

Unnamed Malady

The town was a small one, lazy and leisurely in the afternoon sun. Lane was watching the people on the sidewalk as he waited for the light to change. Suddenly a man stopped, opened his mouth, and appeared to be gasping for breath. He staggered, then, and began to beat the air before him. His eyes went panicky and he made terrible choking sounds.

Jerking his head from side to side, his mouth open, the man fought crazily against *nothingness*.

Lane jumped out of the car and ran toward the suffocating man. He had seen the animals die like this, but never before a human being, a person like himself...

The Gold Medal seal on this book means it has never been published as a book before. To select an original book that you have not already read, look for the Gold Medal seal.

WAR WITH THE GIZMOS

A Gold Medal Original by

MURRAY LEINSTER

GOLD MEDAL BOOKS

Fawcett publications. inc.

FAWCETT BLDG.,FAWCETT PLACE, GREENWICH.CONN.

Copyright 1958 by Fawcett Publications, Inc.

First Printing, March 1958

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book or portions thereof.

All characters in this book are fictional and any resemblance to persons living or dead is purely coincidental.

Printed in the United States of America

PROLOGUE

The first battles of the war with the Gizmos took place in deep wilderness, and human beings knew nothing about them. Cities were not attacked, in the beginning. The initial skirmishes were fought by bears and wildcats and mountain sheep, and other creatures blood-kin to men. Those battles were often magnificent, but they were usually disastrous, and few of them were ever reported.

There was, though, a bear found dead in the high Sierras, killed after a fight of epic proportions, as was shown by torn-up earth and crushed brushwood and toppled saplings. There was a mountain lion found slain in Colorado after no less desperate a conflict. A slaughtered wildcat's furious struggle for life was noted in northern Michigan, where the signs of the conflict were clear. And a fisherman on a stream in Pennsylvania saw the death of a four-point buck. It fought with splendid courage. It used horns and hoofs and pure desperation against an invisible antagonist, but it finally sank to the ground and died while the angler looked on, appalled and unbelieving.

These were battles with Gizmos. The signs were unmistakable. The dead creatures had not a wound or a mark upon them. The battlegrounds showed plainly their tracks, but no trace of a thing or things with which they had fought. In one case, as was noted, a man saw the fighting, but he didn't see the buck's antagonist. He only saw that the buck deer died. Its murderer could not possibly have been anything but a Gizmo.

There is no point, now, in reviewing the controversy about the Gizmos' origin. Some still insist that they came from outer space. This is hard to believe, because a spaceship under Gizmo control is almost impossible to imagine. Some authorities consider that Gizmos are native to Earth. They point to primitive fears of evil spirits as proof of their presence on Earth since time beyond remembering. But the objection to this is that primitive man could not have survived had he been attacked by the Gizmos who made war on us. In effect this argument is that since our ancestors were not exterminated by Gizmos, there were no Gizmos in ancient days. Yet the legends of fiends and *djinnns* and *efrits* and *ghuls*, and of eerie inhabitants of remote, are singularly convincing when one considers them in connection with Gizmos.

In any case the Gizmos seemed to appear with the suddenness of a thunderclap. They had the enormous advantage of being totally unreasonable. These days we believe only in highly scientific things. Highly scientific opinions change continually, and so do the things we believe in. But Gizmos were not flesh and blood, and therefore not scientific, so we would not notice such signs of their presence as must have existed before the war. However they appeared, they were able to marshal their forces without interference; they established bases in our forests, pickets in our woodlots, and observation posts in the parks of towns and cities. Gizmo patrols moved wherever they pleased without anybody crediting their reality – even when they committed atrocities. They had every possible advantage in their preparations for war.

In military terms they secured almost complete surprise. Apart from atrocity reports

there is no evidence that anybody noticed anything the Gizmos did not want noticed. Even the word "Gizmo" was a slang term applied to blips on radar screens for which no cause could be established. We knew that these blips were not caused by solid objects; we also knew that the blips moved independently of the wind. Some radar stations observed many of them, and others very few. There was a flying-saucer scare, once, when six unidentified flying objects were reported over Washington, D.C. Armed forces radar stations admitted reluctantly that they had been detected. But, said the armed forces, they were only Gizmos. It was guessed that they were areas of excessive ionization in the air, of no importance.

This was the error of the century, but a very natural one. A Gizmo had been spotted by radar over a flying field in Texas. It hung stationary over the center of the installation at fifteen hundred feet, as if leisurely surveying the activities below. Nothing was visible where the radar insisted the Gizmo was. A plane took off and, guided by instructions from the ground, dived squarely through the space occupied by the Gizmo. Neither the plane nor its pilot detected anything at the moment of impact. The Gizmo vanished. After that, it seemed reasonable to disregard Gizmos altogether, which was a catastrophic blunder.

Chapter 1

Dick Lane was the first man to be attacked by Gizmos – it was undoubtedly a small patrol of them – and to live to tell about it in intelligible terms. It happened one day when he trudged a dim trail through mixed mountain laurel and oaks and pine trees on the downward slope of a mountain nobody had ever bothered to name. This was in the mountains of western Virginia, some ten miles from Murfree's courthouse. He'd been in other places on his present errand, and his bafflement had been as great as it was here, which meant that his frustration was complete. He'd been tracking down the stories of inexplicable deaths of game animals, and some suspected deaths of men. He'd learned nothing tangible. He had dark suspicions, but nothing to justify them, and on this hot summer afternoon he was discouraged, uneasy and depressed.

To a sportsman, and especially a professional writer about field sports, as Lane was, the matter was important; to the rest of the world it was not. But fishermen and hunters made much of good hunting dogs who'd gone apparently crazy and fought empty air, snapping at it while screaming horribly. Most of them died. And there was a pheasant hunter in New Jersey, last fall, who was found dead beside his dead dog in the center of a patch of brush that had been leveled in some sort of frenzy. Neither man nor dog had a single wound of any sort. There were four fishermen found in the Dakotas, alleged to have died of poisoned mushrooms gathered in the wilds. But at least one of the four loathed mushrooms; he wouldn't have tasted them. And there were cases of experienced guides, scouting the prospects for next-season hunting, who did not return from territory that was wholly familiar to them. One or two were found dead in their scattered blankets, by the ashes of dead fires; others were not found at all. And there were many tales of game animals found dead with the signs of battle all about them. Something unknown was taking toll of game and men.

It was Lane's profession to go to places where there was good hunting and fishing, and then write articles about it, mostly for the magazine *Forest and Field*. Before this recent spate of murders in the wilderness, it had been a pleasant one. But Lane was a sportsman before he was a writer, and he was upset by the wanton killing of game – not killing for food, but scornfully leaving the murdered creatures to rot after they had defended themselves gallantly. *Forest and Field* had taken note of the matter. It was a sportsman's magazine only, so it was not moved by reports of a ten-year-old boy's having been found suffocated in Euclid Park, in Cleveland, and of the death of two children picking blackberries on the outskirts of Englewood, New Jersey, and of an elderly couple's having been found dead in an open car near Sarasota, Florida. These human deaths seemed accidents. Nobody connected them with a common cause. It was Lane and his fellow sportsman who insisted that what was happening to wild creatures and good hunting dogs needed looking into. As a public service, *Forest and Field* had commissioned Lane to find out what was going on. He'd been at it for months, now, with no results – not even credible suspicions.

So on this summer afternoon he trudged along a sloping mountain trail without expectation of success. He'd come to Murfree County because here the reports were especially persistent and detailed. There'd been a case only ten days ago. A man's cattle had acted as if insane in the middle of the night. They had fought frenziedly in their stalls and broken down the walls of the barn in their struggling, and then had crashed through the barnyard fence and fled through the night. Eight animals had been involved. Next morning six of them had been found unharmed, but two were dead, without a mark on them. There were also local reports of dead foxes and wild turkeys and raccoons and opossums. Something was killing a lot of game in Murfree County. Hunting wouldn't be so good this fall. If whatever was happening kept up, there wouldn't be any hunting.

He'd asked questions and searched for clues here as in other places. He found nothing.

This afternoon found him making his way on foot to ask questions at the last place in Murfree County where he could hope to learn anything new. There was a field biological expedition in the county just then, sponsored by Gale University, and the local citizens observed sardonically that it was studying turkey buzzards. The woman professor in charge was not approved of by Lane's informants. She wore pants all the time and hadn't the build for it. Undaunted, Lane was on his way to ask if the expedition had made any observations that might bear on his mission.

The day was singularly perfect. All about him the excessively tumbled mountain country seemed to bake quietly under the sun. The mountains themselves were dark green under a totally blue sky. There had been rain the night before and brooks sang merrily, but the sunshine breaking through the leaves was startlingly hot.

Lane scrambled down a steep slope, with pebbles loosened by his feet bouncing and sliding. He saw the deep valley at the foot of this mountainside, and there was a veiling of faintest green above the red clay of ploughed fields down in the valley. Then he saw the glint of metal in the distance. That would be the trailer – the expedition's trailer – that he was looking for. It vanished behind a spur of stone as he went on, partly downhill and partly at an angle along the mountain. Presently the ground grew level for

a small space. He came to a small natural clearing filled with tall grass, and saw a glint of gray fur in the center of it.

The world was very still. There was next to no air movement. No birds sang. He did not consciously note the fact, but there were not even insect noises in the air: no gnats or mosquitoes hummed around him. He could tell that a vast gulf dropped away to his left, and that to the right the ground sloped up. Above him was a dense forest, whose trees were gnarled and crooked because of the rocky ground. In the clearing it was baking hot.

He felt no uneasiness, no premonition, no hint of danger. He moved toward the bit of fur in the vast stillness. Had it been nighttime, it would have been appalling. But Lane heard the rustling of grass about his feet, and it did not occur to him that the general silence was ominous.

Something invisible touched his face. Again, in darkness this would have been horrifying. But the sun was bright. He brushed the air before him. It felt like a thread of gossamer floating in the sunshine. The touch came again. He brushed impatiently, staring down at his feet. The sight, considering what he'd been working on, was almost familiar – but it was far from gratifying.

There were twenty or thirty dead rabbits in an untidy mass, lying on the ground. They had been dead for days, but there were no flies about them. There were no brilliantly colored butterflies fluttering above the small corpses. They had not been touched by buzzards. This was remarkable. Lane raised his head. The thing he mistook for gossamer touched him a third time. He took out his handkerchief and wiped his face, as he stirred one of the carcasses with his foot.

He heard a faint whining sound he could not identify. The rabbits were dead. That was all. There were no wounds. He stirred another. Discoveries like this had been made before.

He felt eerie, delicate fumbblings at his face. He wiped it again with his handkerchief. He stared down at the small dead creatures. It is not natural for rabbits to gather in so close an assembly, especially to die. There is no natural enemy of rabbits which rounds them up to murder them. But he suddenly realized fact that these little furry bodies had received no attention from flies and such things whose function it is to keep the wilderness sweet-smelling and tidy. Nothing had touched these small corpses at all. Then it occurred to Lane, startlingly, that there was no taint in the air. He puzzled over that. The gossamer touches stopped.

Something closed smotheringly over his face, sealing his nostrils and his lips. His forehead was touched by something which pressed against it gently. The contact was all over his face and throat, as if he were enmeshed in invisible cobwebs.

The whining sound he'd heard was sharply distinct – and he couldn't breathe.

He gasped, or tried to. He could not gasp. Blind panic yammered at him. But one cannot be wholly panicked when blankly amazed. Lane stood still for an instant, trying to fill his lungs with air. He could breathe out. He did. But he could not breathe in. Air would not enter his nostrils and something invisible blanketed his face. He could feel it, though it was neither warm nor cold. He could not breathe through it. He was suffocating.

He staggered, dazed, and beat the air before him. He went stumbling and lurching, his whole conscious purpose that of inhaling, which was impossible. He crashed into brushwood and tripped and fell headlong. His face buried itself in fallen leaves – and here he could breathe! He gasped a deep lungful of air, scented with acrid woods-mould and the odor of dry foliage. Then he struggled up on hands and knees, and his breath shut off. Something blanketed his face once more. It sealed his lips and nose. He fought, and toppled again – and he could breathe.

He lay still, panting, with his face buried in the fallen stuff. An incredible surmise began to form. He felt more fumbings on his neck and ears, delicate touches which made his spine crawl. There was something which wanted him to lift his face so that it could stop his breath.

But he was alone!

Despite the shock of near strangulation, he was filled with a sort of blank astonishment. He lay still, and something fumbled at him; he knew that it wanted him to look up, to rise. It whined impatiently for him to stir. He knew that it intended to kill him, and that he frustrated it by keeping his face buried in dead leaves. It was an invisible thing, and it did not bite or claw or sting, but it fretted because he did not stand up to be suffocated.

Sweat poured out all over him. This was the killer of the wilderness.

The touches stopped.

He lay still and tense. Now, for the first time, he realized the unnatural stillness of the world about him. It was horrifying, this quietude. He strained his ears for sounds of movement by the thing which a moment before had been whining beside his ear. He heard nothing at all. No – very, very faintly he heard the bubbling of a brook nearby. That was all. . . .

A long time later he moved cautiously. There was still no bird call or insect hum. There was no sound at all but the small rustlings his own body made as he moved in the brushwood.

He sat up and stared about with hunted eyes. He was ashen-white. He stared in every direction, slowly and furtively, his eyes assuring him that there was nothing near but tree trunks and brushwood stalks. He got to his feet and began to creep away.

His breath cut off.

There was no warning. There were no fumbling touches, this time. Something clung to his face, whining shrilly, and he could see through it but he could not draw breath, and horror filled him. He staggered back to where dried leaves lay thick upon the ground. He flung himself down and buried his face in them again, and breathed deeply of the leaves.

Presently, his eyes strained, he stood up once more. He held double handfuls of dried leaves before his nostrils and lips. He breathed through them. The smell of woods-mould was strong. He waited, in a sort of desperation. Whatever meant to kill him knew him to be afoot and moving. He could not slip away unperceived. But nothing happened. After a time he dared to move onward down the hillside.

There was no other attempt upon him by anything visible or otherwise. He heard no more high-pitched whines, but the unnatural stillness remained. . . .

A mile away, he was still pale. Two miles away, he was still shaken. He hadn't fully recovered his normal color when he came out upon a shelving slope and saw the aluminum trailer less than half a mile away. It glittered in the bright sunshine, and beyond it the valley spread out, its trees minute so far below, and all the world very beautiful and serene.

He moved on, and saw something else. There was a curious, foot-high construction of wire screening on the ground. An ample female form in riding breeches lay at full length, squinting through one surface of screening to the other. As Lane drew near, he heard a contralto voice saying disgusted things in pseudoprofane terms.

He coughed, and she raised her head to stare at him. He recognized her. "My name's Lane," he said shakily. "Dick Lane. I think you're Professor Warren. Over in Murfree they told me I'd find you here and you might know something I need to find out."

"It's not likely," said Professor Warren irritably. "But what is it?"

She looked at him peculiarly as he hesitated. Happening upon the dead rabbits had confirmed his darkest suspicions—even those he would not fully admit to himself. He had no explanation yet, but he had a clue which was completely incredible. If he told anybody what he'd experienced, he'd be thought insane.

He named his profession and his connection with Forest and Field, and explained that he was trying to track down something important to sportsmen. Game animals were being killed in a strange manner. Something new and deadly was responsible. He had an extremely improbable idea about the matter, and he hoped that as a biologist and a scientific observer she might have noticed something.

She regarded him oddly. Then she pointed.

"Is that the sort of thing you mean?"

He looked. There was a tiny, pitiful heap of draggled feathers about a tiny skeleton with a sharp beak. There were eggs, befouled by rain. "A partridge," he said, "dead on its nest. Yes." He approved of Professor Warren. She noticed things.

"There are half a dozen others like that," she said, still regarding him with a peculiar expression, "within a quarter of a mile. It struck me as strange. In fact—" She looked at his hands.

Lane realized that he still gripped the clumps of dead leaves he'd held before his face when leaving the clearing of the dead rabbits. He dropped them and said awkwardly: "I had a good reason for that—just now. But I suppose I look like a lunatic."

Professor Warren grunted inelegantly. "Not quite," she said. "Of course, holding bouquets of trash while introducing oneself isn't normal, but I never heard of a lunatic who thought his actions strange. You do. And if you're concerned with wild life you may be able to help me in some trouble I'm having with buzzards. This business is part of it," she added dourly, with a wave of her hand toward the enigmatic arrangement of copper screen wire. "Come down to the trailer and have some coffee. What do you know about the manners and customs of buzzards?"

"Very little," admitted Lane. He knew how they nested – hollow stumps, mostly – and how they defended their nests against intruders. The last was hardly a pleasant subject.

"Come along," said Professor Warren. She strode briskly downhill, speaking over her shoulder. "I've been doing some research on intrasensory substitution. Cases where one sense substitutes for another. Pit-vipers have a heat nerve in their foreheads so they can detect the most trivial of temperature variations, and so find warm-blooded prey in pitch darkness where their eyes can't work. That's heat perception instead of light. Bats feel obstacles with their ears. Buzzards have some superior substitute for smell. Put out a dead animal, even covered over with brushwood, or in a pit where it can't be seen. Buzzards come from everywhere, immediately, even from upwind. They couldn't possibly smell it upwind. And when they arrive, why then they try to find it with their noses! When the first buzzard comes downwind to bait that's barely cold, he didn't smell it! He saw the odor. It's the only possible explanation. He simply has to be substituting some operation of his optic nerves for the sense of smell. You see?"

Lane hardly heard. Two miles back, something had tried to kill him, and his mind had not yet recovered its "balance. He'd seen nothing. It was impossible, yet it had happened.

"I was getting good results," said Professor Warren vexedly, "but about ten days ago the buzzards went temperamental on me! Now they float up there, looking for food, and I put out bait which ten days ago they'd have flocked to. And they ignore it. It's ridiculous! I've good proof that a good reek of organic decay can be detected optically. But I have to check through buzzards that it's really done. And there are dead chickens in a barn yonder –" she waved a large hand – "and the buzzards aren't interested! There's a dead cow in a pasture, and they pay no attention! Temperament among buzzards? Or is it those damned dynamic systems I only halfway believe I've discovered?"

She turned to scowl at him. He'd stopped. He was staring at a mole – a gopher. It had burrowed up to the open air and died. It looked pathetic, a mere shapeless blob of fur with tiny pinkish claws barely showing. It was untouched by flies or beetles.

"That's been there for a week," she said curtly.

"The buzzards," said Lane painfully, "hadn't been at some dead rabbits I passed. No blowflies have been at this mole. There was no taint in the air where the rabbits were. But there was something else."

"What?"

"I know what happened," said Lane wryly, "but I can't believe it. It's too crazy! But it fits too well into what I asked you." He stopped. Nobody would believe –

"Hah!" said Professor Warren. "I don't mind making a fool of myself! It looks to me as if there are some gaseous dynamic systems operating around here in what ought to be good, healthy smells! Only they act like something more. They act like pseudoliving things. And I'm wondering if they're what's keeping my buzzards aloft. Dynamic systems, consuming the smells that buzzards ought to see!"

Lane swallowed. Then he said: "What's happened to the flies around here? And the mosquitos?"

"There's not one," said Professor Warren. She stopped short and stared at him. "That's

queer! There haven't been, not for ten days or so!" Her expression showed puzzlement. "Queer I didn't realize it!" She abruptly resumed her march toward the trailer.

Lane followed her, frowning. A shadow swept across the ground before him. He jumped. The shadow swept on. It was a buzzard. It swooped on in a long, beautiful glide and swung outward where the next spur jutted from the mountainside. He saw it float out over the broad, sunlit valley floor.

When they were a hundred yards from the trailer, a dog came out from under it and ran toward them. It was not a beautiful dog. It had started out to be a foxhound and apparently had changed its mind on the way. Its tail drooped. It carried its head low, without spirit.

"That's the Monster," said Professor Warren briefly. "He's not ours. He belongs to a poor white family that fled in terror of their own imaginations last week. The Monster stayed behind when they left, probably because we feed him. I don't think they did."

The dog cringed a greeting. Professor Warren strode on past him.

"Wait a minute!" said Lane. "They fled from what?" "Nightmares," boomed the professor. "They said things sat on their chests and took their breaths. They spent their nights with their heads under the bedcovers. Two of their dogs and all their chickens died, and then their cow. Old age, probably, but they ran away whining of magic."

"Good God!" said Lane, stunned. "Eh?" demanded the professor. She saw his expression. "What's the matter?"

Lane saw much—too much. He put things together. They fitted. The result was impossible, but so were the facts.

"They—this poor white family," said Lane, "begin to seem to me very sensible people. I think I can tell you, after all."

He told her exactly what had happened to him near the pathetic small heap of dead rabbits. It was his profession to tell what he had seen and done; he made a living at it. He knew better than to add details which might make his story more plausible. He told it baldly, factually, without explanation or theory.

"Which," he finished, "is why I carried dead leaves when I spoke to you. It was the equivalent of having a sheet ready to pull over my head."

Professor Warren blinked at him. Then she grunted. "Hah! It fits in. Have to be checked, of course. But idiots have called me wildly imaginative before now. I'd enjoy proving something so wild they couldn't imagine it!" Then she grunted again. "Mr. Lane, I am a desperate woman, just desperate enough to test this absurd story— which I implicitly believe—in the hope of finding out why there has been an outbreak of artistic temperament among the local specimens of *Cathartes aura*—buzzards to you, sir! You'll stay to dinner and tell me what you know." She raised her voice in a bellow. "Carol!" she roared. "Carol! We've got company!"

A door opened at one end of the giant aluminum trailer. A girl appeared carrying a wicker bird cage. Her face was troubled. Lane saw her with a sudden, extraordinary clarity. It was as if, somehow, he saw her and the mountains and the sky and valley with much more than the customary vividness.

Lane had come a long way across the mountains, reviewing his own bafflement on the way. Then he'd had an experience which still made his flesh crawl; he was disturbed because he couldn't believe what he remembered. But now this girl Carol looked completely as a girl should look, and remote from terror and bewilderment and unease. He felt a surprised gratitude that she was here to remind him that the world was good to live in. He regarded her with an astonished satisfaction.

"Aunt Ann," she said uncomfortably, "I put Pogo outside in his cage because it's stuffy in the trailer. Then I looked out and didn't see him on his perch. I went to see, and he was lying on the bottom. There are feathers all about as if he'd been beating against the bars! He's dead!"

Professor Warren glanced at Lane with startled eyes.

"Pogo," she said, "is our canary. Or was." An instant later she said in a brusque voice: "Too bad! I'll look him over. Carol, this is Dick Lane. He's having dinner with us. We're going to talk biology and dynamic systems and ha'n'ts and goblins and what the hell happened to the mosquitoes that were so bad when we set up camp here. We may touch on why the old cow died. Mr. Lane, this is my niece, Carol Warren."

The girl nodded to Lane.

"I have a firm conviction," boomed Professor Warren, "that this young man is going to write, and I'm going to make a learned report on, some theories so wild that they'll make Baron Munchausen's best effort sound like a Sunday-morning chapel talk by the dean of women." She rubbed her hands. "I'll stir 'em up! If they don't try to have me certified insane, they'll get me thrown out of the society for —"

The Monster uttered a sound like a despairing scream. Then he snarled, facing empty air. It was unnatural and horrifying to see him bare his fangs at emptiness while he trembled horribly. He turned slowly, yelping, as if something unseeable moved. Then he snapped and growled furiously. But he was terrified. His yelps were cries of fear. Suddenly he screamed and bolted blindly, snapping at the emptiness about him. He dodged and twisted crazily, making an outcry which was hysteria and fear and the ultimate of panicky ferocity.

Lane felt all his muscles go rigid. Without any doubt, he knew that the Monster heard faint whining sounds, and perhaps had felt faint touches upon his fur, though there was nothing at all to be seen.

"It followed me!" Lane said savagely. Then he snapped to the girl: "Get inside! Fast! Get in the trailer!"

He pushed at the professor while the Monster rolled over, snapping, and then plunged crazily into a tangled mass of briars. There he continued to yelp. Seconds later he scuttled out the far side of the briars and bolted desperately for the trailer. He flung himself through the opened door, almost upsetting Carol as she stood there.

"Inside!" raged Lane. "Get in! Quick! Before it follows!"

His hair stood on end. He thought he heard a faint, shrill, venomous whine. He had the feeling of horror he'd felt back by the dead rabbits, but now he thought of wild things fighting hopelessly in the wilderness, and of the corpses he'd seen. The sound of whining increased, as if it came from more than one source.

He thrust Professor Warren frantically before him as he ripped off his coat and flailed

the air with it. Invisible or not, he would know of anything his coat might touch.

"Quick!" he panted. "Hurry! Get inside!"

Chapter 2

Inside the trailer, nothing happened. Lane went grimly through it, making sure there was no opening to the outer air. The ventilator above the small cook-stove was open. He closed it. The result of these precautions was stifling heat, but Lane felt cold chills down his spine simply by thinking of invisible stranglers trying to worm their way in to where the three humans were. There were times, too, when a deep and bitter rage took possession of him.

"Be still!" said Professor Warren irritably, as she paced up and down the confined space of the trailer's living section. "You make me hot to look at you! I have to think things out. Either we are all quite insane, or the people who used to own the Monster were much more sensible than we've been!"

Carol sat quietly, looking from one to the other – her buxom aunt in khaki riding breeches, and Lane seething in citified tweeds. Outside the trailer there was a rocky shelf which loomed over a valley to the east.

"They said that things sat on their chests and stopped their breaths," Professor Warren went on, "so they ducked under the covers and the ha'nts went away. I was scornful! But now I think that they may have been right!"

Lane forced himself to sit down. He lighted a cigarette. "There was something that tried to strangle me," he said savagely, "and it whined while it did so. I heard the same sound just outside, and the dog saw something. But whatever attacked me and the Monster was invisible! And that's impossible! Real things can't be invisible!"

"Not quite invisible," the professor said calmly. "What do you think I was trying to do with screen wire set up on the two sides of a bit of buzzard bait? I was trying to see what kept it from reeking to high heaven! Didn't you ever hold a match six inches from your nose, and look at the world through the hot gases above the flame? Things wobble and waver when you do. How do you think I made up my mind there were gaseous dynamic systems around here? When you look through one of them, things waver and wobble! The things you're talking about are just as invisible as the column of hot air above a match, which means they're not easy to see – you have to know what to look for – but they can be seen!" "Then what tried to kill me?"

"Certainly a dynamic system," the professor insisted. "It had to be. A dynamic system is a parcel of matter using energy in a patterned way. A whirlwind's a dynamic system. So's a gasoline engine. Or a rabbit, or a man. Whatever attacked you and the Monster had to be a dynamic system because it used energy in a patterned fashion. Look here! Blow a smoke ring."

Lane blinked. The professor gestured impatiently. He blew a smoke ring. It went slowly across the stifling hot interior of the trailer, expanding as it went.

"That," said the professor, "is a very simple dynamic system. It's a quantity of air

which happens to have a toroidal motion. It isn't alive. It's only a vortex ring. You can see it because the air of which it's composed happens to contain smoke. But a vortex ring can exist in plain air just as — "

"Aunt Ann! Look at the smoke ring!" It was Carol, her voice strained.

The professor blinked. Then she looked at the thin, drifting ring of smoke. It was deformed. It was bent on one side exactly as if it had struck something solid.

The professor said, "That's it! There's one now! You can see the ceiling waver through it."

There was a sudden motion of the air. The unseeable something which had deflected the smoke ring moved. The tendrils of smoke wavered and curled through the space from which they had previously been barred.

"It's one of them!" exulted the professor. "Right in here! But why doesn't the Monster react? Fetch him out."

Lane dragged the dog, cowering, from underneath a stool. He held the dog up. The brute panted and wriggled. He gave no sign of fright. His tongue lolled.

"If there is something here," said Lane, "he doesn't smell it. And it can't be seen or he'd see it. It — "

There were now flat layers of tobacco smoke in the air, made visible by sunlight striking into the room through closed glass windows. There was no air movement except the extremely slow general turnover of air in a closed room, but something passed swiftly through those tranquil layers of vapor, disturbing them. It was startling. It was appalling. Lane did not see any wavering of the background behind it.

"Item!" said the professor with satisfaction. "We have a good observation indicating that there are sometimes dynamic systems in air which can move through smoke layers and disturb them. Perhaps we should provide ourselves with sheets to pull over our heads."

She beamed at Lane, who looked warily at Carol.

"It got in, probably when the dog did," he said grimly.

The professor rubbed her hands. "Of course!" she said zestfully. "But we know how to keep it from harming any of us! I'm going to catch this specimen and find out a few things about it!"

Lane's eyes went back to Carol. She was watching all the interior of the trailer with steady, intent eyes — beautiful eyes, Lane thought, but troubled now.

"If it's what we think, it's dangerous," Lane pointed out. "The first thing should be to get her away from this place. I feel responsible. I let the thing in here."

"Pooh!" said the professor.

She went to a cupboard built into the wall of the trailer, and took out some folded sheets. She shook one open, lengthwise, and tossed it to her niece. It spread out in the air.

The Monster snarled. He cried out at the sheet, barking and snarling and yelping all

at once, his voice rising in pitch. The professor's mouth dropped open. The sheet fell almost upon Carol, but it didn't reach the floor everywhere. One edge was caught up upon a stool. Besides, there was a spot where something writhed and squirmed and whined shrilly beneath it. That something was roughly rounded and somewhat more than a foot in diameter. It was caught under the cloth, and apparently could not lift it.

The Monster went mad with terror. He made a tumult of fear and ferocity together. He screamed at the somehow horrible shapelessness beneath the white cloth. Yet he cringed away from it as he made his high-pitched din.

But one edge of the sheet was caught on a stool. The throbbing thing seemed to fight its way toward that upraised edge. Suddenly the sheet sagged. Whatever had been trapped was trapped no longer. It seemed to Lane that its whining became a sound of maniacal fury. The Monster dived out of sight and moaned in terror.

Carol made a convulsive movement. Lane jerked his eyes to her. Her eyes were wide and terrified. Her mouth was open. She tried to gasp. She choked, suffocating, beating the air before her with her hands.

Lane plunged toward her, snatching up the cloth, which ripped because one of his feet was on it. He did not notice the resistance. He flung it over Carol's head in instinctive use of the professor's dictum that a sheet over one's head would be sound sense at such a moment.

Then horror filled him. The sheet did not fall naturally about her. It draped over her head, but it enclosed something else. Something huge and invisible clung to her, whining and throbbing.

It was so completely revolting that at any other time Lane would have felt sick. But now he thrust out his hands. Something pulsating stirred his fingers through the cloth. He found Carol's face while she struggled and put his hands together, scooping away the thing that clung to her. It filled a great part of the remains of the sheet. He clenched it tightly until he'd made the cloth into a bag whose neck he held fast. It was like a rubber balloon imprisoned in the sack, but no balloon ever fought against a cloth that held it, nor emitted a shrill bloodcurdling sound.

Lane's hair felt as if it were standing straight on end, and horror flowed up his wrists from his hands and fingers. But he twisted the cloth, and twisted it again, compressing the captured tiling into a smaller and smaller space.

And suddenly there was nothing imprisoned in the cloth. It collapsed, and there was a reek of carrion in the air.

Professor Warren was pounding on his shoulders.

"Stop it! Stop it!" she cried furiously. Then she swore briefly. "Too late! You've killed it!"

Lane said thickly, "I'll burn it —"

"Oh, Carol's all right," said the professor. "And it's dead. But we learned some interesting items."

"I'm going to make sure it's dead!"

Professor Warren shrugged her shoulders. The Monster moaned and whimpered in

his hiding place.

"Hush!" said Professor Warren angrily. She listened, with her head cocked on one side. There was a sound outside the trailer, now. It was a thin, high-pitched whine, save that it was made of many voices and was loud. It gave the impression of a frenzied anger shared by many things.

"Hm," said the professor after a moment. "After all, it was a brilliant idea to insist that we close all the windows. It sounds as if our guest had friends, and they've come to help him or her or it to murder Carol."

"How can I make sure this thing is dead?" demanded Lane. He still held the limp sack of cloth in his grip. But he was looking at Carol, who had buried her face in her hands.

"If," said Professor Warren, with a fine air of competence, "if you took a jellyfish and put it in a cloth bag and twisted until you'd wrung the jellyfish out through the cloth, I don't think you'd be worried about whether it was dead or not. That's what you did with this thing." She added exuberantly: "It was alive. It had a certain degree of intelligence. Perhaps a considerable degree. It's amazing! And if you sniff you can't help knowing something about its metabolism! No wonder the buzzards were temperamental! There were no smells for them to see!"

She stood still a moment, gloating over her discoveries. Then she moved to the other end of the living space and struck a match. She put water on the small, bottled-gas stove.

"For coffee," she said beaming. "To celebrate. I'm going to make some notes while the water boils. Wildly imaginative, am I? I'll show them some wild imagination! A dynamic system of gases, unquestionably living because it has undetermined but demonstrable intelligence, emotional reactions, and at least some degree of communication with its fellows! We irritated it and it called the others while it attacked! Let 'em try to classify a Gizmo like that!"

She sat down and pulled out a notebook. She began to write, absorbedly and swiftly. The Monster moaned. There remained a raging, whining noise in the air outside. Lane listened. He'd been trying for a long time to find an unknown killer of game and men. He'd found a something which not only tried to kill him, but the girl. It had been filled with fury toward a human being. Now others of its kind shrilled the same insane anger.

"Don't worry!" said the professor, without looking up from where she scribbled. "The thing inside here couldn't lift a sheet. They can't turn over the trailer."

Lane glared out a window. He saw the strained shapes of trees as they grew on the rocky ground. He saw blue sky, very bright as compared to the shadowed mountainside. He moved to the other side of the trailer and looked away, down into the valley. He saw the blurred edge of the mountain's shadow cast on some of the isolated small fields below. Far out he saw a buzzard in leisurely and effortless flight. The tree branches were still, their leaves motionless. It was a moment of late hot afternoon in which the air should have been filled with the triumphant stridulations of insects and the cries of birds. But there was no sound except the venomous shrill whining of things no man had yet seen, yet which were murderers.

Carol stirred, and he turned to her. She was white and shaken.

"You're all right?" asked Lane awkwardly. She nodded. But her hands trembled. "Drink of water?" She shook her head.

He sat down beside her. "We've got to find a better way of killing them," he said grimly, "and then we'll take you somewhere where you'll be safe."

She tried to smile. He felt a certain lifting of the spirit. She was exactly what a girl should be. He found himself marveling at the fact that her cheek curved so exactly as it ought, and her lips were exactly as they should be, and that the line of her throat was absolutely the only perfect way that a throat should curve. He had the sensation of discovery which is pure satisfaction. He was delighted to look; he did not wonder where this delight might lead. She, being a woman, probably did. "We'll have to try fire," he said sagely. "And there'll be odors they can't take. And there'll be weapons we can make, especially to destroy the organization of the gas they're made of. We'll beat them."

"Of — of course," she agreed. She hesitated a moment. "Fire might do. I know what Aunt Ann thought about them. She's said that they're probably ghosts — or the origin of ghost stories. She says they're almost certain kin to will-o'-the-wisps and corpselights and such things that float over swamps, shining faintly in the dark. They exist, but nobody's ever caught one. They must use energy to keep themselves in existence. Aunt Ann has been guessing that the things she's discovered may use the gases of decay as will-o'-the-wisps use marsh-gas, to supply the energy that maintains them. As we use food. If she's right, fire might bother them."

Lane listened with a sort of urgent respectfulness. But he also listened to the whining noise outside.

"Savages," added Carol, "cover their faces when they sleep. And it's rare they'll sleep without a fire going, Aunt Ann says. They believe that ghosts and devils are afraid of fire, and they cover their faces lest evil spirits bother them. If the — things like those that tried to kill us are the things that savages really fear, their superstitions protect them by what they make them do. And the things, if they learned that humans were always protected, would tend to ignore men and attack only lower animals."

"Except," growled Lane, "that now they've found we aren't savages and so aren't protected. But there's more than that. They must be much more numerous than they've ever been before. Or a new and deadly kind may have appeared . . ." He listened to the whining outside. "These things could have started the tales of fiends and devils; the old stories told of devils tearing people to bits. These don't even wound animals, but their victims have been found in the middle of destruction. The effect is of violent murder, but the cause could be the violent death struggles of the victims."

Professor Warren slapped her notebook shut. "Hah!" she said triumphantly. "I'll pin their ears back! Imaginative, am I? Wait till I march into the Biological Department with some of these things trapped in jars. A gaseous organism with a gas metabolism! ... I've got to get bigger jars!"

"I'm trying," said Lane, "to figure out a way to kill them. They're waiting outside by the dozens now. Maybe hundreds." It did not occur to him — not yet — that there might be thousands. Or more.

"We can protect ourselves," said Professor Warren zestfully, "with sheets over our heads. If they can't stop our breathing, they can't do any damage."

Lane was unconvinced. Angry as he was, he could not but remember that there had been a thing – a gas entity – a Gizmo in the trailer. It had made no whining sound. It acted as if guided by cunning, calling no attention to itself until discovered by accident. Perhaps it had meant to wait until the occupants of the trailer were asleep. An attack in darkness and during slumber could be irresistible. In short, the Gizmos might be cleverer than Professor Warren credited. The attempt to kill him had been shrewd, after he escaped the first assault by tumbling into deep dried leaves.

"If you want to try sheets as a protection," he said shortly, "I'll try it. I'm responsible for their being here."

Professor Warren snorted. "Nonsense! Before you got here the buzzards stopped coming to bait because the Gizmos were consuming the gases they looked for. They were here then. And what happened to the gnats and flies and mosquitoes? And the rabbits and the hen quail on their nests? Don't be absurd! They were here before you came. They didn't attack us; the one you killed attacked only after it was trapped. But they were around before you got here."

Lane said grimly: "That's part of my point. If these things are the foundation for legends of devils, they have the necessities of devils, the first of which is that nobody shall believe he exists. Now that these things know that we know of their existence, they need to kill all of us."

Professor Warren raised her eyebrows. "I know they're impossible," she protested, "even if they're true. But are you suggesting they're intelligent?"

"I'm afraid so," said Lane. "If they were the devils of old legend, they contrived deals by which they were worshiped and supplied with the smells of burned flesh and spilled, rotting blood. The pagan deities –"

Professor Warren grimaced. "Don't tell me I've discovered a pantheon! If they're intelligent, where's the evidence?"

"I've got an idea how to get it," said Lane, "if they haven't the information to keep them from revealing themselves."

He gathered up the sheet which had been the means of capture and execution of one of the creatures the professor called Gizmos, among other things. He spread the sheet over one of the closed trailer windows. Carol saw what he was about, and came to help. They draped the window so that it was completely covered by the closely woven cloth. Lane knotted it at the corners so that it was tight, yet there was a fullness in the center of the window opening. He made use of that fullness to slide aside the window and open it slightly.

Nothing happened. The distinctly audible whining sound died as soon as he began to fumble at the window. There was no sound at all – no birdcall or chirrup of insects. There was not even the whisper of wind among the trees of the mountainside. In bright sunshine, the unnatural stillness was horrible.

They waited, staring at the curiously draped window. Nothing happened at all. Lane shrugged.

"I thought I'd provoke a mass attack by opening the window. If they were stupid, I thought one might try to poke inside. But if they were intelligent, I thought they'd try to storm the trailer in a rush we couldn't possibly handle. I was wrong."

Then the Monster yelped in terror. His hackles rising, he backed into the farthest corner of the trailer, snarling at the open window.

"You were right," said the professor.

Things hit the draped cloth, which billowed out tautly. It almost seemed to stretch with the violence of massed Gizmos pushing against it. They tore and tugged at it, their whining filling the interior of the vehicle. It was unspeakably horrible that they should rave so terribly at so flimsy a barrier, and not be able to rend it.

Lane leaped toward the window. The sheet could not be torn. But the tuggings and throbbings of the individually weak murderers were loosening the cloth from the corners of the window frame. One edge billowed momentarily, and a vicious whine of triumph flashed past Lane. He heard Carol cry out.

He thrust back the barrier. He beat at the cloth with his fists, as if to destroy the yielding things by blows. Carol cried out again: "Aunt Ann! Here! Come here!"

There were strugglings. The Monster screamed and snapped. It fought madly against unseeable nothingness. Another part of the cloth barrier bulged to its very edge.

Chapter 3

Professor Warren was chalk-white when the window was safely shut again and the two Gizmos which had got inside were destroyed. Carol herself had killed one by the exact method Lane had used earlier – plucking it from its victim by forming a sack of cloth about it, and then wringing that cloth until there was nothing left inside it to struggle. The professor had been the one attacked. The second Gizmo she'd located by its raging whine and the Monster's snarls in its direction. She drove it by a lucky stroke of a whipping cloth into the flame of the stove. It died in that flame, itself a pale and lambent flicker of fire as its complex hydrocarbon gases burned.

Now there was darkness outside, and silence again. The inside lights were on and Professor Warren sat weakly still. Carol had recovered much more quickly from the similar attempt to suffocate her. But a younger girl is always more resilient than an older woman; Professor Warren had had security and prestige and authority for so long that she was dazed at the idea of an attempt upon her life. That it had been made by what she considered a biological specimen stunned her. Carol had been able to realize her danger more promptly, and more quickly accept the fact of safety regained.

"It was – stupid of me," said Professor Warren in a trembling voice. "I couldn't really believe there was real danger. Even when Carol was – attacked, you got the thing off her so swiftly that I did not truly realize ... I am a very stupid old woman. I thought of these horrors as things to be studied, and nothing more."

"They're a lot more," Lane told her. "They've been cagey, but I'm sure they've killed people before."

"Appalling!" said the professor. She shuddered. "The only parallel I know to such a clanger appearing suddenly, is the appearance of rabies among bats in the Southern states. That's been taken care of. The public has been warned. But here –"

Carol said quietly: "That's not too good a parallel, Aunt Ann. Bats were known, and rabies was known. It had only to be proved that the two had gotten together. This is more difficult. You have to prove that these— things exist. And people who've never encountered them are going to find it hard to believe in them."

"I'll take care of that!" said the professor. "Let me get to a telephone."

"I'm afraid," said Lane, "that that's a problem. How do we get to a telephone?"

The professor gaped at him. "What do you mean?" Then she said angrily. "Do you mean that these— these creatures— these Gizmos—" She stopped short. She seemed to shrivel a little.

"If they're not too intelligent," said Lane, "we will probably be all right. They'll get tired of hanging around outside. But if they're really smart, I don't like the prospects."

He moved to a window. There was only night outside the trailer, now. He screened his eyes with his hand to peer out into the moonlight. There was the dark mountain against a star-studded sky. To the east and below there was a filmy, glamorous mist which obscured the valley. The darkness was a very picture of tranquility. But it was deathly quiet— until he strained his ears and heard a faint whining, fainter than the humming of a mosquito. But it came from many sources. The Gizmos were waiting. He turned away. Carol searched his face. "You say they've killed animals all over the country. Maybe someone else has found out what they are. It might be on a radio news broadcast."

Lane turned on the trailer's radio. There was a hum and then the last notes of a hillbilly ballad. An announcer drawled:

". . . And that ends the Gourdvine Boys program for *today* and this is—" a burst of static— "your friendly station in Danville. News *follows in a moment, but first—*"

Lane breathed, and was astonished at his relief that the situation here was not typical of that of all the world. He sat down. He listened to a commercial for a brand of fertilizer, delivered with immense enthusiasm. Then the news.

He felt better when the news bulletins began with international events. The news was reassuring because it was given first place, and disturbing because such pettinesses were capable of destroying the peace of the world. Political news. Then the day's assortment of freak items. Radar stations all over the United States were reporting an extraordinary number of "Gizmos." They were believed to be the basis of many flying-saucer stories. It had been guessed that they were actually areas of extra-high ionization in the air.

Professor Warren said shakily: "Gizmos. That's what I called these creatures. But— but— if there's metabolism in gas, there has to be ionization! They can be talking about these horrors!"

She listened tensely, but the subject of Gizmos was dropped. There was local news. A truck driver had been found dead in his truck, ten miles out of Danville. Apparently he'd pulled off the road for a nap, and had never wakened. But the windshield and side windows of the truck's cab were broken.

The professor wrung her hands. Outside Pittsburg the bodies of two children,

missing for a week, had been found. Apparently they had died of exposure shortly after their disappearance, though the weather had been warm and there had been no rain.

Professor Warren wrung her hands. "Gizmos!" she said bitterly.

There was an extraordinary movement of game out of certain forests in Aroostook County, Maine. Wild creatures were found on the highways in flight from their natural habitat. A commercial jet-liner, equipped with radar, had arrived in Kansas City with its pilot and copilot in a cold sweat. Its radar had repeatedly reported flying objects in its path, and the pilot had had to dodge all over the sky to avoid collisions – but he'd seen nothing. This seemed to check with ground radar reports of Gizmos in much greater than their usual number. . . .

"Gizmos," said Professor Warren, as Lane turned off the radio. "They're ionization in the air. But they are so much more! The – horrors are alive and they feed on the gases of decay. To use such gases for energy at less than flame temperature, there has to be ionization. I wonder what they'd say if I told them that their radio Gizmos are living dynamic systems in gas? Probably what doctors said when it was suggested that diseases could be caused by germs!"

She relapsed into silence. Carol said quietly: "If they can't pass through sheeting . . ."

Outside the trailer the Gizmos waited, ghostly in their tenuousness. They were very frail, in a way. A thousand of them, weighed in air, would hardly move the pointer of a scale. But they were cunning and very deadly. They were also in very many places where their existence was unsuspected.

In New York, for example, there was a pigeon fancier with a small building for nests and a screened exercise pen for his flock of two hundred homing pigeons. Tonight, as Lane and Carol consulted together in western Virginia, there was a small tumult on the roof of the New York apartment house where the pigeon fancier lived. The roof, of course, was deserted at this hour. Nobody noticed the disturbance. It began with very faint whining sounds which the traffic noises of the city drowned out. Presently there were scufflings and frantic flappings. A pigeon fought madly against suffocation. It fluttered desperately against the screen of the enclosure. Presently it was still. A little later another pigeon fought as crazily in the same confined space. The whining sounds grew louder. Other unseeable horrors – Gizmos – floated through the air toward the spot where the struggles went on. They drifted over the rooftops and above the streets which, like canyons, divided the city. They came from nearby parks and shrubbery-filled squares. They clustered about the pen in which pigeons fluttered helplessly and died. Undoubtedly the Gizmos took a certain pleasure in their murders. Dogs enjoy hunting; so do men. But Gizmos had to kill for a relatively long time before they could feed on what they killed. Therefore they secured a delectable pleasure out of the act of murder, which only later would provide them with food. It was a necessary provision of their nature.

There were two hundred pigeons in this particular enclosure. Nobody heard what took place there. Nobody came to investigate. After a certain interval there was a carpet of strangled birds on the floor of the exercise pen. Feathers from their wings, beaten off in their struggles, lay all about. But there was no longer any motion on the rooftop except that whining things which could not be seen drifted away again through the

darkness above the buildings and the brightly lighted streets. . . .

Within minutes of the finish of the pigeon massacre, a man turned into his own driveway in a suburb of Memphis, Tennessee. There was much shrubbery on the lawn, and the driveway was bordered by many bushes. The smell of growing things and honeysuckle was in the still air.

There was a movement at the end of the drive. The man's small white dog had recognized the sound of his master's car. He came joyously to meet the man. He was clearly visible in the headlights as he trotted, tail wagging, to meet the car. Halfway down the drive, the dog stopped short. He faced the thick brushwood on one side. He bristled. As the car drew near, he snarled. The man braked and opened the car door. Snarling over his shoulder, the dog jumped in. He hopped up on the front seat beside the man. Whining anxiously, he licked his face and then growled ferociously at something in the brushwood.

The man drove on. There were lights in his house. A lamp outside the door winked to brightness. His wife, also, had seen the coming car. As he drove into the garage she appeared in the doorway, smiling. Lights shone upon her, and on the steps, and on the smoothly cropped lawn nearby. It showed the vague shapes of blossoms on the nearer blooming shrubs. She waited for her husband as he and the dog moved toward her.

Then the man felt something like gossamer touch his face. He brushed it away. He heard a thin whine he attributed to a mosquito – and the dog leaped up upon him, snarling and barking and yelping all at once.

The man gasped. His wife cried out. The dog leaped and snapped furiously at the air before his master's face. Then he turned from the man and made crazy rushes, snapping at empty air. Something seemed to be offering battle. It could not be seen. The dog screamed at it between his growlings. But he fought.

The man's wife cried to him to come into the house: that the dog had gone mad. He did go into the house, but he looked out at the dog. He almost believed that it had something to fight – but not quite, because the lawn was lighted and there was absolutely nothing to be seen but the frantic, snapping dog.

Then the dog died. . . .

Hundreds of miles from New York and from Tennessee, a young farmer drove his sweetheart homeward after a country dance. He had a reasonably new car whose motor purred satisfactorily. The highway ran near a patch of woodland. Behind this forest there was more and more; for thirty miles northward there was wilderness. But the road itself ran between fields of half-grown corn which stirred and rustled in the moonlight as the car purred on.

The man saw rabbits first, hopping on the road's hard surface. One often sees a single rabbit when driving at night, but here were many. Then a woodchuck appeared in the headlight beams, waddling across the road. A hundred yards on there was a fox, which turned luminous eyes upon the car and hurried away into the corn. There were more rabbits, squirrels mixed in with them. He saw a second fox, paying no attention to its natural prey. He saw a doe, which the headlights bewildered so that it stood as if fascinated until the car had passed. He saw a skunk. Two fawns, shivering and afraid, fled ahead of the car along the highway. They disturbed a weasel before they rushed out of the light into the brush. There were a brown bear, and a buck deer, gazing about him

with a hunted air. He snorted and vanished. He saw more rabbits, by hundreds, hopping across the Toad.

In a mile the speed of the car was reduced to a crawl, and the farmer and his sweetheart were in a state of purest bewilderment. Before them on the concrete—even beyond the headlight rays—there were what seemed to be thousands of shining jewels. They were the eyes of creatures who should have been deep in the woodland. They stared at the car's lights and flowed across the highway. For nearly ten miles the young farmer and his sweetheart drove at a snail's pace along this strangely crowded highway. It seemed at times as if the road were carpeted with the animals, large and small, which had lived in the forest to the north. They would have covered square miles if gathered into a single mass, but moving without plan as they did, sometimes half a mile of highway showed only a few of them, while other parts were black with moving, furry bodies.

The young farmer caught his breath as a consequence of this migration struck him. "They'll eat up all the crops!" he said anxiously. "All these things feeding will be worse than locusts! They'll eat up everything!" But somehow he could not bring himself to speed up the car and so diminish the number of wild creatures who migrated into the province of men.

This matter was, of course, one to which official attention would be given. An invasion of fields on which crops grew would not be dismissed as unimportant. But there were innumerable other matters which would be ignored: the deaths of cats in towns and cities; the finding of many dead rats upon city dumps, unwounded, yet stiff and cold with bared fangs; and there would be some disturbance over race horses found dead in their stalls. . . .

Lane and Carol discussed possible weapons and possible protection against the Gizmos who definitely had not gone away from the trailer. Professor Warren slept a troubled sleep on a couch which opened into a double bed. There was no thought of relaxation in the ordinary sense. The trailer was beleaguered by things which could not be seen at all unless one knew where to look and understood the significance of a very slight wavering and wobbling of the background behind them.

Presently Lane spoke coldly of the grisly possibilities if there were enough of them, and if they were as cunning and as persistent as they seemed to be. The air in the trailer seemed to grow stale. He felt an angry uneasiness for Carol. He felt that there was something he had neglected which amounted to a near and present danger.

He got up abruptly and went about the living quarters of the biological laboratory vehicle. He checked the doors, as if the Gizmos had strength to move them. He verified that the windows were tightly shut. He made certain that the ventilator above the stove had not been disturbed. Anything that a smoke ring could pass through was suspect. He found nothing wrong, but the hunch persisted. He could not believe all was right. He went into the laboratory end of the trailer and turned on the lights.

There were gossamer touches on his face. He dragged the door shut behind him, because it would have taken longer to close it if he'd passed through first. He dragged at his coat, shouting: "Carol! Professor! Watch out! Gizmos are in!" A steady whining noise sounded all about him. He saw the laboratory clearly, neat and compact. There was a

camera mounted on a stand, with an extraordinarily long-focus lens attached to it; it could take a close-up picture from an incredible distance. It pointed at a small opening in the trailer wall. During travel, that opening was closed by an aluminum-faced cover. During the time when such a camera was in daily use, a cardboard shield covered it. The cardboard was one of those convenient makeshifts often used without thought.

Without thought. Because now the cardboard was toppled to the floor. Perhaps the moving of that cardboard by Gizmos was comparable to the shifting of a locomotive by the strength of men, but it had been accomplished. The laboratory was filled with faintly whining things.

Dick Lane leaned back against the door, frantically making sure that it was tightly shut. He gasped his lungs full of air before it could be denied him, and got his coat before his face. Then he shouted again to Carol and the professor that they must not open the door.

He almost exulted in the rage that filled him, because he was confident that now he knew how to handle the beasts. He heard Carol, anxious and frightened. The professor urged him to protect himself as he'd done near the dead rabbits.

Again he shouted through the muffling cloth. The Gizmos couldn't harm him through cloth. True, there were whining noises in his ears, and gossamer touches upon his forehead and hair. But he glared vengefully above his wadded coat at the seemingly empty room. He shouted again, confidently. He was going to attack the Gizmos with something he'd pick up and use like a flail. They could tack a sheet around the doorway. When he'd cleared the laboratory – or thought he had – he'd open the door, step into the space enclosed by the sheet, and close the door behind him again. It would be like an airlock. If any surviving Gizmo should enter the lock with him, it could be spotted and destroyed. Meanwhile he was safe. There was no hurry.

He stepped forward. He felt stirring resistance, a horrible sensation. He flailed out with one arm, the other holding his coat before his face. Something gave. There was a sickening reek of carrion. He struck again.

Then he realized he was not moving in free air, in which Gizmos floated. He was submerged in Gizmos which had replaced the air. There was no air except what was entrapped by his coat. It was like being in a room packed tightly with balloons filled with unbreathable gas. He could break them, but he could not get air. There was no air. There were only Gizmos. His lungs starved. He panted in the air he had already breathed. It would not support life. It would not let him keep his senses. He began to feel dizzy.

He began to fight blindly to break through the yielding, implacable barrier about him. He heard things smash, but only dimly. It was laboratory apparatus. He heard a window break, but it meant no breath for him. He fought in a dimming horror, panting, struggling with less and less purpose.

He fell, and something whined shrilly, and then he couldn't even gasp in air that did him no good at all. Consciousness went. . . .

But a long, long time later he was dully aware that he was still alive. He was outside the trailer, and there were stars overhead. He could breathe. He heard Carol sobbing

quietly. He stirred faintly, and the professor exclaimed: "He's alive!"

He mumbled. Presently he could sit up. He heard winnings, but nothing touched him. He said thinly: "What happened?"

"If you want to hear it—" snapped the professor—"if you want to!" She raged. "We've been taken prisoner by the Gizmos! They're intelligent, and we're their prisoners, and they haven't killed us yet because we're something new! We're human beings who know they exist! So they're going to experiment with us. We're guinea pigs for these damned Gizmos to do research with!"

Chapter 4

The situation, the atmosphere, and the facts were straight out of an outrageously unreasonable nightmare. There were bright stars overhead. Low on the horizon there was a gibbous moon, risen long after sunset. There were strained, contorted tree shapes on the mountainside. There was the aluminum-bodied trailer, glittering on its moonward side and abysmally black where it cast a shadow. And there was silence—almost.

Winnings sounded very close to his ear, and the hair tended to rise all over his scalp. Carol, straining her eyes to see him, said swiftly: "That's a signal. A steady whine is when they're angry. But little whinings—they want us to do something."

Lane ground his teeth. "Well?"

"You've been unconscious a long time. We were sure you were dead. We've learned some things. They expect you to move away from them when they touch you."

There was an infinitely gentle touch at the back of Lane's neck. He said grimly, unmoving: "Something's touching me now."

"Obey it!" said Carol urgently. "Get up! Move!"

Lane sat more grimly still and the touch at the back of his neck was repeated.

"Why?" he demanded.

"They're studying us," said Carol. "And Aunt Ann's studying them! We've got to find out what they want, how intelligent they are, how we can fool them or escape them . . ."

"If they're studying us," said Lane furiously, "they're too intellig—"

His breath cut off. He sat fiercely still, not trying to breathe. The impulse was defiance in the total absence of hope. But as he sat immobile, fiercely ignoring the thing that acted to suffocate him, he realized that to a nonhuman creature the action would be baffling. No lower animal, no bird or beast or insect, would react otherwise than directly to the stoppage of its breath. They would fight for air. A Gizmo would judge of the death of a victim by the cessation of its attempts to breathe. So if Lane held his breath, to a Gizmo he would seem dead-yet not dead, either.

He sat utterly still, his hands clenched.

The blanketing thing moved away. He had not tried to breathe, and therefore it was

not necessary to deprive him of air any longer. Lane gasped silently and drew pure air into his lungs. There were thin, elfin sounds in the night. Not whinings, these, but musical notes.

"I held my breath," he observed coldly, "and it went away."

Professor Warren said in a strained voice: "Splendid! But don't overwork it! Carol, you understand the trick?"

Carol said coldly, "Something wants me to get up. I'm going to do it."

She rose, in the eerie light of the distorted moon. She moved forward, stopped, backed, then turned.

Professor Warren's voice, strained as before, shook with her anger and humiliation. "Damn them!" she said bitterly. "I can't be sure whether they're actually studying us, as we'd study them with half a chance, or whether they're simply playing with us like a cat with a mouse."

"Possibly both," said Lane. "Or it could be something else entirely. An animal doesn't think like a man."

"They're not animals!" snapped the professor. "They're gas. They're not even protoplasm! How could they be animals?"

The singular, tense rigidity with which Carol obeyed the orders of invisible things ceased. She came back to the others, trembling.

"They let me go," she said shakily. "I hate them!"

The professor said, "Did you understand the trick of holding your breath? A carnivorous animal keeps up its attack until its prey ceases to offer resistance to being eaten. These creatures aren't carnivorous. They're foetiverous—a good term. It would mean an cater of foul smells. They will keep up their attack until their victim is ready to decay. So when one stops trying to breathe—" She stopped, and filled her lungs. She said curtly: "I'm getting orders now. I shall try it."

She sat immobile. There was silence. The professor was perhaps five yards from Lane, who sat with clenched hands in the somehow grisly moonlight in a silent world. Nor was there any movement. The professor sat stony-still, while something whined faintly. Lane watched with burning eyes. Carol pressed her hand to her mouth, watching.

After an inordinately long time, the professor breathed again.

"It worked," she said unsteadily. "Now they'll talk that over and try to figure out how we can stop breathing and then start up again. At least I suppose they'll talk it over!"

Carol said, in a faintly apologetic tone: "When you stopped fighting, Dick, back in the trailer, Aunt Ann and I got desperate. So we put sheets over our heads, with holes for our eyes, and we—went in the laboratory to try to help you. We had a sheet to put over your head, too. But there were too many Gizmos. We could breathe, but they closed us in. They even got underneath the sheets, making that awful whine . . ."

The professor added: "They drowned us—stifled us, by keeping air from us. I collapsed, and Carol did a moment later. Apparently they drew back and let us recover. I thought they'd gone away, satisfied that we were dead. We dragged you out to the

open air. We heard no winnings. We tried to make you breathe again. Then they closed in on us once more . . ." She shuddered. "Three times they stifled us! Three times they drew back before we quite died!" She added abruptly, "They had us, even in the trailer." "I believe they did," agreed Lane slowly. "The way they got me, in the laboratory just now – " He stopped short. There were whinings at his ear. Something touched him. He said very grimly, "They know I'm breathing again. I'm obeying, this time, just to make it confusing."

He rose. He was urged forward. He was halted by a touch on his forehead. He obeyed, while shame filled him that he obeyed even to gain time. He stumbled and fell, and his hands touched dry grass. He seized it, and when he rose, he stuffed dry grass into his pockets.

"I gathered some dry grass," he said coldly, as he allowed himself to be directed to the right. "I have a lighter. Gather dry stuff if you can. We burned a Gizmo in the trailer!"

Carol began to fumble about her, as the professor gave an inarticulate sound of comprehension. She began to scabble for dead grass, too.

Lane halted in obedience to a touch on his forehead. He walked backward, at another touch. He heard the rustling of dry straw being gathered.

"I'm wondering," he said tautly, "if they are trying to train us. They could be trying to panic us. They might want us to run and exhaust ourselves, to make our suffocation easier. If we're out of breath – "

Something sealed his nose and mouth, somehow deliberately. He dropped to the ground. He lay with his nose against the earth, his arms moving out to gather straw.

There were no more touches. No more whines. It seemed as if the Gizmo which had exercised him had contemptuously flung him to the ground. He shook with fury. But he gathered straw as he went back to the others.

"Here's my straw," he said briefly. "I've got matches, too, and here – my lighter's dependable. But we haven't enough burnable stuff . . ."

Carol crawled a little distance away. He heard additional rustlings. He stared up at the sky. Stars twinkled. Then he saw a star which wavered and wobbled without twinkling at all. Once he had seen that, he could perceive the distortion of the star field in a nearly circular space. He could see that the wavering moved. He could see, in fact, a Gizmo.

"There's gasoline in the trailer," said the professor. He heard her also at work in the tall grass about them. "It's for the light generator. Two gallons."

"It'll help," said Lane.

They crawled, pulling dry grass. Their small pile became a larger one. There were no more winnings, but there were muted fluting sounds in the air.

"They're talking us over," said the professor. With a pile of straw before her, she grew vengeful. "What is the time?"

"Four," said Lane. "I think this straw will do. Better twist some for handling. I doubt they'll let us live to daybreak. There've been daylight killings, but usually – "

"Yes, they'd hunt by night and feed by day, normally," Professor Warren said. "The gases they feed on would naturally develop more quickly in hot sunshine."

There was a sort of moaning somewhere in the night. It could have been made by voices which ordinarily whined. It could have been a sudden sweep of wind among many branches. But it had too unearthly a quality to be anything so natural.

"That," said Lane, "could be a decision, if they've been discussing us."

The three humans tensed. Lane twisted masses of straw into bundles whose farther ends were loose and frayed, but which had a tightly bunched end to serve as a handle.

"I think they're moving," said the professor tautly. "In a body. Toward us."

"Maybe," said Carol unsteadily, "they – sent word about us somewhere and waited for orders. And now they've got them."

"Ridiculous!" scoffed the professor.

Lane inconspicuously snapped his cigarette lighter. He held it ready, its flame very small, rising undisturbed in the still air.

He saw the stars waver, toward the south. He looked uphill. Stars wavered there, too. To the east and the north. Overhead there were moving areas in which the stars did not seem to stay still, but to waver erratically to and fro, exactly as if masses of hot gases moved about between the people and the sky.

"They're closing in," said Lane curtly. "Overhead and all around."

He saw a little flare. Professor Warren, bent over, absorbedly struck a safety match on the cover of its packet. Carol waited, her body tense.

Things touched Lane, and the air about him ceased to be. He felt even his clothing stir all over his body as invisible things pressed against it, throbbing and suddenly emitting spiteful, snarling whines. His face and neck felt ticklings like thousands of spider webs thrown to cover and enmesh him. He saw nothing. He heard only the whines. And he could not breathe.

The hand that held the cigarette lighter was untouched. He moved it, to a torch of dry straw. The straw caught and flames leaped up, and the winnings about him seemed to become shrieks, unspeakably eerie and horrible. The air – the Gizmos – touching his body acquired the feel of a ghastly, throbbing wall. The violence of its movement almost toppled him. He waved the torch savagely, and sparks flew in every direction, and there were more ghostly, keening, wailing sounds. Then he could breathe, but the air about him was foul with mephitic odors. He turned triumphantly to the others, to see how the fire was aiding them.

Carol sat tensely with a flaming torch before her. The professor had fallen. Her first match had gone out. Her hands still tried desperately to strike a second, but the brittle bit of cardboard had bent in her grasp.

Lane strode to her and waved his grassy flare about her like someone making mystic conjurations. But it dripped sparks. Things fled, uttering tiny, unearthly shrieks. "I think," he said savagely, as Professor Warren gasped for the breath that again became possible, "I think we fooled them this time!"

His torch was already down to the hard-twisted handle. He plucked another from his belt and lighted it. It crackled and blazed brightly, and he waved it above his head. The look of things was lunacy: three human beings on the spur of a mountain, menacingly waving torches at the moonlight all about.

"The trailer," snapped Lane. "We've got to get set before we try to get far away." Carol helped the professor to her feet. "And I thought," panted the professor, "that they were interesting things to study!"

They made their way toward the trailer. Its electric lights still burned. There was a thin chorus of awful fury all about them. Lane's torch had burned out, and Carol waved hers until he could light another from it. Then the professor marched ahead, scattering sparks lavishly. They reached the trailer and entered it. They waved torches all about its interior, hearing more small shrieks. Once there was a small impact as something in frantic flight bounced against Lane's cheek. The professor lighted all four burners of the bottled-gas stove.

"I feel a fondness for flames, now," she said sardonically.

There was a whimpering, and the Monster crawled from under the couch. Its daytime cover reached down to the floor, and even so slight a barrier had kept Gizmos from entering the space beneath. The Monster, though, was in a pitiable state. He trembled and moaned.

"Temporarily," said Lane coldly, "we are on top. But I'm wondering how long we can stay there."

"We have to warn the public," said the professor. "We have to tell about the existence of these Gizmos and how dangerous they are. That is our first duty. If we can capture one to demonstrate—"

"We did," said Carol. "We did that once, Aunt Ann!"

And it made noises and others came running. We don't want to keep a horde of them about us, trying to kill us for our prisoner's sake! That would be too much proof!"

"True. Then we go and make our reports—I to the University, and Dick to his sportsmen's magazine. They'll alert the authorities, and there will be a prompt handling of the whole situation!"

Carol looked at Lane. He shrugged.

"We'll see. I'll make some firepots. We can't depend on two gallons of gasoline to last forever, but we can pick up sticks and stuff to keep pots going. Where's a can opener?"

Carol found one and helped him. He opened three cans of food at random. A firepot is a tin can with its top off, a draught hole in one side near the bottom, and a handle made of wire to sling it from. Small boys make them every fall by some mysterious instinct, and gloriously carry them about for no reason whatever until their parents make them stop for fear of arson. Lane quickly made three of them.

"You can whirl it about your head," he observed, "with the draught hole forward to blow up the fire. I don't think Gizmos can face such things as this."

He demonstrated the whirling of a firepot at the end of its two-foot wire handle. He found a wooden packing box in the trailer and kicked it into pieces no bigger than his hand. Using those fragments, he started a fire in one of the tin firepots. He gave it to

Carol. He started a second small blaze in a similar contrivance for the professor. He needed a third for himself. He slung the gasoline can over his shoulder and stuffed his pockets with bits of broken wood. They went out of the trailer, leaving it brightly lighted.

They looked unusual as they struck out across the mountain—a young man in tweedy city clothing, a slim young girl in slacks, and an ample older female in riding breeches and puttees. From time to time they whirled their firepots angrily about their heads, and more than once they stopped and gathered about the Monster, who had rolled over on his back and screamed and snapped at nothingness. At such times they grimly passed small containers of glowing coals close to his body until he whimpered and got to his feet again. Also they gathered earnestly about deadfalls and broke off bark and bits of branches to be carried with them for later use in the firepots.

The mountains reared upward as they trudged. The professor was now filled with vengeful thoughts concerning the doom she would presently bring upon Gizmos. Carol absorbedly kept her firepot alight, though she was instantly attentive to any word from Lane. He led the way, and tried to compose a reasonable account of what he'd learned which would convince people who had not been attacked by Gizmos.

They talked very little as they made their way along the trail. There were places where trees closed overhead and hid the heavens. Here the darkness was intense, and the tiny draught holes of the firepots let out dullish red glows which had to guide them past fallen tree trunks and boulders resting in the way. There was the feel of ghastly things lurking among the trees, and the Monster yelped and howled as he trudged with them, panting, and though there was no sound of movement, they knew that things—Gizmos—accompanied them malevolently through the blackness, hoping for the fires in the little tin cans to go out.

After a long time they came to open spaces, where innumerable stars shone overhead, and they could look for miles across mountains lighted by the misshapen moon. Sometimes they felt the small puffs of an errant night breeze, and in every case its touches seemed like signs of an attack by monstrous, unsubstantial fiends, and they flung their firepots about and scattered sparks in all directions.

They saw no other lights, though it was not likely that they looked out over only uninhabited ground. But also they heard no night birds until a grayish glow appeared very, very far away at the horizon. Carol noticed it first.

"Day's coming," she said quietly.

Then they heard, with infinite faintness, the lonely cry of a bird very far away. It had not been murdered, like all things of flesh and blood in the area they had passed through.

"I'm surprised that we've lived this long," said Lane grimly. "I don't think our troubles are over yet, though."

The professor said firmly, "I shall get a research team down here immediately. These things are dangerous! They must be taken in hand immediately!"

She made the statement with that unconscious confidence in superiority which human beings have inherited through some thousands of generations. But Lane did not fully

share it. He knew that there must be Gizmos nearly everywhere. How many? And would those fragile horrors gain strength in numbers?

Some time later, sunlight glowed upon the mountains, and they cast vast shadows upon each other, and little white clouds in the sky were brilliant in sunshine that still had a trace of pink in it. Grass and foliage glittered with dew, and the air smelled fresh and glorious. Now, birds called to each other from the mountainsides. Somewhere a dog barked. Even insects buzzed in the dawn light.

Professor Warren surveyed the scene. The three had come out of a thicket of mountain laurel, and before them there was a gravel road which seemed to come from nowhere and to lead on to the same destination. There was no house in sight, but there was a steep, grass-grown hillside with patches of red clay showing, which could have been a pasture. A catbird perched on a branch less than thirty feet away and uttered its raucous cry.

The professor looked about her with great satisfaction.

"Birds singing," she said appreciatively. "I hear bugs. This territory, anyhow, is not occupied by Gizmos. And now we've got to get to a long-distance wire and get things in motion." She said in sudden indignation: "The nerve of those Gizmos!" She dumped the smoking embers of her firepot. "I've felt silly all the time I've been carrying that! But now we're safe! Which way should we go?"

Carol started a little at her aunt's action. She looked mutely at Lane. He shrugged.

"Murfree's courthouse should be somewhere over yonder," he said, nodding toward his left. "We're probably still five or six miles away, though."

"And my feet hurt!" complained the professor. "I—"

There was a noise in the distance. She stopped, looking avidly toward the source of the sound. It increased and was plainly the motor of an automobile traveling on this highway. It came into view. It was a battered, dark-green car five or six years old.

"We hitch a ride," said the professor with authority. "I've got to get somebody down here with equipment to make a proper study of those monstrosities!"

She waved her arms. The car braked and stopped. The man who drove it regarded them with lively interest.

"Can you give us a lift?" asked Lane.

It would not be wise to start a conversation with a sane person by trying to explain the emergency behind the request.

"Where d'you want to go?" asked the man. "Hop in."

"We want," said the professor firmly, "to get to a telephone. A pay telephone, because we have to make some long-distance calls."

She climbed into the car. There were many parcels in the car, and she rearranged them to make room for herself in the back seat. Carol looked mutely at Lane, indicating the firepot in her hand in which coals still smoldered. He glanced at the Monster; the dog was exhausted from past terror, but he did not seem frightened now.

"I guess it's all right," he said slowly. "I've still got the gasoline and my lighter. And

this car will travel fairly fast."

She dumped the coals, and he emptied his own. It did not occur to either – not even to the professor – to abandon the queer objects which had been such effective defenses against the Gizmos during the night. The Monster had to be lifted into the car, and then Lane and Carol climbed in. The driver watched them wisely. He shifted the gear lever and the motor roared. The car jolted into motion and its clamor grew less.

The driver said brightly, "You'll be that professor that's studying turkey-buzzards back that way. Right?"

"Right," said the professor.

"And she's your niece," said the driver, "and he's that fellow that writes pieces about hunting." "Right," said the professor.

"My name's Burke," said the driver. "Glad to meet you. You found out what killed those cows and partridges and foxes and coons and such?"

Lane didn't answer, and the professor only grunted. She was beginning to realize that in bright sunshine, with birds and insects filling the air with sound, the idea of living creatures which were not flesh and blood, and which suffocated more normal things so that they might gorge on the odors of decay – in bright sunshine an average person might tend to be skeptical. But . . .

"I found out," said Burke. "I'm not sure I believe it, but I found out. So I'm leavin' these parts. Got my luggage right here with me. I'm goin' some place else."

"What did you find out?" asked Lane.

"Never mind!" said Burke. "Never mind that! You wouldn't believe me if I told you!"

He pressed the accelerator. The car picked up speed. It ran onward through the new morning with the hillsides echoing back its roaring. The highway swung right to encircle an out-jutting part of a mountainside, and ran over a narrow bridge spanning a brook all of five feet wide. It turned left again, and then Burke swung off the gravel road and went bumping and bouncing down a still narrower road with a bed of powdery dust. The dust rose in a reddish cloud behind the car. "Nearest telephone's along this way," said Burke.

"That's a new road we were on. This fellow built a fillin' station where he thought the new road would come, an' then the highway folks didn't build it there. He got fooled."

Lane said in a low tone to Carol: "We should be safe now. It's unthinkable that Gizmos could travel really fast. Even if they trailed us from the forest, they'd have been left behind now."

Carol nodded. But her features looked oddly pinched, as if she had a premonition she could not bring herself to mention.

The car swerved around the curving boundary of a cornfield, its trail of swirling dust conspicuous behind it. It swung in to a modern filling station which seemed to belong on a well-traveled road instead of a dusty dirt one. Burke braked on its concrete apron.

"Telephone here," he reported. "Hi, Sam! I brought you some phone customers."

The filling station proprietor came out, leisurely. A cat accompanied him. The

professor got out of the car and nodded briskly. She could see the phone. She went inside, fumbling in the pockets of her breeches for coins. The Monster lay on the floor of the car, panting. The filling station operator said humorously:

"Seen any more ha'n'ts?"

Burke said primly: "Hell! I didn't say I saw anything! Y' can't see 'em! They'll move danglin' strings, an' they make noises, an' they'll make tracks in flour sprinkled over a buried dead chicken. But y' can't see 'em!"

Lane and Carol exchanged startled glances. Then Lane's face went expressionless. He could see Professor Warren inside the plate-glass window of the filling station. She put coins into the instrument.

"When I see 'em," said Sam, "I'll think about believin' in 'em."

Professor Warren greeted someone on the telephone. She began to speak, crisply and with authority, into the instrument. She evidently spoke with great precision and with scientific terminology.

"They've been killin' things," said Burke sagely. "They're what's killed off the game people've been talkin' about. They killed those cows in the courthouse a while back."

Sam said humorously: "They ain't killed me yet."

"They'll get to you," said Burke firmly. "They've been leavin' us humans alone—so far. I'm not stayin' around till they start killin' people. I'm gettin' out."

"Scared?" asked Sam incredulously. "Scared of something you can't see?"

"Yep," said Burke. "I'm scared of anything I can't fight. And how're you goin' to fight somethin' you can't see?"

Inside the station, Professor Warren's expression turned to one of shock, her face bewildered and crimsoning. Then she bellowed infuriatedly into the transmitter. A sound came through the plate glass. It was the professor's voice, expressing a violently disparaging opinion of the person at the other end of the line. Then she stopped and jiggled the hook furiously. She slammed down the receiver and came out, raging.

"Idiot!" she barked. "Lunatic! Fool! Imbecile! He pretends to think I'm joking and says it's bad taste to get him out of bed to listen to a joke! He hung up on me! He says he's going to complain to the dean!"

She stamped her feet, ready to weep from pure frustration. But at this instant the Monster whimpered. Then he yelped. Then he screamed, and tried to burrow beneath one of the seats of the car. He scratched desperately to make a place to hide, while he howled ever more shrilly and horribly.

By instinct, Lane swept his eyes about as his hand went to the two-gallon gasoline can which so far he had not used at all. Carol gasped and pointed.

Back along the dirt road on which the car had come to this place, there was a cloudlike stirring of the air. Over the top of the growing corn they saw a great movement of dust. At first glance—but only at first—it looked as if another car were on the way here. But this dust cloud was larger than a car could raise, and it was not stirred up to float and then settle back again. This cloud moved as a unit, and it did not merely sweep along the highway. It rolled. It was a monstrous ball of airborne reddish powder which

rolled swiftly and terribly onward, at the height of a six-story building. It was unnatural. It was artificial. It was organized. It was horribly, terribly purposeful.

It came swiftly toward the filling station.

Chapter 5

Lane jumped out of the car, unscrewing the top of the gasoline can as he moved. He began to pour recklessly, making a fifteen-foot circle of wetness on the dry ground.

"Firepots!" he snapped. "Carol, get 'em, quick! Get inside this circle! Get the others in it!"

He lighted the gasoline he'd spilled. The flame ran around the ring of oil-soaked ground.

The gigantic dust ball swept on. It turned in its path, following the roadway, rolling up to and over the filling station. There it ceased to roll. Instead, it hovered. Dust poured down from it in a blinding, choking downpour. There was a shrill sound in the air, like the keening of a storm wind. There were eddies and currents and violent gusts, in which the gasoline flames leaped and gamboled. There was a duststorm of a thickness and intensity to overwhelm anything, but it was strictly localized. A hundred yards from the filling station in any direction, the air was perfectly calm. There was no stirring of dust. There was no disturbance of the early-morning tranquility. But in the center of the dust cloud ...

"In here!" rasped Lane. "Come in here!"

He dragged at Carol, bringing her into the ring of fire. The professor came, stumbling. Lane plunged out through the flames and brought in Burke. The filling station proprietor was down, fighting madly for breath, flailing his arms crazily, suffocating and half buried in dust. Lane broke out again, holding his breath, and dragged at him. The strangling man fought as if he were drowning. And things tugged at Lane. His garments quivered. Gizmos as individuals were the weakest of creatures, but here they seemed to have formed themselves into a greater dynamic system whose parts were Gizmos. Swirling currents composed of the whining horrors twisted and spun madly in a complex fashion which combined their separate strengths into the power of storm winds close to hurricane force.

The owner of the filling station fought the tumbling dust as if it were water in which he was drowning. He caught Lane by the body and tried to climb. Lane himself was strangling. . . .

The reek of burning gasoline struck his nostrils. Carol had scooped up gas-soaked dust in a firepot and bent over him with it. His mouth and nostrils were unsealed, while the squealing about him grew more shrill. But what stuff he had to breathe was an intolerable reek of pure foulness.

He staggered back to the ring of flame, dragging the other man. Carol swung her tin-can torch. They got through to the center of the ring of fire. Dust drifted down in palpable masses. Any other source of flame would have been put out, but the gasoline

wetted the dust which fell into it, and flamed even higher as it spread out. The professor, with shaking hands, filled a firepot with burning, gas-soaked dust and whirled it about her head, shouting indistinguishable things above the uproar.

"It'll burn out soon!" panted Carol in Lane's ear.

"I know!" he gasped. "Come with me! Swing the firepot! I'll pump gas out on the ground and light it."

She caught his hand lest they be separated, and they plunged through the smoky yellow flames. Instantly they were in a monstrous tumult and a storm of blinding, stifling dust. It was partly pure good fortune which made Lane stumble into Burke's car in the midst of the screaming obscurity about him. Its wheels were already hub-deep in dust. He dragged Carol around the car and fought his way to the gas pumps. He pulled loose a hose and flipped the switch arm so that the pump would start. He lurched away to the limit of the hose's length-breathing through doubled folds of his coat while Carol swung a firepot—and spurted out a flood of gasoline, letting it pour at full volume on the ground.

Carol cried in his ear: "The firepot's burned out!"

Things tugged at him. He began to suffocate, even with the coat letting him breathe after a fashion, because he was submerged, enclosed in a fiercely clinging mass of Gizmos.

Then he snapped his lighter. Incredibly, the spilled pool of car fuel caught. There was something like a booming roar, and flames leaped up crazily downwind, and there was a shrieking and a wrenching twist of the massed Gizmos nearby as yellow fire leaped up twenty and thirty feet into the air.

Lane gasped for breath. Carol staggered, panting. He steadied her, and then took the burned-out firepot from her hand and dribbled gasoline into it and lighted it at the booming pond of fire, and threw the flaming sand to right and left. There were more thin screamings.

"That's the trick!" he panted.

He flung more burning gasoline-soaked dust. Flames went soaring through the close-packed Gizmos of the cloud formation. The greater dynamic system was wounded, as parts of it were ignited and tended to pass their own destruction on to others. Then, still unable to speak for lack of breath, Carol pointed. Lane struggled to drag the gas hose nearer to the ring of fire he'd first made, and made another leaping pool of flame, and a third. . . .

The squealing cloud began to thin. The globular cluster of Gizmos seemed to evaporate, because it ceased to exist as a unit. The dust the separate creatures had carried now drifted downward. The Gizmos themselves became invisible, as before they made themselves into a jinnlike swirling cloud. Perhaps they fled, or perhaps they continued to hover nearby. Lane knew only that they no longer whined and whirled about the filling station, and that the towering mass of dust was now settling tranquilly to the ground.

The scene of the attack had changed remarkably within the past ten minutes. When the car had arrived, there'd been a dusty dirt road leading past a gas-pump platform of

concrete. There'd been a very neat, modern filling station, with a workshop and a greasing rack and plate-glass windows all tidy and bright and businesslike. Now there was a great splotch of fallen dust upon the landscape, like a miniature Sahara. From four different spots, four fountains of smoky yellow flame roared upward. Dense black soot rose in columns from the tops of the flames. The filling station was smeared with dust. A dune ran into the workshop. There were rust-red hillocks, one of which almost enclosed the car, and an area a hundred yards across in which no green thing showed: it was pure dry powder, fine as talc.

Staggering, nearly knee-deep in the impalpable stuff, the professor and Burke hauled at something so covered with dust that it was unrecognizable until they had it in the clear. It was Sam, the filling-station proprietor. The professor began to apply artificial respiration, unskillfully but with great earnestness. At her command, Burke helped her. There was a tiny stirring somewhere and the station cat broke the surface of the dust. It sneezed and spat and moved daintily away to more solid ground.

One of the fires began to burn low. The flame ring Lane had made first now went out. They smelled burned gasoline. Lane looked anxiously at Carol. She nodded reassurance. Together, they waded through the yielding dust to where the professor and Burke labored over Sam.

"This affair," panted the professor, "is a great deal more serious than I imagined. I'm afraid this poor man is dead!"

Burke, working beside her, said profoundly: "You folks must've worked things out even better than I did. I wouldn't've thought of fighting ghosts with fire. But it sure chased 'em!"

"And things like this," the professor panted, "are apt to happen all over the country. I am beginning to feel genuine alarm. We simply have to alert the authorities. We have to set research teams at work to solve the problem these Gizmos present. They – why, they are a menace to everybody! They can do incalculable harm!"

She worked resolutely at the task of trying to revive the owner of the filling-station, Burke, at her side, working with a precision indicating practice at this task.

"If you don't need help just yet," said Lane, "I'll try the phone again. May be able to get a doctor."

He waded through the dust to the station again. Carol, as if automatically, went with him. He used the telephone, first to try to get a doctor for the owner of the station, and then for long distance. It was incongruous to have so desperately urgent a task to do, and to have the telephone operator break in from time to time, demanding more coins in the phone lest she break off the connection. Toward the end, Carol was handing Lane the coins he needed. Once, he heard the ringing of a cash register bell.

He hung up, his face dark.

"It's not good?"

"It could hardly be worse," he said bitterly. "No doctor. There are only two in Murfree. They're both out on emergency calls. People dead or believed to have died in their sleep. I tried for other doctors nearby. There were a dozen sudden deaths in the county last night, in four families. All the doctors are busy trying to find out what they died of, because it looks contagious." His voice was ironic. "They're trying to find out

how to protect the other members of the families involved, because they must have been exposed! A sudden disease is a better explanation than mine for the things that happened everywhere last night. It's easier to believe, anyhow!"

He started for the door. Carol said: "Dick, I had to take change from the cash register, for the telephone."

He handed her a bill, and she put it in the cash drawer, closed it, and followed him out. The professor had ceased her efforts at artificial respiration and stood wringing her hands. Burke had heaved Sam's limp form over his shoulder and was struggling through the dust toward the station.

"He's dead," said the professor unhappily. "We tried, but — We just thought to look. And he'd breathed in dust. He drowned in dust. He gasped for breath and his lungs filled with it as if it had been water. Nothing can be done — nothing!"

Burke said, "His number was up, that's all. Those things came, carryin' dust, an' they dropped it. They'd've managed to put out any fire we made except a gasoline fire. That's what they had the dust for." He added, "Somebody must've fought 'em with fire before, and they figured out what to do about it."

"We did," said Lane grimly. He spoke to the professor. "Gizmos aren't a local product. They're nation-wide. There were sudden deaths everywhere last night — hundreds of them. What's happened here has been happening everywhere, with variations. The official reaction is that some new disease has developed among animals, and that now it's attacking humans. It's called a plague, which so far has hardly appeared in cities. People are advised to get rid of their pets, to stay away from any place where there's wild life, and to wait for bacteriologists and epidemiologists to track down the germ and develop immunizing shots against it."

The professor was appalled. "The idiots!" she raged. "The fools! We've got to tell them —"

"No," said Lane. "We've got to show them."

Burke waded past him with his burden. He put the proprietor inside his filling station. Then he went out to the car and examined it carefully and brushed a six-inch mass of dust from the top of the hood. He brushed at the radiator, then climbed in and started the motor, listening with a critical ear. He nodded, and put it in gear. The car moved slowly through the dust, which flowed almost like a liquid. Its exhaust left a trail on the surface. There were monstrous frozen dust waves made by its wheels. The dunelike coating on its roof slipped and slid and poured downward.

Once clear of the thicker dust deposit, Burke stopped the car again. He got out and came back to the filling station. He came out with a brush and cloths. He began to clean the car, and then wipe the windows to transparency once more. When he had finished, he beat at his own clothing to rid it of dust.

"I'm known to sportsmen as a reasonably truthful writer about hunting," said Lane, "but that's not a quick channel to acceptance of our information. This is too serious to waste time persuading people about. Have you better contacts than that?"

The professor wrung her hands. "If they've got the idea that it's a plague," she said bitterly, "it'll be ten times harder to make them see sense! There's nobody as hidebound

as a researcher! They talk about teamwork, but it means that nobody dares think anything the rest of the team won't accept! And I've got a reputation for imagination, which is the one thing that scares a scientific mind! They'll believe anybody but me – anybody with a doctorate, at least!"

Burke approached, still brushing at his clothing. He had an odd air of combined apprehension and zest.

"Me," he said, "I'm leaving. I figure you people kept me from getting what he got –" he gestured toward the filling station – "and you know plenty that I'd like to know. You knew what to do when they came in a cloud. I've got to figure things out, and I want all the information I can get. Want to come along with me?"

"We certainly don't want to stay here," Lane said. He turned to the professor again. "Your best bet, of course, is to get back to the University with your facts."

"Facts? What good are facts? I've got to show Gizmos – alive, dead, stuffed and made into microscopic slides for histological examination before anybody with a scientific reputation will agree that a thing can be alive without being flesh and blood. But I've had 'em try to strangle me! Those things are dangerous!"

"Look," said Lane. "I've got some friends – a mixed bunch. Some will believe me, but as mere businessmen who hunt and fish, nobody will listen to them any more than to me. But there's one man – he's head of a pharmaceutical laboratory in New Jersey. They make antibiotics and such things. We've hunted and fished together. It's not likely he'll accept all we've learned without some proof, but he'll let me show him the proof – if I can get it to him." The professor shrugged.

"One more phone call, then," said Lane, "and we'll start." To Burke he said: "We'll ride with you and tell you what we know. When you want to split off, you'll let us out at the nearest airfield or railroad station. Does that suit you?"

"You made a bargain," said Burke expansively. "I'll fill up the car."

Lane went back into the filling station, Carol following. He heard a curious scratching sound. Instantly tense, he went to see. It came from an overturned oil drum. He dragged at it and the Monster crawled out: cringing; moaning; trembling in every muscle. He had fled to the darkest, remotest place his terror-stricken instincts could suggest. He had not been killed. The Gizmos this time had concentrated upon the humans.

Lane fumbled for more money for the phone. Matter-of-factly, Carol pressed the "No Sale" button on the cash register. She handed him coins.

"It looks," said Lane wryly, "as if you agree with Burke that property rights may soon seem ridiculous."

He dropped a coin into the phone.

Outside, Burke filled the tank of the car. He hunted in the stockroom and found half a dozen of the one-gallon emergency tanks designed to be carried in case one runs out of gas. He filled each one, carefully, and also carried out an armful of cans of motor oil. "I've got ideas," he said. "I'm gettin' ready for 'em!" Lane heard him in the workshed as the phone connection through Richmond and Washington and Philadelphia went through to New Jersey. The connection was completed. It was twenty minutes before Lane hung up. His jaw was grimly set and his eyes burned. Burke was sitting at the

wheel of the car. When Lane came out he said with relief: "I was scared they were comin' back with a new trick. If they had, I'd've had to go off and leave you."

Lane did not answer. The professor was already in the car. He held the door for Carol, who urged the Monster to climb in. She had practically to lift him. Burke started the motor, and the car moved off.

"They'll figure," Burke said zestfully, "that we'll head back to get to a hard surface road. I'm goin' to fool 'em. No runnin' into an ambush for me! Those critters are smart!" He added: "I bet they're Martians! They could've landed a long while ago and been building up their invasion army and studyin' us, and now they're ready to take over. But they don't know us humans!"

The professor said querulously: "Dick, you heard news on the telephone. What was it?"

Lane ground his teeth. He had heard the sort of information which would be sent first to laboratories turning out biologicals. It was news of an outbreak of the plague now believed in, duly credited first to lower animals, and now to men. Lane had heard the official report on an outbreak of sudden death in the village of Serenity, Colorado. And he knew that village.

Some three months back he'd been on the West Coast in his hunt for the uncanny cause of deaths among wild creatures. He'd stopped overnight in the tiny village of Serenity because there'd been several reports of inexplicable forest tragedies nearby. The village nestled in a valley whose floor was higher than the highest tips of the Virginia mountains, and the peaks about it were crowned with eternal snow. Lane remembered it distinctly. Some few miles from the houses, there'd been a grizzly bear and her two cubs found dead in a half-acre of crushed underbrush and toppled small trees. Lane had gone over the battlefield very painstakingly with a Colorado game commission man. They'd found no solution to the death of the bear.

Later, they'd dined in the village on mountain trout and listened to local opinions about that killing and other improbable occurrences the inhabitants of Serenity could report. Lane and the game commission man left the village next morning without even a tentative idea of the cause of any of the occurrences, including the death of the grizzly.

Now, Lane interpreted the news he'd heard in pictures of intolerable detail. He remembered the village: about a hundred houses and three stores. He could see it in his mind's eye, nestling among the mountains. He could envision it as of the night just past: lights shining in the houses, stars and a slanting moon overhead. There was that tranquil medley of night noises which to all men is assurance of peace and security and calm.

The lights in the houses had almost all winked out when the first disturbance came. At eleven o'clock Mountain Time there were sudden sounds outside the houses. Pet cats fought and spat and clawed. Dogs barked frenziedly, and snarled and yelped as if in terror. There was an extraordinary clamor, quite enough to wake all the inhabitants of the houses.

Lights came on. People went outside with lanterns and flashlights to see what caused the uproar. But the sound grew less as lights began to flicker on, and as moving lanterns shone outdoors. By the time all the village was awake and looking for the cause of alarm

among their pets, there was no noise. There was only the sound of human voices calling to dogs and cats, and asking fretful questions of other human voices.

Then someone found his dog. It was dead – unwounded, but with bared teeth and glazed eyes. Someone else found his. Most people did not discover their pets, but all who found a dog or cat found it dead. Every domestic pet left outdoors had died – unnaturally. Nobody thought of the months-past similar death of a grizzly and her cubs.

There was angry discussion across property lines in the village of Serenity. It looked like poison; the few owners who identified their own animals leaped to that conclusion immediately. The inhabitants of Serenity raged at the unknown person responsible for such happenings. But it was near the middle of the night. Citizens growled furiously over the carelessness of somebody who'd left poison about, or the unthinkable villainy of anybody who'd distributed poison to pet animals. Angrily, they went back to bed. They fumed as they went to sleep.

These things were known because a rural mail-carrier left the village at a quarter to midnight, himself growling over the loss of a good dog. He drove through the darkness over mountain trails to a mail distribution center for the semiweekly mail. By going at such an hour, he could be back with it near sunrise and be able to join two friends on a fishing trip into the wilds. He didn't make it.

Lane saw the later event, in his mind's eye, as clearly as if he'd been present. Much later in the night, when the village slept again, there were whinings in the air about the houses of Serenity. There were then no lights, so no lights wavered as if units of heated gases passed before them. Stars, though, did shift slightly in their places as faint, shrill whinings moved among the houses. These whinings descended chimneys, and entered open windows, and penetrated screens – as a smoke ring can pass through a screen without destruction – and hovered invisibly in the darkness inside the village homes. Then there was silence, as if by agreement all must wait until an appointed instant.

That instant came. Abruptly, noises rose everywhere. There were shouts among the houses. There were gaspings. Windows smashed here and there as if blindly fighting human beings tried to get the air they were denied by smashing windows. The noise was not at great as when the pets of the village died. It did not even last as long. Presently there was absolute silence once more.

But presently there was a glimmer of light inside one of the houses. A tiny night-light had been overturned. After a while there were flames. They rose, and in time they licked through a roof and leaped and roared in the silent human settlement.

But nobody stirred anywhere, nor called to ask what was the matter. That single house burned to the ground, there among the high mountains, and nobody moved in any of the other silent buildings.

The rural mail carrier found out what had happened when he came back shortly after sunrise.

And Dick Lane, riding in the mountains of western Virginia, swallowed hard as he pictured the reality of what he had been told on the telephone. Hatred filled him, as well as indignation. He would have felt anger if he heard of fish caught wantonly and flung ashore to be left to rot. That would have seemed unconscionable. But the village of Serenity had been destroyed so that men and women and children would serve the

Gizmos in that revolting fashion. And Lane, two thousand miles from Serenity, Colorado, trembled with disgust and horror.

Carol looked anxiously at his face.

"Dick — is there something else you're worried about?"

He shook his head, struggling to bring his hatred under control. Presently he heard Professor Warren explaining just what had been found out. Burke asked surprisingly shrewd questions which had a peculiar slant to them. Burke was a leathery-faced individual with incongruously bright blue eyes. He nodded, as Professor Warren explained.

"First they tried to kill Mr. Lane," he said with something close to zest, "and when he fooled 'em with dead leaves they followed him. They hadn't had anybody beat 'em before. And they knew he knew. You see what I'm drivin' at?"

"No," said the professor.

"Suppose they're Martians," said Burke, with enthusiasm. "Or that they come from Jupiter, or Venus, or somewhere. Suppose they landed in a forest. What'd we do if we landed on Mars or Jupiter and found there was forests with animals in 'em."

"Let's not suppose anything of the sort," snapped the professor. "The facts are preposterous enough!"

Burke grinned. "You don't get me," he said. "If we landed on Mars or Jupiter, we'd be cagey. We'd kinda hide ourselves and do some scoutin'. We wouldn't go around saying, 'Take us to your leaders.' We'd make ourselves a hide-out and study what we were up against. We'd try out our guns on the animals. We'd find out if they were good to eat. If we found there were Martians or Jupiterians that were civilized, we'd send back for more men. We'd build up an army. Bein' a long way from home, we'd live off the animals in the forest where we landed, to save transportation so we could bring in more men. When we got pretty strong, we'd put out some outposts to keep an eye on the natives. We'd make a plan of campaign. We'd keep out of sight till we were ready to take over. Ain't it so?"

"No," said the professor indignantly. "If we landed on another planet and found civilized inhabitants there, we'd try to make friends!"

Burke said ironically: "Yeah? That's what folks did with the Indians, near four hundred years ago? What they did in Africa? Australia? They had natives in those places. Us civilized folk made friends with them?" "It's not a parallel," Professor Warren said shortly. "But it might be, to those critters you call Gizmos," argued Burke. "Just suppose they came from somewhere off Earth, and they've been layin' low, buildin' up their strength and living off wild game as much as they could to save supplies bein' brought in. Suppose they've been putting advanced bases in the bigger forests. Outposts on the edges. Observation posts in woodlots. If they got a big army here already, they'd have to send out foragin' parties. Now and then there'd be sentries and little patrols of Gizmos out, hunting food with orders not to bother humans if they could help it, but not to let any get away that suspected there was such things as them."

"That," said Professor Warren with asperity, "assumes that the Gizmos are not only intelligent like lower animals on Earth, but intellectual, like men, and that they can reason."

"Right!" said Burke. He went on with the same peculiar relish: "They'd have to be smart to get here from another world. And you check what's happened against that idea! Mr. Lane beat off an attack by a foragin' party with dry leaves. He went off and the patrol followed him. But some of 'em sent off for orders what to do about a man who found out they couldn't strangle him if he kept dried leaves before his face. They got orders to wait a good chance and kill him when he wasn't expecting it. They sneaked a spy into the trailer. But you caught and killed that one. Then they tried to break in an' kill you regardless, but they'd got reinforcements by that time. After a while they did manage to break in. They got all three of you alive. They made up their minds to study you, findin' out how fast you learned and so on, and keepin' you alive till they found out all they could. And you turned that trick on them, with fire."

Carol shuddered; the Monster, lying at her feet, whimpered to himself. "You got away," pursued Burke, with an odd air of enjoyment. "You waved fire around your heads and they couldn't face it. Then I came along. And what were the Gizmos doin'? They were sendin' back to headquarters sayin' you were even smarter than they'd expected. And they hadn't a big enough force to handle you, anyway. Maybe Mr. Lane hit on a squad of Gizmos, first. Maybe a battalion was sent to the trailer. But they must've sent a division to make a dust storm that'd put out the kind of fires you'd made, and to kill us all because we knew too much."

He paused. The car went thumping along a long straight stretch of mountain highway. This was a valley among the mountains, and there were pastures and occasional cornfields in view. The sky overhead was very bright and shining.

"The question," said Burke zestfully, "is how many divisions have they got? How good is their communication system? Have they got a beachhead just here in Murfree

County, or are they ready for a general offensive?" He rolled out the technical military terms with satisfaction.

"I've read a lot about wars and fightin'. I'm guessing we've got a war coming with the Gizmos. It's goin' to be a tough fight. There's going to be a lot of people killed before it's over. We could even lose! But there's going to be a lot of advantage to them that know from the start what the Gizmos are and what they can do and what they can't. I want to be one of those that know. Somebody's got to lead guerrilla fightin' against them, wherever they've occupied the country. I'm aimin' to be qualified to do just that!"

He preened himself at the wheel of the clanking car. Lane understood. Burke was one of that considerable part of humanity which enthusiastically believes in anything that's sufficiently dramatic. In Burke, however, his imagination did not exaggerate the drama he believed in. His assumption of an extraterrestrial origin for the Gizmos was based on pure guess, and an unlikely one at that. His description of a military organization among the Gizmos was pure, exciting fantasy. But, however wrong his assumptions, his estimate of the danger was correct.

"Where's the proof?" Professor Warren demanded. "Reason requires a nervous system. What kind of nervous system could a Gizmo have? They've got something – they find prey, they use cunning. But is it a nervous system?"

Carol stirred. She looked steadily ahead, far down the sunlit valley. Suddenly she gasped. She pointed with an unsteady hand.

Lane ground his teeth. There was a dust cloud moving out from behind a mountainside ahead. It grew thicker as it went rolling across cultivated fields. It moved as an entity, as a dynamic system with every appearance of volition and purpose.

Burke braked, his eyes wide and frightened. He brought the car to a stop. A second dust cloud began to form itself to the left. It began to roll down the mountainside.

It was even larger than the one that had overwhelmed the filling station.

Burke frantically put the car in reverse, to back around and flee in the opposite direction.

"That's no good," said Lane. "Ahead's the best bet. Look back there!"

Two more of the impossibly dense dust clouds were already visible behind the car. One came rolling terribly along the way the car had come; another was gathering substance from a dirt road as it swept across the valley bottom.

The four dust clouds moved to converge upon the stopped car.

Chapter 6

The Monster uttered a howling sound which was at once so despairing and so frantic that Lane felt an urge to kick him. But instead he said to Burke: "Give me the wheel. I know how to handle this!"

Burke yielded with alacrity. He fairly popped out the door on the driver's side and agilely exchanged seats with Lane. His teeth chattered as he cranked the front window tightly shut. Lane put the car in gear ahead and moved toward the giant dust spheres, of which one was already astride the highway a mile ahead as the other rolled horribly downhill to meet it.

"What you going to do?" demanded Burke agitatedly. Lane sent the car ahead at a speed far below its maximum. "I'm going to bet that these Gizmos never drove a car in traffic."

He was moving more slowly than the pair of globular whirlwinds behind. One of them was already opaque with its burden of dust, while the other rapidly gathered substance as it billowed and whirled across the valley along a twisting dirt road. They seemed to be overtaking the car steadily.

"They're catching up!" protested Burke shrilly. "They think so – if they think," said Lane. The sphere ahead and to the left on the mountainside seemed to pause in its rolling, while dust swirled up to thicken it. The one ahead advanced, still blocking the way.

"God!" insisted Burke, "they're all four goin' to hit us at the same time!"

Lane grunted. He held down the car to twenty-five miles an hour, while the four globes of destruction accommodated themselves to its pace, maintaining an inexorable rate of closing upon it. Each rolling dust cloud was a full hundred feet in diameter. There were veinings of greater or lesser dust content, where madly moving streams of Gizmos, forming the spheres, were more or less closely packed in their spiraling. The

spheres themselves were dynamic systems, as a charging herd of beasts can be. They were organizations capable of greater deadlines than the sum of the deadlines of their parts. They were, apparently, even capable of acts of coordination when acting as groups, comparable to the cooperation of individual wolves when running down a deer.

Professor Warren said crisply, "I begin to see the structure of these things. I wish we had a movie camera."

"If you' going to let 'em bury us all in dust," chattered Burke, "you let me outa here! You let me —"

Carol reached past his shoulder and locked the car door.

"Dick knows what he's doing," she said. "Be quiet, or he *will* let you out."

Burke's mouth dropped open. Then he realized. A man on foot might not be pursued by a dust cloud composed of a hundred thousand Gizmos. But there were filmy tendrils of lesser denseness clustered about the greater ones. They would be smaller swarms of Gizmos speeding to incorporate themselves in the larger ones. Any of those could separate itself to trail and suffocate a single fugitive. Burke subsided.

"If that thing ahead," said Lane, "should stop stock-still and drop its load of dust, it would block the highway with a drift we couldn't possibly get through. That's why I'm driving slowly, — to keep it coming toward us."

He sounded calm enough, but his knuckles were white on the steering wheel. He turned his head to estimate the looming red monstrosity on the mountain above. He glanced in the back-view mirror to gauge the speed of the one in pursuit. The fourth, rolling across the lateral dirt road, abandoned the road at a curve and came sweeping across partly green, partly red-clay pasture land.

"I hope," Lane added, "that this car has a good pick-up, Burke. Our lives depend on it."

Burke said, "It's okay," in a strained voice.

The situation was as nightmarish as any that had gone before. Ahead there was a rolling, writhing rust-red globe the height of half a dozen houses piled one atop the other. It was not a solid thing, but a cloud, and one could see into it a little way. There were veins and cords of circulation; what looked like nerves and sinews and a circulatory system, branching and rebranching and re-combining again. They were, though, merely thicker and denser swirlings of the powdered soil that made the whole thing visible.

It loomed ahead, so close that Lane could not see its top through the windshield. To his left an even greater and more revolting monstrosity rolled down the mountainside. To the right and behind yet other giant ghastrinesses closed in. It seemed that their bulging middles were about to close over the car, to roof it in — and then solid masses of dust would come plummeting down, to bury the car in powder.

But Lane stepped on the accelerator. As the car plunged forward he pressed down harder, and as it still gathered speed he pushed the gas pedal down to the floor board. The car leaped to forty-five, to fifty, to sixty miles an hour. It passed the point toward which the four spheres tended — what should have been a meeting place of the car with

all the rolling monstrosities. It swept past that spot into the dust-streaming base of the globe which blocked the highway. But it was swallowed up by one, not overwhelmed by four.

Inside the sphere, there was howling wind and the shrieking whine of Gizmos in uncountable number. The car shuddered. Its windows showed only earth outside, as if it had instantly been buried deep underground. Its throbbing clamor was muted, muffled, dulled. Its wheels rolled over softness. Its windshield wipers flicked back and forth, but their clicking was inaudible in the tumult of squealing of gas horrors and the roaring of many winds

—and now, also, the frantic howling of the Monster, who heard Gizmos on every hand and tried to scream and snap and bite in all directions at once.

The car reeled. There was a hissing of dust grains against glass seen in a brownish obscurity, which deepened to pure pitch-black and then became brown again; and then the car came out into the open air, streaming dust on every hand. Lane sent it hurtling down the highway past the mountain.

Those in the car did not see the simultaneous collision of four dust-laden monstrosities because the back window was almost opaque. But they did crash together, and in crashing fused into one, and a sort of writhing chaos rose and wavered and spread out in continuing contortions. It was the height of a ten-story building at its least, and at its greatest it was twice as tall, and as it subsided it covered a space a quarter of a mile square—and the highway was closed by a mass of dust whose dunes rose to thirty feet in height.

On the road beyond, however, the car's windshield wipers clicked and clacked, making a streaky transparency by which Lane could steer. Here, in the path of the monster he'd bored through, there was dust all over the highway. Everywhere the road was slippery with the fine stuff. But Lane drove like a madman. He could not look behind. He swung around a curve in the road, and the backtrail of the monster ended, and he knew that the car hurtled onward with no longer a betraying plume of dust behind it. Even the Monster's howling ended. He lay limply, exhausted, on the floor of the car.

Lane said over his shoulder: "Burke, crank down the window and see what you can see behind."

He drove across a bridge spanning a shallow stream some forty feet in width. The road slanted upward along the side of the mountain, leaving the valley below it.

Burke, his teeth chattering audibly, lowered the window and squinted to the rear.

"There's what looks like smoke back yonder," he reported in a trembling voice. "It ain't stirring much. Looks like it's settling."

Lane observed, "That may mean that the Gizmos are confused, or it may simply mean that they're coming after us without bothering to bring dust with them. They can always pick that up where and when they need it."

"The Monster doesn't agree," the professor said. "He's quiet. Ergo, no Gizmos—at least not angry ones. And after all, Dick, there must be a limit to the speed the creatures can make. They assuredly aren't streamlined, and there is a limit to the effort they can make."

Lane kept the accelerator down to the floor. The car went up and up, nearing the end of a two-mile climb. Carol said, "Are you wondering about their communication system, Dick?"

"I am," he said with some grimness. "They're everywhere – I've had proof of that. And they've proved that they can call enormous numbers of others overnight, anyhow. If they can send messages for help – and we've had three examples of it – can they send messages of warning that we must be killed?"

"It is not likely," said the professor with authority. "It is most improbable."

Burke pulled in his head from where he had been staring anxiously to the rear.

"They're out of sight now," he said with relief. "Maybe we lost 'em. Mr. Lane, d'you think they can send word on ahead for other ones to watch out for us?"

"Most unlikely!" repeated the professor firmly. "Even lower animals can summon aid. Ants can call other ants when they find booty too large for them to handle alone. Other creatures even post sentinels and combine for their mutual defense. But no creature lower than man can transmit the idea of an individual identity."

Burke was suddenly garrulous with relief because there were no longer any dust clouds in view. "But are Gizmos lower than humans?" he demanded zestfully. "If they came here from Mars or somewhere, they've got to be smart. They could be smarter than people."

"Mr. Burke," said the professor, "there is a limit to what even I will believe without evidence!"

The road leveled. It ran through a cut between hillsides which rose still higher, though the valley bottom behind it was deep. A few hundred yards on, it disappeared in a downward curve. When they reached the spot where the landscape spread out to their view ahead, the effect would have been breathtaking under other circumstances. They had crossed the last of one range of mountains, and they could see for scores of miles. Everything was green and beautiful. They could see farmhouses and highways and woodland and villages. To the north a small town – it would be Murfree – sprawled out over a square mile or more. The spires of churches rose above its tree-lined streets. There were rolling pastures, speckled with moving dots of grazing cattle. On the highways there were crawling motes of cars.

Lane started the car down the steep incline. "Either the Gizmos are intelligent, and after us individually for a very good reason, or they're a weird kind of beast. As beasts of the forests, they may have multiplied until they can't stay in the wilderness, and have to move out to get food. If the first is true, we've got to get mixed up in traffic so they can't identify us. If they're really intelligent they might or might not try to wipe out all traffic to get us."

"I think," said Carol, looking at him, "that you've got to risk it, Dick. If we made sure we were alone when we were killed, our death would do no good to anybody. But if we force the Gizmos to kill us – if they can – in a way that proves they do exist, at least that will be a warning to people who don't suspect a thing. Even if we have to risk other people's lives with our own, we've got to make sure that the danger from the Gizmos is realized!"

Lane knew he would have to pass through Murfree if he meant to go on to the north. But he had no choice.

Even at the risk of provoking a mass attack by Gizmos on the little town, he had to reach some source of authority – governmental or scientific – which could make use of what he'd discovered. Meanwhile he could make no specific plans without news of the state of things in general, – without news of atrocities that might have been committed, or discoveries about Gizmos that might have been made. He turned on the car radio. It gave forth hillbilly music exclusively. He snapped it off and drove downhill toward the valley.

It was time to go beyond the mere facts that he and the professor and Carol had been forced to learn in order to survive. So far the Gizmos had surprised them in every encounter. Not once had Lane anticipated the next action of the ghostly killers. In each assault the Gizmos had used what should have been an adequate force and a suitable stratagem to accomplish their destruction. In all instances they had increased the force applied and used a new tactic for which the humans should have been unprepared. It was time to try to guess what they might do next.

But that would depend on how intelligent they were, and Lane had no certain knowledge about that. If one considers any living creature by itself, he is apt to assume that it has intelligence close to genius. The lowliest of annelid worms, regarded by itself, performs actions to secure food and to avoid capture and to propagate its race which no mere human intellect could improve upon. Ants show amazing abilities in agriculture and mycology. The leaf-cutter ant cultivates a fungus underground which appears to be as artificial as a grapefruit: it is found nowhere but in the cities of leaf-cutter ants. In fact, ants have not only technologies but a social system with divisions of labor and a hierarchy of functions for different individuals. If human beings knew only one variety of lower animal, on the evidence they would have to believe it as intelligent as humans so far as its interests ran. That posed the problem here. For their own purposes

Gizmos acted intelligently. But so do all creatures. And the behavior of Gizmos could not be compared to that of flesh-and-blood animals. If what Gizmos did was an instinctive pattern, they were beasts no matter how brilliant their behavior. If what they did was for the attainment of purposes invented by themselves, it was intelligence in the human meaning of the term. In either case, things looked black. If there had been Gizmos from time beyond remembering, as ancient tales of ghosts and devils seemed to prove, then something had multiplied their numbers so that now they menaced humanity. If Burke was right and they had landed on Earth from some other world, then they must be more intelligent than mankind, and humanity was doomed.

But Lane doggedly would not credit their extraterrestrial origin. It would require them to have ships in which to travel, and it was unthinkable that Gizmos could create or control machinery, or that swarms of spaceships bringing them would have avoided detection by radar. Gizmos themselves were detectable by radar, but as phantoms on the radar screens they were single, they moved at low speed, they were not reported from great heights. More convincingly, creatures capable of using tools and spaceships would be capable of making weapons. Gizmos would not combine themselves into gales of whirling dust if they could commit murder neatly and efficiently with suitable tools. Gizmos did not come from outer space. They were creatures of Earth. But even if Burke's

dramatic description of bases and outposts and foraging parties were correct, it could still be such an organization as an ant city or a swarm of bees.

There was a last possibility, which was most disturbing of all. The Gizmos might be Earth creatures with an unfortunately high intelligence and a long and dishonorable record of having used it. If ancient Gizmos had passed for gods and exacted tribute of burnt victims and spilt blood and foulness in general, their descendants would be no improvement. It was proven they were as ruthless as their forbears. They were lovers of corruption and decay. Current events suggested strongly that they planned to make all Earth a stinking Olympus for their monstrous feasts.

This seemed as plausible as any other idea, though Lane would not give full assent to it. But it seemed quaint, with that theory in mind, to drive presently into a sprawling, sunlit, tree-shaded country town while consciously assuring oneself that one was not being trailed by the spawn of Ares and Vulcan and Ashtaroth, and Baal and Loki and kindred fiends from all other imagined kinds of hell.

In this particular case, there was ground for some sort of uneasiness, anyhow. Lane's apprehensions increased when he saw a dead cat in a gutter of Murfree's principal street. He drove steadily on into the business part of town.

Suddenly the professor broke the silence.

"Dick, I want to buy something. Will you stop?"

He parked the car and the professor climbed out and vanished into a grocery store. As they waited Burke seemed to be struggling with strong thoughts.

"I got it worked out, Mr. Lane," he said at last. "These Gizmos've got communications, and reserves, and those dust balls are their mobile armor. They got a chain of command, and division commanders, and they got to have a general staff and a overall plan of campaign. The way they operate is strictly military! You know what they'll do next, Mr. Lane?"

"I've been trying to guess," Lane said wearily.

"When an army's going to smash an enemy," said Burke, his eyes very bright, "first they got to smash the defenses that are set up, ready to use. But we haven't got any — only us four suspect anything at all. So the invading army can go right on and grab all the territory it can. And then what does it do?"

"Tell me," said Lane.

"It smashes what it can't grab!" Burke told him. "It attacks what'd be needed to organize a counterattack.

Factories, railheads, warehouses, communications — it grabs what it can and smashes what the invaded country would need to start to fight back with. That's strategy! The attackin' army makes the defendin' army helpless to fight back. Y'see?"

Lane shook his head.

"These Martians — these Gizmos," said Burke. "They're going to grab all the ground they can. With people scattered like they are nobody can fight 'em. They won't even know they're there! So the Gizmos take over all the ground outside the cities. Either they've done it or they're doing it! But the scientists who'd have to find out that there are

Gizmos and what they're like live in the cities. It's in the cities that there're chemicals and explosives and things to make flame throwers. It'd be in the cities that counterattacks would be figured out and started."

"Well?" asked Lane.

"The Gizmos got to hit the cities now," said Burke. "They got to smash our industrial potential." He savored that phrase with pleasure. "Yes, smash our industrial potential. Turn all the people into refugees. Fill the roads with folks running away from what they think is plague. Keep the government busy trying to organize the evacuation of the cities and trying to feed everybody and lick the plague at the same time, not guessing that what they're up against is invasion and war!" He said raptly: "They could smash civilization that way! The cities'd be empty and the highways would be full, and the factories'd stop and people'd die in their refugee camps and they'd break out and go somewhere else, and they'd die along the Toads, and they'd try to stay by themselves. They'd go back to bein' savages! And when it was all over and the Gizmos ruled the earth, they'd go whinin' through the forest, hunting people. Maybe they'd have kind of hunting preserves for people to live in and be hunted when the Martians felt like it. . . . Maybe they'd keep the empty cities for that, picking out and strangling the people that tried to hide in all empty buildings."

"That couldn't happen," Carol said curtly. "It's impossible!"

"It could happen," insisted Burke. "Some places-most places – it will. But there'll be some places where folks will find out how to defend themselves. Maybe it'll be only one place, but that'll be enough. There'll be a little town where folks are smart enough to make flame throwers and explosives, and they'll study the Gizmos scientific-like and learn how to kill 'em. And so they'll stand off the Martians – the Gizmos. And there'll come a time when they've learned plenty and can take the offensive. They'll go sweeping over the world, fighting the Martians on the land and on the sea, and kill 'em and kill 'em, getting even for the cities the Gizmos destroyed and the countries they murdered."

Professor Warren came bustling back to the car, carrying filled brown paper bags. She said crisply: "Dick, there's a hardware store right across the way. Can't you think of something that would be of use to us in a hardware store?"

Lane started. He got out of the car.

"I'll be right back," he said. "You have matches handy?"

"I bought cartons of them," said the professor. "And some things to make sandwiches with and lighter fluid for you. I was thinking of a possible gasoline torch. Have you money?"

He nodded and went across the street, pausing twice to let a car pass him. His eye caught the waverings of objects seen through the film of hot air next to the hot metal of a car hood and his blood stopped. Only thermal refraction, he decided, but startlingly like a Gizmo.

He went into the hardware store. It was cool, air conditioned. Normally he wouldn't have noticed even that.

He bought two gasoline blowtorches. The clerk was mildly surprised that he bought

two. On the way to the front of the store he saw a portable brazing torch—a tank of compressed gas with a spark maker near the tip. One had only to turn on the gas and strike a spark, and a blue-white flame leaped out. There was even a trigger by which the flame could be increased or diminished. He bought two of those, also. Then he invested in pocket lighters and more fuel for them.

"Is there something else?" asked the clerk.

"I'd like," said Lane dryly, "to buy some Very pistols, but I'm afraid you wouldn't have them on hand."

He went out. Somehow he had a feeling of extreme urgency. He hurried back across the street. It had the leisurely atmosphere of almost any small-town business district. The professor, looking embarrassed, put something out of sight when he appeared. Lane automatically chose Carol as the person to whom to show the mechanism of the brazing torches. Burke watched, but appeared absorbed in other thoughts.

"I see," said Carol. "It works like this."

She lighted and handled the torch with competence, and Lane approved of her warmly.

"I forgot," he said suddenly. "We need a garbage can."

He went back across the street. His unreasonable feeling of urgency made him short with the clerk who insisted on wrapping the can for him. Back at the car, he learned the professor had gone to another store. Carol said:

"She went to buy some pillowcases. When you mentioned a garbage can she realized that a pillowcase was the thing to use with it. She may get a sheet or two, besides."

Lane got into the driver's seat. All about him the people of Murfree went about their business with a comfortable lack of haste. The business district was contained in four blocks, the only part of the town without shade trees. Here the sunshine was already baking hot.

Sitting in the car, Lane felt what amounted to truculent uneasiness, although there had been no sign of Gizmos since the ear came over the pass from the next valley to the east. He waited with growing impatience for the professor's return. He wanted to get out of town, now. He'd gotten equipment with which they could defend themselves more adequately than before. He didn't want to be attacked—if they were to be attacked—in the middle of a town whose people would not know what was happening, but only that they died.

A dog trotted across the street, wisely watching the traffic and moving with that matter-of-fact acceptance of the ways of men which is so casual among dogs, and of which no other lower animal seems capable.

Carol followed his eyes. The dog paused in the middle of the street to let a car go by, and trotted the rest of the way. A man on the sidewalk spoke to the dog. It was one of those trivial incidents which seldom happen in a city where dogs have only their masters, no other human acquaintances, to greet them. The dog politely wagged his tail and trotted on.

Lane was still uneasy, but it was necessary to wait. He opened his mouth to speak—

The man on the sidewalk opened his mouth to gasp. He staggered. He beat the air

before him. His eyes went panicky; he choked, and fell to his knees. He jerked his head from side to side, his mouth open, fighting crazily against nothingness.

The Monster howled.

"Shut the windows," snapped Lane.

He was out of the car, rushing for the fallen man. Other people were hurrying to help. Somebody bent over the victim as he collapsed to the street. Lane thrust other figures aside. He snapped his lighter before the face of the semiconscious, panic-crazed man. There was a leaping, momentary, lambent flame. There was a horrible odor. A thin shrill shriek ended before it was well begun. The fallen man could fill his lungs. He did. He gasped for breath which now he could draw in.

The Monster howled again.

Lane said sharply. "I've seen this before. If it ever happens to you again, or to anybody else, make a flame. Wave it close! You'll be able to breathe! Pass it on!"

There was a small crowd of two dozen people, already gathered about the prostrate figure. Others were hastening to see what was the matter. Lane looked about him, and saw blank incomprehension on every face. The group was merely astonished and concerned over what they assumed to be a stroke of some sort, happening to a friend. To them, what Lane had done was completely without rational connection to the emergency it had met.

Then one of them gagged and struggled to breathe. He flailed his arms crazily. He fought against suffocation with stark terror in his eyes. Lane pushed toward that man and waved a flame before his face and behind him somebody else collapsed and there were startled cries. One of the figures hurrying to this spot stopped short and began to fight for breath. And the Monster screamed in the car, and tried to find a place to hide.

He found himself cursing at the things which now, very obviously, descended upon Murfree with lethal intentions. Flight was the only possible recourse, leaving these people to the fate the Gizmos would deal out. But it did not occur to him. Someone collapsed two yards away. The crowd was still bewildered, still unable to realize that danger existed for them as well as the two-no, three—no, four—struggling figures on the ground. Lane flung himself to his knees beside the nearest, and waved the lighter flame, and then his own breath stopped and he waved the small blaze before his own face. But there was another person down, a woman this time, and whinings were loud all about him.

He knew what would come, yet it was impossible not to try to do what he could. He was actually trying to fight a swarm of Gizmos with a pocket lighter. He swept his absurd little flame about and other small flames rose and tiny shrieks sounded.

Then the professor waded into the extremely small space of crazed confusion. Of all imaginable things, she flourished a pillowcase. By her expression she was holding her breath as she thrust the open end of the pillowslip down upon the contorted face of a fallen fat man, now turning purple. The pillowcase billowed. Something was caught in it, throbbing and fluttering horribly inside the cloth. The professor closed the open end of the bag, squeezing it with an air of intense satisfaction modified by the look of someone trying not to breathe. She held the trapped Gizmo triumphantly aloft. It made a

frantic whine.

Lane freed his own lips and nostrils of a Gizmo, by burning it. His eyebrows were singed by the flare-up, but the stuff he drew into his lungs was unbreathable. His senses reeled, yet he knew such hatred that it seemed he could go on forever, destroying Gizmos one by one, living on hatred only.

But of course it was not so.

Chapter 7

Blue-white flame flashed before Lane's face. There were small shriekings, and Carol gasped, "Back to the car! Aunt Ann has a prisoner! They'll follow – maybe – if we drag him out of town!"

She tugged at Lane's shoulder; again there was a flashing of bluish flame. She'd turned on a brazing torch and worked its spark igniter, and extended the flame to the limit. She cleared space before Lane's nostrils and lips. A brazing torch was supposed to burn for two hours on a tank of compressed gas, so she used it lavishly. Lane took it from her hands. There were human screams in the street now. A few people ran in panic, with no idea of what they fled from. Some few beat at emptiness, struggling to breathe. There were some already on the ground, strangling. And above there was now a loud whining sound, louder than the human voices. It was overhead, as loud as a storm wind, and of a quality that made the flesh crawl.

Lane fought his way to the car, leaning against violent wind-gusts. The Gizmos were forming themselves into that overwhelming whirling formation, that globular organization which they'd used before to carry dust as a weapon. Against it, Lane played the long flame like a scythe. Once, apparently, the blade of fire penetrated to one of the currents which had been visible in the dust clouds. Fire leaped along that flow.

This swarm was no dust cloud, but it was not quite invisible because the appearance of minor waverings produced by a single Gizmo was multiplied by their number. The tops of nearby houses became blurred. Into that squealing organization of spinning Gizmos, Lane probed fiercely, as whalers in ancient days probed with lances for the vital parts of whales. Once he hit what in a roll-tag dust cloud looked like a surface vein; then the dying Gizmos carried the pale thin flame for forty feet. Suddenly now he struck an artery, and the thinnest and palest of conflagrations leaped along that whining wind and flared up beyond where he could see it. But the swarm broke up.

A horse tied to a farm wagon reared and kicked and fell to the ground. Somebody ran crazily, whipping the air before his face. Someone else, on his knees, battled nothingness and toppled to the sidewalk.

"Open!" cried Carol fiercely. "Open the door!"

The professor was gasping for breath, an expression of complete revulsion on her face. The odor of burned Gizmos was awful. She still had the improbable, inflated, frantically throbbing pillowcase.

Carol beat upon the door of the car. Burke, inside it, tried with shaking hands to fill

the gas cup of a blowtorch. He heard nothing, he had closed and locked the car doors in terror. Lane struck the door with the tank of the brazing torch, and the glass cracked, held together only by its shatterproof constitution.

"Open up!" raged Lane, "Or I'll bum a way in!"

Burke jerked his head up and reached over, his fingers all thumbs. It was seconds before he could pull up the tiny knob which worked the door locks. Carol snatched the door wide.

"Down with the window, Carol," commanded the professor. "Dick, you're taking the wheel again. This idiot has cost lives!"

Lane crowded Burke out of the way and started the motor. The professor seated herself stolidly beside the other front door, holding the shrilling, fluttering pillowslip outside.

"Use the flame, Carol," she snapped. "The monsters are trying to tug my fingers loose. And—"

Her voice cut off. Carol carefully swung the flame that Lane had surrendered to her. She speared the place before her aunt's face. The professor breathed, squeamishly.

The car moved. It pulled out into the street as the Monster howled and howled.

"Now," called the professor over the dog's outcry, "now we make this creature squawk. Keep them from suffocating me, Carol."

She caught the neck of the pillowslip with her other hand. She twisted it, confining her prisoner more tightly still. And it uttered a frantic buzzing, whining sound which rose in pitch, and rose again.

"Hal" said the professor with confidence. "Now we can make time! I think they'll follow us!"

Lane swerved to avoid a stopped car. The traffic in the town had been considerable, but the tumult had lasted only minutes. There was a strong tendency for cars to stop to see what was the matter, rather than to flee the spot where other humans might be in trouble. But Lane was leading that trouble away—he hoped. Once, where double-parking blocked the road, he jolted up on a sidewalk and went around the jammed place. The car lurched down again to the pavement of the street

"Look behind," Lane ordered, "and see if people are still being attacked."

"One man's getting up," Carol reported, "with people running to him to ask why he fell. There's another man being helped up."

"How badly are things blurred?" demanded Lane. "If the whole swarm's following us. . ."

There was a pause. He drove at twenty miles an hour. Trees appeared ahead now; the business district was behind them.

"They're following," said Carol, composedly. "They aren't thick at the ground level. I can see clearly there. Most of them are higher. Housetops are fuzzy to look at. Probably most of them are higher still."

Trees closed over their heads. The car rolled on.

The professor asked, "Do you think I'd better squeeze this thing tighter, Dick? They seem to be with us. I can feel them touching my hands and wrists. And Carol's keeping a flame playing out the window that seems to be popping them off at a good rate. But they keep after the squalling thing in the pillowcase."

"Maybe I can speed up a trifle," said Lane. He did so. It did not occur to him to be astonished at his or the professor's composure. When one is busy, though, panic is rare. To be doing something about any situation is an excellent tranquilizer.

"Twenty-five miles an hour," said Lane a moment later. "We'll time their maximum flight-speed. When they stop fumbling at your hands, we'll have hit their speed limit."

The car left the green-shaded streets of Murfree. The cloudless sky and brilliant sunshine on the open fields was an almost dramatic change. Rolling valley and towering mountains made an amazing difference in the feel of the world. There were, now, small buff tings of breeze in the opened front windows of the car, which continued to gather speed.

"They're barely able to keep up, now," said the professor briskly. "How fast?"

"Thirty-two, no, thirty-three miles an hour."

The dusty car rattled less loudly and roared at a lessened tempo. The professor grunted: "Hm. They're back in force now. I don't like the feel of their fumbling at my hands. They are nasty creatures, Dick! Carol, is the main swarm still following?"

"They're still following," said Carol.

"Find out from Burke," Lane told her, "where we can stop their chasing us, without being near any town they can vent their spite on."

Burke had not spoken once since the others forced him to open the car door. He still trembled. Now he said, dry-throated: "I'm — sorry, Mr. Lane, that I didn't help much back yonder. But I didn't understand what you were plannin' to do."

"That's all right," said Lane, with politeness. "The Gizmos attacked Murfree. Professor Warren caught one, and we're making the others follow us because of its squealing. While they follow us, they can't kill people we've left behind. Now we want to know when to make them stop following us. Somewhere as far as we can get from a village, and, if possible, even a dwelling."

"Y-yes," said Burke. But he sat still, frozen. The Monster howled.

"Slap the Monster," said Lane irritably. "Make him shut up! And tell me where to dump our whining friends."

"I'll — try to think, Mr. Lane," said Burke.

Lane drove on. Clouds banked up ahead. There were flickerings of lightning.

"Looks like a thunderstorm," said Lane. "I might manage to drive through it. What do Gizmos do in thunderstorms?"

The professor chortled. "It should be a beautiful thing, Dick! A gas metabolism means ionized gases. But when you want to de-ionize a gas you bubble it through water! Rain ought to cut them down to size!"

Lane saw the gray front of falling water appear through a lower place in the westward rampart of the mountains. It advanced over other crests, presenting a long, drapery-like curtain of rain that moved into the valley. The highway forked, and Lane chose the turning that would take the car nearer to the rain.

"Maybe," said the professor hopefully, "if the rain lets us lose the others, we can keep this one."

"For a pet, no doubt," said Lane. "Is it in extra good voice just now, or are the ones behind us getting nearer?"

"Some," Carol told him, "are going on ahead."

"Which we can't allow," said Lane. "I don't know how smart they are, but if they're smart enough they might blind me with dust and get me ditched." He increased the car's speed a trifle and headed for the center of the storm area.

Presently there was a rush of wind, bearing dust in curling masses before it; then a gray curtain marched across the land. The car rumbled and rattled between ranks of pine trees which hid everything but the dark clouds overhead and the way ahead.

With a sudden rush the rain arrived. It pattered loudly on the car roof, and washed reddish streaks of wet dust down the back window, and the windshield wipers swept it from one side to the other. The professor cranked up the window beside her, cramping the open end of the pillowcase tightly into place. The inflated bag of cloth flapped and wobbled outside, becoming spotted by the rain. Carol turned off the brazing torch with which she'd been protecting her aunt against attack.

The sound of all the world changed as the car was closed. Rain fell in seeming streaks. The highway surface turned dark and glistening, and a two-inch mist seemed to carpet it. The woodland on either side became almost black. Thunder roared and lightning flashed, and the tires sang and the windshield wipers clicked and the air inside the car became dank and somehow fragrant with odors brought in by the wetness.

"We ought to bring our prisoner in," said the professor uncomfortably. "We can probably get it into the little garbage can you've provided. I've decided. Dick, that if I can take this to Washington and show it to some government biologists, there'll be no difficulty in having this affair taken care of."

"Perhaps," said Lane. "But I'm not worried too much about the Gizmos' health. Let's let it stay outside."

He went on. The road curved to the right and went steeply down, returning toward the broader bottom of the valley. There was rain in solid masses, falling on pastureland which now appeared.

They had ridden for a good two miles beyond the last patch of pine trees before, abruptly, they ran out of the rain. Then there was wet red earth on either hand. Ahead, the storm marched toward the north and east. They followed it. The world appeared exactly as usual. But the pillowcase, bouncing and flapping outside the front right-hand window, did not look as resilient as it had some time before.

"I wish you'd stop," said the professor uneasily, "and let me see what's happened to my specimen. It doesn't look as lively as it did. I do want to get this to Washington!"

Lane braked and stopped the car.

"Watch the landscape behind," he said briefly to Carol. "I'll watch ahead." As he heard the professor cranking down her window he reflected that Burke, who owned this car, was reduced to the status of a passenger without voice in the conduct of affairs. He said: "Burke?"

"Y-yes, Mr. Lane," said Burke, still shakily.

"Haven't heard from you in some time," said Lane. "What's your opinion of the state of things now? Still believe in a military organization of the Gizmos?"

"It looks mighty like it to me, sir," said Burke unsteadily. "They – wouldn't want a prisoner carried off that we could learn things from. It'd make 'em stop an attack to try to keep us from carryin' away a prisoner."

Professor Warren broke into lamentations. The pillowslip was soaked by rain; the only dry spots were the places where it had been clamped by the window. Now, inside the car, the pillowslip was limp. It was not totally empty; the wet cloth still contained bubbles. None of them, however, was big enough to be a Gizmo.

"It's dead!" lamented the professor. "And it could have solved everything! We'll have to catch another!"

She opened the neck of the sack. An intolerable odor of carrion came out. She hastily threw the pillowcase out of the window and panted for clean air. Lane put the car into gear and went on.

For almost an hour there was no tangible evidence that Gizmos existed anywhere but in the area they had left, though Lane knew better. Then they came to a place where they saw four dead cattle on a hillside. The animals were definitely dead, not peacefully reclining and chewing the cud. But that was no positive sign of Gizmos. Lane stopped the car and cut off the motor. He listened. The universe was without sound. No insects. No bird songs. He started the motor once more.

"Not proven," he said wryly, "but I'd bet that they're either here or they have been. And it ought to take a lot of Gizmos to kill all the things that chirp and twitter."

Professor Warren stared at him as if appalled at the idea. And it was a startling thing, once one considered it. Any insect-eating bird captures bugs by hundreds or thousands every day, and there is no acre of open ground without its numerous feathered foragers. Woodlands shelter many more. Swifts and swallows carry on their hunting until late in the twilight, and bats carry on through the dark. It's hard to realize the number of insects devoured in one acre in one day, and yet the number of insects is not diminished. To depopulate a field of its insect inhabitants is incredible destruction. To destroy also its birds, its field mice, its rabbits, its moles . . .

"I didn't realize, Dick," said the professor querulously, "how many Gizmos there must have been to destroy even the gnats where we had our trailer. Those dust spheres must have had hundreds of thousands of Gizmos in them. Altogether there must be – it is inconceivable how many there must be! And any one of them can kill a human being. Dick, this is a serious business."

"I've been suspecting it for some time," said Lane dryly, "even if I don't agree that they are Martians."

Burke spoke with a sudden return to his former manner of complete confidence and zest.

"Yes, sir! Those Gizmos are Martians, or Jupiterians, or something from space. It stands to reason they don't belong on Earth! And they're smart as men. Maybe there was gas-creatures on Earth before they came, like there'd be meat-creatures in the woods on Jupiter or Mars if we went there. But these Gizmos come from off of Earth. They're smart. They've got a civilization, they've got military tactics, they've got over-all strategy. They got a general plan for conquerin' Earth, and it looks bad."

"I'll agree that it looks bad," said Lane. "How bad I don't know. But if they can appear in swarms everywhere, it certainly doesn't look good!"

The car now moved in a generally northeast direction between lines of green-clad mountains. It had left the thunderstorm far behind. It went along a gravel-surfaced road between strong, tight fences with here and there a farmhouse. Several times they saw cattle alive. Once more Lane stopped the car and the motor, to listen. The sounds of the countryside were perfectly commonplace. Birds flew up from the top strands of the wire fences as the car came near.

"There are birds and bugs again around here," said Lane.

"And Gizmos," said Carol quietly.

She pointed. A living partridge flapped and flailed upon the ground. As they watched, it lay still. And Lane, coldly searching, saw grass beyond it quiver slightly, as if there were a bubble of heated gases above the dying bird. He started the motor again.

The death of that particular partridge was an extremely minor episode in the developing state of things. There had been other incidents which were equally indicative of something startlingly unusual.

In a backwoods settlement in Alabama, a colored farmer had secured an herb doctor to put an end to an epidemic among his chickens. Herb doctor is the polite term used by witch doctors when they advertise their services in newspapers. It is commonly believed that they can relieve all situations not caused by a judge or a grand jury. At midnight of the night before, this herb doctor had burned a particularly offensive mess of feathers, roots, gums, dusts, and grisly oddments within the affected chicken house. As it burned, the herb doctor recited mysterious words learned by rote and without individual meaning. Actually they came from the Gulf of Guinea by way of some generations of thaumaturgists, and their original significance was bloodcurdling. A truly horrible reek came out of the musky chicken house. A completely offensive aroma stayed behind. The herb doctor came out of the structure and, coughing, said that thereafter the farmer's chickens would be completely safe in their shelter.

And they were. The herb doctor had cast a spell to drive away the spirits, the demons, the invisible fiends who caused healthy chickens to be found dead under their roosts each morning. His spells and the fumigation left the living fowl stupefied where they roosted, but his professional assurance was well-founded. Those chickens were now safe against Gizmos. They and their dwelling stank of odors even Gizmos disliked. So the herb doctor had done an efficient and highly professional job of chasing the Gizmos.

There were other irrelevant happenings. There was a sufferer from asthma in Tarzana,

California, who waked in the night with a familiar sensation of suffocation, his breath cut off. He felt the wild terror which suffocation produces, but he was more or less accustomed to it. If he heard a thin whining in his ears, he paid no attention. This was a very bad attack. But instead of futile beatings at the air before him, he groped beside his bed as his senses reeled. He had readied a tiny glass capsule placed upon a clean handkerchief. He crushed the capsule and thrust the handkerchief to his face. The pungent smell of amyl nitrate filled the air. Then he could breathe again. There was no gradual improvement in his breathing, as usually happened. One instant he was suffocating, the next instant he was breathing perfectly. The smell of amyl nitrate was objectionably strong. He lay back, wide awake but reassured. His ears rang and his heart pounded from his fright, but he was accustomed to attacks of asthma.

He did not hear a high-pitched whine rise in tone until it was an infinitesimal shriek. It did not occur to him that a Gizmo had shared the fumes of amyl nitrate with him; he had never heard of Gizmos. He probably did not even know that amyl nitrate in the least possible concentration will make an internal-combustion engine backfire itself to destruction. Certainly he did not reason that an entity of gas, with a gas metabolism, would react to the smell of amyl nitrate as a human would react to a bath in nitric acid.

The asthmatic man dozed off presently, very grateful that so severe an asthmatic attack had been so brief.

Such incidents were not numerous. It was typical of the over-all situation, however, that grim occurrences such as the fate of the village of Serenity and slaughterings of domestic animals, were as consistently misunderstood as affairs connected with herb doctors and attacks of "asthma."

There had been migrations from the forests in Maine and Minnesota and Georgia and Oregon – that is, migrations that had been observed as they took place. Elsewhere, people in innumerable places had seen foxes slinking harriedly through fields of soy beans, and deer warily following each other in places where deer had not been seen in years. There can be no question but that many wild creatures fled from the forests to human-occupied land as if choosing a peril they knew – men – rather than invisible horrors which whined in the wilderness.

And at about the time that Lane drove away from a newly murdered partridge, some thirty miles or so from Murfree, in western Virginia, there was a considerable group of human beings in Minnesota surveying the area the refugee animals occupied.

The news of the exodus had traveled far, long before dawn. There were farmers whose fields had been uninvaded, and there were those whose crops were partly but not wholly ravaged, and some who had found bears in their barnyards that morning. They had come to where county agents were gathering to confer on the problem of what could be done. Valuable crops were endangered by rabbits and woods-mice and deer and groundhogs and hordes of every kind of herbivorous animal. There were fish and game officials, and representatives of the SPCA. There was even a Department of Agriculture man, roused in his hotel room and driven eighty miles to arrive at dawn. He faced a kind of emergency even the Department had never had dumped in its lap before. And of course there were reporters. Most of them were for local newspapers, but there were one or two press association men, come in hope of a news story.

It was a somehow appalling spectacle in the early light. There was a giant cornfield, with green, straight, leafy stalks rising well over a man's height in mathematically exact furrows which seemed to reach to the horizon. There was a road blocked to traffic by a state policeman's car parked crosswise. Behind this barrier there were other cars, on the road and off it, with still other cars arriving and people moving forward from them on foot. News of the animal migration had traveled fast.

And there were animals in the com. Rabbits nibbled, and groundhogs gorged, and bears waddled recklessly among the stalks, stripping off half-ripe ears to feast on. Timid deer surged here and there, sometimes brave enough to crop the tenderer corn-leaves, but much more often driven in small bands of spasms of terror in which they knocked down and trampled dozens of times as much as they could have consumed. Here a fox could be seen, dining daintily off something small and bloody, while others of its victim's kind eddied and hopped within yards. Skunks moved irritably in the press, their plumelike tails already warning of tempers frayed by crowding.

There were noises in the cornfield – animal noises. There were panics and frights and moments of precarious calm at one spot or another. But the cornstalks went down, and the farmer whose crop was vanishing before his eyes talked desperately with the county agents and fish and game officials and the representative of the Department of Agriculture. His family had been evacuated from the farmhouse far up the road. Stock in the barn and barnyard was at the mercy of predators who moved about in bewilderment and suspicion at the quantity of prey about. His hens were subject to weasels. And the tassels of his very fine corn crop dipped and dropped, and there was a steady sound of munching, and small squealings, and gruntings, and hoarse noises which no animals should have made at all.

There was no action. There was only steady, progressive destruction. The humans, both official observers and gaping curiosity seekers, could do nothing but stare. They could say nothing to each other except more or less varied expressions of amazement, surprise, and bewilderment. When the change came, the humans did not notice it at first. It did not begin where there were people. Perhaps only a small part of the animal horde heard the first thin whinings.

The killings of the animals began three-quarters of a mile from the parked state police car. It began in a clump of half a dozen deer, who abruptly went mad with desperation and charged crazily through the crowded rows of corn. They carried vicious, high-pitched whinings with them. Then a bear reared up and fought nothingness. More whinings came, and rabbits kicked convulsively, and skunks used their weapons of defense, and foxes snapped and gave battle to unseen things, and field mice and ground squirrels tried to squeak as they strangled, and even weasels rolled over and over with their demoniac fangs rending only air.

The humans realized what threatened when a spitting fury – a wildcat – plunged blindly through their midst, giving battle to emptiness. Then rabbits hopped among the cars and onlookers, and died in convulsions. Foxes ran blindly among the people, biting furiously at invisible things, and then they collapsed and died as the humans scattered.

The people did not hear the whinings which were all about them. The animals made a dismal, widespread din of despair and defiance and utterly desperate ferocity. But the

people made an uproar, too. The congregation of onlookers was instantly a confusion of shouting, struggling participants in the panic. They fled to their own cars, or fought to get into any other they could reach.

They cranked up windows and started motors, and there was immediately a chaos of snarled traffic. Fenders clashed. Horns bellowed. Then cars deserted the roadway and crashed through fences and cut wide swathes in the corn, to get around the jam.

In minutes there were only frantic, fugitive dust streaks racing away at top speed, except that there were some stalled cars, and some with tangled bumpers. Their owners struggled to escape by riding upon any one which managed to get into motion.

In half an hour, the press association men were indignantly swearing at staff men in the cities. They'd gotten to the nearest telephones to phone in their stories. The office men regarded the subject of the tales as freak stuff, of no earth-shaking importance. The scale of the phoned narratives made them something else, but by precedent such accounts should later be discredited or at the least scaled down to the possible. But the field men furiously insisted that animal husbandry departments of governments and colleges be queried about this massive outbreak of an animal epidemic. Department of Agriculture offices must be questioned on crop damage. Game officials must be hounded into committing themselves on the danger to human beings from carnivores like wildcats and bears which abandoned their natural haunts. Above all, health departments must be urged into statements on the danger of this animal plague to humans.

As the press association reporters squabbled with skeptical office men, undeniable cases of deaths among the onlookers came to them. A state policeman brought out bodies. Later he would feel cold chills down his back when he realized the chances he'd taken. People who'd gone to see an incredible thing they'd heard about on a party-line phone had died of their curiosity. Their faces were purple and their tongues protruded: they had suffocated.

This was the thing which forced belief. While doctors tried to establish some physical condition which would have caused human beings to suffocate of themselves — because there was no mark of exterior violence on any of the victims — the press association wires began to hum with the story. Helicopters took off with photographers to snap the death scene from the air. Health department emergency crews went racing to find out what had really happened. They would wear respirators and carry elaborate equipment for the securing of biological specimens for research upon the germ or virus responsible for the deaths. The mass of dead animal bodies called for the dispatch of bulldozers to cover up the bodies lest the contagion spread.

But the significance of this happening in Minnesota, to Lane and Professor Warren and Carol in Virginia, was mostly in the lurid headlines it produced. They saw the headlines on a rack outside a drugstore. Lane swerved into a filling station to fill up the car's tank, and while the pump clattered he went across the street and bought papers.

"I'm going to telephone again," said Professor Warren desperately, when she'd read the account and seen the pictures. "Those men who run the bulldozers to cover up the carcasses, and those who look for bacteriological material — they'll disturb the Gizmos at their feeding, as you did those about the dead rabbits. They'll be angered and attack the men. Somehow I've got to make somebody see sense. Sending unwarned men to bury

those animals is murder."

Lane grimaced. Something had drawn his eyes to a distant mountainside, clearly visible from this place on the edge of this small town. He watched the mountainside. There was a vague blurring of the details of the forest on the mountain. The blurring was greatest in the center of a roughly spherical area. It moved, slowly but definitely, far away.

"I'm afraid," said Lane detachedly, "that their danger is almost unimportant compared to the danger to the rest of us. Look there!"

He pointed. Carol drew in her breath, sharply. The professor looked, and tears of rage and frustration came into her eyes.

"Yes, Mr. Lane," said Burke, with a complacent and yet uneasy satisfaction. "Everybody's in plenty of danger. These here Martians or Jupiterians or whatever, are carryin' out a first-class military plan! That thing on the mountainside is a corps of Gizmos, movin' to get ready for G-day – Gizmo day. That's going to be something, when it comes!"

Chapter 8

The Gizmos did not attack. On the morning Lane spotted a mass formation of them in motion down a mountain chain, radar throughout the United States reported an unprecedented number of slow-moving blips which did not represent aircraft. They were then explained as areas of extra-high ionization in the atmosphere. And this explanation was quite accurate so far as it went, but like a deplorable number of scientific explanations it did not go far enough. It described the proximate cause of an observed phenomenon and blandly stopped there. There was something more than a condition of ionization involved.

This morning, areas of ionization were numerous and many were extraordinarily large. For a time, there was some concern lest they interfere with regular radar operation. But the Gizmo masses moved at a maximum speed of a little over thirty miles an hour, plus or minus the pull of the wind where they were. A moment's inspection could distinguish between such a blip on a radar screen and a spot made by a fast-moving plane.

But there were more than five hundred such blips on screens at one time, counting all radar stations. Nobody can guess how many separate groups were involved, though assuredly the total was high in the thousands. Certainly there were massings of Gizmos all over the nation; rather, there was distribution of masses of Gizmos everywhere. But there was still no association of such radar phenomena with outbreaks of plague among domestic and wild animals, the death of the village of Serenity, the slaughter of pets nearly everywhere, and such oddities as an unusual asthmatic attack experienced by a man in Tarzana, California.

The blips made no sort of sense, even when correlated with each other. Had they been spotted in strategic fashion – concentrated at key railroad junction cities, near industrial centers, even near the larger centers of human population – somebody would have

suspected a military purpose. Invasion would have seemed credible, though Gizmos themselves were still unknown. But the massing of Gizmos as it appeared on radar screens, with a pattern changing frequently through the day, did not fit into any specific design, and so was not accorded any serious attention.

Near noon, Lane stopped at a country store and put through a call to the friend who headed the research department of a pharmaceutical house. He put it on record that if men did seek bacteriological specimens or move bulldozers to cover up the multitude of dead animals in Minnesota, some of them would fall victims to a supposed plague. He observed that some of those who wore respirators – biologists seeking tissue specimens – would be victims of the death they tried to interpret. But he prophesied that no one would be attacked by the plague if he held a lighted cigar or cigarette in his mouth.

It was a highly reasonable prophecy, but he did not dare say more. After all, less than twenty-four hours had passed since his own first contact with Gizmos, and the actual history of those hours was too fantastic to be believed.

After the phone call, Lane headed east. They traveled a graveled highway, from which the world looked utterly commonplace and comfortable. They saw birds fly up from the roadside, cattle grazing tranquilly on the rolling fields. There were buzzards soaring lazily and effortlessly against the blue.

He looked at Carol, beside him on the front seat, and she smiled at him without words. He looked in the back-view mirror and saw the professor leaning back in her corner, her eyes closed wearily. He saw that Burke's lips were pursed together and his expression was one of meditation.

"Do you," asked Lane of Carol, "do you really believe that all this is true?"

"I was just doubting it," admitted Carol, "but your eyebrows are singed, and there's a burned place on your shirt." She smiled again, wryly.

"Mr. Burke thinks we may be lower animals, compared to Gizmos."

Lane grimaced. "Burke intends to live out an imaginative novel of which he is to be the hero. Of course the hero of a novel never gets killed. I suspect Burke is casting himself as a sort of dragon slayer who'll lead devoted, admiring followers to victory against the whole tribe of Gizmos." He raised his voice: "Burke?"

"Yes?"

"You've been thinking hard. What's turned up in your mind?"

Burke said zestfully: "I don't know where the Gizmos are goin' to start, but I figure it'll be all of a sudden. It'll be a surprise attack, smotherin' the cities with rollin' masses of Gizmos that'll sweep in and scatter and swarm into the houses, and folks won't know what's happening till they're massacred."

"You suggest," asked Lane mildly, "that the human race will be wiped out?"

"Mighty near," said Burke with vast confidence. "Mighty near! But there'll be some that'll live, and when the Gizmos come after 'em they'll have machine guns shooting fire, and they'll spray 'em with incendiary bombs and flame throwers." He grinned. "They'll give fireworks to the kids to kill Gizmos with! They'll make out all right."

Lane said to Carol: "Fireworks aren't a bad idea for emergencies. But we need

something even better."

"You don't think —" Carol hesitated. "You don't think it will be too bad?"

"It's already too bad," said Lane. "For even one human being to be killed by those beasts — for even one good hunting-dog to be killed to make carrion they'll feed on is intolerable."

The professor spoke, her eyes still closed. "The problem is to find their former place in an ecological system we never guessed at, and then find out what happened to it. Obviously, they are natives of Earth."

"Dick thinks they're the originals of pagan gods," Carol said.

The professor opened her eyes. "It's very likely. Remember, Carol, that the myths of Greece and Rome were cleaned up before they were taught you as a dainty cultural subject! The old pagan gods were just as foul as the Gizmos. They're very likely their ancestors!"

The car rolled on. It was one of forty or fifty-odd million motor vehicles in the United States. This not being a weekend, the majority of them remained at home, but many trucks used the highways, singly or in pairs or in long strings of grumbling might. But where Lane drove there appeared ahead a long trailer-truck backing across the highway to make a turn toward them. Lane slowed. With much effort, the truck managed to make the turn with the aid of a road leading toward a farmhouse. The truck came rumbling back toward Lane. It passed him, the driver waving some cryptic warning.

The meaning of the signal became clear when, just beyond the truck's turning place, there appeared a barrier in the road. There was a state police officer on guard, and he came to the car as Lane braked to a stop.

"The road's closed," he explained. "There's a bad smashup down in the hollow yonder. A big trailer ran off the road, banged into trees, and blocked the way. Then another one ran into it. You'll have to go back and take another road. Where are you headed?"

"North," said Lane. "New Jersey."

The officer shook his head.

"Sixty's blocked too. Another big smashup. You'd better go back through Clifton Forge and take Two-twenty. You ought to do all right that way."

"Thanks," said Lane. He turned to back into the farm-road to make his turn as the truck had done. Then he culled, "Aren't there more accidents than usual today?"

The cop said harassedly: "It's the worst day I ever heard of! There've been six bad ones in this county! Worse still, deeper in the mountains. It's as if everybody driving is drunk!"

The professor put her head out of a back window. "Anybody killed yonder?"

The cop spread out his hands. "Everybody," he said. Then he added, "And somebody came by and got out of his car to try to help. And he had a heart attack and died, too."

Lane looked wryly at the professor. Then he shrugged.

"Look!" he said curtly. "We were in Murfree this morning when a funny thing happened. A man dropped down on the street, strangling. It looked like a heart attack, but it wasn't. Somebody rushed over and waved a burning cigarette lighter before his face. Instantly the choking man could breathe. While that was happening, three or four other people began to choke. The man, whoever it was, cured them the same way. He said that any time such a thing happened, flames would stop the choking, and it did, in Murfree. Something strange is causing what looks like heart attacks. Flames near your face stop them. Try it. The man said nobody ever gets an attack like that if he's smoking, either. He said to pass the word along."

The state cop looked unbelieving, but he nodded. Lane gunned the motor. When he was headed back down the road along which he had come, the professor said bitterly: "He didn't believe a word! And I'm guessing at something more ridiculous still!"

Lane said, "Burke, it looks like you read it wrong. The Gizmos aren't attacking cities. Not yet. They're wrecking trucks and cars, and killing people who get out to help."

Burke's expression was at once scared and triumphant.

"They're smashing communications," he said, "just as I told you. They'll block all the roads with wrecks so the people in the cities can't take to their cars. They'll have to stay right where they're helpless."

Lane nodded gravely, but he didn't believe it. In some ways the Gizmos acted with remarkable intelligence. To round up small animals like rabbits, for example, and kill them only when a considerable number were gathered in a small place, was intelligent behavior. It brought a large store of food to a small area, where many gas-creatures could feed to repletion. More, the area swept clean of game would not remain empty. Other animals would move in, to be rounded up and slaughtered in their turn. Lane began to entertain a suspicion that the Gizmos' touches upon the three of them outside the trailer might not have been deliberate study. It could have been merely an attempt to round them up, according to Gizmo custom.

But any way you looked at it, such practices were intelligent in their own frame of reference. If Gizmos were free to choose less effective stratagems for their purposes, then to choose the best was intellect, and men had rivals — or superiors — in the Gizmo race. But if Gizmos knew these devices only by instinct, they could not act otherwise.

But in any case there is a vast difference between a beast and a man, and Lane had a stubborn streak. He did not want to admit that anything not human could be his equal as a human. The appalling thing about a ghost or devil, after all, is revolt against the notion that something which is not a man can think. So Lane bogged down on Burke's basic assumption that Gizmos were thinking beings.

"I tell you, Mr. Lane," said Burke, with profound gravity and shining eyes, "we better make some better plans than you've got! You don't want to go to New Jersey! Pennsylvania's the place for us! Find us a little town with some coal mines we can prepare for the women and children to stay safe in, and you and I can teach the men how to fight Gizmos. We can hold out forever!"

Lane grunted. "I believe it's military theory that a strong offensive is the best defense. If you want to go to Pennsylvania, I'll find an airport or a railroad station and we'll say good-by."

Burke squirmed. "But I need you to help train the men to fight Gizmos! And I need Professor Warren and Miss Carol, too! You got to help me train the folks to stay alive through what's coming! You and me and the ladies can fix up a town so it can defend itself!"

Lane felt amusement. To Burke, the most dramatic and therefore the most fascinating thing imaginable would be a small town filled with embattled heroes, defying a continent of Gizmos, imagining himself as the leader of the valiant fighting men; Burke was fascinated by such superb drama. He would try ineptly to realize it without ever suspecting that anything could be more important.

"I'm afraid," said Lane with polite regret, "that we can't join you. We have the answers to some questions nobody is ready to ask yet. We have to carry on until somebody is desperate enough to accept what we want to give them."

"But-"

"Stay with us," said Lane, "and we'll give you all the information we have and get. But we'll leave you whenever you say."

Near Tacoma, Washington, a diesel trailer-truck with a total weight of thirty-odd tons was passed by another truck going in the opposite direction. The driver of the thirty-ton truck was madly fighting nothingness in his cab, ignoring the wheel. The other truck barely got by him before the undirected thirty-tonner crashed across a sidewalk and through a plank fence and hurtled into an excavation for the foundation of a building. No one was hurt – not even the driver. At least, there was not a scratch on him. But he was dead.

Outside of Detroit, a convoy of fourteen new cars, each with its own driver, moved sedately along. The driver of the lead car in the convoy died, and his car went off the road. Ten of the thirteen other drivers lost control of their slowly-moving cars, too. They crashed. At so conservative a speed, none of the cars was badly damaged, but all the drivers perished seemingly from heart attacks or shock at sight of their dead friends.

In Albuquerque, New Mexico, a freak windstorm was credited with a dust heap across a heavily traveled road, in which cars could be seen with their tops barely breaking the surface. The cars were empty of humans, who had struggled out of the windows when the cars stopped. But none of them escaped. They were found in the dust pile, suffocated.

An inter-city bus pulled into its terminal in Atlanta, Georgia, with a load of hysterical living passengers and three apparently dead men in the back. The three had collapsed, one after another, following a stop by the bus driver to survey a three-car wreck. Passengers had opened windows to look out. Within minutes, one passenger flailed his arms wildly, his face grew purple, and he fell, unconscious. Other passengers tried to be helpful, but it was evident a doctor was needed. The bus driver pushed his vehicle to its topmost speed, to get his stricken passenger to medical care. But before he reached help, two other passengers went into comas after passing through the same symptoms. The rest of the bus occupants were nearly out of control when the bus reached its terminal, where doctors were available.

By midday the reported number of traffic deaths in the United States was put at six

hundred, which was par for a long holiday weekend, but not for a midweek forenoon. It was considered very probable that the tally was far from complete. When Lane drove into Clifton Forge for the second time and stopped the car at a restaurant, there was a considerable amount of speculation on the increasing traffic accidents on the radio news broadcasts.

Lane listened grimly, at the restaurant table. There was a phone booth in the restaurant, and while the others ordered their meals, he called again to New Jersey, to the Diebert Pharmaceutical Company, Inc. His friend, the research director, was not available.

"I want to leave a message," said Lane. "This is important. Write it down word for word, please. This is the message. 'No excess single-car accidents happened while the driver was smoking.' It's from Dick Lane. Can you read it back?" He listened. "Right. It's important!"

He went back to the table. He told the professor what he'd done.

"That's just what I should have done!" she explained. "Instead of letting that idiot back at the University think I was a practical joker, I should have made predictions. But I didn't know what to predict."

"You could ask for checking observations," suggested Lane. "Wire to any biologists you know that sportsmen report unusual numbers of game animals found dead. Buzzards are not touching what would ordinarily be most attractive food to them. Say there appears to be a correlation of high mortality in game and a refusal of buzzards to approach bait, all in the same areas. Ask them to verify, and suggest an answer. Have 'em send their answers to my friend, since we're headed for his laboratory."

The professor's expression grew bitter. "I should have realized it," she protested. "I've been saying for years that your typical scientist sees and hears no theory but his own, but he speaks his theory to distraction! I've been wanting to tell people what I've found out, when what they want to do is tell me! Oh, Dick, I'm afraid I'm a typical scientist! I'll make out a list of people to wire!"

She began to scribble names on the back of a menu, eating abstractedly when her food came.

Carol smiled at her, and then met Lane's eyes. But Burke said uneasily: "I don't get that, Mr. Lane. What's smoking got to do with automobile drivers? And what have dead animals got to do with it?"

Lane explained that if a flame would destroy a Gizmo, a glowing coal should at least discourage one. The lighted end of a cigar or cigarette being smoked would project into the space a Gizmo must occupy while strangling someone. Hence it would be nearly impossible for a Gizmo to suffocate a man who happened to be smoking.

Burke said, relieved, "I see! That's important."

"Dick," said Carol hesitantly, "wouldn't an increase in Gizmo food supply increase the number of Gizmos?"

"Probably," he agreed. "Fish and game outfits work as hard at keeping up the food supply for wild life as at anything else."

Carol hesitated, as Burke got up and went over to the cashier's desk of the restaurant.

Then she said diffidently: "I'm wondering . . . I've read about a species of parrot in Australia that somehow developed the habit of pecking at sheep's backs until they got through to the sheep's kidneys, which they ate, though their normal food was merely what parrots usually eat. They killed thousands of sheep."

Lane nodded again. Professor Warren looked at her niece with a sudden expectant intentness.

"What's up, Carol?" she demanded.

"I've been wondering," said Carol, looking from her aunt to Lane, "if that species of parrot multiplied very fast when it found out the unlimited supply of food it could get by killing sheep."

"Out of the mouths of babes," exulted the professor. "She's got the answer, Dick! No physical mutation, only an instinctual one! The parrots needed no new equipment. Any parrot could do the same, but only those parrots did, so they multiplied out of all reason, and killed sheep out of all conscience. They had to be wiped out! That's the mechanism by which the Gizmos have appeared, Dick. Carol, you've solved the problem of the ecological imbalance which has made the Gizmos what they are."

Her gaze was warmly triumphant, bent upon Carol. But Carol looked uncertainly to Lane for approval. He grinned at her.

"Smart girl!" he said. "Now figure out some more!"

She flushed. Burke came back with his pockets stuffed with cigars. He sat down at the table again.

"I got some cigars," he said. "You'll find me puffing pretty steady from now on. You better get yourself some too, Mr. Lane. I don't know what the ladies'll do, but if they stay close to us, and we keep puffing —"

"I have a hope in that line," the professor said darkly, "that may prove even more repugnant. But right now I gloat over what Carol has suggested. Do you see the picture, Dick? The Gizmos were a foetiverous race of foul descent, consuming bad smells. Then one of them, undoubtedly, found out that the process by which they drew evil smells out of carrion could be used to draw foul breath out of an animal's lungs, and that the animal would die immediately, when an enterprising Gizmo could continue happily to feed. It is an exact parallel to a parrot's discovering that he could kill a sheep and have a meal. The kidney-eating parrots increased to a multitude; the strangling Gizmos have multiplied into hordes. How or why they contrived their dust clouds I do not know, but from the tales of jinn traveling in clouds like theirs, it is not a novelty to their kind."

Carol said gently: "But I didn't say all that, Aunt Ann!"

"It was all implicit in what you did say. Dick, can we send my telegrams now?"

They sent the professor's telegrams and headed back toward Covington. Highway 220 was not far from Clifton Forge. They had passed over this road only a couple of hours earlier, but much had happened in that interval. There was a station wagon against a tree beside the road, stalled by an impact not even great enough to dent its bumper. Its windows were open, but no one could be seen inside. Lane stopped.

"There are blurrings," he said grimly. "Give me one of the torches, Carol. We might as well try out our armory again."

She gave him a blowtorch which had not been used there. It was filled, and its pressure pump worked, but it was not lighted. He checked it and got out of the car, and walked toward the stalled station wagon.

There were very familiar sounds in the air about him. He plucked out his cigarette lighter and snapped it alight, and out again. His breath cut off. Something vicious whined.

He burned the thing with the flame of his lighter. There was a tiny shriek and he grimaced at the smell. He went on, and looked through the car window. He swore, and raised the torch, turning it on. This torch burned gasoline. A small air-pump built up pressure in its tank, which would feed the fluid through a preheated burning tube. But it was not preheated now, so a fine thin stream of gasoline sprayed out for several feet. Most of it evaporated before it touched the ground. Lane snapped his lighter under the near end of the stream.

There was a whoosh and an uprush of fire. He had touched off not only the liquid gasoline, but the vapor of that which had evaporated. There was a stirring of air as invisible things fled away, with thin shrieks.

He opened the station wagon door and made sure of what had happened. He made flashes within, clearing it of Gizmos. He closed the car windows and felt fury as he started heavily back to the car. Halfway there, he heard sounds about him again. He stood still, holding his breath. He felt fumbings all over his body before he sprayed gasoline again and again set it off. There was a flicker of unbearable heat and a dull booming sound, and he stumbled out of the vitiated air and caught a deep breath of something breathable while the high-pitched small screams still sounded.

He reached the car. Burke stared at him, puffing furiously upon a cigar, his face very pale. Carol said anxiously: "Dick! What was it? Were they — " "Yes," said Lane thickly. "All dead. I won't tell you any more."

He climbed into the driver's seat and drove away, his face a mask of fury, his hands trembling.

"You killed a lot of them," said the professor, forlorn because she could offer no other comfort. "I should have tried to catch one. But you killed a great many. I saw them flare up."

"I didn't kill enough," said Lane.

Within a mile there was another wreck. Before he turned north he had passed four more.

It was well into the afternoon before he reached Hot Springs. The highway had been a shambles all the way. On the outskirts of Hot Springs there was a barrier across the highway. Men with shotguns and improvised surgeon's masks waved him to a halt.

"No traffic!" called one of them from a safe distance. "Quarantine! You can't come through! We're keeping the plague out of this town! Go back!"

Reaction of the general public and the authorities was absolutely rational, even when it led to moderate-sized towns blocking themselves off from the rest of the world as defense against a nonexistent contagion. For months it had been known that something was killing game. It was guessed to be a disease. It seemed reasonable that the "disease" might spread to domestic animals: dead pets and cattle suggested that it had. In the past, at least in the case of spotted fever, an animal disease had gone on to attack human beings. So as a matter of routine there had been research on the problem. This was wholly rational, as was the concentration of research upon disease.

By definition a Gizmo would be in the class of things like an *ignis fatuus*—a will-o'-the-wisp. The idea of a Gizmo was akin to the idea of a ghost or a devil or any evil spirit. Nobody seriously engaged in research on a supposed disease which might be important in animal husbandry would be apt to suspect that a spook might be more deadly than a germ.

Especially, such a thought would not occur at the beginning of real apprehension. The tragedy of the village of Serenity was not yet twenty-four hours old. The attack on Murfree was still hopeless confusion in the minds of those who had witnessed it. Migrations of animals from the forests had only recently been reported, and the death of rounded-up furry fugitives in Minnesota had happened this same day. Now the highways were dotted with wrecks: now cattle were found dead in their pastures and on the open range: now cats and dogs were found suffocated. It was perfectly sane and reasonable that newly disturbed authorities should reason as the fish and game officials had reasoned before. They looked for a plague, the more plausibly because Gizmo swarms in different localities made Gizmo-caused deaths occur in patterns strikingly like contagion from sporadic cases of infection. The reaction of people everywhere was absolutely rational.

Cursing, Lane backed the car and turned it away from the barricade outside Hot Springs. Presently he found a highway to the left, toward the east, and turned into it. He passed hills and hollows and fields and cozy farmhouses. He chose his turnings wisely, and presently he was back on Route Two-twenty on the near side of the tiny Hot Springs settlement. In the long detour he saw no sign of any unusual happening.

Beyond Hot Springs he turned in at a gas pump in the hamlet of McClurg. He had ideas, born of the barricade and the shotguns, that he should not let his fuel supply get too low.

Nobody came to attend the pump. He stopped the motor and got out of the car. There was a sign: Hens for Sale. Fresh Eggs. Vegetables. The gas pump stood in front of a dingy small store. Still nobody came to wait on him. He listened. There was a horrendous squawking of chickens somewhere behind the store. Sounds of panic among chickens do not necessarily mean anything at all, but Lane said over his shoulder: "I'm going to see what's the matter."

He went around to the back of the store. There was a chicken house there, of that modern variety which includes a fowl-run under its roof. This allows electric lights to delude the chickens into getting up in the middle of the night to eat an extra meal and so be inspired to lay more eggs. Behind the coarse wire of its front there was a hysterical tumult. Lane thought he caught the sound of whinings in the uproar.

He called back to the car:

"Looks bad! Get set!"

He moved forward. Chickens fluttered in a snowy confusion inside. The chicken wire bulged where they threw themselves against it. A man shouted angrily at them.

Lane jerked open the door and went in. A bald-headed man slapped hurtling, squalling chickens aside to get at one of three or four which flapped convulsively on the floor in front of the roosts. He picked up one struggling chicken. To Lane's experienced eye it was obviously strangling. Lane shouted in his turn, but the man's face contorted as he found himself unable to breathe, – while the chicken suddenly struggled free and flapped outside.

Lane waved his cigarette lighter. There was a flame and a horrible stench. The man gasped and stared at Lane.

"Come on out!" shouted Lane. "Come out!"

The man blinked, but the din of squawkings continued without a pause. Something bumped against his foot. A white chicken writhed on the floor, suffocating. He bent down.

Lane forestalled him. When the lighter came near the strangling chicken's head, something caught and burned momentarily with a pale bluish fire. The chicken was instantly its insane and hysterical self again, and proved it by joining in the panic.

The man gaped; he was totally unable to accept so irrational a happening. Lane shook him, and he said some bewildered words which were lost in the confusion of noises. There were two more chickens suffocating on the floor. Lane bent to one, picked it up, held the lighter to its head – and there was a momentary flame and a chicken no longer in distress. He picked up the last and rescued it in the same fashion.

"Now come out!" snapped Lane. "It's dangerous here! Come on!"

He pulled the bald-headed man outside.

"What – what the hell did you do?" demanded the man blankly. "What the hell's happenin'?"

"Something's after your chickens," said Lane furiously, though his anger was not with the man. "It killed four of them. One of them had you! Come on, now, and let me show you how to protect yourself."

He heard many whinings. The death-shrieks of Gizmos were evidently signals other Gizmos could hear despite, louder simultaneous sounds. Lane seized his companion by the arm.

"Come on!" he snapped. "Run!"

But the bald-headed man instinctively resisted. And then it was too late. There were awful sounds in the air all about them. Gizmos arrived, and Lane felt them touching all over his body in that dense aggregation which would drown him if it did not suffocate him. A wild fury filled him. As the bald-headed man fought crazily, his face contorted in the struggle for breath, Lane forced his arms through the fluttering resistance of the Gizmos. He put a cigarette in his mouth. When his lighter flared, flames leaped upward palely, causing screams ten feet above his head. He breathed malodors and lighted the cigarette. Then he took it in his left hand and stabbed and stabbed at the empty air.

It was not sensible. It was only partly effective. The glowing tip of the cigarette killed Gizmos, to be sure, but not fast enough. But Lane was not acting as a rational human being; he was too enraged to realize his own folly.

The professor came running.

"Dick!" she called. "I want to catch one! Let me catch one! I need a specimen for Washington."

She waved a pillowslip and an unlit gasoline blowtorch in the sort of insanity which comes of obsessive zeal. She saw Lane as the center of separate, leaping, bluish flames. She hardly noticed the struggling, strangling bald-headed man. She dropped the blowtorch and waded into the viciously whining atmosphere about Lane. The Gizmos were dense enough to blur the sharp edges of tree trunks nearby.

"Got him!" whooped the professor.

Then Carol came running with a brazing torch. Lane picked up the gasoline burner, and he felt wrath as, holding his breath or gasping the unbreathable, he sprayed gasoline and Carol fired it, and flames leaped up and shriekings sounded while Professor Warren sturdily twisted a pillowcase in which something throbbed and made shrill noises. In the car on the far side of the store the Monster's muted howling could be heard.

It lasted for a long, long time. It was intoxication to kill the things that had no substance until a flame touched them.

But presently the throbbing thing in the pillowcase squealed alone. The outline of trees and leaves and branches was quite unblurred. Carol took her finger off the trigger of the brazing torch, looked at Lane and swallowed audibly. Wind came from somewhere and blew away the odor of dead Gizmos. The Monster howled on. Lane took a deep breath; then he looked at the bald-headed man, who stirred only feebly.

"I've been pretty much of a fool," said Lane.

He bent over the semiconscious owner of the chickens, which in their house had now regained a composure as insane as their former panic.

"We wiped out a whole swarm, Dick," said the professor, beaming. "Not a big swarm, maybe, but we wiped them out! They can't help coming to one of their number who's screaming bloody murder instead of practising it! And I've still got my specimen!"

The bald-headed man panted and opened his eyes. They filled with fright.

"You're all right now," Lane told him. "When you get your breath I'll explain what's happened and how to keep it from happening again."

"I had a heart attack!" gasped the man on the ground. "Get me to a doctor! I had a heart attack! Get me to a doctor!"

Lane growled. The owner of the chickens remained fanatically still, panting his own diagnosis of his condition. He couldn't believe what he remembered, and anyhow most diseases had their publicity men in all popular advertising media: in case of a heart attack, the patient must be kept still and a doctor summoned immediately. The bald-headed man desperately demanded the approved and publicized treatment for his imagined ill.

"We'll take him to a doctor, then," grunted Lane after a moment. "No sense leaving him alone! This could happen again! I'll get the car."

He went to the front of the store. Burke was in the driver's seat of the car, ashen with fear, racing the motor, his hands frozen on the steering wheel, and puffing agonizedly on a cigar. Every window in the car was shut tightly. On the floor of the car, the Monster howled despair past even defiance.

Burke looked at Lane with panic-filled eyes. It took long seconds to get him out of his paralysis of fear. Lane knew that if he'd really been able to move, Burke would have driven crazily away the instant he knew a multitude of Gizmos was nearby. He'd have left them, and he'd never have stopped the car until the gas gave out.

Now, Lane filled the tank with gasoline. He pushed Burke into a back seat. He drove the car painstakingly near to the bald-headed man, still flat on the ground. It occurred to him that here was a possible chance to prove the existence and characteristics of Gizmos so the facts would get on the news wires. They had a Gizmo, captive. They could call others at will. There could be a public demonstration for police and newspapermen and public health authorities somewhere. It would end with just such an attack on their audience as had taken place in Murfree. And they could end that attack as they'd ended the one on this man.

They loaded him into the car, because he pathetically insisted that he must remain absolutely quiet lest another heart attack strike him dead. In a consciously feeble voice he gave directions for finding a doctor.

Burke whimpered as the car sped along the highway and the conversation among Lane and Carol and the professor – raised above the Monster's continuing howls – made it clear that they intended deliberately to call such an aggregation of Gizmos as had attacked Murfree and made dust clouds and murdered people in the wrecked cars they'd passed this day.

"But Mr. Lane!" Burke protested, practically wailing. "This here Gizmo in this pillowcase – right now it's calling its friends to come help it!"

"True," said the professor briskly. "And if they come, it will be a consummation devoutly to be wished."

"But they could be dust storms," wailed Burke. "God, Mr. Lane! You're telling 'em to come after us!"

"Exactly," said Lane, "Just as the men in that small town you're going to organize will tell them to come-to be killed."

He heard a chattering between the Monster's doleful, hopeless howls. It was Burke's teeth. But Lane entered into a professional discussion of the methods to be used when they staged a demonstration of the calling of Gizmos for destruction. Suddenly Professor Warren said apologetically: "I'm ashamed to admit it, Dick, but I want to make a hopelessly unscientific experiment. Insofar as I'm a typical scientist, I writhe. But let me make it, eh?"

"Go ahead," said Lane. Then he saw a wreck beside the road ahead. He said, "Carol, will you help your aunt?"

The professor dived down among the wildly assorted parcels in the back of the car. She came up with the paper bag she'd filled in a grocery store in Murfree, minutes before the Gizmo attack.

"I want to try a—a ghost-repellent," said the professor abashedly. "It might work on Gizmos."

"Science is wonderful!" said Lane. He drove past the wreck, which Carol did not see. "Apparently it concocts things to repel even the ghosts it doesn't believe in!"

"Nonsense!" said the professor. "This is not science; it's superstition. But old wives among the Boers were putting bread-mould on wounds for generations before penicillin was thought of! This is a superstitious practice against ghosts and devils. I—"

She brought out a clove of garlic. Clothed as it was in its pearly skin, it was wholly inoffensive. "Ghosts," she said defensively, "were always said to hate the smell of asafetida and garlic. People used to wear asafetida in bags around their necks, probably because it smelled even worse than garlic. I've got some garlic. I'm going to see if it stirs up our discontented prisoner."

With Carol holding the neck of the pillowcase, she thrust in her hand. The captive thing throbbed and whipped about inside its prison of percale, but its whining did not change pitch.

The professor withdrew her hand, while Carol kept the prisoner fast. The professor broke the clove of garlic and rubbed it over her skin. Then she inserted the garlic-smearing hand into the bag again.

There was something like a Gizmo convulsion. The thing in the pillowcase made a noise so shrill that it was almost a whistle. It beat back and forth inside the confining cloth. It raged. It fluttered. The professor withdrew her hand and it continued to bulge and beat the cloth wall about it.

"Garlic was said to drive away devils," observed Professor Warren with satisfaction, "because it actually drove away Gizmos. We have an item of evidence that ghosts and devils and Gizmos are alike. Do you realize, Dick, how conclusive our research becomes almost minute by minute? Now we have a complete defense against Gizmos! There's wild garlic everywhere! If people simply smear it on themselves it will be a perfect protection! Asafetida should do as well or better! Dick, this is a great moment!"

"The revival of the use of the asafetida bag should be a great scientific triumph," agreed Lane mildly.

The Monster screamed horror of the new noises the imprisoned, garlic-wounded Gizmo made. Carol carefully knotted the neck of the pillowcase and passed it to Burke over her shoulder. She bent down to try to comfort the dog, but he would not be comforted. The thing in the bag made noises like shrieks of rage which scared the Monster terribly.

Burke whimpered. The car rolled on. The bald-headed man moaned feebly, "Get me to a doctor. I had a heart attack . . ."

Then Lane looked attentively in the rear-view mirror and said: "Does the way behind look a little bit blurry, Carol?"

Carol turned about to stare. She nodded gravely. "Yes. A swarm of them is following," she said composedly. "They were called by our little friend, no doubt. But we can outrun them."

Burke jerked the cigar from his mouth. Frantically, he pressed its burning end upon the pillowcase prison of the Gizmo. The cloth scorched and gave way. There was a flame and a small shriek and a vile smell.

"I—I killed it!" panted Burke. "You can't call Gizmos into my car!"

Lane said nothing. The thing was done. There was nothing to say. He drove on. The professor compressed her lips and looked volumes at the terror-stricken Burke. Carol cranked down a window until the air inside the car was clean again. Then Lane said coldly:

"Still following?"

"Not now," said Carol. "I can see the blurring, but it's stopped. It isn't coming after us any more."

"Then that's that," said Lane levelly. A little later he said: "I think this will be the doctor's house."

It was very near to sunset, now. Following the bald-headed man's directions, he turned into the driveway of a doctor's neat home set well back from the road, just where the outskirts of a small village began. The world was filled with an odd, beautiful carmine light which sometimes shows at sundown.

The professor got out of the car. Scowling, she beckoned to the bald-headed man, who was so invigorated by the nearness of medical attention that by error he got out unassisted, and then was astonished that he did not drop dead.

"Come along!" growled the professor. "Dick, you keep an eye on Burke. I'm going to see if anything at all can be done. We know how people can protect themselves, now. They've only to use what their great-grandfathers believed in!"

Lane nodded. The professor seized the bald-headed man's arm and marched him toward what was obviously the office part of the building. Her manner and grip suggested marching a malefactor to jail than one taking a patient to a doctor. She vanished through the doorway, thrusting the bald-headed man before her.

Lane lighted a cigarette. Carol looked at him unhappily. Burke squirmed in the back seat. To the west, the crimson of the sky grew deeper above shadowed mountainsides.

Impulsively, Carol touched Lane's hand.

"I know," said Lane. "Thanks for sympathizing, but we'll make out. Don't worry. One Gizmo doesn't make a dust storm, but the trouble is that we needed that one. Our difficulty isn't a new one. Plenty of people think they're what the Gizmos consider them—lower animals. They don't want to think about anything but their own skins and their own stomachs and their own vanity. That's about all a lower animal does think about. Except dogs. If humans were as intelligent and as loyal as dogs ..."

He brooded. Carol watched his face. But there was nothing to be gained by upbraiding Burke. He was the way he was. Presently Carol sighed, and Lane patted her hand. He didn't take his hand away. In the back seat, Burke was desperately anxious not to call further attention to himself. When his cigar burned short he took out another and

lighted it.

The sun set. There were small twilight noises. A dog barked, a long distance away. A bird called in the lonely half-light. The car, cooling off, made small snapping sounds. A vagrant night wind, blowing over newly cut grass, brought fresh, fragrant, cool air to the car. Night fell, while Professor Warren and the bald-headed man remained in the doctor's office.

Sunset moved across the nation. Everywhere the situation was confused; there were numerous places where no one at all had seen anything out of the ordinary. There were other places where dogs and cats and canaries lay dead, and people were perplexed and grieved. These things happened where humans lived – even in their homes.

There was still no search for an explanation; veterinary surgeons puzzled helplessly over dead farm animals which had simply stopped breathing, fought crazily, and died of suffocation. Animal husbandry departments of agricultural colleges were kept busy on telephones, explaining harassedly that the described symptoms were familiar but so far unexplained. They'd been reported in isolated cases for two or three weeks. During the past few days they'd increased markedly. Yesterday and today the animal plague – and it could be nothing but a plague – had flared up with explosive violence until it began to seem a threat to the meat and dairy industry of the nation. As a matter of precaution it was advised that the drinking of fresh milk be stopped. Many calves had died.

But nobody thought of Gizmos, because people thought rationally. And it was not rational to think of Gizmos as the cause of traffic accidents and the depopulation of Serenity, Colorado, and the plague which first drove animals out of forests in Minnesota and Maine and Georgia and Oregon, and then caused them to die in fighting convulsions.

Professor Warren had taken on a large assignment in essaying to save at least some few lives by convincing a country doctor that there were Gizmos, and explaining their actions. But there was a bald-headed man whose life Lane had saved once, and she was averse to having him go back and risk his life again when he could so easily be protected. And there were other lives which might be saved, too.

So she did not come out of the doctor's office immediately. Lane and Carol waited for her, while the sunset colors reached their greatest intensity, and faded, and there was night. Somehow, they were acutely aware of the presence of Burke in the back of the car; his cigar was not fragrant, and from time to time he stirred unhappily.

But for him, the young night might have seemed enchanted. The only light was from the stars and the bright rectangles of windows in the doctor's home. Glimmers from other houses of the village were widely separated and indistinct.

Somehow they were not impatient to go on. They talked very quietly. Neither of them could have told how it happened, but they *were* closer together than they'd been on the move. And of course they said nothing that Burke could not hear. He heard everything. Yet once, without any reference to Burke or his doings preceding it, Lane said angrily under his breath: "Damn Burke!"

In the obscurity of the unlighted car Carol smiled at him. Her fingers, now intertwined with his, tightened just a little.

Eventually the doctor's office door opened wide, pouring lamplight out into the darkness, and Professor Warren emerged, seeming very weary. She came to the car and got in.

"You can go on, Dick," she said drearily. "I convinced the doctor. He had a dozen frantic calls while I was in there – it seems as if I talked for ages – and he gave good advice to his patients about Gizmos. I couldn't have bettered it, knowing what I know. It'll do some good. I meant for him to check my results, but he believed me. He's actually read some of my published papers. Quite a biologist. So he called the editor of a Roanoke paper whom he knows personally. He told the man who I was, and that what I said was true."

Lane started the motor and drove out on the highway, heading north. He'd been on the go for something over thirty-six hours, without relaxation. There was a place called Monterey which would be a good stopping place for tonight. He estimated the distance. Perhaps an hour. Possibly more.

"What about the newspaper?" he asked the professor.

"I was interviewed," said Professor Warren bitterly. "On the doctor's telephone. Quite a clever young reporter! He got all my facts straight, but didn't believe one, and then he asked to talk to the doctor again, and the doctor swore at him and said the story of a patient of his bore out what I said, and his experience of today convinced him I was right – about car wrecks, anyhow. The traffic deaths for today are over a thousand, Dick, and the total's not nearly in yet! The reporter got the editor on the wire to the doctor again. My story's preposterous. That it happens to be true doesn't matter. It will be printed in tonight's and tomorrow's papers. The wire services will pick up some sort of garbled version of it. It will be printed as a freak. But, Dick –"

"What?" asked Lane. But he could almost guess.

"The headline," said the professor bitterly, "will be, Spooks At War With Humans, Says Scientist." Then she said more bitterly still: "I wish I could resign from the human race!"

But it was an entirely rational, scientific attitude to take, at that. The newspaper couldn't be blamed.

Tonight, though, a new sort of evidence appeared to make it rational to look at Gizmos differently. The new evidence was indisputable. With what Lane and Professor Warren and Carol had to say, it probably determined the outcome of the war.

Chapter 10

The confusion in human affairs reached a new high during the night. Hot Springs, Va., was not the only town to shut its figurative gates. It did react early, because Hot Springs is a resort catering to visitors who are heavy spenders. By quarantining the outer world, Hot Springs became apparently a safe place for them to do their spending. So long as

that state of affairs lasted, everybody would be happy. But other communities shut themselves off from the world with the same firm resolution.

Some were mere villages. Most were relatively small towns. Cities could not barricade themselves against infection without starving. So municipal councils of sizable places met and disputed at length. They tried to compromise between the presumed need to keep out infection and the certain need to bring in food. Some of the compromises were peculiar.

Albany, New York, adopted emergency regulations which made it an offense for anybody to open a store or leave his own home. Reno, Nevada, passed a municipal ordinance which imposed splendid sanitary precautions on all its permanent residents, but excused all visitors from any quarantine measures whatsoever. Tucson, Arizona, established a three-man board with authority to do whatever was necessary to protect the public health. Athens, Georgia, forbade groups of more than three, except for the purpose of public worship.

On the other hand, the national government sanely put all laboratories manufacturing biologicals on twenty-four-hour standby readiness, so that they could begin to turn out immunizing shots as soon as the "virus" causing the trouble should be identified. Meanwhile it sent teams of investigators to beard the plague in its lair, so to speak, and at the risk of their lives gather specimens for examination. A good many of those investigators died. It is probable that some of them guessed at the actual nature of the death-causing agent before they died of suffocation. It is also rather likely that few of them believed it.

But one indisputable set of observations was made in Chicago, at the airports and the weather bureau and nearby air force radar stations. They were painstaking, official observations of arbitrary, unreasonable, preposterous facts that could not be explained. They were revealing, but it wasn't possible to conclude anything from them for lack of the information that Lane and the professor and Carol were desperately trying to convey.

The first official observation was probably made at the main Chicago airport, some time after midnight. The field lights glared beneath a cloudless night sky. The curious shapes of radar scanners moved restlessly above their appropriate buildings. There was a distant droning in the air. A winking, alternately red-and-white light appeared against the heavens and drifted among the stars. The buildings of the airport were starkly lighted, with extraordinarily deep shadows where they were in darkness. Windows glowed. A visual beacon rotated sedately, sending its beam into the night. Headlights moved along the airport highways.

Off in the darkness twin landing lights appeared. Something which roared loudly came slanting downward behind those yellow, glaring eyes. When it touched ground the field lights showed a gigantic aluminum cigar with stubby wings. It roared and slowed, and then turned on the ground and came rolling clumsily toward the terminal.

Everything was normal everywhere. The sky-glare from the city was very bright above the horizon. Lamps glowed like earthbound stars along the roads. There was nothing unusual to see or hear — except on the radar screens.

Somebody looked at one of them, and stared blankly, and called other men, and they

gaped at the screen and someone plunged to a telephone and frantically dialed the number of Civilian Air Defense. An instant later someone was calling the air force station, and a man went running down a corridor to tell what he'd seen in the dispatcher's office. There was incredulity, dismay, bewilderment and apprehension everywhere. There were also outbursts of frantic fury. The radar screen reported a state of things which seemed either impossible or a realization of that emergency the Distant Early Warning radar system had been built to give warning of.

Radar said that something was moving toward Chicago, flying upwind across Lake Michigan. According to the radar, it was impossibly large and it moved with unlikely deliberation. Its speed was roughly thirty miles an hour. It had a shape—a bulbous head and a trailing, tenuous tail which frayed away to nothingness and reappeared without any discoverable organization in its parts. On the screens it actually looked like nothing on earth, but it would have been very like a crawling slug leaving bits of slime behind it which gathered together and followed while changing form and density. But it was flying—it was in mid-air. By its trailing tail it seemed to have moved over the lake from the most thinly inhabited parts of Wisconsin. But it headed upwind for Chicago.

Telephones hummed; short-waves flickered through darkness. A voice said authoritatively that it was a Gizmo, meaning a radar blip with no known cause except a belief that it was an area of extra-high ionization in the air. But it was the great-grandfather of all Gizmos. Its bulbous head was a good two miles in diameter, flattened to rise no higher than four thousand feet, and descending no lower than two. Its tail was ten—twenty—thirty miles in length, depending on the tenuity at which one ceased to measure it. It moved on a specific course. It would presently arrive at Chicago unless it sheered off. And there was nothing in the heavens or on earth or in the sea which should produce such an image on a radar-screen.

So much was undeniable from the beginning. And this was no observation by a mere human, who might delude himself. This was a report from complex electronic devices. It was images formed on phosphors coated on radar screen tubes, excited by accelerated electrons whose pattern of impact was governed by echoes from the original of the image. Phosphors do not imagine. Electrons are not affected by panic. As a radar image it was a faithful report—in its own terms, without interpretation—of something which actually was.

Not only airport radars revealed it; at air force installations the image appeared. The weather bureau cloud-pattern radar showed it, from a different angle and in different perspective, but absolutely the same thing. And nothing like it could exist. A bomber fleet would appear as specks; this was like a cloud or a solid object of preposterous size—yet it could not be solid. It was too big. It could not be a cloud because it had movement of its own. It did not float with the wind. Its motion was affected by the wind, but was still its own.

Pilots went running to their planes. There were thunderous roarings down runways and planes lifted and snarled away into the night. And the radar report was not one to call for a mere investigatory scramble. There was an emergency alert at all fields within striking distance. Half the available striking force of nearby airfields went aloft and toward the deliberately moving incredibly huge source of the alarming radar reflections.

They found it, and they found nothing. Their own radars pinpointed its borders. They fired rockets into it. Ultimately they plunged into it, backwards and forwards and sidewise. There was no nucleus, no solid object, no perceptible thing to cause the phenomenon. Some pilots expressed the opinion that when in the strange reflecting object their jet motors operated a little differently; some thought better, some thought worse. Some pilots returned to their bases to be replaced by others with full fuel tanks. The radar-perceived object was too huge to be affected by planes flying through it. It moved on toward Chicago. Once a pilot reported that the jet flame of other planes than his own seemed to be longer than usual. But he was not sure of that, either. It is not likely that the observation was accurate. Gizmos flying in swarms needed space between individuals, just as birds in a flock need it. Radar would not pick up millions of small things separately, but report the mass. This night, radar did.

And at twenty past two o'clock in the morning, the Gizmo swarm reached Chicago. Sirens throughout the city had roused the citizens. Radio and television stations which had gone off the air went back on to give due notice of the coming of the inexplicable thing, with encouraging statements that nothing was actually expected to happen, but with warnings that traffic jams must be avoided. Citizens of Chicago were told to stay home. They would be told everything that happened; they would have the best advice on measures to be taken for their own protection, if protection was needed.

The Gizmo swarm descended upon the stockyards.

Even roaring jet planes, circling desperately in the invisible cloud, had their thunder drowned out by the noise from the penned beasts when the Gizmos arrived. Confined in pens, the doomed cattle bellowed as whinings descended upon them. Their composite cry of despair carried all over the city. There was no one in Chicago, wakened by sirens and terrified by broadcast warnings, who did not hear it. A watchman in the stockyards used the telephone in a glass-enclosed booth from which he viewed the cattle pens. He told of whinings that rose to a shrill keening. He babbled of the beasts below him fighting madly, climbing upon each other, flinging their horns about, uttering cries no creature had ever uttered.

Suddenly his voice broke off and there were sounds of things being smashed. The line went dead.

When morning came the stockyards were filled with murdered animals. Cattle, sheep – the sheep had fought terribly – and swine were all dead. A few human beings died with them, but less than twenty – guards and watchmen and the like. It is on record, however, that there were workmen making repairs on the inside of a cold-storage room, in one of the larger packing houses. They worked comfortably through the whole episode, not having heard the sirens or the broadcasts nor even the ghastly outcry of the dying animals. When their work was finished they came out to an astonishing stillness. Day was breaking. They looked upon acres of massacred hooved animals. They met masked police and firemen and doctors from the hospitals, gingerly examining the scene.

This produced the greatest series of separate insanities in the history of human reactions. It was past all doubt that something existed which nobody had guessed at – invisible, lethal and purposeful. There was a body of vociferous persons who

demanded that war be immediately declared upon Russia, because the Russians must have done it. There was a smaller, louder group which in a strangely exultant fashion insisted that flying saucers were now proven, that the cattle in Chicago had been killed by invaders from space, and that the air force pilots who denied seeing flying saucers on the way to Chicago should be court-martialed. Of course less indignant but firmly convinced individuals maintained that the cattle had been killed by spores of a disease which were carried upon a wind current. The fact that the radar cloud moved against the wind did not shake their conviction. They considered that the observations of the wind and its velocity must have been wrong.

The newspapers ran out of space for large-type headlines and had more or less to confine themselves to printing the facts. It was quaint, though, that a small news story from Roanoke, Virginia, was crowded out of type altogether. Even the later editions had no room for it. They had to report public reaction in Chicago, and related happenings.

That reaction was remarkable. One of the most astonishing things about the human brain is its ability to hold firmly to two mutually contradictory beliefs at the same time. The death of Serenity and the astonishing number of people who died in their sleep on Tuesday night had been followed by the murder of refugee animals in a Minnesota cornfield and an astronomical increase in traffic deaths on Wednesday, and the Chicago cattle-massacre in the small hours of Thursday morning. The existence of a lower-animal plague – an epizootic – which could also kill men seemed to be established. But also something which in the Chicago manifestation was definitely not a disease was no less established. The similarity between the Chicago affair and the murder of animals in Minnesota was complete, so far as the manner of death was concerned. That motorists were suffocated obviously fitted in. It had been noted, by the way, that the victims of car accidents had rarely been traveling at high speed when the accidents took place. They were driving at a leisurely pace – often under thirty miles an hour – with the car windows open. It would seem that anybody should have concluded that there was only one inimical agency at work.

Maybe some people did, but they were in an unheard minority. Public opinion believed with passionate unanimity in an unknown disease which killed men and animals indiscriminately, and also in something else which might be Russian – or from outer space – but was alive and deadly and killed animals and men. Death was assumed to be abroad in the land, at once a disease to be avoided and an entity to be fought. So small towns barricaded themselves behind barriers, and enacted strict quarantine laws which had very little sense behind them, and demanded the stationing of anti-aircraft batteries at every crossroad post office. Larger towns took even more stringent measures. Guided missile defenses were especially in demand. If there was anybody, anywhere, who pointed out that the cattle in Chicago did not die of disease, he was denounced for his denial of the general belief that they had. But anyone who observed that if the cattle had died of plague anti-aircraft batteries would be useless was regarded as subversive.

The confusion might have been instructive, Lane considered sardonically, if it didn't make for inconvenience to people on important business like himself and his party. They spent the night at the only motel in Monterey, with the Monster in the room occupied by Carol and the professor, and Burke snoring heavily between nightmares in

the room with Lane. When morning came, it developed that there had been so many traffic accidents in Virginia that the governor of West Virginia had ordered the border between the two states closed to traffic. It was illegal, but it was enforced.

Lane abandoned Route Two-twenty and headed east for the Shenandoah Valley. He was stopped by a barrier and guards at Staunton, and navigated narrow country roads around it to be stopped again at Harrisonburg, where a trigger-happy guard put a bullet through the top of the car's windshield. Burke fainted.

They made a tedious, time-consuming detour around Harrisonburg, and lost three hours trying to get up on the Skyline Drive, which did not pass through any towns and might give them a clear run for a reasonable distance. They didn't make it. They plodded through more back-country lanes, instead. New Market was tranquil. There were dogs and children in plain sight, and people moved naturally about; there was no sign of anything inconsistent with a perfectly commonplace small town on a commonplace summer day. But Luray was blocked to traffic. Again they wandered interminably along trails with tire-tracks on them, but which had never seen a bulldozer. More than once they forded small brooks and followed meandering signs, only to arrive at a farmhouse beyond which that trail did not go. Then they had to backtrack and try another fork. They had been traveling fourteen exhausting hours when they found Strasburg. It was untouched by the alarm that filled so many other places. They slept there, but at four next morning they were on their way. The only news they heard was from the car radio, which pictured public confusion many times confounded. It developed now that Chicago had not been the only target of a radar-reflecting cloud – Gizmos. The Kansas City stockyards were a shambles. Shipping pens in Texas had been visited by whinings heard in the midst of the bellowing of maddened steers. In the corn belt, cattle fattening for market died in the center of patches of torn-up ground. The St. Louis hog market posed a problem at once in the disposal of dead swine and the defense of the city's population, should the plague return.

They'd planned to head for Winchester and so to Washington. Professor Warren's professional reputation was sound. She should have only to explain and offer to demonstrate her discoveries, and everything would be taken care of. But Lane still held his own contact in reserve.

As they pulled out of the sleeping town of Strasburg at four o'clock in the morning, however, an all-night radio reported that the Rock Creek Park Zoo, in Washington, had been visited by a radar-reflecting cloud which came upwind along the Potomac and wiped out the entire display of animals. There were also no pets left in an entire quarter of Washington. The news broadcast said that inhabitants of the city were already streaming out on every highway. They seemed to be especially worried by the fact that planes had tried to break up the cloud with explosives before it reached Washington, and had failed. Bridges and highways were already filled with traffic. Measures were being taken to check the exodus.

When the news report ended, Lane said grimly: "That changes our plans. We don't go into Washington."

"But," said the professor, "I need to go to Washington, Dick. Let me have half an hour's talk with a competent biologist in the Department of Agriculture and I

guarantee — "

"You didn't hear why Dick doesn't want to go into Washington," Carol said.

"There'll be martial law by daybreak," Lane said dryly. "They'll call it a Civil Defense emergency. But they're going to have to stop people running out of the city. Probably all cities."

"Day before yesterday," said Lane, "there were well over a thousand victims of traffic accidents which we know were caused by Gizmos. Yesterday was certainly no better. Did you hear any reference to traffic accidents in that broadcast?"

"No." The professor was appalled. "Do you think it was so bad they're censoring the news? They're afraid to let people leave the cities, and afraid to tell them why?"

"I think," Lane told her, "that I don't envy anybody in authority the decisions he has to make. It's going to occur — it's already occurred to a lot of people that the radar-reflecting clouds which kill beasts in stockyards and zoos can also kill human beings. People have been killed in cities, so they'll want to get out. If Gizmos are killing people on the highways, they should be made to stay at home, but if you tell them the reason, they'll feel that they're doomed either way."

Carol said, "Aunt Ann might call in and have someone come out to meet her and get her information and see what proof we can find."

Professor Warren said, fuming, "I didn't think! Of course I can't take Carol into Washington if the people there are going crazy with fear!"

Lane said carefully, "Not all of them will react that way. There's a part of the population which will react in an acceptable way to a situation which distresses them. Unfortunately, some of them may have to make decisions and they'll want to be calm when they make them."

The car rumbled on for a moment. Carol said unhappily: "Tranquilizers?"

"Exactly," said Lane. "Precisely like the old tales of seamen breaking into the whisky stores in time of shipwreck. Very helpful, at a time when brains are needed!"

He stopped short. This was half-past four in the morning. There were hours yet to sunrise. The headlight beams bored on ahead. This was Route Eleven, not notable for heavy traffic. They were perhaps ten miles out of Strasburg, and they had not yet met more than two pairs of headlights all the way. Here the highway dipped down, to rise again two hundred yards farther on, a brook and a bridge across it at the bottom of the depression. It was a commonplace spot on an ordinary highway; this was very early morning and a predawn chill was everywhere. There was actually a vague mistiness down in the hollow.

But Lane noticed that the mistiness was not still. It writhed and stirred in a boiling motion. His eyes glanced sharply at the rising part of the road beyond. In the headlight rays it was blurred and wavery. The headlight beams from the car passed through something that distorted the light, like small columns of heated gas. They were doubly disturbed when reflected back.

"Torches!" snapped Lane.

He pressed down on the accelerator, and the car went downhill, gathering speed. It

went through the beginning of the mist and the fuzziness. Instantly angry whinings sounded all about. But the car gathered speed on the level bottom place, while the whinings grew shriller and more angry. But sparks flashed inside the car from a brazing torch.

Carol waved it and something flickered into blue flame. There was a stench, and the whinings grew to a keening howl. Something clapped itself over Lane's nose and lips. He held his breath and drove on furiously, and the car breasted the rise beyond the hollow and roared away on the level highway. Its speed went up and up. It was fifty miles an hour when Carol speared the place before his face, and something screamed and flared.

"Thanks," said Lane, gasping, as wind whipped away the reek of carrion. "They may follow for a little way, but we're all right. See how things are in the back."

The professor wailed: "I could have caught another specimen! But I didn't have a pillowcase ready!"

"Burke?" said Lane sharply. "You okay?"

Carol swung the torch about. She used it, stabbing emptiness before Burke's contorted, fear-crazed face. His breath stopped. There was a flicker of light, then, and he collapsed into shuddering limpness.

"That," said Lane, "is how people in cars on the highway get killed – not in hollows, but anywhere. It disposes of the idea that Gizmos are intelligent and purposeful, but it doesn't make things look any brighter."

It didn't. It only made them more understandable. Now that Gizmos had acquired the instinct to hunt instead of scavenging only, their pattern of action was clear. They were social creatures in the sense that they moved and fed in groups or flocks. As is usual among all social creatures, at any moment there were individuals separated from their fellows, and they would commit individual atrocities. Some, on the other hand, would be surfeited, not interested in hunting. But they all would tend to hunt by night and feed by day. In their native forests they drifted in grisly, faintly whining masses, flowing invisibly between the trees and through the underbrush. In a sense they grazed, in that they sought their subsistence on a broad, deep front, on which they murdered every bird, every animal, every insect. When they found running animals in any number, it was their custom to round them up into terrified groups whose frenzy made them mutually prevent each other's escape. Then the Gizmos killed them.

It was an admirable device for food gathering. Lane pictured the over-all situation as one in which such masses of invisible horrors flowed slowly and terribly everywhere. They would be attracted from many miles by the scent of the stockyards. They would go blindly to that scent of prey. They had attacked this car because it had disturbed them, but, mindless as they now appeared to be, they killed human beings. They were capable of rage. They furiously attacked any place where one of them was held captive. They acted as if they were capable of enormous vindictiveness.

Rage, indeed, might have substituted for reason to make them trail Lane and the others across the mountains to where Burke had picked them up in the car. Fury over the death-cries of their fellows might have produced the cloud formation over the filling station. It need not have been hatred against them as specific persons; it could have been anger at prey which had turned upon them. They had no fangs to bare, nor any claws to

extend. They could perform mass-movements out of emotion as other creatures crouched to spring.

Lane, driving through the dark, did not think of such fine details. He imagined creeping, crawling crowds of Gizmos flowing across the countryside, killing every living creature. If such a swarm should flow into a city . . .

The first report of such an event came from St. Joseph, Missouri.

Chapter 11

The St. Joseph incident did not get into the news reports. But on the outskirts of the town there was a gigantic poultry farm devoted to the raising of fowl for meat rather than the production of eggs. The chickens therefore ranged outdoors, with small buildings in which to roost at night. The fowl-runs extended in a long row beside a highway, to make the maximum display to motorists who passed. There were signs advertising live fowl, dressed fowl, plucked fowl, frozen fowl, and fowl in sections. There was even a group of roasting spits in a window of the sales building where one could order fresh-roasted chickens.

At nine o'clock in the morning frenzy struck the chickens in the farthest of the fowl-runs. At one end of that wire enclosure, chickens suddenly flung themselves crazily about, tumbling end over end, flapping hysterically. Others flapped and squawked madly away from that part of the run. Attendants at the farm went hurriedly to find out what was the matter. Up to this moment, the doings of the Gizmos had been matters St. Joseph had only read and heard about. People were jittery, but not quite scared.

A helper opened a gate into the last yard and went in. Struggling, frantic fowl were piled deep against the end of this particular enclosure. He heard whinings in the air, but he moved to clear away the panicky pile-up of chickens, which might suffocate in the press. He grabbed a flapping, frantic, but silent hen to toss it away from the fence. It did not writhe, it squirmed, its beak open but no sound coming out of it, its eyes glazing. At the same time, the helper heard a strident humming whine very close to him. The chicken in his hands ceased to struggle save for convulsive, dying shudders. There was no reason for it to die, but it seemed to do so.

Then something brushed against his face. Instinctively, he swiped at it with the feathered object in his hand. There was a frantic, high-pitched buzzing whine, and then his breathing ended. He tried to gasp and could not. He stood paralyzed by fright and shock, with the flapping chickens hurtling crazily about him. One struck him in the face and saved his life. Because at the impact the angry whining in his ears rose even higher, and he could breathe.

He fled.

He was incoherent, but he babbled that things tried to choke him, and the chickens in the next to the farthest run began to die as those in the farthest grew still. Invisible death came very slowly and very deliberately along the long line of fenced enclosures, and foot by foot the chickens in them died.

There were too many witnesses and the succession of events was much too clear for this to be taken for a plague. Those who had stopped to buy chickens, the men who worked at the farm, even a state patrolman saw it. He was the one who linked the whining with the deaths, and he concluded that the chickens were being killed by a cloud of insects which were too small to be seen clearly. His premise was wrong, but his reasoning was sound. He concluded that if one breathed through a cloth, the insects would be kept out of one's lungs. He tried it, to drive the onlookers out of danger; he was an intelligent and a courageous man, that trooper.

The creeping cloud of suffocation enveloped the entire poultry farm after the state patrolman had gotten the people out of its way. It went on, invisibly, terribly, into the heart of the suburb whose edge touched the farm. There were two human deaths in that suburb. The patrolman tried to alarm everybody. He sent those he warned to warn others. Two stubborn, suspicious individuals refused to stir. He saved all the rest. Two-thirds of a new housing development was enveloped by something nobody could see but which could be heard as a thin, hungrily complaining sound as its cause moved murderously onward.

It occupied six blocks of brand-new houses, with only two human fatalities. But then, as blindly and as mindlessly as it had entered the suburb, the swarm of monsters flowed in its grisly, slow-motion fashion off into woodland nearby, where it killed innumerable wild bees, rabbits, grubs, ants and beetles. Later there was another gruesome find there, too, but it had nothing to do with the Gizmos.

This did not get into the newspapers because the public was already jumpy enough. There were elaborate precautions in force to prevent further alarm. Preventing panic was something that could be done; they couldn't think of anything else that seemed practical. But the means chosen for the prevention of terror had some odd side effects. For example, it was not possible for Professor Warren to reach anybody in Washington to tell them something even more useful to do.

The acceptance of telephone calls from the country districts – in fact all long-distance calls other than official ones – were stopped. This was to keep panic from being conveyed into the cities from the open country. When Professor Warren tried to make a call to Washington, she was politely told that no trunk lines were available. The same thing happened each of the other six times Lane stopped the car at a back-road garage or store where a telephone might be found.

"We just heard a news broadcast," he said dryly, when she came out to the car after the seventh attempt. "Now there's no reference to the trouble in St. Louis or Kansas City. Maybe they think people will forget if they ignore it. And the business in Chicago is played down. It's said that bacteriologists think they've isolated a suspicious germ. Last night it was thought to be a Russian trick! There's still no mention of any unusual number of traffic deaths. Two-thirds of the broadcast dealt with foreign news."

"And I can't get a line to Washington," said the professor bitterly. "I don't think we'd be allowed to enter the city anyhow. Drive on, Dick. I give up on trying to attend to this affair reasonably. But we have to do something!"

"We will do something," promised Lane. "We'll stay out of cities."

The professor's latest failure happened a few miles out of Winchester. She tried yet

again in Martinsburg, where there appeared to be no inclination to keep anyone from driving through. They got a meal there which was a very belated breakfast, but no telephone line to Washington.

This was the third day of their attempt to complete what should have been one day's long drive. It was almost a repetition of the first. They could not go through Hagerstown. They lost hours finding a way on unmarked roads to circle it. Chambersburg was blocked, too, and they had again to make a long detour. Lane was tempted to try the Pennsylvania Turnpike, but he bought gas in a crossroads group of houses called Green Village, and was informed that the Turnpike was closed. "Quarantine or something," said the man who worked the gas pump.

Lane asked questions. Dairy farms in Chippensburg had lost all their cattle during the night past. Two men had lost their lives with the animals. It occurred to Lane that the relatively small loss of human life was due to the exact fact that the Gizmos were mindless. As scavengers, they'd found food in the carcasses of dead wild creatures. As hunters, they still associated food with fur or feathers or the chitinous shells of insects. They would attack men, but their first instinct and preference was for lesser creatures.

Lane turned east, avoiding main highways. When a good highway appeared, Lane doggedly turned aside or else crossed it quickly and dived into obscure lanes again. Three times he passed through areas in which no bird called or insect sang. Once he passed the still-smoking embers of a farmhouse which had burned without any attempt by anybody to salvage anything. There was a dead horse in the pasture to its left.

In late afternoon squadrons of planes appeared overhead. Once Lane heard a faraway droning, and presently discovered a helicopter hovering in the air. A little later the car reached a hillcrest, from which he saw a billowing puff of smoke spouting up from a highway which was black with cars beyond it.

"Stopping traffic," observed Lane, "probably from Harrisburg. They would pick a four-lane highway! They're being stopped so they won't be killed on the roads. Of course, if a feeding horde of Gizmos came on them stopped as they are—"

He searched out a way and then drove on. Presently he scuttled across the empty part of the blocked road and dived into a dirt lane on the other side. This was between Harrisburg and York, Pennsylvania. The highways nearer Lancaster were practically empty. Either the police had acted more quickly, or there were fewer exit highways to block.

He got northward of the Turnpike by pushing through a minor underpass, and headed east again. It was not sensible to try to pass through Philadelphia or to try to get into New Jersey to the south of it. Near Reading he came upon solid masses of cars crawling away from Philadelphia.

"I've got a hunch," said Lane. "Counting what the news reports have told—and what they haven't—I have a hunch that my prophecies to Jim Holden have him pretty well convinced that I know what I'm talking about."

"Holden?" Carol said.

"Friend of mine," explained Lane. "We've hunted together more than once. He's head of research at Diebert Laboratories. He's the one we're headed to see."

"Jim Holden?" Professor Warren said excitedly. "Is that Dr. James Holden? The one who made the report on adaptation of living tissues for transplanting? Good heavens, Dick! Do you know him?"

"I suppose it's the same man. Why?"

"Why didn't you tell me?" demanded the professor. "We've wasted time. If I can talk to him for half an hour – knowing my work as he must – he'll put his laboratory and his staff at my disposal. And with such a team we'll have a definitive, documented report on Gizmos ready within days, and the whole business will be ended!"

Lane turned in his seat to stare at her. He was honestly amazed. Professor Warren had shared every experience with Gizmos that he had. She'd seen all the horrors he had seen, yet it was suddenly and startlingly clear that as a biologist her concept of Gizmos was totally unlike his. She probably knew more about their metabolism than he could guess, and undoubtedly had a clearer idea of the pattern of motion which kept their gaseous dynamic systems in being. It would be a highly complex system, vastly more complicated than a smoke ring. It could vary for locomotion, for hunting, and in response to stimuli from without. When she thought of Gizmos, she thought of them like that. Lane was a hunter and a fisherman; he thought of the way creatures acted. In consequence, while the professor looked forward to a completed examination of Gizmos, Lane was guessing what they would probably do next.

And it seemed to him the most obvious thing in the world. From the facts that deaths among game animals had been rare in the beginning, and more and more frequent later, Lane had formed an opinion. That really alarming phenomena attributable to Gizmos had turned up within the past week confirmed it. He made a grim evaluation of the fact that until three days ago only people interested in game conservation and animal husbandry were concerned with Gizmo affairs; now there was censorship of news concerning them, restriction of civilian movements, and frantic scurrying for promising courses of conduct, and all the phenomena of war.

The state of affairs made it look as if the Gizmos would be forced to attack cities and human lives everywhere within hours.

The reasoning was absolutely simple. Living creatures with ample food and no enemies increase in number by geometrical progression. If there had been only a hundred Gizmos in the forests of America six months ago, then five months ago there might have been ten thousand, four months ago a million, and three months ago a hundred million. Two months ago ten thousand million Gizmos might have gone totally unseen in the wildernesses of North America. Now a hundred times as many could not stay in the wilds. There wasn't enough food for them. They had to come out. Domesticated animals would stay their hunger only so long, because it was very highly probable that as they fed they multiplied. All the animals of ploughed ground and pasture would feed them only briefly. Not months. Not weeks. Days. And two days – three – were already gone.

"I was thinking," said Lane in a careful tone, "that I might possibly be able to reach him before I can get to his place. People might not be allowed to telephone into the cities to tell of tenor outside, but it is conceivable that one can telephone from one small town to another. I'm going to try."

He stopped at a closed-up country store. Its windows were barred. Its doors were padlocked. A dog growled from under its porch, and a window opened on the floor above. A shotgun barrel peered out. The dog barked angrily.

"Store's closed," snapped a Pennsylvania Dutch voice. "Everything is all. Go away or I shoot!"

"Ten dollars," said Lane, "to use your telephone. You can hold your gun on me while I do it. I do not want to buy anything. I only want to use your phone."

There was some argument, and it was Carol who made the conclusive appeal. She did not look like the companion of a suspicious character. The professor was the picture of adamant virtue. No woman traveling with undesirable characters would be gotten up like the professor.

Lane made his call. The storekeeper let him in alone, with his shotgun at full cock, and stayed right there while Lane talked. Lane got the Diebert Laboratories through three separate small-town exchanges, and talked to his friend Dr. Jim Holden over a connection which sang and hummed and was otherwise unsatisfactory, but did let him hear the explosive relief in his friend's voice when he recognized Lane.

Lane's prophecies had been borne out. All manufacturers of biologicals had been kept informed of all events, for their information when a break in the situation came. They could ask questions. On the basis of Lane's prophecies, Holden had.

Lane's prediction that some men would be stricken while operating bulldozers in Minnesota had been borne out. But men smoking cigars or cigarettes were immune while smoking—but only then. Lane had predicted it. This was so far beyond reason that when proved true that the head of the laboratories feverishly waited for more information from Lane.

Lane talked incisively. Holden was eager to listen, prepared to try out anything Lane might suggest. The phone connection was bad and grew worse. The singing of the wires sounded like Gizmos on the line. But Lane was able to tell much, and to give assurance that he was on the way.

When he went back to the car, a housewife was talking to Professor Warren from the upstairs window. As he settled into the driver's seat again, the woman said with satisfaction:

"Ja. Garlic. My grossmutter used to say that spirits would run from garlic. I try it. Danke!"

Lane started the motor while the Professor muttered defensively:

"It's true whether it's scientific or not. And if she calls up her friends and tells them, it may save some lives." Carol looked hopefully at Lane.

"Holden said," he told her, "that there've been animal deaths near his plant. He'll try to catch a Gizmo, with everybody smoking cigars. Once he does that, everything's in line. But we want to get there. Fast! I've warned him that a swarm will come running if one Gizmo's trapped." He looked at the sky. "It's late!"

He sent the car down the road with a cloud of dust following it. It was now close to sunset; the time for Gizmos to hunt food was nearer. Their loathsome appetite was

greater today than yesterday, and greater tonight than today. By tomorrow –

The urgency which possessed Lane should have been cured by his having reached someone who could do something with what he'd learned. But he seemed to feel continuously more uneasy. The situation was better in one respect; the public might believe in an animal plague, but it also believed in a deadly entity which reflected radar-waves and destroyed animals and men. Therefore there were not many cars moving in the darkness. Fugitives from cities, blocked on the highways by implacable armed men, were afraid to be alone in their vehicles. They gathered in groups. They broke fences and built fires. Others came to them, and more fires were needed, and made. Along the highways on which men were forbidden to flee, those who had tried to run away clustered about great, leaping flames and took comfort from the light and their own numbers. This was a wise thing; the fires did deter the Gizmos – and the smell of men was not their first choice of prey.

So Lane in the old car went hurtling along back roads, and hummed through silent villages, and flung through the darkness on an absurdly roundabout way to the north of Philadelphia, and into New Jersey by a most unlikely way, and then down into the Trenton area by a deserted truck route that nobody seemed to guard.

And they came to the Diebert Laboratories, thirty miles from Trenton. Burke slept noisily in the back seat. But the Monster suddenly gave tongue to terror. He howled in the closed car.

"Holden must have things stirred up," said Lane. "It does seem as if we ought to be somewhere near the plant." He peered into the light cast by the car's headlights. "That sign says to make a right turn." He swung the car. "There are the buildings ahead, I'd guess. Only –"

He whistled softly. There were the buildings of the pharmaceutical laboratories ahead, with lights inside. The headlights faintly showed the modernistic main building – but it seemed to be blurred and out of focus. The private industrial roadway led straight to the plant, but nothing was distinct. The buildings looked like drowned things regarded through rippling water. Yet there were lights.

Carol lighted a brazing torch. She turned its flame on the perforated burner of a gasoline blowtorch, brought it up to temperature, and turned on the gasoline. It caught with a roar and a fierce blue flame. She handed it to the professor and then prepared a second.

"I don't know how much longer the torches will run," she said absorbedly, "but the gasoline ones will run for two hours."

"I," said the professor firmly, "shall get out a pillow easel."

Lane drew a deep breath and headed for the building structure housing hundreds of people immersed in a Gizmo horde many times greater than even the Chicago swarm. They enclosed the entire structure. The humans inside the building would suffocate.

"I think," said Lane regretfully, "we've got to open the car windows. These torches probably give off carbon dioxide. We'd better not breathe too much of it, if we can help it."

The car went on. The air seemed thick and viscous. It was the Gizmos, of course, drawn to the building in numbers and in density and in sheer monstrous masses such as

even Lane had not imagined before.

Carol cranked down the right-hand front window. She thrust a flame out of it.

It leaped up and forked and spread horribly; it seemed that the very sky took fire. And there was suddenly a screaming, unearthly outcry. The air about the car was convulsed as close-packed Gizmos strove to flee, creating whirlwinds and gusts which shook the car. And always there was a gout of fire coming from the right-hand front window, and that flame rose to the burning sky and masses of flame raced madly in all directions. Above all there was a whining and a keening and a sound of horror through which the Monster's howlings were hardly able to be heard.

Then there was a horrible reek of dead Gizmos, and there ceased to be an upward spout of flame from the torch Carol kept roaring out of the window.

The car went on to the buildings in an enormous silence. Lane honked the horn. Lights came on, outside a door. The four of them got out of the car.

Doctor Holden appeared when the door opened as the bearers of torches reached it.

"It looks like a trick we didn't think of," he said blandly. "We've been working on something more technical. We loaded a dead cow on a handler-truck, with all of us smoking cigars, and we left it a while and then brought it into a small laboratory we had ready. There were Gizmos — your term, Lane — feeding on the carcass, and we had them where we could work with them. They protested, and their friends gathered. They've been protesting for hours, and their friends are still coming. We hadn't quite solved the problem of the ones outside when you turned up. Come in! Let's get this business going all over the country. I like the way you do things, Lane."

Lane heard Professor Warren snort. Carol pressed his arm, confidently, smiling up at him. He introduced Professor Warren.

"How do you do?" said the professor briskly. She extended an object she'd brought from the car. "I have a present for you. A Gizmo, freshly caught in a pillowcase and now confined in a small garbage can. It's in very good voice. . . ."

It was a near thing, of course. It has since been demonstrated that Gizmos multiplied by an involved sort of gaseous fission, so that when a single Gizmo settled down to a meal of their awful nourishment, two Gizmos rose up at the meal's end. Their rate of increase was astronomical. When Lane and his party arrived at the laboratories it was literally the last minute when it could be hoped to prevent at least a holocaust of human beings and possibly the complete extermination of animal life.

But it was extraordinarily simple to handle the matter, once it was attacked by technical means — which made it convincing — instead of grimly personal battle with flames and torches. At the laboratory they already had tape recordings of the cries of Gizmos held captive and enraged, and Holden had an open wire to the authorities who'd asked him to stand by. He passed on answers in quick, minute-by-minute succession.

It is a matter of record that Lane arrived at the laboratory a little after eleven p.m. Eastern Daylight Saving Time. Much that Lane had reported was already passed on. By midnight, transcriptions of the Gizmo cries were being made at army bases and military installations and air force fields and civil defense headquarters all over the country. By

twelve-thirty those hair-raising noises were being played over public-address systems and wherever loudspeakers could be set up. Loudspeaker trucks posted themselves at the edges of cities and played the siren song of rage.

And Gizmos came. And then they were worked upon by flame throwers, torches, and fireworks. Later the speakers were mounted near great fans whose revolving blades cut through the whirling gaseous dynamic systems and chopped them to bits. That they were lethal to Gizmos was demonstrated by the awful reek downwind. On airport tarmacs, loudspeakers called Gizmos from the sky to be shattered by the blades of idling propellers.

Swarms were tolled to destruction in Newark and Poughkeepsie and Yonkers and Hartford and Boston and Pittsburg. There were monstrous stenches – at which wise men rejoiced – in Tallahassee and Laramie and Salt Lake City and Missoula and San Diego and Omaha and Houston and Cincinnati.

Nobody has ever estimated the maximum number of Gizmos. They were very difficult to wipe out. For weeks, helicopters droned above wildernesses giving out the sounds which, because they expressed frenzied rage, brought frenzied invisible monsters to join them – and to die. There was a report of an isolated band of Gizmos in the Dakotas more than three months later, but they were adequately taken care of.

The war with the Gizmos ended in a victory for the humans, of the only kind which amounts to anything in these modern days. One side was exterminated, which ended the matter. There were some very trivial things which turned up later. Burke, for example, proposed honorable matrimony to Carol. Carol declined. The professor wrote a magnificent book on the fourth kingdom of nature – gaseous – which is sometimes criticized for her indignation at any suggestion that she is imaginative. . . .

When the tumult was over, Lane asked Carol where she lived.

"With Aunt Ann," said Carol, "wherever that may be." Lane grimaced. "What," he asked, "would be a good alibi for me to go wherever that might turn out to be? If-

Carol said carefully: "I'm not engaged. Or anything."

Lane drew a deep breath. "Swell!" he said. "We've only known each other three days, but I'm concerned about the Monster. Somebody ought to make a home for him. I'll – well – I'll make some temporary arrangement for him, while I hang around. . . . Er, my intentions are honorable."

He grinned, suddenly, and she smiled back.

THE END of a Gold Medal Original *by* Murray Leinster

A CHILLING OF TOMORROW CREST

BOOK THE 27th DAY (s209)

by JOHN MANTLEY

The incredible story of five ordinary human beings who were abducted into the

unknown and returned to earth with the power to destroy it

" . . . high class science fiction with Alfred Hitchcock type of suspense-laden atmosphere . . . a standout novel."

Boston Herald

A CREST BOOK NOW AVAILABLE WHEREVER PAPERBACK BOOKS ARE
SOLD-35¢

If this CREST BOOK is not obtainable at your local newsstand, send only 35¢, plus 5¢ for postage and handling, to CREST BOOKS, FAWCETT PUBLICATIONS, INC., GREENWICH, CONN. Please order by number and title. Canadian orders cannot be accepted.