us to get some reactions from us--"

"Studying us!" yelled Thorne, outraged. "They're just lousy savages!"

"I don't think they are," Knight replied.

"They don't wear any clothes," Thorne thundered, slamming the table with his fist. "They don't have any tools. They don't have a village. They don't know how to build a hut. They don't have any government. They can't even talk or hear."

I was disgusted with Thorne.

"Well, we got that settled," I said. "Let's go back to work." I got up off the bench, but I hadn't gone more than a step or two before a man came pounding down from the radio hut waving a piece of paper in his hand. It was Jack Pollard, our communications man, who also doubled in brass as an electronics expert.

"Mack!" he was hollering. "Hey, Mack!"

Mack lumbered to his feet.

Pollard handed him the paper. "It was coming in when Greasy blew the horn," he gasped. "I was having trouble getting it. Relayed a long way out."

Mack read the paper and his face turned hard and red.

"What's the matter, Mack?" I wanted to know.

"There's an inspector coming out," he said, and he choked on each and every word. He was all burned up. And maybe scared as well.

"Is it likely to be bad?"

"Hell probably can the lot of us," said Mack.

"But he can't do that!"

"That's what you think. We're six weeks behind schedule and this project is hotter than a pile. Earth's politicians rave made a lot of promises, and if those promises don't pay off, there'll be hell to pay. Unless we can do something and do it fast, they'll bounce us out of here and send a new gang in."

"But considering everything, we haven't done so badly," Carr said mildly.

"Don't get me wrong," Mack told him. "The new gang will do no better, but there has to be some action for the record and we're the ones who'll get it in the neck. If we could lick this breakdown business, we might have a chance. If we could say to that inspector: 'Sure, we've had a spot of trouble, but we have it licked and now we're doing fine--' if we could say that to him, then we might save our hides."

"You think it's the Shadows, Mack?" asked Knight.

Mack reached up and scratched his head. "Must be them. Can't think of anything else."

Somebody shouted from another table: "Of course it's them damn Shadows!"

The men were getting up from their seats and crowding around.

Mack held up his hands. "You guys get back to work. If any of you got some

good ideas, come up to the tent and we'll talk them over."

They started jabbering at him.

"Ideas!" Mack roared. "I said ideas! Anyone that comes up without a good idea, I'll dock him for being off the job."

They quieted down a little.

"And another thing," said Mack. "No rough stuff on the Shadows. Just go along the way we always have. I'll fire the man who strongarms them."

He said to me: "Let's go."

I followed him, and Knight and Carr fell in beside me. Thorne didn't come. I had expected that he would.

Inside Mack's tent, we sat down at a table littered with blueprints and spec sheets and papers scribbled with figures and offhand diagrams.

"I suppose," said Carr, "that it has to be the Shadows."

"Some gravitational peculiarity?" suggested Knight. "Some strange atmospheric condition? Some space-warping quality?"

"Maybe," said Mack. "It all sounds a bit far-fetched, but I'm ready to grab any straw you shove at me."

"One thing that puzzles me," I put in, "is that the survey crew didn't mention Shadows. Survey believed the planet was uninhabited by any sort of intelligence. It found no signs of culture. And that was good, because it meant the project wouldn't get all tangled up with legalities over primal rights. And yet the minute we landed, the Shadows came galloping to meet us, almost as if they'd spotted us a long way off and were waiting for us to touch down."

"Another funny thing," said Carr, "is how they paired off with us -- one Shadow to every man. Like they had it all planned out. Like they'd married us or something."

"What are you getting at?" growled Mack.

I said: "Where were the Shadows, Mack, when the survey gang was here? Can we be absolutely sure they're native to this planet?"

"If they aren't native," demanded Mack, "how did they get here? They have no machines. They haven't even got tools."

"There's another thing about that survey report," said Knight, "that I've been wondering about. The rest of you have read it--"

We nodded. We had not only read it, we had studied and digested it. We'd lived with it day and night on the long trip out to Stella IV.

"The survey report told about some cone-shaped things," said Knight. "All sitting in a row, as if they might be boundary markers. But they never saw them except from a long way off. They had no idea what they were. They just wrote them off as something that had no real significance."

"They wrote off a lot of things as having no significance," said Carr.

"We aren't getting anywhere," Mack complained. "All we do is talk."

"If we could talk to the Shadows," said Knight, "we might be getting somewhere."

"But we can't!" argued Mack.

"We tried to talk to them and we couldn't raise a ripple. We tried sign language and we tried pantomime and we filled reams of paper with diagrams and drawings and we got exactly nowhere. Jack rigged up that electronic communicator and he tried it on them and they just sat and looked at us, all bright and sympathetic, with that one big eye of theirs, and that was all there was. We even tried telepathy --"

"You're wrong there, Mack," said Carr. "We didn't try telepathy, because we don't know a thing about it. All we did was sit in a circle, holding hands with them and thinking hard at them. And of course it was no good. They probably thought it was just a game."

"Look," pleaded Mack, "that inspector will be here in ten days or so. We have to think of something. Let's get down to cases."

"If we could run the Shadows off somehow," said Knight. "If we could scare them away --"

"You know how to scare a Shadow?" Mack asked, "You got any idea what they might be afraid of?"

Knight shook his head.

"Our first job," said Carr, "is to find out what a Shadow is like. We have to learn what kind of animal he is. He's a funny kind, we know. He doesn't have a mouth or nose or ears . . ."

"He's impossible," Mack said. "There ain't no such animal."

"He's alive," said Carr, "and doing very well. We have to find out how he gets his food, how he communicates, what tolerances he may have, what his responses are to various kinds of stimuli. We can't do a thing about the Shadows until we have some idea of what we're dealing with."

Knight agreed with him. "We should have started weeks ago. We made a stab at it, of course, but our hearts were never in it. We were too anxious to get started on the project."

Mack said bitterly: "Fat lot of good it did us."

"Before you can examine one, you have to have a subject," I answered Knight.

"Seems to me we should try to figure out how to catch a Shadow. Make a sudden move toward one and he disappears."

But even as I said it, I knew that was not entirely right. I remembered how Greasy had chased his Shadow from the cookshack, lamming him with the frying pan.

And I remembered something else and I had a hunch and got a big idea, but I was scared to say anything about it. I didn't even, for the moment, dare to let on to myself I had it.

"We'd have to take one by surprise somehow and knock him out before he had a chance to disappear," Carr said. "And it has to be a sure way, for if we try it once and fail we've put the Shadows on their guard and we'll never have another chance."

Mack warned, "No rough stuff. You can't go using violence until you know your critter. You don't do any killing until you have some idea how efficiently the thing that you are killing can up and kill you back."

"No rough stuff," Carr agreed. "If a Shadow can bollix up the innards of some of those big earthmovers, I wouldn't like to see what he could do to a human body."

"It's got to be fast and sure," said Knight, "and we can't even start until we know it is. If you hit one on the head with a baseball bat, would the bat bounce or would you crush the Shadow's skull? That's about the way it would be with everything we could think of at the moment."

Carr nodded. "That's right. We can't use gas, because a Shadow doesn't breathe."

"He might breathe through his pores," said Knight.

"Sure, but we'd have to know before we tried using gas. We might jab a hypo into one, but what would you use in the hypo? First you'd have to find something that would knock a Shadow out. You might try hypnotism--"

"I'd doubt hypnotism," said Knight.

"How about Doc?" I asked. "If we could knock out a Shadow, would Doc give him a going over? If I know Doc, he'd raise a lot of hell. Claim the Shadow was an intelligent being and that it would be in violation of medical ethics to examine one without first getting its consent."

"You get one," Mack promised grimly, "and I'll handle Doc."

"Hell do a lot of screaming."

"I'll handle Doc," repeated Mack. "This inspector is going to be here in a week or so--"

"We wouldn't have to have it all cleared up," said Knight. "If we could show the inspector that we had a good lead, that we were progressing, he might play ball with us."

I was seated with my back to the entrance of the tent and I heard someone fumbling with the canvas.

Mack said: "Come in, Greasy. Got something on your mind?"

Greasy walked in and came up to the table. He had the bottom of his apron tucked into his trouser band, the way he always did when he wasn't working, and he held something in his hand. He tossed it on the table.

It was one of the bags that the Shadows carried at their belts!

We all sucked in our breath and Mack's hair fairly stood on end.

"Where did you get this?" he demanded.

"Off my Shadow, when he wasn't looking."

"When he wasn't looking!"

"Well, you see, it was this way, Mack. That Shadow is always into things. I stumble over him everywhere I go. And this morning he had his head halfway into the dishwasher and that bag was hanging on his belt, so I grabbed up a butcher knife and just whacked it off."

As Mack got up and pulled himself to his full height, you could see it was hard for him to keep his hands off Greasy.

"So that was all you did," he said in a low, dangerous voice.

"Sure," said Greasy. "There was nothing hard about it."

"All you've done is spill the beans to them! All you've done is made it almost impossible --"

"Maybe not," Knight interrupted in a hurry.

"Now that the damage has been done," said Carr, "we might as well have a look. Maybe there's a clue inside that bag."

"I can't open it," grumbled Greasy. "I tried every way I know. There's no way to open it."

"And while you were trying to open it," asked Mack, "what was the Shadow doing?"

"He didn't even notice. He had his head inside that washer. He's as stupid as--"

"Don't say that! I don't want anyone thinking a Shadow's stupid. Maybe they are, but there's no sense believing it until we're sure."

Knight had picked up the bag and was turning it around and around in his hand. Whatever was inside was jingling as he turned and twisted it.

"Greasy's right," he said. "I don't see any way to get it open."

"You get out of here!" Mack roared at Greasy. "Get back to your work. Don't you ever make another move toward any of the Shadows."

Greasy turned around and left, but he was no more than out of the tent when he gave a yelp that was enough to raise your scalp.

I almost knocked the table over getting out of there to see what was going on. What was happening was no more than plain solemn justice.

Greasy was running for all he was worth, and behind him was the Shadow with a frying pan, and every jump that Greasy took, the Shadow let him have it, and was every bit as good with that frying pan as Greasy was.

Greasy was weaving and circling, trying to head back for the cookshack, but each time the Shadow got him headed off and went on chasing him.

Everyone had stopped work to watch. Some of them were yelling advice to Greasy and some of the others were cheering on the Shadow. I'd have liked to stay and watch, but I knew that if I was going to put my hunch into execution, I'd never have a better chance to do it.

So I turned and walked swiftly down the street to my own tent and ducked inside and got a specimen bag and came out again.

I saw that Greasy was heading for the equipment pool and that the Shadow still was one long stride behind. Its arm was holding up well, for the frying pan never missed a lick.

I ran down to the cookshack and, at the door, I stopped and looked back.

Greasy was shinnying up the derrick of a shovel and the Shadow was standing at the bottom, waving the frying pan as though daring him to come down and take it like a man. Everyone else was running toward the scene of action and there was no one, I was sure, who had noticed me.

So I opened the cookshack door and stepped inside.

The dishwasher was chugging away and everything was peaceable and quiet.

I was afraid I might have trouble finding what I was looking for, but I found it in the third place I looked -- underneath the mattress on Greasy's bunk. I pulled the peeper out and slipped it in the bag and got out of there as fast as I could go.

Stopping at my tent, I tossed the bag into a corner and threw some old clothes over it and then went out again.

The commotion had ended. The shadow was walking back toward the cookshack, with the pan tucked underneath its arm, and Greasy was climbing down off the shovel. The men were all gathered around the shovel, making a lot of noise, and I figured that it would take a long, long time for Greasy to live down what had happened. Although, I realized, he had it coming to him.

I went back into Mack's tent and found the others there. All three of them were standing beside the table, looking down at what lay there upon the surface.

The bag had disappeared and had left behind a little pile of trinkets. Looking at the pile, I could see that they were miniatures of frying pans and kettles and all the other utensils that Greasy worked with. And there, half protruding out of the pile, was a little statuette of Greasy.

I reached out a hand and picked up the statuette. There was no mistaking it -- it was Greasy to a T. It was made of some sort of stone, as if it might have been a carving, and was delicate beyond all belief. Squinting closely, I could even see the lines on Greasy's face.

"The bag just went away," said Knight. "It was lying here when we dashed out, and when we came back, it was gone and all this junk was lying on the table."

"I don't understand," Carr said.

And he was right. None of us did.

"I don't like it," Mack said slowly.

I didn't like it, either. It raised too many questions in my head and some of them were resolving into some miserable suspicions.

"They're making models of our stuff," said Knight. "Even down to the cups and spoons."

"I wouldn't mind that so much," Carr said. "It's the model of Greasy that gives me the jitters."

"Now let's sit down," Mack told us, "and not go off on any tangents. This is exactly the sort of thing we could have expected."

"What do you mean?" I prompted.

"What do we do when we find an alien culture? We do just what the Shadows are doing. Different way, but the same objective. We try to find out all we can about this alien culture. And don't you ever forget that, to the Shadows, we're not only an alien culture, but an invading alien culture. So if they had any sense at all, they'd make it their business to find out as much about us as they could in the shortest time."

That made sense, of course. But this making of models seemed to be carrying it beyond what was necessary.

And if they had made models of Greasy's cups and spoons, of the dishwasher and the coffee pot, then they had other models, too. They had models of the earthmovers and the shovels and the dozers and all the rest of it. And if they had a model of Greasy, they had models of Mack and Thorne and Carr and all the rest of the crew, including me.

Just how faithful would those models be? How much deeper would they go than mere external appearances?

I tried to stop thinking of it, for I was doing little more than scaring myself stiff.

But I couldn't stop. I went right on thinking.

They had been gumming up equipment so that the mechanics had to rip the machines all apart to get them going once again. There seemed no reason in the world why the Shadows should be doing that, except to find out what the innards of those machines were like. I wondered if the models of the equipment might not be faithful not only so far as the outward appearance might go, but faithful as well on the most intricate construction of the entire machine.

And if that was true, was that faithfulness also carried out in the Greasy statuette? Did it have a heart and lungs, blood vessels and brain and nerve? Might it not also have the very essence of Greasy's character, the kind of animal he was, what his thoughts and ethics might be?

I don't know if, at that very moment, the others were thinking the same thing, but the looks on their faces argued that they might have been.

Mack put out a finger and stirred the contents of the pile, scattering the miniatures all about the tabletop.

Then his hand darted out and picked up something and his face went red with anger.

Knight asked: "What is it, Mack?"

"A peeper!" said Mack, his words rasping in his throat. "There's a model of a peeper!"

All of us sat and stared and I could feel the cold sweat breaking out on me.

"If Greasy has a peeper," Mack said woodenly, "I'll break his scrawny neck."

"Take it easy, Mack," said Carr.

"You know what a peeper is?"

"Sure, I know what a peeper is."

"You ever see what a peeper does to a man who uses one?"

"No, I never did."

"I have." Mack threw the peeper model back on the table and turned and went out of the tent. The rest of us followed him.

Greasy was coming down the street, with some of the men following along behind, kidding him about the Shadow treeing him.

Mack put his hands on his hips and waited.

Greasy got almost to us.

"Greasy!" said Mack.

"Yes, Mack."

"You hiding out a peeper?"

Greasy blinked, but he never hesitated. "No, sir," he said, lying like a trooper. "I wouldn't rightly know one if somebody should point it but to me. I've heard of them, of course."

"I'll make a bargain with you," said Mack. "If you have one, just hand it over to me and I'll bust it up and fine you a full month's wages and that's the last that we'll say about it. But if you lie to me and we find that you have one hidden out, I'll can you off the job."

I held my breath. I didn't like what was going on and I thought what a lousy break it was that something like this should happen just when I had swiped the peeper. Although I was fairly sure that no one had seen me sneak into the cookshack—at least I didn't think they had.

Greasy was stubborn. He shook his head. "I haven't got one, Mack."

Mack's face got hard. "All right. We'll go down and see."

He headed for the cookshack and Knight and Carr went along with him, but I headed for my tent.

It would be just like Mack, when he didn't find the peeper in the cookshack, to search the entire camp. If I wanted to stay out of trouble, I knew, I'd better be zipping out of camp and take the peeper with me.

Benny was squatted outside the tent, waiting for me. He helped me get the roller out and then I took the specimen bag with the peeper in it and stuffed it in the roller's carrying bag.

I got on the roller and Benny jumped on the carrier behind me and sat there showing off, balancing himself—like a kid riding a bicycle with no hands.

"You hang on," I told him sharply. "If you fall off this time, I won't stop to pick you up."

I am sure he didn't hear me, but however that may be, he put his arms around my waist and we were off in a cloud of dust.

Until you've ridden on a roller, you haven't really lived. It's like a roller coaster running on the level. But it is fairly safe and it gets you there. It's just two big rubber doughnuts with an engine and a seat and it could climb a barn if you gave it half a chance. It's too rambunctious for civilized

driving, but it is just the ticket for an alien planet.

We set off across the plain toward the distant foothills. It was a fine day, but for that matter, every day was fine on Stella IV. It was an ideal planet, Earth-like, with good weather all the time, crammed with natural resources, free of vicious animal life or deadly virus -- a planet that virtually pleaded for someone to come and live on it.

And in time there'd be people here. Once the administration center was erected, the neat rows of houses had been built, once the shopping centers had been installed, the dams built, the power plant completed--then there would be people. And in the years to come, sector by sector, project community by community, the human race would spread across the planet's face. But it would spread in an orderly progression.

Here there would be no ornery misfits slamming out on their own, willy-nilly, into the frontier land of wild dream and sudden death; no speculators, no strike-it-rich, no go-for-broke. Here there would be no frontier, but a systematic taking over. And here, for once, a planet would be treated right. But there was more to it than that, I told myself.

If Man was to keep going into space, he would have to accept the responsibility of making proper use of the natural resources that he found there. Just because there might be a lot of them was no excuse for wasting them. We were no longer children and we couldn't gut every world as we had gutted Earth.

By the time an intelligence advances to a point where it can conquer space, it must have grown up. And now it was time for the human race to prove that it was adult. We couldn't go ravaging out into the Galaxy like a horde of greedy children.

Here on this planet, it seemed to me, was one of the many proving grounds on which the race of Man must stand and show its worth.

Yet if we were to get the job done, if we were to prove anything at all, there was another problem that first must be met and solved. If it was the Shadows that were causing all our trouble, then somehow we must put a stop to it. And not merely put a stop to it, but understand the Shadows and their motives. For how can anybody fight a thing, I asked myself, that he doesn't understand? And to understand the Shadows, we'd agreed back in the tent, we had to know what kind of critters they might be. And before we could find that out, we had to grab off one for examination. And that first grab had to be perfect, for if we tried and failed, if we put them on their guard, there'd be no second chance.

But the peeper, I told myself, might give us at least one free try. If I tried the peeper and it didn't work, no one would be the wiser. It would be a failure that would go unnoticed.

Benny and I crossed the plain on the roller and headed into the foothills. I made for a place that I called the Orchard, not because it was a formal orchard, but because there were a lot of fruit-bearing trees in the area. As soon as I got around to it, I was planning to run tests to see if any of the fruit might be fit for human food.

We reached the Orchard and I parked the roller and looked around. I saw immediately that something had happened. When I had been there just a week or so before, the trees had been loaded with fruit and it seemed to be nearly ripe, but now it was all gone.

I peered underneath the trees to see if the fruit had fallen off and it hadn't. It looked for all the world as if someone had come in and picked it. I wondered if the Shadows had done the picking, but even as I thought it, I knew it couldn't be. The Shadows didn't eat

I didn't get the peeper out right away, but sat down beneath a tree and sort of caught my breath and did a little thinking.

From where I sat, I could see the camp and I wondered what Mack had done when he hadn't found the peeper. I could imagine he'd be in a towering rage. And I could imagine Greasy, considerably relieved, but wondering just the same what had happened to the peeper and perhaps rubbing it into Mack a little how he

had been wrong.

I got the feeling that maybe it would be just as well if I stayed away a while. At least until mid-afternoon. By that time, perhaps, Mack would have cooled off a little.

And I thought about the Shadows.

Lousy savages, Thorne had said. Yet they were far from savages. They were perfect gentleman (or ladies, God knows which they were, if either) and your genuine savage is no gentleman on a number of very fundamental points. The Shadows were clean in body, healthy and well mannered. They had a certain cultural poise. They were, more than anything else, like a group of civilized campers, but unencumbered by the usual camp equipment.

They were giving us a going over--there could be no doubt of that. They were learning all they could of us and why did they want to know? What use could they make of pots and pans and earthmovers and all the other things?

Or were they merely taking our measure before they clobbered us?

And there were all the other questions, too.

Where did they hang out?

How did they disappear, and when they disappeared, where did they go?

How did they eat and breathe?

How did they communicate?

Come right down to it, I admitted to myself, the Shadows undoubtedly knew a great deal more about us than we knew about them. Because when you tried to chalk up what we knew about them, it came out to almost exactly nothing.

I sat under the tree for a while longer, with the thoughts spinning in my head and not adding up. Then I got to my feet and went over to the roller and got out the peeper.

It was the first time I'd ever had one in my hands and I was interested and slightly apprehensive. For a peeper was nothing one should monkey with.

It was a simple thing to look at--like a lopsided pair of binoculars, with a lot of selector knobs on each side and on the top of it.

You looked into it and you twisted the knobs until you had what you wanted and then there was a picture. You stepped into the picture and you lived the life you found there--the sort of life you picked by the setting of the knobs. And there were many lives to pick from, for there were millions of combinations that could be set up on the knobs and the factors ranged from the lightest kind of frippery to the most abysmal horror.

The peeper was outlawed, naturally--it was worse than alcoholism, worse than dope, the most insidious vice that had ever hit mankind. It threw psychic hooks deep into the soul and tugged forevermore. When a man acquired the habit, and it was easy to acquire, there was no getting over it. He'd spend the rest of his life trying to sort out his life from all the fantasized ones, getting further and further from reality all the while, till nothing was real any more.

I squatted down beside the roller and tried to make some sense out of the knobs. There were thirty-nine of them, each numbered from one to thirty-nine, and I wondered what the numbering meant.

Benny came over and hunkered down beside me, with one shoulder touching mine, and watched what I was doing.

I pondered over the numbering, but pondering did no good. There was only one way to find out what I was looking for. So I set all the knobs back to zero on the graduated scales, then twisted No. 1 up a notch or two.

I knew that was not the way to work a peeper. In actual operation, one would set a number of the knobs at different settings, mixing in the factors in different proportions to make up the kind of life that one might want to sample. But I wasn't after a life. What I wanted to find out was what factor each of the knobs controlled.

So I set No. 1 up a notch or two and lifted the peeper and fitted it to my face and I was back again in the meadow of my boyhood --a meadow that was green as no meadow ever was before, with a sky as blue as old-time watered silk and with a brook and butterflies.

And more than that --a meadow that lay in a day that would never end, a place that knew no time, and a sunlight that was the bright glow of boyish happiness.

I knew exactly how the grass would feel beneath bare feet and I could remember how the sunlight would bounce off the wind-ripples of the brook. It was the hardest thing I ever did in my entire life, but I snatched the peeper from my eyes.

I squatted there, with the peeper cradled in my lap. My hands were unsteady, longing to lift the peeper so I could look once again at that scene out of a long-lost boyhood, but I made myself not do it.

No. 1 was not the knob I wanted, so I turned it back to zero and, since No. 1 was about as far away as one could imagine from what I was looking for, I turned knob 39 up a notch or two.

I lifted the peeper halfway to my face and then I turned plain scared. I put it down again until I could get a good grip on my courage. Then I lifted it once more and stuck my face straight into a horror that reached out and tried to drag me in.

I can't describe it. Even now, I cannot recall one isolated fragment of what I really saw. Rather than seeing, it was pure impression and raw emotion --a sort of surrealistic representation of all that is loathsome and repellent, and yet somehow retaining a hypnotic fascination that forbade retreat.

Shaken, I snatched the peeper from my face and sat frozen. For a moment, my mind was an utter blank, with stray wisps of horror streaming through it. Then the wisps gradually cleared away and I was squatting once again on the hillside with the Shadow hunkered down beside me, his shoulder touching mine. It was a terrible thing, I thought, an act no human could bring himself to do, even to a Shadow. Just turned up a notch or two, it was terrifying; turned on full power, it would twist one's brain.

Benny reached out a hand to take the peeper from me.

I jerked it away from him. But he kept on pawing for it and that gave me time to think.

This, I told myself, was exactly the way I had wanted it to be. All that was different was that Benny, by his nosiness, was making it easy for me to do the very thing I'd planned.

I thought of all that depended on our getting us a Shadow to examine. And I thought about my heart if the inspector should come out and fire us and send in another crew. There just weren't planets lying around every day in the week to be engineered. I might never get another chance.

So I put out my thumb and shoved knob 39 to its final notch and let Benny have the peeper.

And even as I gave it to him, I wondered if it would really work or if I'd just had a pipe-dream. It might not work, I thought, for it was a human mechanism, designed for human use, keyed to the human nervous system and response.

Then I knew that I was wrong, that the peeper did not operate by virtue of its machinery alone, but by the reaction of the brain and the body of its user--that it was no more than a trigger mechanism to set loose the greatness and the beauty and the horror that lay within the user's brain. And horror, while it might take a different shape and form, appear in a different guise, was horror for a Shadow as well as for a human.

Benny lifted the peeper to that great single eye of his and thrust his head forward to fit into the viewer. Then I saw his body jerk and stiffen and I caught him as he toppled and eased him to the ground.

I stood there above him and felt the triumph and the pride --and perhaps a little pity, too -- that it should be necessary to do a thing like this to a guy like Benny. To play a trick like this on my Shadow who had sat, just moments ago, with his shoulder touching mine.

I knelt down and turned him over. He didn't seem so heavy and I was glad of that, because I'd have to get him on the roller and then make a dash for camp,

going as fast as I could gun the roller, because there was no telling how long Benny would stay knocked out.

I picked up the peeper and stuck it back into the roller's bag, then hunted for some rope or wire to tie Benny on so he would not fall off.

I don't know if I heard a noise or not. I'm half inclined to think that there wasn't any noise-that it was some sort of built-in alarm system that made me turn around.

Benny was sagging in upon himself and I had a moment of wild panic, thinking that he might be dead, that the shock of the horror that leaped out of the peeper at him had been too much for him to stand.

And I remembered what Mack had said: "Never kill a thing until you have figured out just how efficiently it may up and kill you back."

If Benny was dead, then we might have all hell exploding in our laps.

If he was dead, though, he sure was acting funny. He was sinking in and splitting at a lot of different places, and he turning to what looked like dust, but wasn't dust, and there wasn't any Benny. There was just the harness with the bag and the jewel and then there wasn't any bag, but a handful of trinkets lying on the ground where the bag had been.

And there was something else.

There still was Benny's eye. The eye was a part of a cone that been in Benny's head.

I recalled how the survey party had seen other cones like that. but had not been able to get close to them.

I was too scared to move. I stood and looked and there were a lot of goose pimples rising on my hide.

For Benny was no alien. Benny was no more than the proxy of some other alien that we had never seen and could not even guess at.

All sorts of conjectures went tumbling through my brain, but they were no more than panic-pictures, and they flipped off and on so fast, I couldn't settle on any one of them.

But one thing was clear as day-the cleverness of this alien for which the Shadows were the front.

Too clever to confront us with anything that was more remotely human in its shape-a thing for which we could feel pity or contempt or perhaps exasperation, but something that would never rouse a fear within us. A pitiful little figure that was a caricature of our shape and one that so stupid that it couldn't even talk. And one that was sufficiently alien to keep us puzzled and stump us on so many basic points that we would, at last, give up in sheer bewilderment any attempts that we might make to get it puzzled out.

I threw a quick glance over my shoulder and kept my shoulders hunched, and if anything had moved, I'd have run like a frightened rabbit. But nothing moved. Nothing even rustled. There was nothing to be afraid of except the thoughts within my head.

But I felt a frantic urge to get out of there and I went down on my hands and knees and began to gather what was left of Benny.

I scooped up the pile of trinkets and the jewel and dumped them in the bag along with the peeper. Then I went back and picked up the cone, with the one eye looking at me, but I could see that the eye was dead. The cone was slippery and it didn't feel like metal, but it was heavy and hard to get a good grip on and I had quite a time with it. But I finally got it in the bag and started out for camp.

I went like a bat winging out of hell. Fear was roosting on one shoulder and I kept that roller wheeling.

I swung into camp and headed for Mack's tent, but before I got there, I found what looked like the entire project crew working at the craziest sort of contraption one would ever hope to see. It was a mass of gears and cams and wheels and chains and whatnot, and it sprawled over what, back home, would have been a good-sized lot, and there was no reason I could figure for building anything like that.

I saw Thorne standing off to one side and superintending the work, yelling first at this one and then at someone else, and I could see that he was enjoying himself. Thorne was that kind of bossy jerk.

I stopped the roller beside him and balanced it with one leg.

"What's going on?" I asked him.

"We're giving them something to get doped out," he said. "We're going to drive them crazy."

"Them? You mean the Shadows?"

"They want information, don't they?" Thorne demanded. "They've been underfoot day and night, always in the way, so now we give them something to keep them occupied."

"But what does it do?"

Thorne spat derisively. "Nothing. That's the beauty of it."

"Well," I said, "I suppose you know what you're doing. Does Mack know what's going on?"

"Mack and Carr and Knight are the big brains that thought it up," said Thorne.

"I'm just carrying out orders."

I went on to Mack's tent and parked the roller there and I knew that Mack was inside, for I heard a lot of arguing.

I took the carrier bag and marched inside the tent and pushed my way up to the table and, up-ending the sack, emptied the whole thing on the tabletop.

And I plumb forgot about the peeper being in there with all the other stuff.

There was nothing I could do about it. The peeper lay naked on the table and there was a terrible silence and I could see that in another second Mack would blow his jets.

He sucked in his breath to roar, but I beat him to it.

"Shut up, Mack!" I snapped. "I don't want to hear a word from you!"

I must have caught him by surprise, for he let his breath out slowly, looking at me funny while he did it, and Carr and Knight were just slightly frozen in position. The tent was deathly quiet.

"That was Benny," I said, motioning at the tabletop. "That is all that's left of him. A look in the peeper did it."

Carr came a bit unfrozen. "But the peeper! We looked everywhere--"

"I knew Greasy had it and I stole it when I got a hunch. Remember, we were talking about how to catch a Shadow--"

"I'm going to bring charges against you!" howled Mack. "I'm going to make an example out of you! I'm going to--"

"You're going to shut up," I said at him. "You're going to stay quiet and listen or I'll heave you out of here tin cup over appetite."

"Please!" begged Knight. "Please, gentlemen, let's act civilized."

And that was a hot one -- him calling us gentlemen.

"It seems to me," said Carr, "that the matter of the peeper is somewhat immaterial if Bob has turned it to some useful purpose."

"Let's all sit down," Knight urged, "and maybe count to ten. Then Bob can tell us what is on his mind."

It was a good suggestion. We all sat down and I told them what had happened. They sat there listening, looking at all that junk on the table and especially at the cone, for it was lying on its side at one end of the table, where it had rolled, and it was looking at us with that dead and fishy eye.

"Those Shadows," I finished up, "aren't alive at all. They're just some sort of spy rig that something else is sending out. All we need to do is lure the Shadows off, one by one, and let them look into the peeper with knob 39 set full and--"

"It's no permanent solution," said Knight. "Fast as we destroyed them, there'd be other ones sent out."

I shook my head. "I don't think so. No matter how good that alien race may be, they can't control those Shadows just by mental contact. My bet is that there are machines involved, and when we destroy a Shadow, it would be my hunch that we knock out a machine. And if we knock out enough of them, we'll give those other people so much headache that they may come out in the open and we can

dicker with them."

"I'm afraid you're wrong," Knight answered. "This other race keeps hidden, I'd say, for some compelling reason. Maybe they have developed an underground civilization and never venture on the surface because it's a hostile environment to them. But maybe they keep track of what is doing on the surface by means of these cones of theirs. And when we showed up, they rigged the cones to look like something slightly human, something they felt sure we would accept, and sent them out to get a good close look."

Mack put up his hands and rubbed them back and forth across his head. "I don't like this hiding business. I like things out in the open where I can take a swipe at them and they can take a swipe at me. I'd have liked it a whole lot better if the Shadows had really been the aliens."

"I don't go for your underground race," Carr said to Knight. "It doesn't seem to me you could produce such a civilization if you lived underground. You'd be shut away from all the phenomena of nature. You wouldn't--"

"All right," snapped Knight, "what's your idea?"

"They might have matter transmission--in fact, we know they do--whether-by machine or mind, and that would mean that they'd never have to travel on the surface of the planet, but could transfer from place to place in the matter of a second. But they still would need to know what was going on, so they'd have their eyes and ears like a TV radar system--"

"You jokers are just talking round in circles," objected Mack. "You don't know what the score is."

"I suppose you do," Knight retorted.

"No, I don't," said Mack. "But I'm honest enough to say straight out I don't."

"I think Carr and Knight are too involved," I said. "These aliens might be hiding only until they find out what we're like -- whether they can trust us or if it would be better to run us off the planet."

"Well," said Knight, "no matter how you figure it, you've got to admit that they probably know practically all there is to know about us --our technology and our purpose and what kind of animals we are and they probably have picked up our language."

"They know too much," said Mack. "I'm getting scared."

There was a scrabbling at the flap and Thorne stuck in his head.

"Say, Mack," he said, "I got a good idea. How about setting up some guns in that contraption out there? When the Shadows crowd around--"

"No guns," Knight said firmly. "No rockets. No electrical traps. You do just what we told you. Produce all the useless motion you can. Get it as involved and as flashy as possible. But let it go at that."

Thorne withdrew sulkily.

Knight explained to me: "We don't expect it to last too long, but it may keep them occupied for a week or so while -e get some work done. When it begins to wear off, we'll fix up something else."

It was all right, I suppose, but it didn't sound too hot to me. At the best, it bought a little time and nothing more. It bought a little time, that is, if we could fool the Shadows. Somehow, I wasn't sure that we could fool them much. Ten to one, they'd spot the contraption as a phony the minute it was set in motion.

Mack got up and walked around the table. He lifted the cone and tucked it beneath one arm.

"I'll take this down to the shop," he said. "Maybe the boys can find out what it is."

"I can tell you now," said Carr. "It's what the aliens use to control the Shadows. Remember the cones the survey people saw? This is one of them. My guess is that it's some kind of a signal device that can transmit data back to base, wherever that might be."

"No matter," Mack said. "Well cut into it and see what we can find."

"And the peeper?" I asked.

"I'll take care of that."

I reached out a hand and picked it up. "No, you won't. You're just the kind of

bigot who would take it out and smash it."

"It's illegal," Mack declared.

Carr sided with me. "Not any more. It's a tool now—a weapon that we can use." I handed it to Carr. "You take care of it. Put it in a good safe place. We may need it again before all this is over."

I gathered the junk that had been in Benny's bag and picked up the jewel and dropped it into a pocket of my coat.

Mack went out with the cone underneath his arm. The rest of us drifted outside the tent and stood there, just a little footloose now that the excitement was all over.

"He'll have Greasy's hide," worried Knight.

"I'll talk to him," Carr said. "I'll make him see that Greasy may have done us a service by sneaking the thing out here."

"I suppose," I said, "I should tell Greasy what happened to the peeper."

Knight shook his head, "let him sweat a while. It will do him good."

Back in my tent, I tried to do some paper work, but I couldn't get my mind to settle down on it. I guess I was excited and I'm afraid that I missed Benny and I was tangled up with wondering just what the situation was, so far as the Shadows were concerned.

We had named them well, all right, for they were little more than shadows—meant to shadow us. But even knowing they were just camouflaged spy rigs, I still found it hard not to think of them as something that was alive. They were no more than cones, of course, and the cones probably were no more than observation units for those hidden people who hung out somewhere on the planet. For thousands of years, perhaps, the cones had been watching while this race stayed in hiding somewhere. But maybe more than watching. Maybe the cones were harvesters and planters—bringing back the plunder of the wilds to their hidden masters. More than likely, it had been the cones that had picked all the Orchard fruit.

And if there was a culture here, if another race had primal rights upon the planet, then what did that do to the claims that Farth might make? Did it mean we might be forced to relinquish this planet, after all—one of the few Earthlike planets found in years of exploration?

I sat at my desk and thought about the planning and the work and the money that had gone into this project, which, even so, was no more than a dribble compared to what eventually would be spent to make this into another Earth. Even on this project center, we'd made no more than an initial start. In a few more weeks, the ships would begin bringing in the steel mill and that in itself was a tremendous task—to bring it in, assemble it, mine the ore to get it going and finally to put it into operation. But simpler and easier, infinitely so, than freighting out from Earth all the steel that would be needed to build this project alone.

We couldn't let it go down the drain. After all the year, after all the planning and the work, in face of Earth's great need for more living space, we could not give up Stella IV. And yet we could not deny primal rights. If these beings, when they finally showed themselves, would say that they didn't want us here, then there would be no choice. We would simply have to clear out. But before they threw us out, of course, they would steal us blind. Much of what we had would undoubtedly be of little value to them, but there would be some of it that they could use. No race can fail to enrich itself and its culture by contact with another. And the contact that these aliens had established was a completely one-sided bargain—the exchange flowed only in their direction.

They were, I told myself, just a bunch of cosmic sharps.

I took the junk that had been in Benny's bag out of my pocket and spread it on the desk and began to sort it out. There was the sector model and the roller and the desk and my little row of books and the pocket chess set and all the other stuff that belonged to me.

There was all the stuff but me.

Greasy's Shadow had carried a statuette of Greasy, but I found none of me and I was a little sore at Benny. He could have gone to the extra effort to have made a statuette of me.

I rolled the things around on the desktop with a finger and wondered once again just how deeply they went. Might they not be patterns rather than just models? Perhaps, I told myself, letting my imagination run away with me, perhaps each of these little models carried in some sort of code a complete analysis and description of whatever the article might be. A human, making a survey or an analysis, would write a sheaf of notes, would capture the subject matter in a page or two of symbols. Maybe these little models were the equivalent of a human notebook, the aliens' way of writing.

And I wondered how they wrote, how they made the models, but there wasn't any answer.

I gave up trying to work and went out of the tent and climbed up the little rise to where Thorne and the men were building their flytrap for the Shadows. They had put a lot of work and ingenuity into it and it made no sense at all -- which, after all, was exactly what it WAS meant to do.

If we could get the Shadows busy enough trying to figure out what this new contraption was, maybe they'd leave us alone long enough to get some work done.

Thorne and his crew had gotten half a dozen replacement motors out of the shop and had installed those to be used as power. Apparently they had used almost all the spare equipment parts they could find, for there were shafts and gears and cams and all sorts of other things all linked together in a mindless pattern. And here and there they had set up what looked like control boards, except, of course, that they controlled absolutely nothing, but were jammed with flashers and all sorts of other gimmicks until they looked like Christmas trees.

I stood around and watched until Greasy rang the dinner bell, then ran a foot race with all the others to get to the tables.

There was a lot of loud talk and joking, but no one wasted too much time eating. They bolted their food and hurried back to the flytrap.

Just before sunset, they set it going and it was the screwiest mass of meaningless motion that anyone had ever seen. Shafts were spinning madly and a million gears, it seemed, were meshing, and cams were wobbling with their smooth, irregular strokes, and pistons were going up and down and up and down. It was all polished bright and it worked slicker than a whistle and it was producing nothing except motion but it had a lot of fascination--even for a human. I found myself standing rooted in one spot, marveling at the smoothness and precision and the remorseless non-purpose of the weird contraption. And all the time the fake control boards were sparkling and flashing with the lamps popping on and off, in little jagged runs and series, and you got dizzy watching them, trying to make some pattern out of them.

The Shadows had been standing around and gaping ever since work had started on the trap, but now they crowded closer and stood in a tight and solemn ring around the thing and they never moved.

I turned around and Mack was just behind me. He was rubbing his hands in satisfaction and his face was all lit up with smiles.

"Pretty slick," he said.

I agreed with him, but I had some doubts that I could not quite express.

"We'll string up some lights," said Mack, "so they can see it day and night and then we'll have them pegged for good."

"You think they'll stay with it?" I asked. "They won't catch on?"

"Not a chance."

I went down to my tent and poured myself a good stiff drink, then sat down in a chair in front of the tent.

Some of the men were stringing cable and others were rigging up some batteries of lights and down in the cookshack I could hear Greasy singing, but the song was sad. I felt sorry for Greasy.

Mack might be right, I admitted to myself. We might have built a trap that would cook the Shadows' goose. If nothing else, the sheer fascination of all that motion might keep them stuck there. It had a hypnotic effect even for a human and one could never gauge what effect it might have on an alien mind. Despite the evident technology of the aliens, it was entirely possible that their machine technology might have developed along some divergent line, so that the spinning wheel and the plunging piston and the smooth fluid gleam of metal was new to them.

I tried to imagine a machine technology that would require no motion, but such a thing was entirely inconceivable to me, And for that very reason, I thought, the idea of all this motion might be just as inconceivable to an alien intellect.

The stars came out while I sat there and no one wandered over to gab and that was fine. I was just as satisfied to be left alone.

After a time, I went into the tent, had another drink and decided to go to bed.

I took off my coat and slung it on the desk. When it hit, there was a thump, and as soon as I heard that thump, I knew what it was. I had dropped Benny's jewel into the pocket of the coat and had then forgotten it.

I fished into the pocket and got out the jewel, fearing all the while that I had broken it. And there was something wrong with it-it had somehow come apart. The jewel face had come loose from the rest of it and I saw that the jewel was no more than a cover for a box-shaped receptacle.

I put it on the desk and swung the jewel face open and there, inside the receptacle, I found myself.

The statuette was nestled inside a weird piece of mechanism and it was as fine a piece of work as Greasy's statuette.

It gave me a flush of pride and satisfaction. Benny, after all, had not forgotten me!

I sat for a long time looking at the statuette, trying to puzzle out the mechanism. I had a good look at the jewel and I finally figured out what it was all about.

The jewel was no jewel at all; it was a camera. Except that instead of taking two-dimensional pictures, it worked in three dimensions. And that, of course, was how the Shadows made the models. Or maybe they were patterns rather than just models.

I finished undressing and got into bed and lay on the cot, staring at the canvas, and the pieces all began to fall together and it was beautiful. Beautiful, that is, for the aliens. It made us look like a bunch of saps. The cones had gone out and watched the survey party and had not let it get close to them, but they had been ready for us when we came. They'd disguised the cones to look like something that we wouldn't be afraid of, something perhaps that we could even laugh at it. And that was the safest kind of disguise that anyone could assume-something that the victim might think was mildly funny. For no one gets too upset about what a clown might do.

But the Shadows had been loaded and they'd let us have it and apparently, by the time we woke up, they had us pegged and labeled.

And what would they do now? Still stay behind their log, still keep watching us, and suck us dry of everything that we had to offer?

And when they were ready, when they'd gotten all they wanted or all they felt that they could get, they'd come out and finish us.

I was somewhat scared and angry and felt considerably like a fool and it was frustrating just to think about.

Mack might kid himself that he had solved the problem with his flytrap out there, but there was still a job to do. Somehow or other, we had to track down these hiding aliens and break up their little game.

Somewhere along the way, I went to sleep, and suddenly someone was shaking me and yelling for me to get out.

I came half upright and saw that it was Carr who had been shaking me. He was practically gibbering. He kept pointing outside and babbling something about a

funny cloud and I couldn't get much more out of him.

So I shucked into my trousers and my shoes and went out with him and headed for the hilltop at a run. Dawn was just breaking and the Shadows still were clustered around the flytrap and a crowd of men had gathered just beyond the flytrap and were looking toward the east.

We pushed our way through the crowd up to the front and there was the cloud that Carr had been jabbering about, but it was a good deal closer now and was sailing across the plains, slowly and majestically, and flying above it was a little silver sphere that flashed and glittered in the first rays of the sun. The cloud looked, more than anything, like a mass of junk. I could see what looked like a derrick sticking out of it and here and there what seemed to be a wheel. I tried to figure out what it might be, but I couldn't, and all the time it was moving closer to us.

Mack was at my left and I spoke to him, but he didn't answer me. He was just like Benny-he couldn't answer me. He looked hypnotized.

The closer that cloud came, the more fantastic it was and the more unbelievable. For there was no question now that it was a mass of machinery, just like the equipment we had. There were tractors and earthmovers and shovels and dozers and all the other stuff, and in between these bigger pieces was all sorts of little stuff.

In another five minutes, it was hovering almost over us and then slowly it began to lower. While we watched, it came down to the ground, gently, almost without a bump, even though there were a couple or three acres of it. Besides the big equipment, there were tents and cups and spoons and tables and chairs and benches and a case or two of whisky and some surveying equipment -- there was, it seemed to me, almost exactly all the items there were in the camp. When it had all sat down, the little silver sphere came down, too, and floated slowly toward us. It stopped a little way away from us and Mack walked out toward it and I followed Mack. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw that Carr and Knight were walking forward, too.

We stopped four or five feet from it and now we saw that the sphere was some sort of protective suit. Inside it sat a pale little humanoid. Not human, but at least with two legs and arms and a single head. He had antennae sprouting from his forehead and his ears were long and pointed and he had no hair at all.

He let the sphere set down on the ground and we got a little closer and squatted down so we would be on a level with him.

He jerked a thumb backward over his shoulder, pointing at the mass of equipment he'd brought.

"Is pay." he announced in a shrill, high, piping voice.

We didn't answer right away. We did some gulping first.

"Is pay for what?" Knight finally managed to ask him.

"For fun." the creature said.

"I don't understand," said Mack.

"We make one of everything. We not know what you want, to we make one of all. Unfortunate, two lots are missing. Accident, perhaps."

"The models." I said to the others. "That's what he's talking about. The models were patterns and the models from Greasy's Shadow and from Benny--"

"Not all," the creature said. "The rest be right along."

"Now wait a minute," said Carr. "Let us get this straight. You are paying us. Paying us for what? Exactly what did we do for you?"

Mack blurted out: "How did you make this stuff?"

"One question at a time," I pleaded.

"Machines can make," the creature said. "Knowing how, machines can make anything. Very good machines."

"But why?" asked Carr again. "Why did you make it for us?"

"For fun." the creature explained patiently. "For laugh. For watch. Is a big word I cannot --"

"Entertainment?" I offered.

"That is right," the creature said. "Entertainment is the word. We have lot of

time for entertainment. We stay home, watch our entertainment screen. We get tired of it. We seek for something new. You something new. Give us much interesting. We try to pay you for it."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Knight. "I begin to get it now. We were a big news event and so they sent out all those cones to cover us. Mack, did you saw into that cone last night?"

"We did." said Mack. "As near as we could figure, it was a TV sender. Not like ours, of course-there would be differences. But we figured it for a data-sending rig,"

I turned back to the alien in his shiny sphere. "Listen carefully," I said. "Let's get down to business. You are willing to keep on paying if we provide you entertainment?"

"Gladly." said the creature. "You keep us entertained, we give you what you want."

"Instead of one of everything, you will make us many of one thing?"

"You show it to us," the creature said. "You let us know how many."

"Steel?" asked Mack. "You can make us steel?"

"No recognize this steel. Show us. How made, how big, how shaped. We make."

"If we keep you entertained?"

"That right." the creature said.

"Deal?" I asked.

"Deal," the creature said.

"Prom now on? No stopping?"

"As long as you keep us happy."

"That may take some doing," Mack told me.

"No, it won't," I said.

"You're crazy!" Mack yelled. "They'll never let us have them!"

"Yes, they will," I answered. "Earth will do anything to cinch this planet.

And don't you see, with this sort of swap, we'll beat the cost. All Earth has to do is send out one sample of everything we need. One sample will do the trick. One I-beam and they'll make a million of them. It's the best deal Earth has ever made."

"We do our part," the creature assured us happily. "Long as you do yours."

"I'll get that order right off now," I said to Mack. "Ill write it up and have Jack send it out."

I stood up and headed back toward camp.

"Rest of it," the creature said, motioning over his shoulder.

I swung around and looked.

There was another mass of stuff coming in, keeping fairly low. And this time it was men-a solid press of men.

"Hey!" cried Mack, "You can't do that! That just isn't right!"

I didn't need to look. I knew exactly what had happened. The aliens had duplicated not only our equipment, but the men as well. In that crowd of men were the duplicates of every one of us -- everyone, that is, except myself and greasy.

Horrified as I might have been, outraged as any human would be, I couldn't help but think of some of the situations that might arise. Imagine two Macks insisting on bossing the operation! Picture two Thornes trying to get along together!

I didn't hang around. I left Mack and the rest of them to explain why men should not be duplicated. In my tent, I sat down and wrote an imperative, high-priority, must-deliver order for five hundred peepers.

End.

Short story taken from "5 Unearthly Visions"

Edited by Groff Conklin

(c)1965 Fawcett Publications

231-01868-050

First published 1957 Galaxy Publishing Corp - Galaxy Science Fiction.
This electronic version scanned and proofed by E-book_Worm.
Nov 19 2002