

SATURN

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

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**RED FLAG
OVER THE
MOON**



ROBERT SILVERBERG, CHARLES STEARNS, CHARLES FONTENAY

SATURN

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SATURN

PRESENTS THE

STARTLING FACTS

After Sputnik and Muttnik, what? Science-fiction has been talking about space-flight for years while the politicians laughed it off as "Buck Rogers" stuff. SATURN dares to present a realistic analysis of what the future of space-flight is really going to be.

RED FLAG OVER THE MOON

by ROMNEY BOYD

After Sputnik and Muttnik, what? Science-fiction has been talking about space-flight for years while the politicians goofed. SATURN dares to present a grimly realistic analysis of what the future of space-flight is really going to be.

A MOUNTAIN of self-deception came crashing down on the heads of the Western world on October 4, 1957, when the ominous beep-beep-beep of a man-made moon came circling the globe. For that satellite, the first actual step in the conquest of outer space, was not—as ten thousand science-fiction stories would have had it and as millions of lines of smug newspaper and magazine stories had predicted—was not an American invention.

Only a few weeks earlier Russian claims to having perfected a powerful rocket capable of intercontinental cargo travel (the cargo being, of course, atomic warheads) were pooh-poohed. From the White

House on down to the lowliest politicians, the report was greeted with shrugs, smiles of scorn for such obvious poppycock, and jeers that it was mere propaganda. But as it turned out the Soviets were not making scarehead stories, they were coldly stating facts.

They produced a rocket capable of penetrating outer space. They blasted off a miniature globe many times heavier than our most ambitious plans had projected and at a higher altitude—and they then said that it was just an advance trial, a mere preliminary to the real thing.

And while the Russians were preparing to complete this first successful space breakthrough, what were we doing?

We had postponed our efforts at putting up an earth satellite from an indefinite time in the fall of 1957 to an equally indefinite time in the early summer of 1958. Our officials were engaged in refereeing a ridiculous dispute between the Air Force and the Army as to which of several half-finished rocket programs should be scrapped and which kept. The earth satellite we planned and couldn't bring about on schedule was to be a piddling little thing of about twenty pounds; to be sent up—if we were lucky—to about three hundred miles.

Of course once the Sputnik, as the Soviets call their moon, was up and going, there was a great scurrying and to-do in the circles of the brave gentlemen who compose the United States rocket leaders. Efforts were made to say that, well, the Russians were a little ahead of, but not much—a few months maybe—we weren't in a race anyway—besides we'd soon outstrip them with our know-how.

The facts are otherwise. The size and weight and height of the Sputnik shows that the Russians are not just a few months ahead, but at least two years ahead; that they

possess the means and technique to plan space operations many times greater than those in our present capacity; and that they are forging ahead without halt, without inter-departmental arguments, and without a lot of shoddy lobbying to see into whose cooperative pockets the new few billions of defense money is going to be funnelled.

In plain language, this is all going to mean that the Russians are going to be the first to conquer space, the first to reach the moon, the first to set up a permanent base on the moon.

WE ARE SORRY to have to make this observation so bluntly. But it is the peculiar quality of a magazine of this sort, a science-fiction magazine whose readers are accustomed to view the future with intelligent eyes rather than with the blinkers that "family" magazines impose, to be able to present an unpleasant aspect of the future in its true light.

I know that it is possible to raise objections, but for the most part these objections will be derived from the soft soap that is going to be dished out heavily by the culprits who

were responsible for our fumbling failure to keep ahead of the Soviets in a field where we certainly once had a head start. Raise these objections if you will, but a two-year lead in rocketry with the full consciousness of the importance of the outcome is not to be overcome so easily. The Soviets, having brought to world attention their leadership in the field, must now redouble their national effort to keep it. You can rest assured that they know this and that, while we are holding post-mortems and emergency committee meetings, they will be plunging ahead with tests, plans, and vaster engineering operations. They have publicly stated their objectives—and stated them without all the evasiveness we give to ours.

The United States has the means to make up the loss—if time permits. We have an industrial apparatus far superior to that of the Soviets, but do we have the time to spare? Are our leaders willing to take a stand quick enough and firm enough? What is more—are they willing to scrap fast some of the rubbish they have cluttered up our rocket projects with?

What exactly does a Soviet

victory in moon-flight mean? Well, the moon is a permanent fixed space platform, from which every part of the Earth's surface can be surveyed telescopically down to the smallest detail. To construct a telescope in the low-gravity airlessness of the moon's surface is a simple matter compared with telescope construction on Earth. With great ease and speed, lenses can be arranged, on simple skeleton frameworks, virtually fixed on the Earth—which, please remember, is a *fixed* object in the lunar skies. Observations will be a hundred times clearer there because of the lack of an obscuring atmosphere.

It would be no problem to set, almost at once a spy observatory on Luna that will be able to spot every movement on Earth of a troop of soldiers or even of a single automobile. There will be no military secrets left.

The next step, following the observatory, would be the setting of a rocket-artillery base on the moon. From such a point, it would be no problem to fire direct rocket shots at any activity on the Earth's surface the Lunar Station didn't like. What is more it would be vastly difficult for

the Earth to fire back.

In addition to these obvious military advantages, there is also the tremendous boost to science that working on the moon will give. Conditions of matter in low gravity and in outer space are still not subject to experiment to the Earth-bound. The certainty of making great discoveries and great strides in the conquest of nature is taken for granted once we have reached outer space. The qualities of various elements at temperatures near absolute zero are already suspected to hold tremendous potentials for energy liberation—and such temperatures could be had without much difficulty during the two-week long lunar nights. The world's chemists would sell their souls for a chance at such experimentation.

The Russians, who have had a bug on engineering education (they are outstripping us in the number of students and graduates—another scandal) since 1945, know all about these possibilities. They are giving their rocket and space travel men the same type of high priority drive that the U.S.A. gave the atomic bomb project during World War II.

The cold fact is that Soviet achievement of the moon is

going to make them the masters of the Earth. They know it—and what is worse, until October 4, 1957, apparently the Pentagon didn't know it.

THERE ARE men among the rocket engineers of America who knew this, too. Such men as G. Harry Stine, whose book **EARTH SATELLITES AND THE RACE FOR SPACE SUPERIORITY**, published by Ace Books shortly before the advent of the Sputnik, put the case with clarity and passion. In his unique thirty-five cent newsstand paperback, Stine outlined what America planned to do in the launching of its own earth satellite, the Vanguard, and then went on to outline what American engineers saw as the next steps along the line.

These steps consisted of advanced designs of cargo-carrying rockets and man-carrying rockets—the ICBM—and then of a vast and elaborate project to construct a manned space station—an Earth Satellite as large as a small city, with a permanent crew of engineers and researchers. This space station in turn would serve as the place where the first moon-exploration rockets

would be put together and then launched. It would act to serve the same defensive and research purposes that the moon would serve.

Possibly this is still the official United States program. If it is, it is going to be too bad for us. Because the Russians stated the answer quite clearly a few months ago. One of their scientists pointed out that construction of this colossal space platform was a waste of time and an evasion of the obvious. For the obvious, said this Soviet rocketman, is that a really permanent and stable space platform already exists—and that was Luna itself. The Russian logic called for by-passing any such man-made platform and for setting up shop without delay on the moon itself.

The sense here should be self-evident. Stine admits in his book (which is *must* reading for everyone interested in this space race) that his space station is entirely indefensible in time of war. At the very outbreak of hostilities it could be blasted from existence by one easily aimed H-bomb warhead rocket (since its orbit would be but a few hundred miles from Earth). But the moon, old Luna, cannot be knocked out

of the sky no matter how many H-bombs we plaster its surface with. It is a permanent station in the sky. If shelled from Earth, the occupants have merely to set up their posts on the other side of the moon, the side forever turned away from Earth, and they will be safe from all that Earth-stationed enemies can do.

In his book Stine outlines with great ingenuity and enthusiasm the plan for the construction of this space platform. This is basically the one originated by Darrell C. Romick. It calls for the construction of this city in the sky by the piecing together of hundreds of thousands of small sections, each transported up to orbit by means of huge three-stage rockets. It would call for the construction of these rockets in mass quantity—about as many as an automobile plant can turn out cars! The cost would be in the billions and the task would take about four years to complete.

Four years to complete, billions in costs, and not worth a single cent in wartime! No wonder the Russians are smiling today. They have stated their objective—the moon itself. They are driving for it in the most direct fashion.

Their plans call for the furtherance of multi-stage rockets capable of delivering a cargo-head vast distances. They claim to have already produced the ICBM, and their claim includes an invention that will deliver it with precision on any target they name. The fact that their present rocket strength is sufficient to lift an object of 184 pounds a height of five hundred and sixty miles, and impart to it a speed of 18,000 miles per hour, proves that they have the ability. It is simple mathematics to figure out what the same rocket power could do in lifting an object that might weigh only five or ten pounds. Considering that each pound of payload calls for hundreds of pounds of fuel, obviously this rocket is quite capable, *as it now stands*, of delivering an object—a tiny one—to the moon itself. Or around the moon. Or on its way to the planet Venus.

Such are actually their announced plans. They will first send robot rockets around the moon for observation. Then they will send one or two on to Mars and Venus. Next they will start landing bits of cargo on a selected spot on the lunar surface—parts of stations, necessary equipment. When all

is ready, they will deliver a man to put the stuff together and set up their station. With a high priority drive they can do all this within five years. Certainly they could drive a missile to the moon's surface right now—if they haven't already done so by the time this magazine is in print.

But G. Harry Stine, in advancing the case for the artificial space platform, was only supporting what happened to be the most advanced American thought about our own space rocket capacities in 1957. Our plans for an earth satellite one weighing only twenty pounds, had been announced originally for the fall of 1957. But they had been vague and were finally set back six or eight months. Doubtless these plans are being hastily revised, but the fact still remains that America does not have the ability to put a satellite of Sputnik's weight up there. We can't do it.

Stine was exceedingly aware of the menace of space, of the desperate need for getting up there first. His book is a vigorous and fearless examination of the vital importance to America of our space operations and our space defenses. He pointed out how the decline

and fall of the empires of the past, from the Persian and Roman to the British, was in each case due to the failure of these empires to keep up with technical developments outside their frontiers. Let the United States fail to keep its technical lead and we face the same historic fate.

LET'S FACE it, we were caught flat-footed. Our projects were tied up in arguments between builders as to which design was the more ideal. Our Project Vanguard was lingering for lack of sufficient cash and manpower. The leaders of our country had their heads buried in the sands of golf courses, hoping like the ostrich that what they weren't willing to see would therefore cease to exist. A week after Sputnik had electrified the world, too many of these leaders were already busy trying to stick their heads back in the golf traps—denying the obvious, shrugging it off, pretending we had bigger plans all the time, and so forth. Such leaders would do well to study the last days of the Roman Empire and meditate on them.

What can the rest of us do, especially those of us who, through science-fiction, know

how real and vital space flight is going to be to the human future. We can do something—we can do our utmost to sway public opinion behind a new crash program for rocket engineering and space flight.

In spite of the fact that America has more science-fiction magazines and science-fiction readers than any other country in the world (and here again Russia is a close second), we have always been shy of publicly admitting belief in space travel. Buck Rogers may be a household word, but serious people smile when they hear it. When the first American society of space-travel enthusiasts was formed back in 1931, it took the name of the American Interplanetary Society and called its journal *Astronautics*. But as soon as it grew large and began to attract practical engineers to its ranks, it embarrassedly changed its name to the conservative American Rocket Society and its magazine to *Jet Propulsion*. To this day rocket engineers would rather talk in public only about ballistic missiles, jet planes, and cargo rockets, and avoid public references to any "wild" ideas of moon-flight.

It is this curious reluctance

to admit publicly what is actually the heart's desire of every rocket man that has helped to hold back our progress. Mention moon-flying to a congressman and he'd think you crazy. Instead talk about V-2s and missiles. That sounds more businesslike.

This sort of nonsense has got to stop. Rocket men must speak out and name their objective boldly and clearly. We want the moon! We want it now, and we want it for the free world! We have the means, we have the will—give us the money and we will give you the universe!

That's the way the Russians talk. They state their objectives without blushing. They never hesitated to put pictures of space rockets on the covers of even the most sedate of science journals. Their government bureau in charge of rocketry is boldly called the Min-

istry for Interplanetary Communication!

Science-fiction readers should speak out plainly. We can collar our acquaintances, write our congressmen, put letters in the newspapers, come out openly. Stop the nonsense, clear the decks, build the space-ships *now*.

If we don't, then in a few years we are going to be able to stand out in our back yards and look at a real new Soviet Satellite. It's going to be a big white sphere in the night sky with very familiar features. It's going to be called Luna; there'll be a red flag stuck on a mast in the middle of the Sea of Serenity and another on the top of Tycho. And the Man in the Moon will be broadcasting down to Earth every day—in Russian.

That's the way it's probably going to be.

THE END

THE ORZU PROBLEM

by LLOYD BIGGLE, JR.

All he did was to obey orders—but out in the galaxy sizes can be terribly deceptive!



ALL RIGHT. So I've been in the government service for twenty years, and my rating is only Grade 10. That isn't *my* fault. The Special Problems Section is a tough place to work. I've been up and down plenty of times during those twenty years. I've dropped from Grade 3 down to

Grade 7, and once I went from Grade 2 all the way down to Grade 8. I never blamed a - one but myself for those demotions. When a man pulls a boner, he has to live with it.

This last time, though, I was at the top—a bona fide Grade 1, and the only one on this Base. Central Administration

bounced me all the way to Grade 10 without a hearing, and I hadn't done a thing. I was as innocent as a man can be in these corrupt times, and I can prove it.

It began with a letter, and the Chief brought it in himself. The Chief takes a personal interest in the members of his staff, and when he comes up with a first class stinker, he likes to see the expression on the face of the man that gets it. He leered at me, and slid the letter across my desk.

"Special Problems Section, Base XVI," I read. "Requisition: With all possible dispatch furnish one pair live Orzus to Galaxia Zoological Gardens. Details as to capture and shipment are left to your discretion."

"Pretty good joke," I said. "I suppose we tell them to go chase their own Orzus?"

"We do not," the Chief said.

I didn't like his tone of voice. I snapped, "Since when does the Galaxia Zoological Gardens have any authority over Special Problems?"

"Ever since the Galactic Commission passed a special resolution ordering all Special Problems Sections to extend full cooperation. Galaxia Zoological Gardens are to have a

prize collection of monstrosities from all over the galaxy. An added tourist attraction for the capital, they say, and maybe it's a good idea. If the collection is hideous enough, it might make the politicians look good."

"One pair live Orzus, coming up," I said.

With considerable reluctance I laid aside the problem of the decreasing birth rate on Parmo, and went down to the library to stalk my Orzus.

Normally a problem of this type is no problem at all. Special Problems simply passes the request along to the local Colonial Administrator. The Administrator finds someone in his organization who can carry it out, and sends Special Problems a billing for any expense involved. Special Problems passes the billing along, with appropriate padding, of course, to the department that originated the request. And the problem is buried in an *Action Taken* file.

The library had a new girl in the reference section—a trim little redhead with green eyes and the kind of figure I didn't think they allowed out on the perimeter.

"Where did you come from?" I said. "I thought this

Base had some kind of regulation against being beautiful."

"I've heard that line eighty-seven times in the last four days," she said. "And I came out here to marry a man in the Supply Department."

"Dial me one pair of Orzuz," I said.

She did. We worked out eleven different ways to spell Orzuz, and all we got was a blank screen.

I went to see the Chief. "Just tell me one thing," I said. "What's an Orzuz?"

The Chief laughed. "Maybe that's why it's a special problem." Sometimes his sense of humor is positively malicious.

I went back to my desk and prepared a message for the Director of the Galaxia Zoological Gardens. "With regard to your request for one pair Orzuz, please advise as to planet and species desired."

I hoped he'd assume that this sector was overpopulated with Orzuz and their near relations, and he'd have to do some research before he bothered me again. With luck, he might even decide to forget about his Orzuz. I sent the message down to Communications, and went back to my problem of the birth rate on Parmo. I also went back to the problem of

the little redhead.

I've been married eleven times, at various Bases around the galaxy, and that doesn't include a number of unofficial cohabitation experiments. With due modesty I might say I've had a measure of practical experience that no psych-conditioning can touch, and it took me just three days to eliminate the opposition and take over.

There was only one drawback. She was a girl with old-fashioned ideas. No cohabitation for her—it had to be marriage or nothing. "All right," I said. "Let's get married."

We set a date. My work was going along nicely. There is nothing quite like a decreasing-birth-rate problem for a man planning to get married. Then back came the reply from the Director of Galaxia Zoological Gardens, by high-priority space relay.

"Orzuz desired native to planet Arnicus, Pron II, Sector 1169," he wrote. "Reference *Journal of Galactic Explorations*, Vol. LXVI, No. 5, p. 1043."

Whereupon I wrote out a requisition for one pair of live Orzuz, to be shipped to the Galaxia Zoological Gardens, and addressed it to the Colonial Administrator on Arnicus.

It was that simple. I sent it down to Communications. Communications sent it right back with a sarcastic note to the effect that there was no Colonial Administrator on Arnicus. In fact, there wasn't anybody on Arnicus. The place wasn't deemed fit for human habitation.

Back to the library I went, and my redhead wasn't exactly pleased to find me there on business. I checked out the reel of the appropriate number of the *Journal of Galactic Exploration*, and dug up a few survey reports on Arnicus.

I started reading, and what I found would have curled my hair if I had any. Arnicus is a super-tropical world, with two continents at its polar caps, and five thousand miles of boiling ocean separating them. The average temperature at its poles is 200 Fahrenheit in the shade, with lots of shade, in the form of slimy, swampy jungle.

Orzu himself was specifically designed for populating nightmares—a giant reptile, nine feet high at the shoulders, fifteen feet long, and with a bristling crop of tentacles where his nose should have been. It was also claimed that he had three eyes. I doubted

that the explorer had gotten close enough to count accurately, but on an Orzu one eye, more or less, couldn't have much influence on the total effect.

I wrote up a little report on the generally hellish nature of Orzu and his environment, and took it to the Chief. He read it through as if he enjoyed it immensely. "When do you leave?" he said.

"When do I leave?" I squalled. "Listen, I *can't* leave. I'm getting married next week."

"You don't say," he said. He pulled my file, and went through it, counting slowly. "... eight, nine, ten, eleven! It isn't as if it were something that hasn't happened before. You'll have plenty of time to get married after you collect the Orzus." He grinned happily. "I'm glad this came along. I've been wanting to get you onto a normal-gravity base so you can see how much weight you've put on."

"That's a great idea," I said. "Send me back to Terra for that leave I was supposed to have last year. I think the girl would like that. But leave Orzu out of it."

"I'll fix it up with Exploration to get you a ship and

crew," he said. "But you go along to boss the operation. Either you bring back Orzu, or you stay on Arnicus and grow your own tentacles. Special Problems has a reputation to maintain."

As you know, Special Problems has top priority over any department except the military. It took just three days to get an expedition together and equip it. The military cooperated with the loan of a space cruiser.

As I had figured, my little redhead didn't take kindly to the idea. She was looking forward to getting married, which is an excellent state of mind for a woman to be in. When I told her we'd have to wait she threw a tantrum and quite a few other things. The same night I saw her down by the space port strolling with her man from the Supply Department. And when I went down to the library to wish her good by, she told me not to hurry back.

I LEFT for Arnicus with a Space Navy crew, a dozen experienced explorers, and the best equipment Base could provide. And there were several things wrong. No one on board had ever been to Arnicus be-

fore—and few of us were pleased at the prospect of going there.

My explorers were hardened individualists. The first day they got into violent arguments over Orzu and how best to cope with him. After three hours they'd split up into factions that weren't on speaking terms.

The man in charge of the project was me, and I was more concerned about my redhead than Orzu. Also, I'd never before been in charge of anything that involved more than one female filing clerk. It was not a pleasant trip.

On the fourteenth day I stood with the Captain on the bridge, absorbing my first view of Arnicus. What I saw made me sick. The planet was wrapped in swirling dirty, yellow-brown clouds, and where I caught a glimpse of land I saw nothing but a hideous purple vegetation.

The captain snapped out the necessary orders to put the ship into a polar orbit. "Which continent do you want to start with?" he said.

"I'd just as soon forget the whole thing," I said. "But as long as I can't, take your pick. Wherever you'd prefer to land."

"Land?" He stared at me.

"You want me to put this ship down in a swamp? Nothing doing. We stay in an orbit, and you ferry your men and supplies down by flyer."

"Now just how am I going to get a pair of Orzus into this ship by flyer?"

"That's your problem. But I'd suggest that you concentrate on *small* Orzus. There's the size of the air lock to consider."

I hadn't thought of that. There were, in fact, a number of things I hadn't thought of, as I found out when I started conferring with my exploration team on the subject of what to do with Orzu if we actually caught him.

My right-hand man was a veteran explorer named Jan Garish. A small, wizened man with a leathery, wrinkled face and a drooping mustache in which he took an obnoxious pride. He had spent most of his life knocking around in various galactic hell-holes. Though he'd never been on Arnicus, he differed from the rest of us in that he was looking forward to it.

"First thing we do," he said, "we test atmosphere. We get chemist to make some. We get engineer to make pressure cage. We get zoologist to tell us what

Orzu maybe eats. Then we catch Orzu, put him in cage. He lives, we tow cage up to ship. He don't live, we make chemist and zoologist try again, and we catch more Orzu. Simple, eh?"

Simple. I longed for the good, old, bring 'em back alive days, when a zoo only collected specimens from its own planet.

The captain gave me the ship's chemist for my exclusive use, and that worthy individual rubbed his hands together, stroked the two or three hairs surviving on his bald head, and vowed, Space, yes, he could duplicate the Arnicus atmosphere. He could duplicate *any* atmosphere—but he couldn't say for how long. How much of the stuff would Orzu be breathing per hour? Wouldn't it maybe be better to simply compress enough of the real thing to get Orzu to the zoo, and then let the zoo worry about it?

I didn't know, and I left it up to him.

The zoologist wasn't so easy. He was a member of my exploration team, but he hadn't volunteered for the job. I asked him how we'd pack back enough vegetation to keep Orzu alive. He said he didn't know,

that was my problem—and anyway, Orzu was probably carnivorous.

That possibility hadn't occurred to me, and in my last sleep on board the cruiser I was caught in a weird nightmare in which my little red-head developed a third green eye, sprouted long red tentacles, and tried to stuff me into a food synthesizer.

THE FLYER spiraled down over the north pole, keeping well away from the ocean. My chemist warned that it might be one churning vat of poison, and I didn't argue with him. Also, we wanted to keep as far from the smouldering equator as possible.

We skimmed over several hundred square miles of jungle without sighting a clearing, and finally we eased the flyer straight down through the trees. Tangled vines caught at it. Huge purple leaves flapped against the ports, and stuck there, blinding the pilot. It was raining globules of some unmentionable liquid.

We had special atmosphere suits with a built-in cooling apparatus. We climbed into them, and Jan Garish was the first man out the air lock. He begged me for the job, and I

gave in with appropriate reluctance. He took one step, and sank into the slimy mud up to his hips.

"Welcome to Arnicus," I said.

The rain left a sticky film on my face plate, and I had to keep wiping it off to see. I scrambled around Garish, found solid ground—I only sank in to my knees—and looked about. The others followed me. We stood shifting from one foot to the other, and watching each other to see if one of us would suddenly sink in over his head.

Garish floundered out of sight into the flapping vegetation, and quickly floundered back again. "We're in a swamp," he said.

No one denied it.

"Well," he said, "it gets worse in that direction. Maybe it'll get better the other way."

A good man, Garish. We found solid ground, and I began to feel better. I'd been wondering how anything as big as Orzu could exist in a swamp. We moved the flyer, brought out our tents, and made a camp. The chemist set up a laboratory in the flyer, and gleefully went to work on the atmosphere. My explorers went

back to their argument about how best to catch Orzu, if we could locate him. The locating didn't worry me. If Orzu was around at all, he wouldn't be easy to overlook. Nine feet high, the report had said.

While the rest of us were hacking out a clearing around the camp, Jan Garish took three men on a preliminary survey of our surroundings. "Don't try to bring in Orzu all by yourself," I told him.

"No," Garish said, after giving the possibility careful consideration. "Maybe we find tracks, though."

"I don't even want you tracking him, yet. He might have a nasty temper. If you find a place that looks as if a battle cruiser has ploughed through the jungle, just get back here fast."

We had the camp in order, and I was relaxing in my tent, comfortably sealed off from the sulphurous Arnicus atmosphere, when he returned. He stomped out of the air lock, pulled off his suit, and sat down glumly.

"Nothing," he said.

"No Orzu?"

"No nothing. Don't like the looks of this place. No birds. No animals."

"Just be patient," I said.

"Maybe Orzu sleeps in the daytime."

"Maybe." He grunted, and it was not an optimistic grunt.

The following day we organized our search. We split into three parties, and combed the jungle, working out away from the swamp. Nothing.

We shifted our camp, and kept moving away from the swamp until we ran into another swamp. Nothing. At the end of a week we went back to the ship to replenish our supplies, and then we tried again. Nothing.

Another week, and still a third, we stumbled and threshed our way through that putrid jungle. We slopped through swamps. We hacked our way through the thick, purple, slime-coated vegetation. We tripped over trailing vines that always looked like snakes, but never were. We chafed in those cooled atmosphere suits, and we sweated in them, too, from sheer nervous frustration. Nothing.

The fourth week started out like the first three. Then, on the second day, I came floyn-dering out of a swamp and found a trail—not a very big trail, to be sure, but *something* had passed that way. I divided my men into two groups, and

we started out to follow that trail in both directions. I led one party, or rather, I ran on ahead of it.

"Hey, take it easy," someone called. "Maybe Orzu bites."

I didn't slow down. I'd stopped being afraid of Orzu. All I wanted to do was get my hands on him. I tore down that winding trail, widening the gap between myself and the others, and suddenly I came to a sharp turn and blundered into...

A TENT. A couple of men standing there, their atmosphere suits sticky with slime. Two, three more men hurrying out of the tent and gaping at me. Two more tents in the background, and beyond them, half buried in the purple jungle, the crumpled remains of a small space yacht.

They swarmed down on me and pumped my hand. Both hands. They climbed all over me. They mobbed the other men as they came up. They leaped and howled with joy, and maybe they wept a little, too. I couldn't tell, with them wearing suits.

When the celebration had quieted down, one of them, who seemed to be the leader, took me aside and started the

hand shaking all over again. "I'm glad to see you," he said. "Thought we were done for. We crashed two weeks ago. Smashed most of our equipment, and we're almost out of air, and—say, what are you doing here?"

I sighed. "Looking for Orzu."

He took two quick steps backwards, and then he jumped at me again, clamped a stranglehold on my neck, and pounded me on the back. "Man, you must be an expert! But how did you manage it in this jungle?"

"What are you talking about?" I said. "And who are you, anyway?"

He stepped back again. "Why, I'm Orzu. Who did you think I was?"

It was my turn to back away, and we were almost too far apart for normal conversation. "Orzu?" I repeated blankly.

"Stephen Orzu. I'm heading a research party for the University of Arcturus."

We got into his tent, somehow, and I told him my story. The air was thin, and he looked completely exhausted, but he laughed until he fell off his chair and rolled on the floor.

"You came all the way to Arnicus and spent three weeks in the jungle looking for..." He gasped for breath.

"Orzu," I said.

"But there isn't any Orzu!" he panted.

"There is an Orzu," I said, feeling the way a child must on Star-Festival Night, when someone says, "There isn't a Galactic Spirit."

I gave him a photo-copy of the report from the *Journal of Galactic Exploration*. He read it carefully, and rolled over onto the floor again. I quieted him down, and got him back onto his chair.

"According to this..." I began.

"I know," he said. "I wrote that myself for the *Journal*. But they left out some of it. They left out the part that said the creature's extinct!"

He sat there, tears running down his face and laughter choking him, and there wasn't anything that I could say. Not a thing.

"I named it after myself," he said finally. "I discovered it—discovered some skeletal remains, that is—and I've always wanted something like that named after me. The Bureau of Explorations has to approve it before it becomes official,

but that's a routine matter."

"Oh," I said.

"You're quite a few thousand years too late to capture Orzu alive."

"You don't say," I said.

"I can show you some lovely bones."

"No, thank you. I never was very interested in bones."

He cut short another spasm of laughter, and said thoughtfully, "You know, I wonder if this could be my fault. I wrote that letter in a hurry, and I just might have neglected to mention that Orzu is extinct. I'll have it corrected in the next issue of the *Journal*."

"I wish you would," I said.

"Otherwise, some naive clerk might get sent Orzu-hunting."

Eventually Scientist Orzu recovered sufficiently to show us the specimens he'd collected. There was life on Arnicus—lots of it, in fact. But it was small, and in our search for a nine-foot-high Orzu, we'd overlooked it altogether.

He showed us some nasty-looking reptiles, some odd insects, and an assortment of other small creatures. And a prize specimen.

"This should interest you," he said. "This is Orzu's ninth cousin on his stepfather's side."

It was Orzu, all right, in the

miniature. Tiny reptiles three inches long, but with all the tentacles, and the three eyes, and probably the evil disposition that old Orzu had. I tried to pick one up, and it bit me.

"I based my description of old Orzu on these," Scientist Orzu told us. "They could be direct descendents, but more likely they're another branch of the family. We'll probably never know, because fossil remains are hard to come by on this planet. Cute little fellows, aren't they?"

They looked repulsive to me, but I had an inspiration. "Let's call these things Orzu," I said, "and ship a couple off to the Galaxia Zoological Gardens." I wanted to salvage some measure of success from my three weeks in the Anicus jungle.

"Oh, no!" Scientist Orzu bellowed, rearing back indignantly. "I want my name on the big fellow. You wouldn't understand, of course, but it's a life-long ambition with me—to have a giant fossil named after me. This may be my last chance. You have to discover one of those things to have the privilege of naming it, and Space knows when I'll get away on another field trip."

He ducked into a tent, and came out with an armful of

bones. "Look at him!" he purred.

I know a fanatic when I see one, and I didn't press the point. "Then how about *Morzu*?" I said.

He beamed at me. "I have a better idea. Let's name it after you!"

"No, thank you," I said, when I had my shuddering under control.

"Well, *Morzu* sounds good." He chuckled. "I guess it will see *more zoo* than Orzu, at that!"

I wasn't carrying a blaster, and probably it was just as well for Orzu that I wasn't.

The scientist had already solved the problem of atmosphere and diet for his specimens, so we sent the ship a *mission accomplished* message, and started packing. Everyone was happy except Jan Garish, who went around mumbling because he wouldn't be able to set foot on the southern continent. We ferried our own equipment, and Orzu's, up to the cruiser, along with two extra pairs of *Morzus* for the zoo, and in the words of the Captain we got the hell out of there.

WHEN WE reached Base, I left the space port on the

run to look for my little red-head. She'd moved, and when I located her new address her husband came to the door. She'd married her man from the Supply Department, and he gave me a brief description of what would happen to me if I tried to bother her, and slammed the door in my face.

At that point I was boiling hotter than the ocean on Arnicus. I tore back to the space port and got the Morzus shipped to Galaxia by slow freighter, hoping they'd die before they got there. I spent two hours composing a message for the Director of the Zoological Gardens. I told him that Orzu was rare and almost never seen alive, but I was shipping him not one pair, but two, of practically the same thing—a first cousin we were calling Morzu. I added some details about diet and atmosphere that Scientist Orzu had supplied, and a few precautions on the care of Morzus that I made up on the spot. I also told him that the creatures were extremely active, and he would have to provide an unusually large amount of space per animal if they were to thrive. I sent the message off, and hoped for the worst.

I was still steaming mad the

next morning, when Scientist Orzu called at my office. Why not? I'd lost my girl, and spent three weeks in that jungle hell, and all for nothing.

It was nearly a year later that I learned the fate of the Director of the Galaxia Zoological Gardens. As I'd hoped, he assumed that Morzus were roughly the same size as Orzus, and he worked day and night to have a sealed cage ready for them when they arrived. It was an enormous cage, some thirty feet high and covering four acres, with a transparent ceiling so that the visitors could walk around on top and look down on the giant reptiles. Of course he invested a lot of money in expensive heating and atmospheric equipment, the total bill running into the hundreds of thousands of credits.

Along with the Morzus we'd sent him specimens of Arnicus soil and jungle vegetation, and when he'd gotten a roaring jungle going in his cage, someone turned the Morzus loose there, maybe thinking they would grow up to the size of old Orzu. Those microscopic reptiles disappeared into that four-acre jungle, and the last I heard the zoo personnel were still looking for them. The

Director was fired for squandering the tax payers' money.

I expected a reprimand, and it wasn't long in coming. Two weeks after I saw the news release about the director, I was knocked from Grade 1 down to Grade 10, fined two years of seniority, and confined to Base for eighteen months.

It was all done without a hearing, as I said, but I knew I deserved it, I didn't even file an appeal. I considered it worth it, at that price, and when I think of the zoo personnel beating through that Arnicus jungle looking for Morzus, I still get laughing fits.

Then the trial brief arrived, and you could have warped me twice around a comet. It wasn't the Galaxia Zoo that filed the complaint—it was Scientist Orzu! A balder concoction of lies I have never seen. My party, he said, kept him starving in the jungle for two weeks without bothering to rescue him. We caused irreparable damage to valuable scientific specimens by forcing him to pack his belongings with undue and unnecessary haste. We appropriated to our own use four valuable specimens as the price of getting him off

Arnicus at all. We made no effort to salvage his thorough smashed space yacht, which was government property. And so it went, through four and a half pages.

My screams of protest could have been heard as far away as Sirius, but it was too late for counteraction. Why, I asked myself. Why? What did I ever do to him, except save his life?

But it proved to be very simple. Orzu had suffered a crushing defeat. He had to take it out on someone, and I'd insulted him. It turned out that another scientist had done some browsing on Arnicus fifty years before, and he found skeletal remains of the same reptile that Orzu wanted to name Orzu. He also had the same idea about getting the big fellow named after himself, and he got his claim in first, by forty-nine years and six months. *

So I got demoted and fined for something I didn't do, and still maintain that I'm innocent. It certainly isn't my fault that the official name for Orzu's pet fossil is Smith.

THE END

THE SKITZ AND THE UNSKITZ

by JEFFERSON HIGHE

For that slick chick of the future, things had to be "real skitz" to be right . . . but, my, what queer notions that Boston longhair had about how a girl should behave!

THE FIRST burring of the telephone sent an icy drill probing at the bedrock of her sleep and she sat up in the rumped bed, groping like a drowning person clutching for salvation at the empty air. The room circled and slowly came to rest. Squalor of sleep hung over it like mist over a swamp. Oh God, I'm drunk, she thought and reached for the phone again. Then she realized that it was not the phone which was ringing but the clock and she thought, who's crazy enough to get up at this hour? But the clock hands told her that it was nearly one P.M., and she remembered that this was to be the Day and the Night.

She lit a cigarette and her

hand went automatically to the switch on the table beside her. A side of the room flared into light and sound as the expensive Spellcaster went to work, and an Army colonel, in full color and tridi, stepped out of the wall with a world map in his hands and began to talk of the Quasiwar. It was another of the priority spells which all stations were being forced to cast. She flicked off the switch irritably, wishing, as she had a thousand times, that the Quasi—which had been going on all her life—might finally come to something definite.

With the switch off, the color went out of the room and the miasma of sleep and living came back on the tide of shadow. Better get up she

thought, pushing against the feeling of guilt and terror that she knew was lurking in some corner of her morning mind.

It's a beautiful morning, a beautiful day, she told herself as she touched the switch and a wall became a window and the hard bright day flushed the room with light. With the coming of the light, the lost and guilty feeling came, as she knew it would, and she went on with the litany, like a morning prayer. Beautiful morning, beautiful morning, she crooned to the high noon outside; I'm so happy, I'm having so much fun, it's such a wonderful thing to be alive.

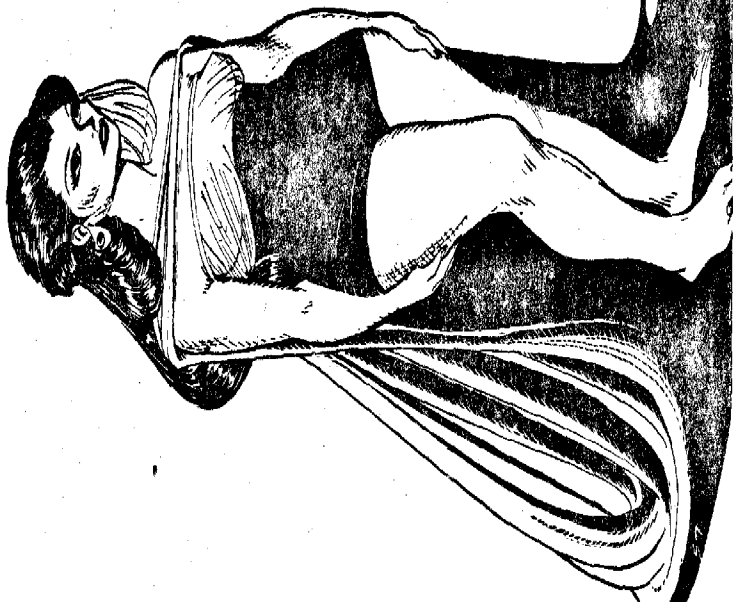
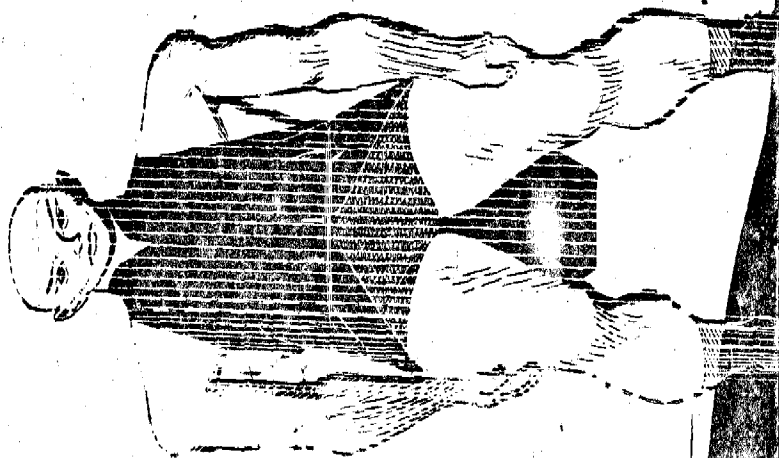
She caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror—she was very pretty and blonde and small and strongly curved—and thought that she looked sallow and hungover and blamed it on the harsh light. But she did not touch the switch to control the terrible daylight that came through the wall. Must be outward-going, she crooned to herself and caught a robe quickly around her body; I have so much fun; I have such a good time.

The litany did not help, as it never really did. The scream of a Banshee car came up from the street, there was a clap of

laughter from its occupants and for a moment the sunlight from the wall was blurred by the oily smoke of the Banshee's jet. In the moment of silence she heard the tapping sticks of the Hands. I'm a free woman, I'm happy, I have fun, she told herself, but it was no good, and she spoke aloud into the silence: "Better joy-pop." And went across to the closet that housed the Psychomat.

When she was inside, she began to feel better at once. The red light of the Cosmone came on as she lay down on the couch; she heard the hiss of the concealed valve as the diluted carbon monoxide began to flow, and she did not even feel the prick of the needle as it went into her thigh. Curled like a foetus on the low couch she felt relaxed and at ease. "I want to tell you, Father," she said, whispering into the neutral ear of the Confessomech, "about when I was a little girl..."

WHEN SHE came out of the Psychomat ten minutes later she felt that she was healed. She began to dress rapidly, first the glass stilt shoes, then the new blouse with the peekaboo windows at the breasts, then the lovely long



backless dress. Now, she felt, she was armored for the Day, and she went down the hall to Louise's bedroom.

She entered without knocking, going past the wall where the indefatigable colonel was still booming away in full color, now engaged in balancing a globe on his index finger. She nodded briefly at the young man who was just putting on his tie and who said, "Morning, Jill," and blew a kiss at her as he went out the door.

"Bye, doll," Louise called after the young man.

A woman as long and slender as a snake, dark, with a red slash of a mouth and dark mineral eyes, she moved over on the bed, patting the edge of the bed for Jill to be seated, and switched off the colonel. "Geez, the army is getting cute men these days," she said. "No wonder we're winning the Quasi. Did you watch the spell? *Real* skitz."

"No. I don't like that kind of thing."

"Honey, you must be real hung not to go for *that*."

"To tell you the truth, I didn't feel very well this morning."

"Oh?" Louise looked at Jill noncommittally and reached

languidly for a cigarette. "Who are you sleeping with these days, dear?"

"Why, no one, much. No one in particular and not very often."

"No wonder you feel depressed."

"No," Jill said. "It's not that, really."

"Harry?"

"Of course *not!*" Jill said indignantly. "You were absolutely right about him. He wanted to marry me—can you imagine? I haven't seen him in weeks."

"That's good. I thought you were going irresponsible for awhile there, doll. You were getting to be almost like husband and wife together. He looked too much like Tony."

"I know." Jill felt herself blushing. She too had thought, uneasily, of Harry's resemblance to her ex-husband. Why does she always put me in the wrong, she asked herself resentfully. Sure, she has a high Responsibility rating, but does she have to keep waving it at me?

"Who were you with last night?"

"No one. I think." Jill felt the blush on her body deepening. "After all, I *did* get terribly high," she said virtuously.

"Yes, that's true, doll. But *nobody*! Well, that's hardly responsible behavior, is it? And considering that this is the Day?"

Suddenly, unaccountably, Jill began to cry, and Louise flipped on the switch, filling the room with sound and began to dress. The colonel was talking about a recent sighting of flying saucers. "It has been fully established," the colonel said, "that these Sightseers, as the Government Corporation has officially decided to call them, are visitors from another star system and *not*, I repeat, *not*, an invention of the Other Side. There is nothing to fear from them. Perhaps they are interested in learning from us. We may regard them as tourists none the less." He went into a complicated and self-satisfied explanation of the Sightseers, and Louise, finished dressing, whistled into the Service Warp and came toward the bed with a long glass of Hashicola.

"Drink this, doll."

Jill took a long pull at the drink and felt better at once, but she put the glass down on the table.

"I can't drink much of it," she said.

"Hashicola—" Louise began.

"I don't care what the AMA says," Jill told her rebelliously. "I know it's bad for my heart."

"The Association of Medical Advertisers knows what is best," Louise said stiffly. Then she softened and sat down on the side of the bed and put her arm around Jill.

"Look, doll," said said. "I know how it is. Everybody's nervous before the Night. Even old timers like me. That's why the Amalgamated sends us out to live for a month or two with neophytes before they take the tests."

"Yes," Jill said meekly. Then: "I feel guilty!" she blurted.

Louise looked at her for a long moment.

"I think you'd better learn to watch your language," she said coldly.

"I'm sorry—I didn't mean it that way. I just mean wrong. Mixed up. Unskitz."

"That's not very responsible talk," Louise said quietly. "I thought you had the stuff to get through the confirmation tonight. I could be wrong." She let the insinuation lie there between them for a moment. Then she said softly: "Been thinking of Tony again?"

"Maybe."

"Well," Louise said briskly,

"if *that's* all. For a moment I thought it was really something bad. Now finish your drink like a good girl."

Jill took another long drink and put the glass down.

"I don't really need any more," she said. "I had ten minutes of psycho this morning. Wonderful." She stretched luxuriously. "Seemed like months."

"That's all right," Louise said judiciously. "But you don't want to overdo it. I know lots of Joy Girls use it, but it gets them finally. They begin to live in a trance state and it's hard to be a real activist when you're like that. And the next thing Amalgamated drops you. When the hard stuff gets you that way, you're hooked, and the next thing, once they take away the Psychomat, you'll be wanting to work."

"That's not fair!" Jill said angrily. She heard the tapping of the Hands going by in the street and shuddered.

"Come here, doll," Louise said. She put her arm around Jill's shoulder and led her to the high window. In the noon sun the stucco and glass and chrome lashed and glittered.

"Lift your eyes to the hills."

Jill looked up at the great houses, all angles and plate

glass, that went up the terraced sides of the mountains. She saw the geometrized gardens and the emerald flash of the swimming pools.

"All that," Louise said. "All of it's your playground after today. You won't be a Petty-Responsible after tonight—you'll be a part of Amalgamated Joy with the whole world at your feet. And now look at that." She pointed down into the depths of the street.

The Hands were coming off the noon shift in hundreds. Dressed alike, each wearing his Spellbinder hat with the small screen six inches in front of his face, each with the white cane with its electronic eye to guide him, the Hands tapped along the sidewalks toward home. Involuntarily, Jill drew back.

"Yes," Louise said. "Think of it—two dimensional spells—no color—*nothing* but priority programs and you *have* to watch them all the way to and from the factory. That's what happens when you become a work-addict, if you haven't got the stuff for Amalgamated."

"I know," Jill sighed. I suppose it's my Petty-Responsible mentality. After all, taking care of the gallery is a little like—well—like work."

"I know. But you can see where it would lead. After all, if everybody were to become a work-addict, what would happen to the machines? Economic chaos. *Some* of us have got to be responsible."

"Yes, of course."

"That's better. Now, drink."

Without protest Jill finished the drink. The talk had helped, and now with the Hashicola in her blood stream (but with, in spite of the AMA, just the *tiniest* itching at the end of her nose) she began to feel warm and responsible all over and she thought that she would get a real shot of something from the Service Warp. The thought of Tony came into her mind momentarily, but she put it away and whistled into the Warp and began her second litany: I'm so happy! I'm having fun! I'm having fun!

MOST DAYS no one came to the little gallery with its old-fashioned grapho-morphic art, but today, as Jill and Louise came down to the shop from the apartment above, someone was waiting to get in. Jill was on the point of telling him that tonight was the Night, and that the gallery was closed, but the Warp had given her what she needed and she felt

relaxed and easy. She touched the control button and the field that served as a door flickered out and she saw that he was a young man, handsome, she thought, in spite of the glasses he wore. Beside her, Louise whistled a confirmation and swayed toward him on her ten inch heels. For a moment of blurry panic Jill thought, he looks like Tony, and then, but now they all do. Then she flicked the switch opening the walls to the light.

"Tony Madison's gallery?" the man asked. He had a touch of accent which Jill could not place.

"I'm Jill Madison," she said. "We have some of his work here; all that's left."

"But the artist?"

"No," she said stiffly. "Not here."

He turned away and pressed the button under the first of the art works. It was a nude—a particularly distorted one, she thought—of herself. It was in slow motion.

"Amazing!" the young man said.

"You're a collector?"

"Collector? Well, in a small way, yes."

"From the East, I bet," Louise said. "That's where they go for this unskitz stuff."

She pushed her breasts against the young man's shoulder.

Joy Girl or not, Jill thought, she's pretty uncoordinated in spite of all her training. "What she means," she said, watching the young man edge imperceptibly away from Louise, "is that in the East they like primitive art of this kind. Out here on the Coast, everyone goes in for the Artomatic. Punch a few buttons and make your own pictures. It's practically the California Way in art."

"I'm told that Mr. Madison has some things painted in the old way," the young man said. "You know—brush, oil paint, canvas..."

"I'm sure you don't realize that what you're asking is illegal," Jill said quietly.

"Illegal! I'm terribly sorry," the young man said. He seemed so upset that Jill smiled a forgiveness at him.

Louise snorted. "How far east can you get?" she asked.

"I'm sorry," the young man said. "Permit me to introduce myself. I am Dr. Liri. I am a curator at a museum near Boston."

"Boston!" Louise laughed. "I guess that must be the last museum in the country. After all, things don't get used up if you save them that way, do

they?"

"But we think that some things are worth saving."

"Make new ones. Isn't that what the machines are for? Saving is uneconomical."

"I'm sure Boston knows what's best for it," Jill said, wanting to save Liri from a political argument. She tried another gambit. "I hear there's trouble with the Indians in the New England Area."

"Oh no. They never come into the cities, and since few of us go into the country there's never any real trouble."

Louise was more interested in Art than in the Indian problem.

"What do you want these old things of Tony's for?" she asked.

"Some of us think them very fine. And since Mr. Madison seems to have stopped painting we'd like to collect what we can."

"Stopped painting?" Louise laughed. "*That's* a good way to put it. Why don't you get the real story? Ask Jill."

"I used to be married to Tony," Jill said in answer to Liri's questioning look. "We broke up."

"Tony always was pretty irresponsible," Louise confided to Liri. "But nobody thought

he'd go subversive." She turned to Jill. "Tell him about it, doll. Tell him what Tony finally started doing."

"He started to paint," Jill said miserably. "With his hands," she added, feeling the blush travel from her heels all the way up her back.

"And was a '49er," Louise said. "Went east with the pioneers."

"You *don't* know that for sure," Jill protested. "Nobody really knows what happened to him."

"I'm sorry this has been so upsetting for you," Liri said. "I would not have asked if I had known that you were—"

"It's all right," Jill said. "It doesn't disturb me. But this is the Day and if you don't mind, I'd like to close up the gallery. I've got a lot of things to do."

"Of course. Again I want to apologize."

He seemed so genuinely sorry that Jill relented a bit. "Some other time," she said.

"I'd like to, but I'm afraid that may not be possible." He hesitated a moment. "Perhaps I could take you to lunch?"

"You're a sweetheart," Louise said. "Of course she'll go to lunch with you. I have to be running along anyway."

"Doll!" she whispered to Jill

as they were closing up the gallery. "This may be a real piece of luck, maybe just the one you need in the rites tonight. Play him big, honey. Try to find out his RR."

Then she was gone and Jill and the young man were in the street. Around them the great white buildings leaped at the sky, the big houses flashed their chrome geometry on the hills, an occasional Hand tapped along the street.

"I don't suppose," Liri said, "That it's practical to walk to a restaurant."

Jill laughed. Maybe he'll turn out to be Fun, she thought. Now that Louise was gone she felt more relaxed.

"In these shoes? We'll get the belt line down at the corner."

HALF WAY down the block a group of Hands were digging a ditch to lay a sewer pipe. The great machine built for the work stood by in stoic idleness while a timer with a stop watch and guards with B guns cradled in their arms watched to see that the Hands did not work a second longer than the time allotted to them. Without their spell-binder hats, the Hands worked bareheaded and with their shirts off,

laughing and talking as their shovels shifted the earth. One of them was singing. Shuddering, Jill moved to the far edge of the walk.

"They seem happy," Liri said.

"Work-addicts," Jill told him. "Couldn't stand responsibility. They're a terrible drain on the economy, people say, but it keeps them from revolution. Don't you have them where you come from?"

"Not quite the same. But it's not such a big place."

"Los Angeles is the biggest of the Thirteen States," Jill said proudly. "Four-fifths of the population of the whole continent." She wondered why she should be trying to impress a proper Bostonian.

He did not seem impressed. "If you don't mind," he said, "can we go out to the beach on this belt line? I've got a hydrojet out there and we could eat on board."

Hydrojet! Jill thought; he must have a fabulous RR; Louise was right.

They got onto the belt line at the corner, moved across to the Express side, and were whipped westward through the canyons at a dizzying speed. At the beach a water taxi took them out to the jet.

It was the most luxurious craft Jill had even seen. While she scouted it, reading sign like an Apache, Liri was busy with other things.

"What do you want for lunch?" he called.

"Oh, anything. Some All-Purpose, I suppose. Plenty of drinks."

"No All-Purpose on board," he said. "But I'll see what I can put together."

After a while he called to her and she went out onto a small sundeck where he was just finished putting food on a table.

"You mean you *cooked* it?" She could hardly believe it.

"Yes."

"But it's—it's like *work*!"

"Pleasant hobby," he said. "Anyway there aren't any servants here."

"I suppose it's all right."

She picked at the food on her plate—it was real meat—without enthusiasm and was shocked—it tasted very good. A slow understanding came to her and she looked at Liri almost with awe, seeing his work in cooking the lunch as the eccentricity of one rich and powerful enough to afford it.

"You must have a tremendous RR," she said boldly.

Liri was not interested in

the subject. "I suppose so," he said. "You said something about the Day. What did that mean?"

"You don't know about the Day and the Night? Oh, I suppose they do things differently in Boston, but I thought everyone knew about the Day. It's C Day. That's California Day. Or maybe it's Consumer's Day. Some people even say it means Capitalist Day—it started so long ago that no one can really remember."

"Why does it mean so much to you?"

"Because that's the day Amalgamated Joy makes its selections. I thought everyone knew that."

"I've been out of touch, I'm afraid. And is this selection so important to you?"

"It's the day all the Joy Girls and all the contenders are tested. That's how our Responsibility Rating is determined. Some of the old girls are dropped out and some of the neophytes are confined. I'm a neophyte."

"And if you're selected?"

"I'm a full-fledged Responsible, then. I give up the gallery; it means just about everything. I become one of the Veblenite elite—a perfect User."

"Veblen?"

"You know," she said impatiently. "*Theory of the Leisure Class*—that's the book all government theory is based on, they say."

"I see. You use, but you don't make anything."

"Right."

"And the Hands?"

"They didn't have the ability to be Users, that's why they have to drug themselves with work. In the past only a handful of people had the strength of character to be wholly Users. But now, with the training of Amalgamate Joy, lots of us can. And it's more democratic."

"And your husband? He didn't like that?"

"No, Tony didn't like it. Reactionary type, always talking of the old days. Maybe he *did* go east with the Pioneers. People say there have begun to be settlements all through the Unoccupied Territories—Iowa, Illinois, North Dakota." She stopped, a little hazy about the geography.

"Tell me," he asked. "Are you happy?"

"Happy? Of course, I'm happy." Suddenly, terribly, she began to cry. "It's too hard," she sobbed, thinking of the Day, of the eliminations coming up. "It's too hard."

"Why don't you give it up?"

"I can't. Where would I go?"

"It can be arranged," he said.

As she blacked out, she was asking herself, how could I have got so drunk?

WHEN SHE WOKE UP, her first thought was that she was in her bed in her apartment. Then she saw the man sitting in a chair against the opposite wall. He was red-headed and angular and handsome and completely impossible.

"Hello, Jill," he said.

"Tony!"

He came across and sat down on the bed beside her.

"Tony! How did Liri—did he bring me to the Unoccupied Territories?"

"Farther than that, kitten. This is another planet, another star system."

"How could he have?"

"That gadget," he said, pointing across the room to what looked to Jill like a tricycle in an odd no-shape kind of box.

"Then he was one of the Sightseers."

"Observers, they call themselves. When a country gets close to space flight, they get

interested. Want to know what their visitors might be like. So they sort of pick up samples."

"But that's not fair! It's kidnapping! It's—"

"It's pretty high-handed," he admitted. "But they don't harm you, you know."

"You mean they've kept you all this time?"

"No. I could get in the machine and go back any time. But I like it here. I have plenty of time to paint, there's no hustle and bustle. I'm free."

"Irresponsible seems to be a better word," she sniffed.

"Let's not quarrel, kitten," he said. "All that talk about Responsibility and Fun and Wholly Using—that's what wrecked you and me before. Here all we have to do is be ourselves. It's a real chance for us to start over, to be happy together."

She started to object, to say that what he meant by happiness was irresponsible and wrong and bad. But she remembered that it was still the Day, in her mind the Hands went tapping down all the streets, her nose itched from Hashicola and she was worn out from her strenuous joy. She thought of Louise, felicity's athlete, and her constant advice. Then she put her arms

around Tony and pulled him down beside her.

For a week it was perfect. Everything was new and strange. Tony painted in the mornings—mostly sketches of her—and in the afternoon they took care of his homestead since he raised most of his own food. When she got over her first feelings about the work taboo she found it fun of a limited sort. She was surprised that there were no flower machines in the garden but only old-fashioned roses, larkspur, lupin. She found that there were oak, chestnut and willow trees not just, as she had believed, palms.

There was no Spellcaster, though. There was not even old-fashioned radio. This lack of material had been at first merely offensive; later she missed them as means of diversion and asked him about them.

"We don't need that stuff, kitten," he said. He went over to her and put his arms around her. "Aren't we the stuff of our own pleasure?"

She pulled herself away. "That's not what I mean, Tony," she said. "That's fine, but after that, what is there to do?"

A week later she had begun

to feel something like cabin fever. She was posing for him and now suddenly the question she had asked knotted itself in her throat and she got down from the stand and asked again. "But what is there to do?"

Tony put down the brush and wiped his hands. "You've got to decide that for yourself, Jill. Nobody can tell you. You might make a life out of just being yourself here, with me. Or we could move to town and you could get some job that you liked. There's plenty to be done."

"But I can't *do* anything," she said sullenly.

"You could learn."

"But work's no *fun!*"

"I can't help you then."

Suddenly she saw that it was going to be a real quarrel.

"You mean you won't," she told him.

"I can't."

"You don't really care about me. All you care about is what you call your work." She began to cry, pitying herself and wanting him to pity her. "I'll go back," she sobbed. "I'll go back right now." She went over to the queer tricycle contraption at the other end of the room.

"Jill, I want to help you. If

you know how I can, then tell me."

"No!" she said, screaming now, knowing that she had moved him. "You don't really want to help. It's just the way it was before. You're selfish! Selfish! You don't really care about me."

"Jill, for God's sake! What do you want me to do?"

"Come back with me," she said.

"I can't do that."

Now they were both silent and she knew that it had turned deadly serious and that she had only one more card to play.

"I'll go," she said in a high warning voice like a parent threatening a child.

Tony said nothing.

"Damn you," she screamed, crying again. "You won't help me. And I want to be happy! I've got a *right* to be happy. I want to have fun!"

She pressed a button on the tricycle.

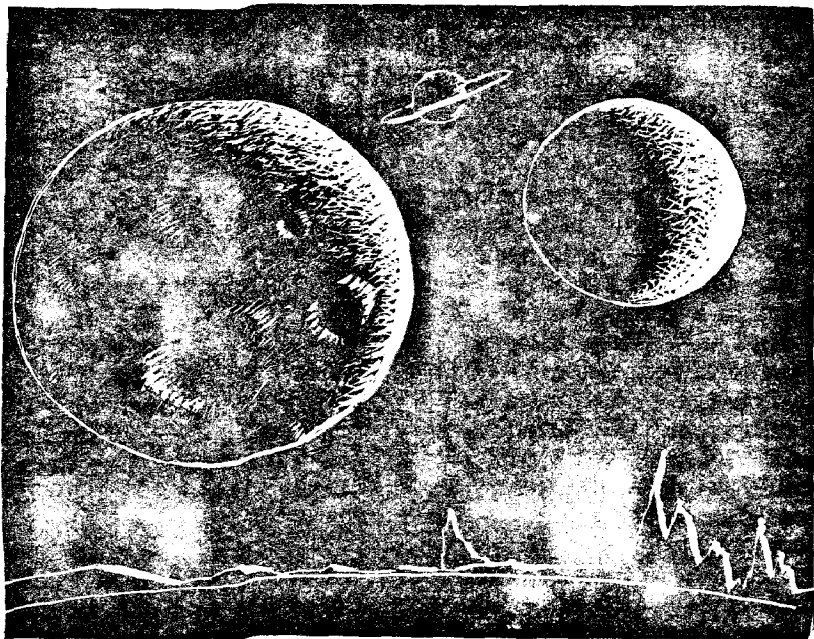
She was in her old apartment. Through the wall, from Louise's room she heard a high hysterical giggle, the clink of glasses, a monotonous and furious sound of lovemaking; a Banshee blasted in the street and then there was the ticking progress of the Hands, and over and around and through the other noises she heard her own voice screaming, I want to be happy! I want to have fun!

THE END

SPUTNIK SHOES

by CHARLES A. STEARNS

He found a new way to play hookey — by taking a little stroll into outer space!



IT TOOK them twelve minutes to do in Willy Martin. That is an all-time record. Willy, who for several years had gone quietly about his business of cleaving the skulls of lovely young women with a

hatchet, as they slept, knew that death often comes easily, and must have been surprised that in his case it took so long. By the time they finished with him, he was parboiled and basted to a turn, and no long-

er had the slightest interest in exposing the grey matter of slumbering females.

When he had cooled off enough to be approachable, the prison doctor came in, examined him, and pronounced him well done. The men came with a litter, unshackled him from the Chair, and bore him off in triumph.

He had lost, but with a flourish.

And, as was customary in that sovereign state, they removed Willy's scorched prison garments from him and clad him in a cheap, but neat, blue serge suit. They took off his heavy shoes, which, it is significant to note, were not of leather, but an obscure *ersatz* material which had carbonized and was as hard and crackly as glass when the thing was over.

Had anyone bothered to measure—which they did not—the electric potential of the shoes, they would have discovered a faint, but quite discernable magnetic field of curious properties building up in that strange material. It should have been dimagnetic, but it was not. It had subtly changed.

They put the shoes, with the clothing, in a cardboard box that had once carried canned

peaches, and replaced them with thin, patent-leather oxfords which would do for the state-sponsored funeral. Will Martin, as someone remarked had extremely small, neat feet.

After being washed and shaven, the cadaver of Willy was taken to Potter's Field and interred with scant ceremony, and the malignant influence which that young man had cast upon a world he did not understand should have been gone forever.

Should have been.

PROFESSOR SACCHARINO, sere and disillusioned at fifty-two, sat like Siva the Destroyer with folded arms and idling brain, effecting effortlessly the apathetic silence, if not the respect, of his rabble brood.

He was a plump, gouty man, with receding hair and receding hopes. He was not, in particular, day dreaming, for all of the dreams of a specialized failure past middle age are dead, and he had once been a specialist. Once. But now there were only a one-room country school and forty grubby waifs between himself and starvation.

Having once been a practicing instructor of economics in

a famous and exclusive New England private school, he understood this full well, and loathed the vacuous faces before him as he had objectively loathed them for four years.

Once, Professor Saccharino was fond of telling himself, he had liked young people. In fact, it had been his excessive affinity for one of the older girl students at the New England school which had forced his banishment to this intellectual Siberia. In a manner of speaking, he had been banned in Boston, and had come west for his health.

It was late spring, and flies swarmed through the open, screenless windows. He swatted them angrily, but his urchins knew better than to try it. Bitterly enough, he supposed they had learned that he was a master in the old, heavy-handed tradition.

Actually, in these dull, endless hours, he would have looked with gratefulness upon an infringement of regulations, and today he was not disappointed.

He did not recognize the breach at once, but when the realization was borne upon him at last, and he saw who it was that had transgressed, he exulted quietly, and sat, observ-

ing the criminal from the corner of his eye, savoring his position.

It was the boy known, ironically enough, as Brainy Phelps. He had a large, useless head, a hideous complexion, and ears that were somewhat cylindrical. In considering this gargoyle, whom he considered his personal nemesis, Professor Saccharino liked to remind himself that such Huck Finnish atavisms as Brainy Phelps were on their way out, evolutionwise. Like the vermiform appendix and the wisdom tooth, they could be considered as a nasty reminder of man's earthy origin.

The act was incredible enough. Brainy had simply unbuttoned his shirt, and was examining, with intent to incise with jackknife, a boil upon his stomach.

Nor was Professor Saccharino the only person who viewed this operation with interest. In the next seat sat Cassandra Watson, who, though still in the eighth grade, was almost fifteen years of age.

Cassandra was old for her age. All of the men who sat on the green benches in front of the general store as she came flouncing by agreed that

she was old for her age.

Cassandra liked males of all shapes, ages, and sizes. Brainy Phelps, ignorant of this fact, was engrossed in his pustulectomy. He was thirteen and had no interest in girls.

Cassandra leaned over and pinched him. It was strictly a playful pinch, but playful pinches have a habit of stinging.

"Quit that," said Brainy, in a low voice.

She did it again.

He lashed out with his bare foot. The foot was like rhinoceroshide, and the sturdy nail raked her shin, bringing a trickle of blood. Cassandra yowled.

It was at this time that the Assyrian came down, like a wolf on the fold.

BRAINY PHELPS was a young man inured to ordinary pain, and rather philosophical about the unfairness of boyhood, but when it was all over he felt faint.

He had expected his hind-quarters to burn incessantly, and to that end he had followed Professor Saccharino docilely into the cloakroom. This, in itself, should have aroused his suspicions, for the administration of justice usual-

ly took place before the eyes of the school, as a warning.

He was trustful, however, and the first inkling he had that all was not well, came with brutal swiftness, in the form of a fist in his mouth.

Afterward, as a critical veteran, he had to admit that it had been a pretty fair beating. Even his Old Man couldn't have done better. He was locked in the cloakroom, alone for the remainder of the afternoon with his seditious thoughts, and peace reigned outside his prison.

But peace was not in his soul. Professor Saccharinio had not laid a hand on Cassandra Watson. The beating might have been considered the divine right of kings and schoolmaster, but *that* was injustice.

The longer he thought about it, the madder he got. "Hell," he told himself, looking up at the small window. "I could get out of here if I wanted to."

Professor Saccharino's top-coat, the fine relic of better days, hung on a hanger against the wall. He spat upon it, and for a moment the coat was the object of all his resentment.

He backed away and favored it with a calculating look. Then he took out his jackknife and opened it. So often is crime

accomplished in a momentary passion and repented at leisure.

A dozen quick strokes and the die of his future was irretrievably cast forever. The coat hung in shreds.

In another moment, heart pounding, he had scaled the lunch pail racks, thrust a leg through the window, and dropped to the ground, where he availed himself of free flight across the field and into the brush.

BRAINY PHELPS had never owned more than one or two pairs of shoes in his life, there was nothing farther from his mind than footwear as he picked his way through the Dumps.

The Dumps were for the city of Topeka, which was some twelve miles distant, and they were a huge, strange and wonderful acreage.

Presently he trod upon a broken bottle, which pained him considerably and would have *penetrated* any ordinary foot, and he was hopping about, cussing the glass, when he discovered the shoes of Willy Martin.

They were of a dead, charcoal black, and curled slightly at the toes, and they had no

strings, so that he could step into them with ease and even shuffle around a little. The state had not given Willy Martin shoestrings for fear that he might cheat it of its pleasure.

The inner soles, touching the pads of his feet, made them tingle as when he used to walk on the dry ice that Aeolus Green, the grocer, threw out behind his store.

This did not frighten him. Instead of removing the shoes, as he should have done, he delved into his capacious pockets and brought out a ball of string. He unsnarled a few feet of it and sat down to lace the shoes securely upon his feet.

He got up and took a few wide-legged steps, admiring the shoes. They flopped a little, but they didn't fall off.

A raw, red gully stretched in front of him. Beyond lay the open meadow.

He had vaulted that gully a thousand times, but never as now. When he rose in the air, the shoes clicked together, exactly as a nail clicks to a magnet, and stuck! His feet were rudely jerked from under him. A mighty force swished him along through the grass and weeds. His shoulders and back bumped against the high places, but the feet remained a

good twelve inches above the ground, impelled by some strange, invisible undertow.

Brainy thought at first that some hidden cable had snarled him, but he soon saw that nothing was attached to his shoes.

He didn't cry out. It happened too swiftly. But his head, bumping the ground, and his bruised elbows, gave him food for hurried thought, and then as suddenly as it had begun, his heels were digging a furrow in the turf, and he came to rest.

He sat up. He was a hundred yards from where he had started, and he seemed to have run into a gently rising hillock.

He bent over and pried his feet loose from one another, with some effort, and observed them with stunned silence. He was not notably superstitious, but that he had discovered something wonderful—and perhaps terrible—he could not doubt.

He made as if to remove the shoes, then hesitated. The power seemed to accumulate only when the shoes were *together*, indicating that they somehow complemented each other. (His own reason was somewhat foggy, but that was the idea.) If he removed them, and they got together, he would never see

them again. Also, someone might take them away from him.

Brainy Phelps sighed, took a good, hard look at his feet, and stood up. He took a cautious step, then another. Nothing happened. He inched the shoes closer together. Still closer. They clicked together and he felt a kind of lateral strain upon the material.

Then, very lightly, he leaped. It was not more than a couple of inches that he leaped, but he was instantly scooting along on his stomach. His clawing hands caught a bush and hung on grimly until he could double up his legs and pry the shoes apart.

"Godlemighty!" he testified.

PRESENTLY Brainy Phelps found himself gazing, with foreboding, upon his own doorstep. He had arrived home with conscious effort, for he would rather have been almost anywhere else on earth. He knew his limitations, however, and figured, practically, that he might as well eat once more before running away, if he could get by with it.

He went in and the Old Man was lying, fully clothed, on the couch, snoring. He wore a green silk cowboy shirt and

tooled cowboy boots with red leather tops. The boots had cost thirty dollars. They were fine boots. An expensive, broad-brimmed white Stetson hung upon the corner of the chair.

The Old Man was really only a millworker, but he always dressed like a rodeo cowboy and it made Brainy real proud to see him walk down the street, even if he did have to walk a block behind. There were a couple of bottles in bed with the Old Man, and he smelled pretty high, so there wasn't any danger for a while of his waking up.

It was at such times that he was able to steal enough money out of the Old Man's pockets to buy food for them. He made good money, and seldom missed a dollar or two. Of course, when he did, it meant a good lambasting, but they had to eat.

Brainy found some beans and threw them in the pot along with yesterday's greens. Then he cut some long strips of hog jowl and added them to the concoction, which as anybody knows makes real eating. He could hardly wait, it made him so hungry. There was some cornbread that the widow Fisher, who had her

cap set for the Old Man, had sent over, and he put that in the oven to warm while the other cooked. Then he went out behind the woodshed and sat down on a log to think.

His thoughts were practical. "If a body could lock his arms about his knees, and lean forward in just the right position, he might be able to keep from bumping the ground." He had the ominous feeling that the strange force of the shoes continually accelerated them, and that they might have no top speed within the imagination of man. A body couldn't be too careful with a thing like this.

First he made certain that no one was in sight, and then he aimed himself at a little juniper bush, assumed a scientific position, and jumped. He soared along, just brushing the tops of the weeds, and it was a wonderful, exhilarating feeling. The juniper gently caught him.

His heart pounded all over again with the excitement of discovery. To tell the truth, he had had a notion that it was all a dream, what had happened back there at the Dumps.

He was preparing to take off again, but a car was roaring up the lane. He watched

it with fascination until he could recognize the driver. Then he ducked behind the shed.

Professor Saccharino got out of the car. He picked his way fastidiously through the mounds of tin cans and rubbish on the front lawn, and knocked on the front door. The mutilated coat was over his arm, and his round face was an implacable mask.

Maybe the Old Man wouldn't wake up. Maybe he would give up and go away.

But he didn't give up. He just kept knocking louder, until the Old Man, inside, bellowed like a bull, and asked who the hell it was waking him up in the middle of the night. When the Old Man was real drunk, dynamite wouldn't wake him.

He heard them talking together.

"Boy, come here!" That was the Old Man.

He didn't breathe. Stealthily he drew himself up to the rear window of the shed and slithered onto the flat tin roof, where he lay flat, hoping they wouldn't see him.

"I'm a comin' out there to you, boy!" The Old Man took off his broad, fancy belt, carefully removed the expensive

gold buckle, and took a couple of swipes at the air for practice.

"There he is—on the roof!" screamed Professor Saccharino suddenly.

They had spied him, then. He stood up shakily.

The Old Man put the belt behind his back and smiled a crooked, hypocritical smile. "Come down here, son," he said.

"See here," snapped Professor Saccharino. "I mean to have payment for this coat after the boy is disciplined. I want that understood, sir."

"Shut your mouth," the Old Man said. "You boy! Come down here."

"No," said Brainy.

The Old Man's mouth sagged. He had never before been openly defied. He snatched a splintered plank from the ground, threw it, and it whistled through the air, barely missing Brainy's ear.

Brainy retreated to the other side of the roof. Beyond lay the open fields and the prairie. Beyond that, Topeka, and vaguely a billion miles away, the mountains and freedom.

He heard a scuffling sound behind him. The Old Man was coming up.

He put his feet together, looked down at the shoes, prayed to a divinity he hardly knew, and jumped.

At once he was swishing through the air, and the pressure upon the tendons of his legs was as if he squatted upon a magic carpet. The Old Man had seen him jump. He slid to the ground and came running around to head him off.

But when he saw that Brainy hadn't landed, but was gliding away just above his head, he cursed and made a grab for him. He was still a couple of sheets in the wind, it seemed, and when he saw that he couldn't quite reach his son, he let loose with a string of cusswords that filled Brainy with grudging admiration.

It had been Brainy's bad judgment to direct his course parallel with, and above the main road, and the Old Man ran along beneath him, high-heeled boots pounding the dust, and getting in a hurried swat with the belt now and then.

After a couple of minutes he was out of breath, and Brainy had a brief respite. He thought that he had gotten away, but he saw them climb into Professor Saccharino's automobile and take after him.

The Old Man opened the door and climbed upon the hood, then to the top of the car. He looked like a daredevil rider, but it really wasn't too dangerous, for they were only moving about ten miles an hour.

The car glided closer, and the Old Man's lean, ugly face was level with Brainy's own, and his arms were outstretched like the wings of a big buzzard. Then Providence intervened. The car had to swerve for the corner, and the Old Man fell off.

The last thing he heard was the Old Man hollering at him.

BUT THE TRIUMPHANT deliverance of Brainy Phelps from his enemies was not without its drawbacks. He had gained considerable speed by now, and was stirring up quite a breeze, which revived him mentally, and caused him to consider the future.

He would continue upon his course, he decided, until he came to a tree. He would grab the tree, climb down and continue on foot to the railroad tracks, where he would hitch a ride on a freight to the West Coast. This might be a less pleasant mode of transportation, but until he learned to

control the magic shoes, it would also be less dangerous and unpredictable.

Presently he *did* pass near to a tree, but its topmost branch was beneath his feet and he could not reach it. Then he knew that he was in real trouble. *He was gaining altitude.*

It made a cold band of fear around his stomach. For all his weakness in most of the liberal arts, Brainy was strong in geography, for the simple reason that he was an escapist at heart, and all escapists are good in geography. He was aware of the curvature of the earth, and he sensed the truth—that instead of maintaining their level in flight, the wonderful shoes were in reality moving at a *tangent* to the surface of the earth. He couldn't have explained it to anybody, but he knew, all the same.

That was just after six o'clock. A little before seven, it occurred to him that he could take off the shoes, but he was now fifty feet above the hard and uncompromising ground, and he didn't dare.

By eight o'clock it was getting dusk, and he could see the outline of the Capitol Building in Topeka. He figured he was doing at least thirty-five

miles an hour.

Over to the right, a black car that might, or might not be the Professor's, was following him, but he welcomed it. And in the outskirts of the city a firetruck, alerted, followed him for a couple of blocks with extended ladder, but they just couldn't seem to get together, quite. The ladder got tangled in some electric cables. He could hear lots of sirens.

That was all for a while. Just before midnight a helicopter appeared above him and put down a rope ladder. He was already a hundred miles west of Topeka and picking up speed.

It was only a small 'copter. The ladder blew horizontally in the wind, and the 'copter labored to keep up. Finally it fell behind.

He was cold, and the wind was harsh in his face. He ducked his head, and dozed once, fitfully and briefly, curled in a kind of ball. He wished that he had a jacket.

They had all given up, and he knew now that he would crash into the mountains, and that would be the end of that.

But he didn't. He opened his eyes in the early light of dawn, and there was frost on his lids, and he could scarcely

get his breath. Below him was the gray foothills, and the peaks rose on either side. He was too stiff to move. The sunrise was the last thing he saw, reflected on the snow-capped summits. The cold pressed in. He grew drowsier, drowsier, and slept, unknowing and uncaring.

And his velocity, as he hurtled above the earth, accelerated in a steadily increasing curve, and the Earth fell away more rapidly than ever, and presently, had he been able to see it, it would have appeared as a great sphere behind him. The frost of outer night was upon his eyelids, however, and he did not know when he passed the sonic barrier, for he was frozen solid as three-day-old cornpone.

THE FORM of Brainy Phelps, a pitiful little lump of static molecules, drifted among the stars.

The strange force that was in the shoes, and which could not have been artificially or naturally duplicated within a billion years of trying, so precise was its value, had no limitations and soon approached light speed. It was all the same to Brainy, of course.

Certain watchers, however,

from a dark planet within the galactic rim, detected the appearance of a small, unidentified object one day within their firmament, and being a naturally curious race, sent out a ship with tractor beams to capture it and bring it in.

It was Brainy, of course, and they detected the singular power in the shoes at once and were very favorably impressed. They had not known that any race other than themselves possessed the secret of space travel—much less without a ship—and they had been around quite a long time and knew a lot of worlds.

But Brainy was indifferent to this too, and it occurred to them that if they would converse with him, they must first thaw him out.

This they achieved, but it was quite a job, for the molecular structure of the body had been broken down, to a great extent, by the freezing and thawing, and the brain, in particular, had almost to be rebuilt from the cortex up.

When they finished, Brainy Phelps yawned broadly and awakened.

They talked through the use of pantomime and a few words mutually learned. It was not very satisfactory, and natural-

ly they could not learn from him whence he came, since his term for Earth was meaningless to them. Just the same, they were able to place his origin with some accuracy because of his trajectory, and the effect of continuous bombardment of cosmic radiation upon his cells.

They were kind and considerate, and it made Brainy feel pretty important the way they took him for a major scientist of his race, even if he couldn't quite see them. The spectral values of their bodies were such that his eyes were not adapted to the task, and he had to squint, but they were still only shadows.

They were a gregarious race, and were looking, just as aliens always are, for a hospitable world other than their own to settle on.

"You mean an Invasion?" said Brainy who had heard dark rumors of such things before.

"Of dear, no," they said. "Rather infiltration. We have a very adaptable life-form, and there is a saying here, 'When in Syxygia, do as the Syxygians do!' The Terrans will not even know we are there, and we will be able to contribute a little, perhaps, to the native culture.

We are peace-loving and completely non-aggressive. Of course, you must help point out the proper planet."

"I don't know," Brainy said. He wasn't so sure that he wanted to go back and face the Old Man and Professor Saccharino. "What if they find out we're there?"

The aliens shuddered all through their amorphous bodies. "Please!" they said. "We mustn't think about it. It would be so messy!"

"Okay," Brainy said. "When do we leave?"

"The assumption of human form will take a few hours. Then we may go."

"Make it snappy," Brainy said. "I'm kind of hungry."

IT WAS FIFTEEN to eight, that mellow spring morning that it happened.

Professor Saccharino had not mellowed, however, with the passing of the seasons, and recalled, as in a dream that black afternoon two springs ago when he had been less sure of the inevitability of his drab life than now.

Since daybreak this morning he had felt a curious restiveness, and almost longed for the clamour of settling down to the daily pattern of study.

That, at least, would furnish company for his thoughts.

He glanced at the clock on the wall, took the school bell off his desk and went to the door.

He jangled it a couple of times and drew back to let them pass before him, like a general inspecting his troops. They came in a subdued stream past him, the scrubbed little boys and girls of the primary classes, the all-wise ragamuffins and coquettish damsels of ten, and the older students, either sullen or preoccupied by each other.

Cassandra Watson came through the door. The passing of the seasons had done wonders for Cassandra. It was rather too bad that this was her last year. She favored him with a smile and a distracting wiggle.

He nodded.

An unruly redhead marched before his field of vision. A familiar head.

It did not seem strange at the moment, though he had last seen Brainy Phelps flitting over the tree tops in the gener-

al direction of the Pacific Ocean.

More featureless faces. Then he saw the head again, and this time there could be no doubt.

"You," he said and grabbed the boy's arm.

Brainy looked up at him and grinned. It was a secret, undismayed grin, and it disturbed Professor Saccharino more than he could say.

Brainy wriggled loose from his grip and took his seat beside the other two red-headed boys that were sitting in the front row.

Professor Saccharino, observing them, shuddered as though with the ague. There were three of them there, uncombed unbrushed unkempt, waiting to be instructed.

They were all identical.

He ran to the window and threw up the sash, leaning far out to gulp the fresh air and revive himself, for he felt faint and ill.

But it was no good.

The schoolyard was full of Brainies.

THE END

THE POWDER OF HYPERBOREA

by CLARK ASHTON SMITH

*The theft of the thirty-nine girdles of virginity!
A newly translated legend from the days before
Atlantic, on the world's first inhabited continent.*

LET IT BE said as a foreword to this tale that I have robbed no man who was not in some way a robber of others. In all my long and arduous career, I, Satampra, Zerios of Uzuldaroum, sometimes known as the master-thief have endeavored to serve merely as an agent in the rightful redistribution of wealth. The adventure I have now to relate was no exception; though as it happened in the outcome, my own pecuniary profits were indeed meager, not to say trifling.

Age is upon me now. And sitting at that leisure which I have earned through many hazards, I drink the wines that are heartening to age. To me, as I sip, return memories of splendid loot and brave nefarious

enterprise. Before me shine the outpoured sackfuls of *djals* or *pazoors*, removed so dexterously from the coffers of iniquitous merchants and money-lenders. I dream of rubies redder than the blood that was shed for them; of sapphires bluer than depths of glacial ice; of emeralds greener than the jungle in spring. I recall the escalade of pronged balconies; the climbing of terraces and towers guarded by monsters; the sacking of altars beneath the eyes of malign idols or sentinel serpents.

Often I think of Vixēela, my one true love and the most adroit and courageous of my companions in burglary. She has long since gone to the bourn of all good thieves and

comrades; I have mourned her sincerely these many years. But still dear is the memory of our amorous, adventurous nights and the feats we performed together. Of such feats, perhaps the most signal and audacious was the theft of the thirty-nine girdles.

These were the golden and jeweled chastity girdles, worn by the virgins vowed to the moon god Leniqua, whose temple had stood from immemorial time in the suburbs of Uzuldaroum, capital of Hyperborea. The virgins were always thirty-nine in number. They were chosen for their youth and beauty, and retired from service to the god at the age of thirty-one.

The girdles were padlocked with the toughest bronze and their keys retained by the high-priest who, on certain nights, rented them at a high price to the richer gallants of the city. It will thus be seen that the virginity of the priestesses was nominal; but its frequent and repeated sale was regarded as a meritorious act of sacrifice to the god.

Vixeela herself had at one time been numbered among the virgins but had fled from the temple and from Uzuldaroum

several years before the sacerdotal age of release from her bondage. She would tell me little of her life in the temple; I surmised that she had found small pleasure in the religious prostitution and had chafed at the confinement entailed by it. After her flight she had suffered many hardships in the cities of the south. Of these too, she spoke but sparingly, as one who dreads the reviving of painful recollections.

She had returned to Uzuldaroum a few months prior to our first meeting. Being now a little over age, and having dyed her russet-blonde hair to a raven black, she had no great fear of recognition by Leniqua's priests. As was their custom, they had promptly replaced her loss with another and younger virgin, and would have small interest now in one so long delinquent.

AT THE TIME of our foregoing, Vixeela had already committed various petty larcenies. But, being unskilled, she had failed to finish any but the easier and simpler ones, and had grown quite thin from starvation. She was still attractive and her keenness of wit and quickness in learning soon

endeared her to me. She was small and agile and could climb like a lemur. I soon found her help invaluable, since she could climb through windows and other apertures impassable to my greater bulk.

We had consummated several lucrative burglaries, when the idea of entering Leniqua's temple and making away with the costly girdles occurred to me. The problems offered, and the difficulties to be overcome, appeared at first sight little less than fantastic. But such obstacles have always challenged my acumen and have never daunted me.

Firstly, there was the problem of entrance without detection and serious mayhem at the hands of the sickle-armed priests who guarded Leniqua's fane with baleful and incorruptible vigilance. Luckily, during her term of temple service, Vixeela had learned of a subterranean adit, long disused but, she believed still passable. This entrance was through a tunnel, the continuation of a natural cavern located somewhere in the woods behind Uzuldaroum. It had been used almost universally by the virgins' visitors in former ages. But the visitors now entered openly by the tem-

ple's main doors or by posterns little less public; a sign, perhaps, that religious sentiment had deepened or that modesty had declined.

Vixeela had never seen the cavern herself but she knew its approximate location. The temple's inner adit was closed only by a flagstone, easily levitated from below or above, behind the image of Leniqua in the great nave.

Secondly, there was the selection of a proper time, when the women's girdles had been unlocked and laid aside. Here again Vixeela was invaluable, since she knew the nights on which the rented keys were most in demand. These were known as nights of sacrifice, greater or lesser, the chief one being at the moon's full. All the women were then in repeated request.

Since, however, the fane on such occasions would be crowded with people, the priests, the virgins and their clients, a seemingly insurmountable difficulty remained. How were we to collect and make away with the girdles in the presence of so many persons? This, I must admit, baffled me.

Plainly, we must find some way in which the temple could

be evacuated, or its occupants rendered unconscious or otherwise incapable during the period needed for our operations.

I thought of a certain soporific drug, easily and quickly vaporized, which I had used on more than one occasion to put the inmates of a house asleep. Unfortunately the drug was limited in its range and would not penetrate to all the chambers and alcoves of a large edifice like the temple. Moreover it was necessary to wait for a full half hour, with doors or windows opened, till the fumes were dissipated; otherwise the robbers would be overcome together with their victims.

There was also the pollen of a rare jungle lily, which, if cast in a man's face, would induce a temporary paralysis. This too I rejected. There were too many persons to be dealt with, and the pollen could hardly be obtained in sufficient quantities.

At last I decided to consult the magician and alchemist, Veezi Phenquor, who, possessing furnaces and melting-pots, had often served me by converting stolen gold and silver into ingots or other safely unrecognizable forms. Though skeptical

of his powers as a magician, I regarded Veezi Phenquor as a skilled pharmacist and toxicologist. Having always on hand a supply of strange and deadly medicaments, he might well be able to provide something that would facilitate our project.

We found Veezi Phenquor decanting one of his more noisome concoctions from a still bubbling and steaming kettle into vials of stout stoneware. By the smell I judged that it must be something of special potency; the exudations of a polecat would have been innocuous in comparison. In his absorption he did not notice our presence until the entire contents of the kettle had been decanted and the vials tightly stoppered and sealed with a blackish gum.

"That," he observed with unctuous complacency, "is a love-philter that would inflame a nursing infant or resurrect the powers of a dying nonagenarian. Do you—"

"No," I said emphatically. "We require nothing of the sort. What we need at the moment is something quite different." In a few terse words I went on to outline the problem, adding:

"If you can help us, I am

sure you will find the melting down of the golden girdles a congenial task. As usual, you will receive a third of the profits."

Veezi Phenquor creased his bearded face into a half-lubricious, half-sardonic smile.

"The proposition is a pleasant one from all angles. We will free the temple-girls from incumbrances which they must find uncomfortable, not to say burdensome; and will turn the irksome gems and metal to a worthier purpose—notably, our own enrichment." As if by way of afterthought, he added:

"It happens that I can supply you with a most unusual preparation, warranted to empty the temple of all its occupants in a very short time."

Going to a cobwebbed corner, he took down from a high shelf and abominous jar of uncolored glass filled with a fine grey powder and brought it to the light.

"I will now," he said, "explain to you the singular properties of this powder and the way in which it must be used. It is truly a triumph of chemistry, and more devastating than a plague."

We were astounded by what he told us. Then we began to

laugh.

"It is to be hoped," I said, "that none of your spells and cantraps and involved."

Veezi Phenquor assumed the expression of one whose feelings have been deeply injured. "I assure you," he protested, "that the effects of the powder, though extraordinary, are not beyond nature."

After a moment's meditation he continued: "I believe that I can further your plan in other ways. After the abstraction of the girdles, there will be the problem of transporting undetected such heavy merchandise across a city which, by that time, may well have been aroused by the horrendous crime and busily patrolled by constabulary. I have a plan...."

We hailed with approval the ingenious scheme outlined by Veezi Phenquor. After we had discussed and settled to our satisfaction the various details, the alchemist brought out certain liquors that proved more palatable than anything of his we had yet sampled. We then returned to our lodgings, I carrying in my cloak the jar of powder, for which Veezi Phenquor generously refused to accept payment. We were filled

with the rosiest anticipations of success, together with a modicum of distilled palm-wine.

Discreetly, we refrained from our usual activities during the nights that intervened before the next full moon. We kept closely to our lodgings, hoping that the police, who had long suspected us of numerous peccadilloes, would believe that we had either quitted the city or retired from burglary.

A LITTLE before midnight, on the evening of the full moon, Veezi Phenquor knocked discreetly at our door—a triple knock as had been agreed. Like ourselves, he was heavily cloaked in peasant's homespun.

"I have procured the cart of a vegetable seller from the country," he said. "It is loaded with seasonable produce and drawn by two small asses. I have concealed it in the woods, as near to the cave-adit of Leniqua's temple as the overgrown road will permit. Also, I have reconnoitered the cave itself.

"Our success will depend on the utter confusion created. If we are not seen to enter or depart by the rear adit, in all likelihood no one will remember its existence. The priests will be searching elsewhere.

"Having removed the girdles and concealed them under our load of farm produce, we will then wait till the hour before dawn when, with other vegetable and fruit dealers, we will enter the city."

Keeping as far as we could from the public places, where most of the police were gathered around taverns and the cheaper lupanars, we circled across Uzuldaroum and found, at some distance from Leniqua's fane, a road that ran country-ward. The jungle soon grew denser and the houses fewer. No one saw us when we turned into a side road overhung with leaning palms and closed in by thickening brush. After many devious turnings, we came to the ass-drawn cart, so cleverly screened from view that even I could detect its presence only by the pungent aroma of certain root-vegetables. Those asses were well-trained for the use of thieves: there was no braying to betray their presence.

We groped on, over hunching roots and between clustered boles that made the rest of the way impassable for a cart. I should have missed the cave; but Veezi Phenquor, pausing, stooped before a low hillock to part the matted creepers, show-

ing a black and bouldered aperture large enough to admit a man on hands and knees.

Lighting the torches we had brought along, we crawled into the cave, Veezi going first. Luckily, due to the rainless season, the cave was dry and our clothing suffered only earth-stains, such as would be proper to agricultural workers.

The cave narrowed where piles of debris had fallen from the roof. I, with my width and girth, was hard put to squeeze through in places. We had gone an undetermined distance when Veezi stopped and stood erect before a wall of smooth masonry in which shadowy steps mounted.

Vixeela slipped past him and went up the steps. I followed. The fingers of her free hand were gliding over a large flat flagstone that filled the stair-head. The stone began to tilt noiselessly upward. Vixeela blew out her torch and laid it on the top step while the gap widened, permitting a dim, flickering light to pour down from beyond. She peered cautiously over the top of the flag, which became fully uptilted by its hidden mechanism and then climbed through motioning us to follow.

We stood in the shadow of a broad pillar at one side of the back part of Leniqua's temple. No priest, woman or visitor was in sight but we heard a confused humming of voices at some vague remove. Leniqua's image, presenting its reverend rear, sat on a high dais in the center of the nave. Altar fires, golden, blue and green, flamed spasmodically before the god, making his shadow writhe on the floor and against the rear wall like a delirious giant in a dance of copulation with an unseen partner.

Vixeela found and manipulated the spring that caused the flagstone to sink back as part of a level floor. Then the three of us stole forward, keeping in the god's wavering shadow. The nave was still vacant but noise came more audibly from open doorways at one side, resolving itself into gay cries and hysterical laughers.

"Now," whispered Veezi Phenquor.

I drew from a side-pocket the vial he had given us and pried away the wax with a sharp knife. The cork, half-rotten with age, was easily removed. I poured the vial's contents on the back bottom step of Leniqua's dais—a pale

stream that quivered and undulated with uncanny life and luster as it fell in the god's shadow. When the vial was empty I ignited the heap of powder.

IT BURNED instantly with a clear, high-leaping flame. Immediately, it seemed, the air was full of surging phantoms—a soundless, multitudinous explosion, beating upon us, blasting our nostrils with charnel fumes till we reeled before it, choking and strangling. There was however no sense of material impact from the hideous forms that seemed to melt over and through us, rushing in all directions, as if every atom of the burning powder released a separate ghost.

Hastily we covered our noses with squares of thick cloth that Veezi had warned us to bring for this purpose. Something of our usual aplomb returned and we moved forward through the seething rout. Lascivious blue cadavers intertwined around us. Miscegenations of women and tigers arched over us. Monsters double-headed and triple-tailed, goblins and ghouls rose obliquely to the far ceiling or rolled and melted to other and more nameless apparitions in lower

air. Green sea-things, like unions of drowned men and cotopi coiled and dribbled with dank slime along the floor.

Then we heard the cries of fright from the temple's inmates and visitors and began to meet naked men and women who rushed frantically through that army of beleaguering phantoms toward the exits. Those who encountered us face to face recoiled as if we too were shapes of intolerable horror.

The naked men were mostly young. After them came middle-aged merchants and aldermen, bald and pot-bellied, some clad in undergarments, some in snatched-up cloaks too short to cover them below the hips. Women, lean, fat or buxom, tumbled screaming for the outer doors. None of them, we saw with approbation, had retained her chastity girdle.

Lastly came the priests, with mouths like gaping squares of terror, emitting shrill cries. All of them had dropped their sickles. They passed us, blindly disregarding our presence, and ran after the rest. The host of powder-born specters soon shrouded them from view.

Satisfied that the temple was now empty of its inmates and

clients, we turned our attention to the first corridor. The doors of the separate rooms were all open. We divided our labors, taking each a room, and removing from disordered beds and garment-littered floors the cast-off girdles of gold and gems. We met at the corridor's end, where our collected loot was thrust into the strong thin sack I had carried under my cloak. Many of the phantoms still lingered, achieving new and ghastlier fusions, dropping their members upon us as they began to diswreathe.

Soon we had searched all the rooms apportioned to the women. My sack was full, and I had counted thirty-eight girdles at the end of the third corridor. One girdle was still missing; but Vixeela's sharp eyes caught the gleam of an emerald-studded buckle protruding from under the dissolving legs of a hairy satyr-like ghost on a pile of male garments in the corner. She snatched up the girdle and carried it in her hand henceforward.

We hurried back to Leniqua's nave, believing it to be vacant of all human occupants by now. To our disconcertion the High Priest, whose name Vixeela knew as Marquanos,

was standing before the altar, striking blows with a long phallic rod of bronze, his insignia of office, at certain apparitions that remained floating in the air.

Marquanos rushed toward us with a harsh cry as we neared him, dealing a blow at Vixeela that would have brained her if she had not slipped agilely to one side. The High Priest staggered, nearly losing his balance. Before he could turn upon her again, Vixeela brought down on his tonsured head the heavy chastity girdle she bore in her right hand. Marquanos toppled like a slaughtered ox beneath the pole-ax of the butcher, and lay prostrate, writhing a little. Blood ran in rills from the serrated imprint of the great jewels on his scalp. Whether he was dead or still living, we did not pause to ascertain.

WE MADE our exit without delay. After the fright they had received, there was small likelihood that any of the temple's denizens would venture to return for some hours. The movable slab fell smoothly back into place behind us. We hurried along the underground passage, I carrying the sack

and the others preceding me in order to drag it through straitened places and over piles of rubble when I was forced to set it down. We reached the creep-hung entrance without incident. There we paused awhile before emerging into the moon-streaked woods, and listened cautiously to cries that diminished with distance. Apparently no one had thought of the rear adit or had even realized that there was any such human motive as robbery behind the invasion of terrifying specters.

Reassured, we came forth from the cavern and found our way back to the hidden cart and its drowsing asses. We threw enough of the fruits and vegetables into the brush to make a deep cavity in the cart's center in which our sackful of loot was then deposited and covered over from sight. Then, settling ourselves on the grassy ground, we waited for the hour before dawn. Around us after awhile, we heard the furtive slithering and scampering of small animals that devoured the comestibles we had cast away.

If any of us slept, it was, so to speak, with one eye and one ear. We rose in the horizontal sifting of the last moonbeams

and long eastward-running shadows of early twilight.

Leading our asses, we approached the highway and stopped behind the brush while an early cart creaked by. Silence ensued, and we broke from the wood and resumed our journey cityward before other carts came in sight.

In our return through outlying streets we met only a few early passers, who gave us no second glance. Reaching the neighborhood of Veezi Phenquor' house, we consigned the cart to his care and watched him turn into the courtyard unchallenged and seemingly unobserved by others than ourselves. He was, I reflected, well supplied with roots and fruits.

We kept closely to our lodgings for two days. It seemed unwise to remind the police of our presence in Uzuldaroum by any public appearance. On the evening of the second day our food supply ran short and we sallied out in our rural costumes to a nearby market which we had never before patronized.

Returning, we found evidence that Veezi Phenquor had paid us a visit during our absence, in spite of the fact that all the doors and windows had

been, and still were, carefully locked. A small cube of gold reposed on the table, serving as paper-weight for a scribbled note.

The note read:

"My esteemed friends and companions: After removing the various gems, I have melted down all the gold into ingots, and am leaving one of them as a token of my great regard. Unfortunately, I have learned that I am being watched by the police and am leaving Uzuldaroum under circumstances of haste and secrecy, taking the other ingots and all the jewels in the ass-drawn cart, covered up by the vegetables I have provientially kept, even though they are slightly stale by now. I expect to make a long journey, in a direction which I cannot specify—a journey well beyond the jurisdiction of our local police, and one on which I trust you will not be perspicacious enough to follow me. I shall need the remainder of our loot for my expenses, et cetera. Good luck in all your future ventures. Respectfully, *Veezi Phenquor*

"POSTSCRIPT: You too are being watched, and I advise you to quit the city with all feasible expedition. Marquanos, in spite of a well-cracked mazzard from Vixeela's blow, recovered full consciousness late yesterday. He recognized in Vixeela, a former temple-girl through the trained dexterity of her movements. He has not been able to identify her; but a thorough and secret search is being made, and other girls have already been put to the thumb-screw and toe-screw by Leniqua's priests.

"You and I, my dear Satampira, have already been listed, though not yet identified, as possible accomplices of the girl. A man of your conspicuous height and bulk is being sought. The Powder of the Fetid Apparitions, some traces of which were found on Leniqua's dais, has already been analyzed. Unluckily it has been used before both by myself and other alchemists.

"I hope you will escape.... on other paths than the one I am planning to follow."

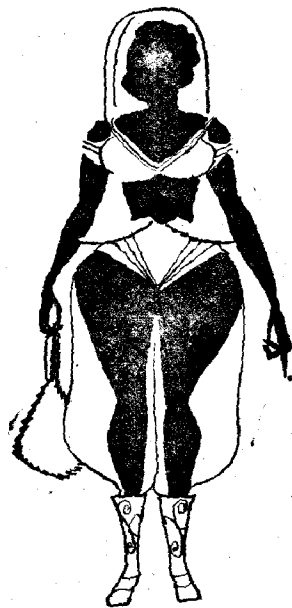
THE END

NEVER MARRY,

A VENERIAN

by CHARLES L. FONTENAY

The Casanovas of Venus had reputations that were system wide, but still how could a girl resist such a super-dreamboat!



LASSA met Tobi at one of the sidewalk cafes in Lotus, the most cosmopolitan metropolis of Venus, and it was not until much later that she realized,

with an amused shock, that she had permitted herself to be "picked up."

Tobi, tall and dark, waved away the waiter who ap-

proached when Lassa gave him smiling permission to share her table.

"Nothing," said Tobi. "I just wish to sit and watch the passers-by, and perhaps amuse this charming young lady with my idle conversation."

He did amuse her. He fascinated her. He knew more about Venus and things Venarian than anyone else she had met on this extended vacation. His knowledge went far beyond common things, too. He was brilliant and understanding.

Lassa was surprised to learn they had been talking for three hours, when Hal appeared beside their table.

"Miss Virdo, your mother sends word that you should be getting dressed for the party tonight," said Hal.

"Thank you, Hal," she said. "Tell Mother I'll be up right away."

Hal bowed slightly and left them.

"A very gracious gentleman," remarked Tobi, and Lassa read into his tone a faint reproach for not having introduced Hal. She smiled.

"Hal is a robot," she explained. "The Virdo family robot. A remarkable likeness to the human, don't you think?"

"I'm surprised he is still a servant," said Tobi. "On Venus, you know, robots have equal rights with humans."

"Hal's loyalty is built into him," she said. "We had him built on Luna especially for this trip. No broadcast power here, you know, so we have to plug him in every night to recharge his generators. And now I'm sorry, but I really must go."

They saw each other often after that, dancing, driving through the colorful sand hills, swimming in the artificial lake north of Lotus.

"You are the first really intelligent woman I have ever known, Lassa," Tobi told her soberly. "Most women are all body and no brains."

"But don't you like my body too, Tobi?" she asked, a little piqued.

"Your face and body are perfect," he assured her. "I admire perfection, but it is very rare."

So the time came when, Tobi having said nothing about it, she asked him to marry her.

"Are you sure it's me you admire, Lassa, and not just a strong, handsome body?" he asked. There was anxiety in his tone.

"You are strong and handsome, Tobi," she said, patting his arm. His muscles were like iron. "But I think most of all I love you for your mind. You are the most brilliant and talented person I have ever known."

Of course, Rico raised tearful objections to the engagement, as Lassa had expected. Rico was from Earth, and there had been an understanding between them.

"It wasn't so much for my sake, Lassa," Rico implored. "But at least choose an Earthman to marry. Don't you know Venerian law? Don't you know that on Venus a wife becomes her husband's slave and cannot divorce him?"

"Please, Rico," she said stiffly. "I certainly am not marrying Tobi with the idea of divorcing him."

The wedding, in the great Cathedral of the Golden Lotus, went off like clockwork. The bride and groom fled in a shower of real Terrestrial rice, and by nightfall were established in a room of the beautiful Hotel Venus de Milo, on the far side of the lake.

They passed up supper, though Lassa objected that "I've never sat across a table from you since the day we

met." But Tobi was tired. His shoulders drooped and his movements were slow. It made her wonder if he was as young as he looked.

They retired to the bridal suite. In the tub, Lassa relaxed in a bubble bath and luxuriated in delicious trepidation.

"How many brides," she wondered, "go through this range of emotions on their wedding nights? Do all of them wonder if they have made the right choice? Do all of them think, all at once, 'I don't really know the man I married at all?'"

Clean and soft, she emerged into the bedroom in filmy negligee. Tobi had removed his shirt, but that was all. He was sitting in the big easy chair, waiting for her.

"Is something wrong, Tobi?" she asked in alarm. "You aren't ill, are you?"

"Nothing's wrong," he said. As she approached, he lifted his hand and held out to her the plug end of an electric cable.

"What's this?" she asked.

He turned his back to her. Horrified, she saw the socket between his shoulder blades.

"Plug me in," he ordered.

THE END

REQUIEM FOR A SMALL PLANET

by RAY CUMMINGS

*The last story of one of science-fiction's original
greats—and as timely as tomorrow's headlines.*



THE VOICE of the Hittag city was always a restless, muttering murmur, floating here from far off over the distant hills. And you could see the blotch of its glow-lights. Sometimes the voice would rise as though in anger. Sometimes

the blotch would spread, then die away and surge again. Restless; active with the struggle for accomplishment. To Jan, as he stretched sprawled on the blue sward, comfortable and lazy with the fullness of the food inside him, it seemed that the intruding presence of the distant Hittags was the only dissonance here in his little world. The shimmering blue pool at his feet was beautiful. Mara's music, as she played and sang to herself after the evening meal, was sweet and gentle like herself. The perfume of the flowers massed around the garden and Mara's dwelling here, the shining opalescence of the eternal twilight, seemed to make Jan's soul expand so that life was holding everything that one could want.

But always—all Jan's young life—the jangle of the Hittag's was off there beyond the purple hills.

Now little Mara came through the dwelling entrance into the garden. Her stringed lute was in her hand. Her long pale hair, the pale draped robe, shimmered blue in the warm dimness. Her gentle beauty was like an aura around her.

"Jan?"

He stirred on the sward. "Yes, Mara? Here I am." He

sat up, smiling, extended his hand as she came to him so that he drew her down, reclining beside him.

"Play more, Mara."

The stirring flying things cheeped to join her music, little vivid blobs of color as they flitted among the blue-gold leaves. The fountain of the pool was a soft background of harmony.

But the Hittag splotch in the blur of distance was muttering loud tonight. Jan could see that Mara's blue eyes were troubled.

He stopped her music. "What is it, Mara? There is something wrong?"

It seemed such a momentous question.

"Old Mama Megan," she said. "To the very aged must come a divination? Don't you think so?"

"What of her?"

"She tells me that now we should fear Hido."

That terrible word fear. Word so incongruous here in the little realm of the Marans that one might grow from childhood to maturity and scarcely hear it uttered. Fear Hido? How could they fear Hido who for so long had done the few simple tasks of gathering the food from the lush

fields, serving it, and keeping their dwelling in order? Hido with his dwarfed, ugly little body, his imp-grin and comical gestures and jokes that always made you laugh—why should the dread word fear be invoked, because of him?

“Mama Megan reminds me that once he was a Hittag,” Mara was saying.

So long ago, when still Jan's mother and father were living and Jan was very small, Hido had come; beaten and scourged by the Hittags, he had come like a refugee to the Marans. No Hittag had bothered to chase him. No Hittag, busy, restless with his civilized struggle toward what he called achievement, would ever bother with anything concerning the little race of Marans off here in the secluded hills. To the great Hittags, the simple Marans were savages. Unimportant in the restless Hittag world.

Jan himself knew little of them, but it was enough. Their present ruler, him whom they called HittagH, surely was a madman, lashing them on, mad with lust of power to lift himself and push down others who might oppose him. Life for the Hittags was a struggle always to create complexities. A life

of fear. A life with violence and bloodshed, and they called it civilization's upward struggle! To Jan, it was the reality of savagery. Nature was benign here in this world peopled only by the Hittags and Marans. Surely, there was nothing to struggle against. Jan's father had once said a strange word, and tried to explain what it was. Sickness. A thing that ended lives before their life-span of time. It was not here. Only age at last could kill. Or sudden accident or violence. For the simple Marans, accidents was rare. Violence, the Hittags created. But why? Why?

Jan, now that he and Mara had reached maturity so that soon children would be coming, knew that there was no answer to that. He could only be thankful that surely their children would be spared such struggle.

“Mama Megan wishes you to come to her,” Mara was saying.

“Come now?”

“Yes, that would be best. Soon she will be sleeping.”

JAN ROSE to his feet, stretching his long, slim body. He was much taller than Mara. Taller, really, than most

of the Marans. A little different, too. His eyes were blue, like Mara's; his blond hair was cut shorter, but still it was like hers. Yet about him there was something very different. A different cast of feature, perhaps a sort of sternness, incongruous to his gentle nature. He could remember that his father had been the same, perhaps even his mother also.

There was a mystery about Jan. It used to trouble him a little, when he was a questioning child. Now suddenly it was troubling him again. Old Mama Megan would know. With her great age and wisdom, surely she would be able to tell him. He thought now that tonight he would ask her.

Pulling Mara by the hand, Jan strode into the dwelling room, where Hido was removing the evening food. The misshapen dwarf, with his ugly grinning face, pointed chin and bulbous nose, set down his tray and did a little mock dance, waving his thick arms and jiggling so that his stone bracelets tinkled.

"Laugh," he said. "Who but Hido shall always make you laugh? Go hasten to your love-couch, I wish you well."

"Hido, shush," Mara said.

"And life is merry and we

are wise to keep it so." He was still jiggling as he vanished with his tray.

They found old Megan in her wood-chair, quiescent with the weight of great age. The opal sheen from outside lay spread on her thin wrinkled face, as though it were a sort of glory. Her hands were folded in her lap among the leaves of her robe. She was so old now that to Jan it seemed that only her glowing eyes were really alive.

She greeted them silently, with one hand stirring into a gesture so that they sat down on the leaf-strewn floor before her, hand in hand like little children who had been summoned.

Then she said, "I have not told you, but now I should. It will be soon now that I am gone from you."

"Mama Megan—" Mara gave a little cry; Jan just silently stared. It is the way of life, but you can never quite get use to it, the inevitable passing of the old whom you love. Mara's mother, and her mother and hers, were here, with no thought yet of dying. Now Megan, oldest of them all, had found her time drained out. Jan realized it; so many of the old had tried to explain

it. Nature tells you, with little warning signals that you cannot miss.

And now old Megan knew, so that she had sent for them.

"Mama Megan—" Jan touched her hand with a caress, but she smiled gently.

"It is not for sorrow, the ways of wise nature," Megan said. "But there are things now, I must tell you. Things of the Maran Secret. I have been its Custodian, you know."

They knew it, of course. The Maran Secret. To all the young it was a mysterious thing, a thing you could not even begin to understand. A legend. A tradition. Yet everyone knew it was very real. From out of the dim past, down through the generations unnumbered, someone always was the Custodian. Near the end, warned by nature that time had run out, always the Custodian must pass it on to someone else, this knowledge of the Maran Secret.

"To us both, Mama Megan?" Jan and Mara spoke together.

"Yes, I have decided. You two, still so young yet being as one, with your coming children."

"Now?" They held their breath.

"Yes. Perhaps you will be surprised. There is nothing that I can tell you save where it is."

"The Secret?" Her words were puzzling. Always Jan had thought it was something which was to be explained. But now old Megan was telling them it was nothing of that. Merely it was something that was hidden here, with Megan's knowledge only that she knew where it was hidden.

"But what is it?" Jan murmured.

Her grey, palsied head shook with negation. "I do not know. Through the ages, always it has been here. They say it has a container, indestructible by time. It lies there, buried in the ground."

She was telling them the place. Not far from here, out in the nearest little valley between the twin hills. Now they were the Custodians and could find it if need be.

"Find it if need be?" Jan echoed. "If need be for what? And you don't know what it is? You talk riddles, Mama Megan."

She was still gently smiling. "The new Custodians must know what I know. I must tell you now something of the history of the Marans. You have not been taught it. Perhaps

that is because we Marans feel it is a little shameful. There was once a time when the Marans here were struggling upward, building a great civilization."

"Like the Hittags," Mara breathed.

The smile on Megan's pallid lips was ironic. "Yes. Like the Hittags. The Hittags were primitive then—just little roving tribes far away. The Marans were the Great Race. They were learned in science. They built great cities—vast, complicated ways of living, working very hard with frantic urge to satisfy needs which they created for themselves."

Megan's thin, shaking arm gestured vaguely toward the window oval where it shone with the opalescent distance outside. "Their cities are out there now, buried in the ruins of time. And we, here, are all that is left."

"But what happened?" Jan demanded. "They got tired of working? Tired of working, for nothing at all?"

"Perhaps they reached the peak that man is allowed to go," Megan said. "I do not know. I am not wise enough to interpret the ways of God. I know only that their science at last tampered with nature

too freely. Some engine of death which they had found with which to murder each other, at last turned against them. There was the Great Catastrophe. And then there was nothing left but a world in ruins, and little remnants of struggling beings left in the chaos."

"And that's—us?" Jan murmured.

"Out of them, our world as we have it here now, has come," Megan said. "The span of ten times my long life. But these Marans who were left—surely they had learned their lesson." Her thin, quavering old voice took on a sudden warmth, almost as though in talking of this, she were young again. "A lesson learned from the lash of an unthinkable horror. Those chastened Marans, suddenly saw what fools their forebears had been. And they lived for the things that all mankind really wants. So that now, as you see and feel, we are happy here."

"And now the Hittags are doing it all over again." Mara said.

"Yes. I suppose so."

"But Mama Megan," Jan said. "You forget to tell us about the Maran Secret."

It was something left from

the great Maran civilization. Something the pitiful survivors found intact in the ruins. They had a temptation to preserve it, so that always to now, it had been kept hidden here.

"To be used if need be," Jan said. "What did you mean by that?"

Old Megan shook her head. "Words that the Custodian before me passed down. Perhaps, originally, one might have thought he could have a need to use the hidden thing, whatever it is. We cannot imagine that—not now—because it is a thing diabolic."

How different from what Jan and Mara always had pictured the Maran Secret to be! Just a shuddering, unknown thing, diabolic.

OLD MEGAN'S eyesight was dim, her hearing blurred. Jan and Mara had their backs to the door oval; they were intent, so that the little noise there behind them went unnoticed. Megan did not see the moving shadow as now it slid away.

Megan was saying, "There is no one in the world now—perhaps even among the Hittags save their madman ruler—who would want our Secret. But always I have remembered

that Hido is a Hittag. I wanted to tell you that—though perhaps it means so little as a warning that I do great injustice to the clowning fellow. But they say now that HittagH is desperate. There is someone else there among them who lusts for the Leadership."

Jan had heard of it. In his mind there was a dim picture of the boastful madman, lurking in his tower—the Great Leader, yet fearing everybody and everything. His mind, warped, twisted, bringing mad fits of rage, so that alternately he would order murder done, and threaten suicide if ever his power were successfully assailed.

Suddenly Jan remembered what he had wanted to ask her. "Mama Megan," he said. "My father and my mother—how is it they were not very old, like you, yet they passed and were gone?"

Megan's face clouded. Her eyes looked away. "They died," she said. "One quite soon after the other. You were very small."

"Yes, I know. I can remember them a little. Was it an accident?"

"No."

"Violence?" A shudder was within Jan.

"Violence?" she echoed. "Oh no. They were here. Right here in this house. I was with them."

"Then—what?" he demanded.

"They called it a meaningless word," she said. "A sickness. Perhaps, like I feel now. Jan, child, question me no more. Your father told me little. Almost nothing. What little it was, I could not understand."

"I am not just like the Marans," Jan declared. "I know it. There is something different."

"Question me not. Your father left you a message. You have it written down."

"To be opened, only if ever great and terrible danger comes to me," Jan said bitterly. "Yes, I have it." He touched his chest. "I have it always on me, as you told me I must. Yet never can I open it, of course. For how can great and terrible danger come to a Maran?" A little while ago he could have said that sincerely. Yet now, somehow, it sounded empty, fatuous.

Old Megan was sagging in her chair, her little strength drained from the talk. Mara said, "Jan, we must go."

Then they left her. Present-

ly on their couch Jan lay with Mara in his arms with the soft warm redolence of the opalescent air caressing them. The little shining pool outside their window splashed with music to lull them. Surely they felt older. Not children now. The new Custodians.

Jan was thinking of the mystery of it. A thing diabolic, so ironically to be treasured from generation to generation just because that was the tradition, the command of ancestors long gone. He was thinking too of the mystery of himself, the message from his father that he could not open. Never had he wondered about it more than now.

And he was thinking of his love for Mara and hers for him. And their coming child. Surely they were very singularly blessed...

He knew that he had been asleep. Mara, warm here in his arms, was asleep. But something had awakened him. Something horrible. Then he knew it was a scream he had heard, because now it was repeated—a scream, gurgling off horribly into a moan. It awakened Mara. She gasped in fear, with her arms around him.

"Jan!"

"That was Megan! Surely that was Megan!"

IN THAT MOMENT, as he and the trembling Mara flung on their leaf-ropes, it seemed that a bridge was crossed by Jan. A great gulf spanned. A transition, as though from one world to another. For a brief interval he stood dazed, trying to encompass it. All his life, here among the Marans, the thought of violence was a distant thing. Something apart. Something to be contemplated abstractly as happening somewhere to others, but never to oneself. Yet here now, embodied in that scream, was the presage of violence. Something—someone—forcing violence.

Perhaps Mara was feeling the same. She clung to him. She was gasping, "Megan—in danger—" Then as he turned and dashed through the dim and silent cubby rooms, Mara was running behind him.

Old Megan was not in her chair. She was not on her sleep-couch. She was lying on the flooring. Dead? As they bent over her, the blue-veined waxen eyelids fluttered up. She murmured,

"Hido came. He must have listened as I made you Custo-

dians—yet he—did not think he had heard clearly enough."

That grinning, hideous dwarf, trying to force more information from Megan, finally had knocked her from her couch. Her slow gasping voice now was barely audible.

"Jan—other Hittags were here. I saw them here lurking in my corridor. If they—find now the Maran Secret—if the madman Leader gets it—our little world is gone, Jan."

"Megan! Megan!" Mara was bending down, sobbing. She tried to hold the old woman's head in her warm arms.

But Jan only stood mute, with the turmoil of his thoughts flooding him. Now Megan's faint voice was saying, "Remember your father's message—so that at least you and Mara may save yourselves. I—love you both—my children—good-bye—"

She lay so still. The waxen shell of her lay still, and the evanescent thing which was Megan had fled away.

Violence. Megan had died by violence. Unthinkable thing, yet here it was. As he faced it, groped with the reality of it, unprecedented fury rose in Jan. It blurred him, this coping with a wild rush of new emotions. Then he turned, shout-

ed something at Mara. He hardly knew what it was.

"Mara—wait—don't come!"

The opalescent dimness outside, the eternal glowing, shimmering twilight of the little Maran realm, enveloped Jan as he ran. And now he knew that Mara was coming behind him, running with flashing pale limbs and her robe and pale tresses fluttering behind her.

The dim hills shone ahead of him as he ran, for the little valley between them. Then suddenly a figure rose up from a leafy copse in front of him. Hido. The dwarf jumped. He flung a rock, but Jan ducked down and then was upon him.

It was a blur of horror, this weird new thing that Jan knew was the lust to kill. The gibbering dwarf was hard with muscle. Jan could feel it as they rolled, pounding wildly at each other. Mara was standing with a hand against her mouth, her wide blue eyes staring at this incredible scene of violence.

Now the dwarf had him down, astride him, trying to grip his throat. But the simple work of the fields hardens one. Jan too, had the strength and the youth, so that now he had heaved the heavy dwarf away and leaped to his feet. And

plunged again. Jan knew that this time his antagonist was under him; Hido was screaming from the blows in his ugly face.

He was finished, but Jan did not know it, nor care. How could he know anything, save that he was fighting something which had to be killed? He was on his feet again. Incredibly there was frenzied strength in him, enough to lift Hido up. A great jagged rock, Jan's height, was nearby; and now he was jamming Hido against it, pounding the dwarf's head against the pointed rock.

"Jan! Jan!"

He hardly heard Mara's cry of horror. The dead twisted thing was at his feet, but once more he picked it up, panting, sweating as again he heaved it headfirst to crash soddenly against the rock. Incredible, this lust. It was like a water-maelstrom bursting loose inside him, a thing once surging that was not to be checked.

"You—you—" His tongue had no epithet, though weirdly he wanted one.

He was hurling the limp body, and picking it up and heaving it again. . . then pounding it with a rock held in his hand until at last his strength and breath gave out and he

dropped back beside it on the ground, spent and trembling.

Violence. His first experience with violence. In that moment Jan knew he hated it, would always hate it, with a revulsion so terrible that it made his gorge rise. The dim opalescent scene swim dizzily around him. He felt Mara's shaking arms holding him.

Megan had said there were other Hittags here. Jan was Custodian. The thought made him leap to his feet and he drew Mara up with him. She understood, of course, because now again she was running behind him, trying to keep with him as he dashed into the glowing little valley.

HE KNEW he was too late, because far up there ahead of him, shapes were fleeing. The Hittags. There was a group of them. In that moment they bounded away and were gone in the twilight glow, little dots vanishing in the distance beyond which the Hittag city was a blotch in the sky...

He paused to stare, and Mara caught up with him.

"Jan, that was the Hittags?"

"Yes, I think so. They may have gotten it."

Then at last he and Mara

were gazing blankly at the hidden rock which already had been found and moved, revealing the hole down into which he and Mara climbed to find the hidden little place underground. Evidence of strange science was here. The forgotten science of so long ago—smooth and glistening polished walls here underground; a little metal casket here, of a strange smooth substance impervious to time. And the casket was open; its tiny mysterious contents was gone...

The new Custodians. Children, really, so short a time ago. Perhaps all the Marans—so simple and trusting and gentle a people now—were not much more than children. Even old Megan, mistrusting Hido, yet had made Jan and Mara Custodians in simple fashion. Only those who live by violence, trained to it, will think to guard in advance against a murderous enemy.

"Mara, what can we do?"

But Jan knew then that it was an irrevocable thing. She was standing staring at him. And because she was a girl, and more perhaps because she was a woman whose child was coming—and the horror of the first violence she had ever seen was flooding her—sud-

denly now the color of life faded from her face. She stood staring at Jan, puzzled, bewildered by the feelings within her. Perhaps she thought it was death now rushing at her. She gave a soft little cry; her hand went out as though to clutch at him, and she wilted down, lay at his feet.

To Jan, she was dead. Fainting was something beyond his experience or knowledge. He crouched holding her in his arms, his grief blurring him. Mara and their child, both gone. There was nothing here with Jan but a great, drab void of emptiness, with everything which had been his life suddenly taken away.

Then he saw that she was breathing. It brought hope.

"Mara! Oh, my Mara—"

So much time passed. He could not guess how long he sat there in the cold and dank little vault with his dying one in his arms. But death held off. Now a little of the rose-color was coming into her cheeks and lips. She stirred.

Her eyes opened. She had come back to him. She and their child. The flooding thankfulness of it misted his vision, choked his voice so that he could only hold her with his cheek against hers and his

fingers winding in her tossed, pale hair.

It may have been the full time that one would sleep while he sat there, holding Mara and both of them wondering when death would come. But she was strong with color now. Gradually it came to them that she would not die.

"The Hittags took the Maran Secret," she murmured. "Oh, Jan, what shall we do?"

There was nothing they could do. They left the vault open as they had found it. The little valley between the twin peaks glowed around them as they stood wondering what they could do. To Jan then came the presage that though the valley looked the same, certainly everything was different now with the Maran Secret gone. A new era, just beginning. An era of danger, of horror...

THE VALLEY here was no longer the same. Always it had been like everything here, shimmering with quiet peace and security. Now there were voices Marans running here, shouting, babbling with the new emotion of terror.

"Doomed. Death—death is coming to us all!"

"The end of the world—"

"Where shall we go—what can we do?"

A little way down the valley, as Jan and Mara too were running, they came upon an old Maran sitting on a rock with his hands dangling and on his face the vacancy of bewilderment. Jan seized him. "Tell me—"

He stared. "My Meeta," he mumbled. "I cannot find her. I do not know where she is. I tried to find her—"

"They talk of doom and death," Jan gasped. "The end of the world!"

"Yes," the old Maran said. "The Secret was stolen—have you not heard that? Already news has come to us from the Hittag city. The Hittags themselves fleeing here—fools! What fools, those men who call themselves civilized."

Jan was shaking him. "Doom?"

"Their madman leader has the Secret. In his impregnable tower he stands laughing at his enemies because with the Secret he is bringing the end of the world, and he laughs and jibes because he is a madman."

Now Jan and Mara were running again, with the babbling chaos of terror around them. And others were telling them—the horrible, diabolic

science with a madman using it...

Suddenly in a little blue-green glade with the tinkling splash of a brook at their feet, Jan remembered. He stopped the aimless panic of their flight.

"Jan, what is it?" Mara gasped.

"That message my father left me." He remembered it now against the flesh of his chest, under his leaf-robe. "He said, if there were ever terrible danger." Now Jan drew it out. He sat down by the brook, opening the small flat package with the wondering, awed Mara beside him.

"Jan, what is it? What does he say?"

There were very many words in his father's small, neat script. For a long time Jan sat reading, his face grim, his eyes puzzled.

"Jan, what does he say?"

"So much that I cannot understand."

A chance at least to save just him and Mara—and their child who was coming. That much seemed clear. Now Jan knew that his mother and father, and he himself who had not yet been born, had come here from some strange and distant place. Why of course!

A strange and distant place so that they were not just like the Marans. Here was the chance for Jan and Mara to return there. A haven... Jan felt it so. An escape...

He tried to explain it to Mara. "We must go ourselves and our unborn child."

His whole world was here by the brook, as he stood with his arms around Mara. Everything else was doomed by a madman.

"There is enough, just for us two—"

There was a flat little vial, and as he opened it, tiny pellets rolled out into the palm of his hand.

"Now, Mara—"

"Oh, Jan, whatever you say—" She was docile, trusting because he gently smiled at her, trying not to show his fear.

THE PELLETS were sweet to the taste. They bubbled on the tongue and were gone. Now Jan and Mara sat by the brook, clutching at each other with a vast and terrible dizziness sweeping them so that they closed their eyes. But still the world swam and swayed with soundless clapping in their heads. Perhaps it was yet another form of dying?

But then Jan opened his eyes. The dizziness passed. With an incredible amazement, even though his father's message had warned and tried to explain, Jan and Mara stared at the strange scene around them. It seemed all in motion. Everything was dwindling. And drawing closer. The nearby blue-green trees were shrinking down and coming nearer. The little shining brook was narrowing and already it was lapping against them. Jan could feel the movement under him. But he knew, what the message had said, it was his own body which was moving. Growing larger. He and Mara, swiftly now and with steady acceleration, growing gigantic so that everything else seemed dwindling into littleness...

Already the giant bodies of the two of them were sprawled over the ribbon of brook...

Jan staggered to his feet. To him, Mara was the same, unchanging.

"Quick now!" He tried to smile at her again. "Don't be frightened. I will lead us."

The letter had warned him what to do. The trees here now were down at their knees. The walls of the shining valley were shrinking, rushing forward. For a moment the voices of the

panic-stricken Marans and Hittags were little squeaks down among the tiny trees. The valley walls came with a soundless sliding rush. Then one of them was here at hand, hardly waist high so that Jan leaped up to what always before he had seen as a hilltop.

"I'll lift you, Mara. Quick."

Then he had drawn her up. There was a moment when the valley seemed just a little narrowing rift in the ground beside them. A moment more and it was a crack, so small that when they staggered to their feet again, hardly could they notice it.

Now a new vista of rocks and distant mountains was around them. Mountains that shrank with ever increasing speed, coming down, shifting forward. The scene closing together, until again, monstrous titans, they drew themselves upward.

There was no sense of time. Jan could tell nothing of that. It seemed a journey endless. Journey into largeness. He could envisage now that somewhere down among the tiny cracks and crevices at his feet lay the infinitesimal space which held the Maran and Hittag world...

Now the scene here, dwin-

dling and closing together so swiftly, was shining with a new radiance. Long since, the shimmering opalescence of the little world down there, had gone. The boulders, crags, and closing, shrinking mountains, were glittering with cold nakedness. Rocks of many facets, prismatic with light.

Overhead the sky was changing. It was a blur now; but in the blur there seemed to be light which was yellow. A blur of it far off to one side.

NOW A definite horizon seemed to have come around them. As Jan and Mara stood together, clutching at each other with the glittering ground shrinking under their feet, Jan could see that the tumbled landscape was all down lower than their heads. It spread out and stopped at an abyss. The brink made a distant circle around them. Beyond it, there was the blur of empty sky coming down. There were shadows in the sky now. High up, monstrous moving shapes with the blur of yellow light on them.

The shrinking circle of the abyss came closer. And suddenly Jan's viewpoint changed so that he saw himself and Mara standing here gigantic. En-

larging giants with a little circular spread of glittering rock under them—a circle shrinking until presently in a step he reached its edge.

“Jump, Mara! Wait, I’ll go first.”

He jumped, and it was less than the height of his head. Only waist high when he had lifted Mara down and they stood on a black undulating plain. Beside them now the white glitter of rock from which they had jumped was a little boulder. It shrank. A rock as big as one’s head. Then smaller . . .

Mara gasped, shaking as she clutched Jan. And all the world now was a chaos because there were immense titans who seemed to be standing in the far distance, back beyond the edge of the black plain. Human shapes looming far up, with great spread of pink-white faces. They moved, and there was wind here.

Then a human hand came slowly down toward them. A hand far bigger than their bodies. A voice, roaring from high up overhead, said, “Careful, Hal. Not too fast.”

A strange language. But Jan remembered. The message had reminded him of the queer language which his father and

mother had taught him when he was still a child. They said it was the first language he had ever spoken. They had begged him never to forget it. When they had died, he had practiced it with Mara. Queer words. His father had called them *English*.

“Careful, Hal—”

Now the monstrous hand had grasped them so that they were cradled in it. With a rush of wind they were off the black plain and down on a wooden ground, with the towering legs of a giant stretching up over their heads. But the giants were dwindling . . .

Then at last the growth had stopped, and Jan and Mara with a group of grave-faced men in size like themselves around them, stood in a room. Lights were overhead. Windows were there, with strangeness that Jan remembered he should call daylight outside them. Strange things, strange sounds out there.

HIS FATHER’S MESSAGE

had told him what to expect. This would be a room in the Bureau of Standards, in a place called Washington. His new world. Strange new world for him and Mara and their child . . .

He stood holding Mara. Someone said, "They seemed to understand us."

"Yes," Jan said. "My father taught me."

Now he saw that the black plain was a smooth square of marble, with a hooded light over it. And in its center, a tiny grain of crystal quartz which held the world into which his father and mother had gone, when his scientist father had discovered the strange drugs so many years ago. Explorer into smallness. His father and mother had remained there and guards night and day had watched the tiny fragment of quartz...

There was one scientist here they called Hal Matheson—a youngish, goggled fellow, thin-faced with somber eyes. "My father was here to see them go," he said. "Then you would be Blanchard's boy? Your mother said, if you were a boy you would be called Jan."

"I am Jan," he said. Then he explained about Mara. "We came," he said. "My father's message told me to come, if terrible danger threatened—"

It was as though his words were timed by fate. One of the men cried out. As Jan turned to gaze at the marble slab, there seemed a tiny aura of

something around the grain of quartz. Premonitory aura, and in that same split-second, there was a tiny puff of light. The grain was gone.

The end of a world. It was as swift, as simple as that—And as unimportant. Certainly of no moment here in the vastness of this other, teeming world...

Save perhaps as a symbol... A presage... a warning...

Someone here in the room laughed grimly. "Dissolution—hah! That could happen to the best of us—"

"Shut up, Hal! Don't be ghoulish—"

As though with macabre prophecy he had spoken at just the right instant; the windows brightened with a glare. Jan and Mara felt themselves falling, or knocked down. A whiteness so blinding beat here at the windows that they flung their hands to their closed eyes, yet still could not shut it out. Then it was gone, but there was a great clatter and roaring and breaking glass and the room shuddering around them and outside, a terrible, distant, immense roaring of horror...

Through the shattered window it seemed that Jan could see a vast column of vapour

surging upward...

The voices and the shouts and running footsteps were a bewildering chaos, so that Jan could only crouch and hold Mara with her questioning gaze on him like a frightened child...

The voices were shouting such strange things...

"An H-bomb fell in Virginia—"

"Missed us and fell in Virginia—"

"It's war! War!"

"So what?" That ironic, ghoulish laugh again. "You knew if we waited, we'd get the first one, didn't you?"

War...War...The cries of it were spreading everywhere...

And Jan crouched huddled, holding Mara...

Violence... Violence... He could think of nothing else. The horror of man wanting to create violence... Then he was thinking of the blue-green sward outside Mara's dwelling, the tinkling splashing of the shimmering pool a background to Mara's music... Surely things like that must be the essence of what man really wants... If only he knew it...

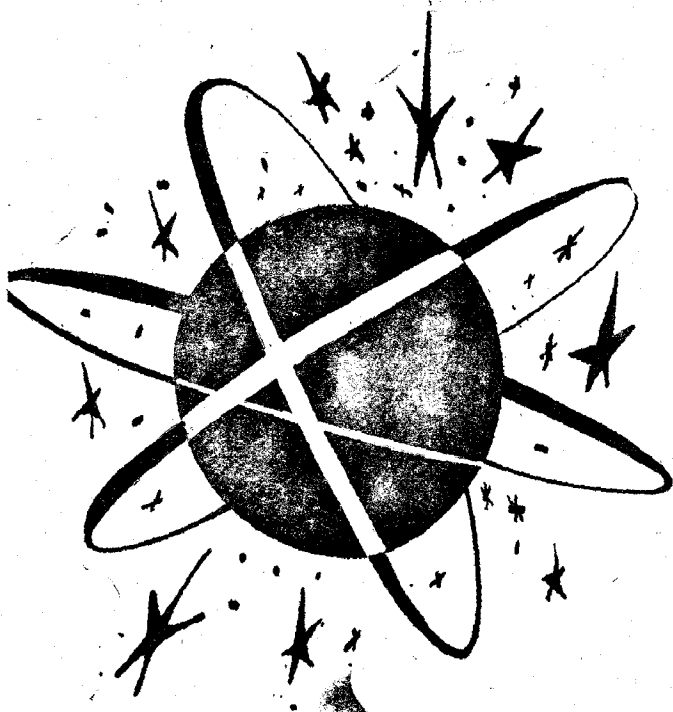
Now Jan and Mara were questioning each other with gazes of mute bewilderment. It seemed that their last haven had gone.

THE END

THE STARS ARE WAITING

by MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY

Everything was top secret except in India. There everything was plain secret, with the top entirely off.



ON A CERTAIN street in Washington, there is a certain building which makes the Pentagon, by comparison, look like Open House. I'm not going to tell you even what street the building is on. If I did, a certain very secret division of the FBI would be breathing down my neck, before you could say

"Security." So; on this certain street, in this certain building, is a certain room, and I sleep in that room.

My name is David Rohrer, and I am an M. D. with certain other qualifications. If you're getting bored with these equivocations, read on; I'll be specific enough in a minute or two.

It was on a Tuesday night in 1964; that's close enough to the actual date. If you're curious, it was six months to the day after India closed all her frontiers. Of course, you didn't read about that in the newspapers, but if you were a tourist or a missionary going to India, you found out about it the hard way.

As I say, on a Tuesday night in 1964, about eleven-thirty, the phone in my room suddenly rang. I swore, sat up, grabbed the thing and put it to my ear. I knew it would be important; there are no outside lines in the building, except a specially sealed off and scrambled wire which goes to the White House, and another one to a room on the top floor of the Pentagon. The room telephones are all inside communication, easier, and more private, than a public address system.

"Rohrer," I said curtly.

I recognized the voice that answered. You would too; you've heard it often enough, telecast from the floor of the Senate. "Get down here, Doc, right away. *Flanders is back!*"

I didn't even waste time answering. I dropped the phone cradle, shoved feet into my shoes, hauled on trousers over my pajamas, grabbed my bag and ran downstairs.

The Senator's room was on the second floor. I could see lights around the crack beneath his door and heard muted voices coming from inside. I shoved the door open.

"It's the Doc!" someone said as I pushed my way through the crowd.

The Senator, in striped pajamas that would have looked better on a film star, was sitting on the edge of the bed, and a group of men whom even the president wouldn't recognize were gathered around. In the bed which had obviously been occupied, not long ago, by the Senator, a man was lying.

He was fully clad—socks, overcoat, but someone had pulled off his shoes, which were filthy with mud. His head lolled back on the pillow. I could see at that distance that he wasn't dead; his chest rose and fell

heavily, and his breathing was a stertorous noise in the room. I pushed some of the police aside and took up his lax hand.

"What happened here? What's the matter?" I asked to nobody in particular. I didn't actually expect an answer, but curiously enough I got it from the Senator, of all people. "Nothing. He just walked up the front steps and in. Bagley, in the hall, recognized him and sent him up to my room. He knocked—the regular code knock—so I got up and let him in, and he collapsed."

I glanced at his overcoat while I felt the thumping pulse. "He's bone-dry. It's pouring rain outdoors. Even if he came in a cab, how did he get here without so much as his hair getting wet?"

"That's what I'd like to know," one of the men growled.

"There's something funny going on..." someone murmured.

"Damned funny." I let the man's hand drop and opened my bag.

AFTER A brief examination, I straightened up. "There isn't a wound anywhere on him. Not even a bump or concussion on his head. Either he's fainted

from shock—which, judging from his pulse and heartbeat, seems unlikely, or at least a typical—or he's doped. And I don't know of any drug that would do that." I pushed up his eyelid. The eye seemed normal, the pupils neither dilated nor contracted.

As I frowned in puzzlement, the man's eyes suddenly opened. He stared around rationally for a moment, and his eyes came to rest on me. I asked quietly, "How do you feel now?"

"I—don't know."

"Do you know where you are?"

"Certainly." He seemed to make an attempt to sit up; gave it up.

"What is your name?" I asked him quietly.

"Julian Flanders." He smiled, and added, "Of course."

The Senator interceded with a question, "How did you get here without getting wet?"

A faint look of distress came over his face.

"I don't know."

Another man, who was in at least temporary authority, put in, "When did you leave India, Flanders?"

"I don't know."

"Amnesia," I said low-toned,

"partial aphasia."

The man in authority grabbed my arm. "Rohrer, listen! Can you bring him out of it? You've got to bring him out of it!"

I answered, "I don't know. Certainly not now. The man's in no condition—"

"He's got to be in condition."

I said with some sternness, "His heartbeat is so far above normal that it's dangerous even to try to make him talk. I'm going to give him a sedative," bending over my bag, I began to load a hypodermic, "and he *must* rest in quiet for some hours. After that, perhaps we can question him. He may, of course, come out of it with memory completely restored, if his heart doesn't fail."

I gave the injection. Flanders' heavy breathing gradually stilled a little; the heartbeat diminished infinitesimally, but went on thud-thudding at a dangerous rate.

A doctor has privileges. I managed to clear everybody out of the room except the top man of the secret police, and told the Senator to go upstairs and climb into my bed; I'd stay with Flanders. Eventually, the building quieted down. To

make a long story short, I sat by Flanders, smoking and thinking, until dawn. He slept, breathing heavily, without moving even a finger or foot, until morning. I knew how odd that in itself was; a normal sleeper, even the one who vows that he sleeps like a log, turns over some eighteen times in a normal night. Flanders did not stir. It would have been like watching a corpse, except for the rasping breaths, and the steady thump-thump of his heart when I bent and put a stethoscope to his chest.

It would be both foolish and futile to write down the events of the next few days. Important faces came and went, on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. I had to report; No Change. Flanders woke now and then. He knew his name, answered ordinary questions, about his early life, recognized his wife when a plainclothesman brought her secretly into the building, asked about his children. But whenever anyone asked a question about anything which had happened since the day he had left this house with a secret pass which would smuggle him into India, the answer was always the same; the look of acute distress, the

quicken breathing, and the muttered, disturbed "I—don't know—"

On Saturday morning, the Senator called me out of the room. "The Chief wants to see you downstairs, Rohrer," he told me, and I scowled. "I can't leave my patient—"

The Senator looked disgusted. "You know as well as I do, there won't be any reason you'd have to stay. I'll babysit with him myself." He gave me a little shove, "Go on, Doc. I think this is important."

THE CONFERENCE room downstairs was so elaborately soundproofed that it might have been on the moon. There were good reasons for that, of course. But it always made me nervous.

Secrets have been told in that room for which twenty governments would give anything short of their plutonium stockpiles. After I came in, a guard at the door went through a careful ritual of locking it again, and I turned to look around the table.

Some of the men I knew by name. Others I knew by reputation or because their faces were familiar to the newspapers. The man at the head of

the table, who seemed to be in charge, was one of the top men in the FBI, and it was he who spoke first.

"Sit down, Dr. Rohrer," he said courteously, "Can you tell us anything about Mr. Flanders?"

I took a seat and told them briefly what I knew of the case. I was perfectly candid about admitting that the circumstances baffled me. When I had finished, the Chief cleared his throat and looked around the table. "I just wanted to add," he put in unobtrusively, "that there is no use in suggesting that we summon other medical advice." He coughed, "Dr. Rohrer is probably better qualified than any man presently in the United States, and everyone at this table will realize the impossibility of calling in anyone from outside."

He looked back at me, "Is there any chance of restoring Mr. Flanders' memory and his ability to speak within a few days?" he asked me bluntly. "I may as well add now, Doctor, that for these purposes we must consider Flanders as expendable. Provided that you can restore his memory and powers of speech in time to avert what we believe will be a major mili-

tary catastrophe, you need not worry about the eventual consequences in the terms of Flanders' health."

I didn't like that. No medical man would. At the same time, I realized that the Chief meant exactly what he said. The cold war which America has been fighting, on and off, for the past twenty-two years, was in a stage of minor retrenchment. Our soldiers were not wearing uniforms and carrying bazookas and badger-jets; they were dodging, like Flanders, in and out of the nets of intrigue. Flanders was not a private in this hierarchy of strategy; in fact, he probably ranked as a brigadier general had there been any way to evaluate worth. I knew, then, how desperate the situation must be.

I told them slowly, "We can try narcosynthesis, hypnosis, electric shock if that fails. I must warn you, however, that Flanders' heart may fail at any moment."

"It mustn't!" one man barked, "Not until we know what happened!" He stood up and pounded on the table with something which could have mere irritation or actual hysteria, "Chief, can't you tell Rohrer *why* we have to wring out

what's inside Flanders' head before he conks out?"

The man at the head of the table turned toward him and spoke placatingly, "Of course. I have already said that Dr. Rohrer is to be trusted implicitly."

There were a few minutes of silence; then the Chief began to talk.

I HAD KNOWN, of course, when India closed her frontiers. In this certain house in Washington that kind of news comes in as a matter of course, although not a whisper of it gets into the papers or even reaches the Pentagon. I had not known that India's first move had been to cancel all her munitions orders.

I learned it now for the first time. Nearly eight months ago, India had quite suddenly cancelled all orders outstanding, in England and in the United States, for munitions, armaments and the flood of war supplies which the United States has poured out in the name of a prepared Free World united against a sudden move from the other side of the Steel Curtain. With the exception of a sudden recession in the Wall Street tickers, this had had little ef-

fect on the world. One of the Indian representatives in the United Nations had made one of the perennial Disarmament Speeches which come from India. This resolution had been shouted down without a vote. Then India had just quietly closed her frontiers.

Americans, Englishmen, all foreign citizens, were asked politely to leave the country. At first, we had been fearful that this heralded a sudden shifting of the Indian influence to the Russo-Chinese coalition; however, angry radio messages filtering out, announced that Russian, Chinese and Korean nationals had been expelled even less politely from India.

Then the news blackout had begun.

India did not withdraw from the U. N., although all outstanding Indian troops were withdrawn from the world's various fronts. To angry questions, Hindu and Moslem diplomats returned equivocal answers; they had decided that disarmament was the only way to world peace. Naturally, for the sake of morale, this had been kept out of the newspapers; fake speeches and photographs were concocted to keep any hint of the true situation

form filtering down to the restless public. Planes which crossed the frontier into India were challenged and turned back, without violence but with unquestionable menace. The sea harbors were closed, and from the north came word that the northern entrances to India had all been closed by dynamiting the rocky and treacherous passes of the Himalayas.

To all intents and purposes, India had simply seceded from the planet Earth.

It was apparent to any politician, the Chief continued, what really had happened. India had simply discovered some great secret weapon and was working for world domination in one great master stroke. If the brainless fools in the U. N. had any sense, he continued, they would have made terms with Russia, to unite and wipe out this menace to Free World and Russo-Chinese coalition both. India, he ranted on, was obviously a traitor to the Free World, and must suffer a traitor's punishment. He glowered around the table and went on in a little more muted mutter; public opinion still had a few fools who kept contending, in loud-mouthed idiocy, that India had simply been seized by

some sort of Hindu revival of non-violence and Neo-Gandhism, and was actually disarming behind its curtain of silence. And while we were stalling, he shouted, Norway had suddenly cut off all munitions orders. Her frontiers would be closed any day, and already the slump in the armament industries was threatening a serious world depression!

After a ferocious scowl, he continued, directly at me, not orating now but talking like a badly scared man, "So you can understand, perhaps, Doctor, why we have to know what has happened to Flanders. We sent him secretly to India to find out what's really been happening. He managed to radio back a code message that he was on the trail, only a week ago Monday. This is Sunday. They tell me that he turned up on the steps here Tuesday night. You've got to find out what Flanders knows about what's been happening in India!"

He rose in dismissal. I sat still, staring in dismay. I hadn't believed that anything like this was possible!

I said hoarsely, "I'll do my best, Chief."

I TRIED everything I dared. There wouldn't be much

point in detailing the things we tried, because the details wouldn't mean much to a layman, and besides, most of them are still marked *Classified*. Things like that may not mean much now, but I want to stay on the outside of the Federal prison until the day comes.

Anyhow, eventually, on a Tuesday night—another rainy Tuesday, almost exactly a month after the night when Flanders appeared in dry clothing and muddy shoes in the Senator's bedoom, I knew that he was going to talk, I signalled to the Chief and the Senator, who had been present at all tests, to switch on a dictaphone. There might not be time for much questioning, and there certainly was no margin for recovering ground which Flanders might go over sketchily. We'd have to get it down, word for word, just as he said it, while his strength lasted.

The dictaphone began to hum. I gave Flanders the shot, and asked him a few preliminary test questions. Almost abruptly, his stertorous breathing stopped; he began to breathe normally and quietly, although the pounding heart-beat continued, on and on, a thunder in my stethoscope. He

wouldn't last long under this dosage. But he'd remember, and we might be able to get his story down.

He began to talk....

THE ROOM was silent.

There was only the heavy pounding in the stethoscopes and the occasional rasp as one of the listeners shifted his weight. Flanders was a tall, lean man, normally, and he had lost so much weight that he resembled a skeleton. His face was a death-mask molded in yellow wax, and his lips barely moved while his voice was a racking whisper in the stillness.

"Chief—Senator—Doc. I've got something to say—don't interrupt me—important I say it. I won't last long. I'm a—kind of booby-trap. A puzzle. They sent me back—a locked puzzle—if you could unlock me, then you're fit to have the answer. Sort of a final test."

The whisper receded for a moment, and he took up the story as if there had been no interval, "...went to India, like I was sent, and found out where they kept the government now. Chief, there isn't any government any more. Just a lot of happy people. No gov-

ernment. No famine. Bright colors...food you never tasted, and the ships that come and go every day...ships—"

I thought he was delirious, and felt for his pulse. He jerked his hand away in irritation, and I said gently, "What ships, Flanders? All the sea harbors are closed."

And the man smiled, a curiously sweet smile, and murmured, "Not those harbors. I mean the ships from the stars."

The Senator muttered, "He's mad as a Hatter!"

"No, Doc, Chief—listen," Flanders' broken whisper went on, "I seen them. Big ships, whooshing down in the plains. Big spaceport—north of Delhi. I saw one of the men from the stars. I'm a—" he paused and sighed wearily, "God, I'm tired—I'm a volunteer. He asked me if I felt like dying to bring the message back. He said I couldn't go out and live, because if they didn't believe me—I mean if you folks didn't believe me—then they couldn't have anybody spreading stories. Can I give you the message? Will you make a record of it? Then I can—quit—and I'm so tired—"

The Chief started to rise. Imperatively, with the authority

of a medical man, I gestured him sharply back. "Sit still!" I said humoringly to Flanders, "Tell us. We've got a dictaphone."

He muttered in that terrible racked whisper, "Show me—got to see it—hooked up—my own words—"

Over the Chief's angry gesture, I showed Flanders the dictaphone.

He leaned back on his pillows, smiling. I have never seen a happier smile on the face of a child. He stirred a little and put out his hand, and incredibly I felt the terrible racked heartbeats slowing and easing. And abruptly the emaciated body heaved itself upright, and Flanders suddenly spoke in a new, a strong and sharp voice.

"Men of America, of the planet which you call Earth," he said strongly, "This man Flanders is a volunteer whom we are using to bring you our message. And this is what we have to say. The stars are waiting for you. The stars are waiting."

A moment's pause; then that sharp, strong inflexible voice continued, "A hundred thousand years ago, men's ancestors lived on this world and were a part of the great empire

which stretches from sun to sun and has so stretched space before your planet was born out of the womb of your little yellow star. Great cataclysms of nature wrecked your planet. Many were evacuated, but many chose to stay with their home world, with the floods, the sunken continents the deluges and tidal waves. For this they paid a price. They reverted to savagery. And savages know no space."

Another, long, quiet pause, while the Senator said in the sharp stillness, "Impossible! This is—"

"Shut up!" the chief snapped, for Flanders, or rather, the curiously alien voice through Flanders, was speaking again.

"...assume that you have reclinbed most of the distance from savagery, and the stars are waiting for you. We have been watching. We are ready to reclaim your world. We make only one condition; there is no war in space. We insist upon trust and sufferance. We insist. We do not show ourselves until we know that you are ready.

"Whatever country will totally remove and destroy all weapons of disaster, whatever

country will close off their frontiers and withdraw completely from a world torn by war, that nation and that people will be received into the Commonwealth of the Stars. It is so with the state you call India. It is so with the state you call Norway, which today has closed its frontiers.

"The invitation is extended equally to all. Lay down your arms. You will be protected in ways you cannot even imagine. You need not fear that your enemies on this Earth will be permitted to harm you, for they, and not you, are the truly isolated.

"Display your trust and your will to nonaggression. Disarm yourselves. Lay down your arms. The stars are waiting."

The voice trailed off, was silent. The thunder in the stethoscopes began again. Flanders slumped; the rattling breath, tortured, tore through the room, stopped.

I let my hand drop from his wrist.

"He's dead, sir," I said.

Before the words were out of my mouth, the Senator was clawing at the telephone.

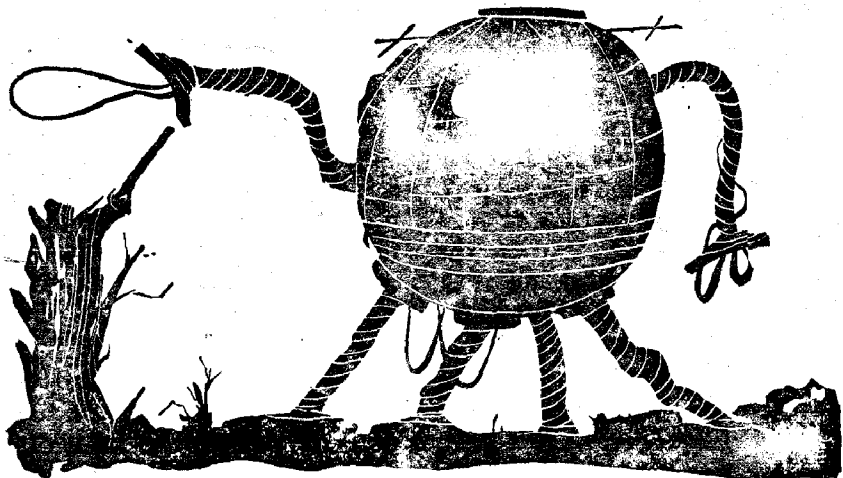
"Get me the President!"

THE END

ALAREE

by ROBERT SILVERBERG

The ways of star folk are strange and varied, but none so odd as those of that Earth spaceship's latest crew member.



WHEN OUR SHIP left its carefully planned trajectory and started to wobble through space in dizzy circles, I knew we shouldn't have passed up that opportunity for an overhauling on Spica IV. My men and I were anxious to get back to Earth, and a hasty check had assured us that the *Aaron Burr* was in tip-top shape—so we had turned down the offer of an overhaul, which

would have meant a month's delay, and set out straight for home.

As so often happens, what seemed like the most direct route home turned out to be the longest. We had spent far too much time on this survey trip already, and were rejoicing in the prospect of an immediate return to Earth when the ship started turning cartwheels.

Willendorf, computer-

man first class, came to me looking sheepish, a few minutes after I'd noticed we were off course.

"What is it, Gus?" I asked.

"The feed network's oscillating, sir," he said, tugging at his unruly reddish-brown beard.

"It won't stop, sir."

"Is Ketteridge working on it?"

"I've just called him," Willendorf said. His stolid face reflected acute embarrassment. Willendorf always took it personally whenever one of the cybers went haywire, as if it were his own fault. "You know what this means, don't you, sir?"

I grinned. "Take a look at this, Willendorf," I said, shoving the trajectory graphs toward him. I sketched out with my stylus the confused circles we had been travelling in all morning. "That's what your feed network's doing to us," I said. "And we'll keep on doing it until we get it fixed."

"What are you going to do, sir?"

I sensed his impatience with me. Willendorf was a good man, but his psych charts indicated a latent desire for officerhood. Deep down inside, he was sure he was at least as competent as I was to run this

ship, and probably a good deal more so.

"Send me Upper Navigating Technician Haley," I snapped. "We're going to have to find a planet in the neighborhood and put down for repairs."

IT TURNED OUT there was an insignificant solar system in the vicinity, consisting of a small but hot white star and a single unexplored planet, Terra-size, a few hundred million miles out. After Haley and I had decided that that was the nearest port of refuge, I called a general meeting.

Quickly and positively I outlined our situation and explained what would have to be done. I sensed the immediate disappointment, but, gratifyingly, the reaction was followed by a general feeling of resigned pitching-in. If we all worked, we'd get back to Earth sooner or later. If we didn't, we'd spend the next century flip-flopping aimlessly through space.

After the meeting, we set about the business of recovering control of the ship and putting it down for repairs. The feed network, luckily, gave up the ghost about ninety minutes later; it meant we had to stoke the fuel by hand, but at least

it stopped that damned oscillating.

We got the ship going. Haley, navigating by feel in a way I never would have dreamed possible, brought us into the nearby solar system in hardly any time at all. Finally we swung into our landing orbit, and made our looping way down to the surface of the little planet.

I studied my crew's faces carefully. We had spent a great deal of time together in space—much too much, really, for comfort—and an incident like this might very well snap them all if we didn't get going again soon enough. I could foresee disagreements, bickering, declaration of opinion where no opinion was called for.

I was relieved to discover that the planet's air was breathable. A rather high nitrogen concentration, to be sure—82% but that left 17% for oxygen, plus some miscellaneous inerts, and it wouldn't be too rough on the lungs. I decreed a one-hour free break before beginning repairs.

Remaining aboard ship, I gloomily surveyed the scrambled feed network and tried to formulate a preliminary plan of action for getting the com-

plex cybernetic instrument to function again, while my crew went outside to relax.

Ten minutes after I had opened the lock and let them out, I heard someone clanking around in the aft supplies cabin.

"Who's there?" I yelled.

"Me," grunted a heavy voice that could only be Willendorf's. "I'm looking for the thought-converter, sir."

I ran hastily through the corridor, flipped up the latch on the supplies cabin, and confronted him. "What do you want the converter for?" I snapped.

"Found an alien, sir," he said laconically.

My eyes widened. The survey chart had said nothing about intelligent extra-terrestrials in this limb of the galaxy, but then again this planet hadn't been explored yet.

I gestured toward the rear cabinet. "The converter helmets are in there," I said. "I'll be out in a little while. Make sure you follow technique in making contact."

"Of course, sir," said Willendorf. He took the converter helmet and went out, leaving me standing there. I waited a few minutes, then climbed the catwalk to the airlock and

peered out.

They were all clustered around a small alien being, who looked weak and inconsequential in the midst of the circle. I smiled at the sight. The alien was roughly humanoid in shape, with the usual complement of arms and legs, and a pale green complexion that blended well with the muted violet coloring of his world. He was wearing the thought-converter somewhat lopsidedly, and I saw a small, green, furry ear protruding from the left side. Willendorf was talking to him.

Then someone saw me standing at the open airlock, and I heard Haley yell to me, "Come on down, Chief!"

THEY WERE ringed around the alien in a tight circle. I shouldered my way into their midst. Willendorf turned to me.

"Meet Alaree, sir," he said. "Alaree, this is our commander."

"We are pleased to meet you," the alien said gravely. The converter automatically turned his thoughts into English, but maintained the trace of his oddly-infected accent. "You have been saying that you are from the skies."

"His grammar's pretty sha-

ky," Willendorf interposed. "He keeps referring to any of us as 'you'—even you, who just got here."

"Odd," I said. "The converter's supposed to conform to the rules of grammar." I turned to the alien, who seemed perfectly at ease among us. "My name is Bryson," I said. "This is Willendorf, over here."

The alien wrinkled his soft-skinned forehead in momentary confusion. "We are Alaree," he said again.

"We? You and who else?"

"We and we else," Alaree said blandly. I stared at him for a moment, then gave up. The complexities of an alien mind are often too much for a mere Terran to fathom.

"You are welcome to our world," Alaree said after a few moments of silence.

"Thanks," I said. "Thanks."

I turned away, leaving the alien with my men. They had twenty-six minutes left of the break I'd given them, after which we would have to get back to the serious business of repairing the ship. Making friends with floppy-eared aliens was one thing; getting back to Earth was another.

The planet was a warm, friendly sort of place, with

rolling fields and acres of pleasant-looking purple vegetation. We had landed in a clearing at the edge of a fair-sized copse. Great broad-beamed trees shot up all around us.

Alaree returned to visit us every day, until he became almost a mascot of the crew. I liked the little alien myself, and spent some time with him, though I found his conversation generally incomprehensible. No doubt he had the same trouble with us. The converter had only limited efficiency, after all.

He was the only representative of his species who came. For all we knew, he was the only one of his kind on the whole planet. There was no sign of life elsewhere. Though Willendorf led an unauthorized scouting party during some free time on the third day, he failed to find a village of any sort. Where Alaree returned to every night and how he had found us in the first place remained mysteries.

As for the feed network, progress went slowly. Ketteridge, the technician in charge, had tracked down the foulup and was trying to repair it without building a completely new network. Shortcuts, again.

He tinkered away for four days, setting up a tentative circuit, trying it out, watching it sputter and blow out, building another.

There was nothing I could do. But I sensed tension heightening among the crewmen. They were annoyed at themselves, at each other, at me, at everything.

On the fifth day, Kittredge and Willendorf finally let their accumulated tenseness explode. They had been working together on the network, but they quarrelled and Ketteridge came storming into my cabin immediately afterward.

"Sir, I demand to be allowed to work on the network by myself. It's my specialty, and Willendorf's only screwing things up."

"Get me Willendorf," I said, frowning.

When Willendorf showed up I heard the whole story, decided quickly to let Ketteridge have his way—it was, after all, his specialty—and calmed Willendorf down. Then, reaching casually for some papers on my desk, I dismissed both of them. I knew they'd come to their senses in a day or so.

I SPENT most of the next day sitting placidly in the

sun, while Ketteridge tinkered with the feed network some more. I watched the faces of the men. They were starting to smoulder. They wanted to get home and they weren't getting there. Besides, this was a fairly dull planet, and even the novelty of Alaree wore off after a while. The little alien had a way of hanging around men who were busy scraping fuel deposits out of the jet tubes, or something equally unpleasant, and bothering them with all sorts of questions.

The following morning I was lying blissfully in the grassplot near the ship, talking to Alaree. Ketteridge came to me. By the tightness of his lips I knew he was in trouble.

I brushed some antlike blue insects off my trousers and rose to a sitting position, leaning against the tall, tough-barked tree behind me. "What's the matter, Ketteridge? How's the feed network?"

He glanced uneasily at Alaree for a moment before speaking. "I'm stuck, sir. I'll have to admit I was wrong. I can't fix it by myself."

I stood up and put my hand on his shoulder. "That's a noble thing to say, Ketteridge. It takes a big man to admit he's

been a fool. Will you work with Willendorf now?"

"If he'll work with me, sir," Ketteridge said miserably.

"I think he will," I said. Ketteridge saluted and turned away, and I felt a burst of satisfaction. I'd met the crisis in the only way possible; if I had *ordered* them to cooperate, I would have gotten noplacé. The psychological situation no longer allowed for unbending military discipline.

After Ketteridge had gone, Alaree, who had been silent all this time, looked up at me in puzzlement. "We do not understand," he said.

"Not *we*," I corrected. "*I*. You're only one person. *We* means many people."

"We are only one person?" Alaree said tentatively.

"No. *I* am only one person. Get it?"

He worried the thought around for a few moments; I could see his browless forehead contract in deep concentration.

"Look," I said. "I'm one person. Ketteridge is another person. Willendorf is another. Each one of them is an independent individual, an 'I'."

"And together you make *We*?" Alaree asked brightly.

"Yes and no," I said. "*We* is composed of many *I*, but we

still remain *I*."

Again he sank deep in concentration; then he smiled, scratched the ear that protruded from one side of the thought-helmet, and said, "We do not understand. But *I* do. Each of you is—is an *I*."

"An individual," I said.

"An individual," he repeated. "A complete person. And together, to fly your ship, you must become a *We*."

"But only temporarily," I said. "There still can be conflict between the parts. That's necessary, for progress. I can always think of the rest of them as *They*."

"*I—They*," Alaree repeated slowly. "*They*." He nodded. "It is difficult for me to grasp all this. *I*... think differently. But *I* am coming to understand, and *I* am worried."

That was a new idea. Alaree, worried? Could be, I reflected. I had no way of knowing. I knew so cursed little about Alaree—where on the planet he came from, what his tribal life was like, what sort of civilization he had, were all blanks.

"What kind of worries, Alaree?"

"You would not understand," he said solemnly and would say no more.

TOWARD afternoon, as golden shadows started to slant through the closely packed trees, I returned to the ship. Willendorf and Ketteridge were aft, working over the feed network. The whole crew had gathered around to watch and offer suggestions. Even Alaree was there, looking absurdly comical in his copper alloy thought-converter helmet, standing on tiptoe and trying to see what was happening.

About an hour later, I spotted the alien sitting by himself beneath the long-limbed tree that towered over the ship. He was lost in thought. Evidently whatever his problem was, it was really eating him.

Toward evening, he made a decision. I had been watching him with a great deal of concern, wondering what was going on in that small but unfathomable mind. I saw him brighten, leap up suddenly, and cross the field, heading in my direction.

"Captain!"

"What is it, Alaree?"

He waddled up and stared gravely at me. "Your ship will be ready to leave soon. What was wrong is nearly right again."

He paused, obviously uncertain of how to phrase his next

statement, and I waited patiently. Finally he blurted out suddenly, "May I come back to your world with you?"

Automatically, the regulations flashed through my mind. I pride myself on my knowledge of the rules. And I knew this one.

ARTICLE 101 A

No intelligent extra-terrestrial life is to be transported from its own world to any civilized world under any reason whatsoever, without explicit beforehand clearance. The penalty for doing so is—

And it listed a fine of more credits than was ever dreamt of in my philosophy.

I shook my head. "Can't take you, Alaree. This is your world and you belong here."

A ripple of agony ran over his face. Suddenly he ceased to be the cheerful, roly-poly creature it was so impossible to take seriously, and became a very worried entity indeed. "You cannot understand," he said. "I no longer belong here."

No matter how hard he pleaded, I remained adamant. When to no one's surprise Ketteridge and Willendorf announced, a day later, that their

pooled labors had succeeded in repairing the feed network, I had to tell Alaree that we were going to leave without him.

He nodded stiffly, accepting the fact, and without a word stalked tragically away, into the purple tangle of foliage that surrounded our clearing.

He returned a while later or so I thought. He was not wearing the thought-converter. That surprised me. Alaree knew the helmet was a valuable item, and he had been cautioned to take good care of it.

I sent a man inside to get another helmet for him. I put it on him—this time tucking that wayward ear underneath properly—and looked at him sternly. "Where's the other helmet, Alaree?"

"We do not have it," he said.

"We? No more I?"

"We," Alaree said. And as he spoke, the leaves parted and another alien—Alaree's very double—stepped out into the clearing.

Then I saw the helmet on the newcomer's head, and realized that he was no double. He was Alaree, and the other alien was the stranger!

"I see you're here already," the alien I knew as Alaree said to the other. They were stand-

ing about ten feet apart, staring coldly at each other. I glanced at both of them quickly. They might have been identical twins.

"We are here," the stranger said. "We have come to get you."

I took a step backward, sensing that some incomprehensible drama was being played out here among these aliens.

"What's going on, Alaree?" I asked.

"We are having difficulties," both of them said, as one.

Both of them.

I turned to the second alien.

"What's your name?"

"Alaree," he said.

"Are you all named that?" I demanded.

"We are Alaree," Alaree-two said.

"They are Alaree," Alaree-one said. "And *I* am Alaree. *I*."

At that moment there was a disturbance in the shrubbery, and half a dozen more aliens stepped through and confronted Alarees one and two.

"We are Alaree," Alaree-two repeated exasperatingly. He made a sweeping gesture that embraced all seven of the aliens to my left, but pointed-

ly excluded Alaree-one at my right.

"Are we-you coming with we-us?" Alaree-two demanded. I heard the six others say something in approximately the same tone of voice, but since they weren't wearing converters their words were only scrambled nonsense to me.

Alaree-one looked at in pain, then back at his seven fellows. I saw an expression of sheer terror in the small creature's eyes. He turned to me.

"I must go with them," he said softly. He was quivering with fear.

Without a further word, the eight marched silently away. I stood there, shaking my head in bewilderment.

WE WERE scheduled to leave the next day. I said nothing to my crew about the bizarre incident of the evening before, but noted in my log that the native life of the planet would require careful study at some future time.

Blastoff was slated for 1100. As the crew moved efficiently through the ship, securing things, packing, preparing for departure, I sensed a general feeling of jubilation. They were happy to be on their way

again and I didn't blame them.

About half an hour before blastoff, Willendorf came to me. "Sir, Alaree's down below," he said. "He wants to come up and see you. He looks very troubled, sir."

I frowned. Probably the alien still wanted to go back with us. Well, it was cruel to deny the request, but I wasn't going to risk that fine. I intended to make that clear to him.

"Send him up," I said.

A moment later Alaree came stumbling into my cabin. Before he could speak I said, "I told you before, I can't take you off this planet, Alaree. I'm sorry about it."

He looked up pitifully and said, "You mustn't leave me!" He was trembling uncontrollably.

"What's wrong, Alaree?" I asked.

He stared intensely at me for a long moment, mastering himself, trying to arrange what he wanted to tell me into a coherent argument. Finally he said, "They would not take me back. I am alone."

"Who wouldn't take you back, Alaree?"

"*They*. Last night, Alaree came for me, to take me back. They are a *We*—an entity—a oneness. You cannot under-

stand. When they saw what I had become, they cast me out."

I shook my head dizzily. "What do you mean?"

"You taught me—to become an *I*," he said, moistening his lips. "Before, I was part of *We*—*They*. I learned your ways from you, and now there is no room for me here. They have cut me off. When the final break comes, I will not be able to stay on this world."

Sweat was pouring down his pale face and he was breathing harder. "It will come any minute. They are gathering strength for it. But I am *I*," he said triumphantly. He shook violently and gasped for breath.

I understood now. They were *all* Alaree. It was one planet-wide, self-aware corporate entity, composed of any number of individual cells. He had been one of them, but he had learned independence.

Then he had returned to the group—but he carried with him the seeds of individualism, the deadly, contagious germ we Terrans spread everywhere. Individualism would be fatal to such a group mind; they were cutting him loose to save themselves. Just as diseased

cells must be exercised for the good of the entire body, Alaree was inexorably being cut off from his fellows lest he destroy the bond that made them one.

I watched him as he sobbed weakly on my acceleration cradle. "They...are...cutting...me...loose...now!"

He writhed horribly for a brief moment, then relaxed and sat up on the edge of the cradle. "It is over," he said calmly. "I am fully independent."

I saw a stark *aloneness* reflected in his eyes, and behind that a gentle indictment of me for having done this to him. This world, I realized, was no place for Earthmen. What had happened was our fault—mine more than anyone else's.

"Will you take me with you?" he asked again. "If I stay here, Alaree will kill me."

I scowled wretchedly for a moment, fighting a brief battle within myself, then I looked up. There was only one thing to do, and I was sure, once I explained on Earth, that I would not suffer for it.

I took his hand. It was cold and limp; whatever he had just been through, it must have been hell. "Yes," I said softly. "You can come with us."

SO ALAREE joined the crew of the *Aaron Burr*. I told them about it just before blast-off, and they welcomed him aboard in traditional manner.

We gave the sad-eyed little alien a cabin near the cargo hold, and he established himself quite comfortably. He had no personal possessions. "It is not *Their* custom," he said and promised that he'd keep the cabin clean.

He had brought with him a rough-edged, violet fruit that he said was his staple food. I turned it over to Kęchnie for synthesizing and we blasted off.

Alaree was right at home aboard the *Burr*. He spent much time with me asking questions.

"Tell me about Earth," Alaree would ask. The alien wanted desperately to know what sort of a world he was going to.

He would listen gravely while I explained. I told him of cities and wars and spaceships, and he nodded sagely, trying to fit the concepts into a mind only newly liberated from the *gestalt*. I knew he could comprehend only a fraction of what I was saying, but I enjoyed telling him. It made me feel as if Earth were coming closer that much faster, sim-

ply to talk about it.

And he went around, begging everyone. "Tell me about Earth." They enjoyed telling him, too, for a while.

Then it began to get a little tiresome. We had grown accustomed to Alaree's presence on the ship, flopping around the corridors doing whatever menial job he had been assigned to. But though I had told the men why I had brought him with us, and though we all pitied the poor lonely creature and admired his struggle to survive as an individual entity, we were slowly coming to the realization that Alaree was something of a nuisance aboard ship.

Especially later, when he began to change.

Willendorf noticed it first, twelve days out from Alaree's planet. "Alaree's been acting pretty strange these days, sir," he told me.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Haven't you spotted it, sir? He's been moping around like a lost soul, very quiet, and withdrawn, like."

"Is he eating well?"

Willendorf chuckled loudly. "I'll say he is! Kechnie made up some synthetics based on that piece of fruit he brought with him, and he's been stuff-

ing himself wildly. He's gained ten pounds since he came on ship. No, it's not lack of food!"

"I guess not," I said. "Keep an eye on him, will you? I feel responsible for his being here, and I want him to come through the voyage in good health."

After that, I began to observe Alaree more closely myself, and I detected the change in his personality too. He was no longer the cheerful, child-like being who delighted in pouring out questions in endless profusion. Now he was moody, silent, always brooding, and hard to approach.

On the sixteenth day out—and by now I was worried seriously about him—a new manifestation appeared. I was in the hallway, heading from my cabin to the chartroom, when Alaree stepped out of an alcove. He reached up, grasped my uniform lapel, and, maintaining his silence, drew my head down and stared pleadingly into my eyes.

Too astonished to say anything, I returned his gaze for nearly thirty seconds. I peered into his transparent pupils, wondering what he was up to. After a good while had passed, he released me, and I saw

something like a tear trickle down his cheek.

"What's the trouble, Alaree?"

He shook his head mournfully and shuffled away.

I got reports from the crewmen that day and next that he had been doing this regularly for the past eighteen hours—waylaying crewmen, staring long and deep at them as if trying to express some unspeakable sadness, and walking away. He had approached almost everyone on the ship.

I wondered now how wise it had been to allow an extra-terrestrial, no matter how friendly, to enter the ship. There was no telling what this latest action meant.

I started to form a theory. I suspected what he was aiming at, and the realization chilled me. But once I reached my conclusion, there was nothing I could do but wait for confirmation.

On the nineteenth day, Alaree again met me in the corridor. This time our encounter was more brief. He plucked me by the sleeve, shook his head sadly and, shrugging his shoulders, walked away.

That night, he took to his cabin, and by morning he was dead. He had apparently died

peacefully in his sleep.

"I GUESS we'll never understand him, poor fellow," Willendorf said, after we had committed the body to space. "You think he had too much to eat, sir?"

"No," I said. "It wasn't that. He was lonely, that's all. He didn't belong here among us."

"But you said he had broken away from that group-mind," Willendorf objected.

I shook my head. "Not really. That group-mind arose out of some deep psychological and physiological needs of those people. You can't just declare your independence and be able to exist as an individual from then on if you're part of that group-entity. Alaree had grasped the concept intellectually, to some extent, but he wasn't suited for life away from the corporate mind, no matter how much he wanted to be."

"He couldn't stand alone?"

"Not after his people had evolved that *gestalt*-setup. He learned independence from us," I said. "But he couldn't live with us, really. He needed to be part of a whole. He found out his mistake after he came aboard, and tried to rem-

edy things."

I saw Willendorf pale. "What do you mean, sir?"

"You know what I mean. When he came up to us and stared soulfully into our eyes—he was trying to form a new *gestalt*—out of us! Somehow he was trying to link us together, the way his people had been linked."

"He couldn't do it, though," Willendorf said fervently.

"Of course not. Human beings don't have whatever need it is that forced those people to merge. He found that out, after a while, when he failed to get anywhere with us."

"He just couldn't do it,"

Willendorf repeated.

"No. And then he ran out of strength," I said somberly, feeling the heavy weight of my guilt. "He was like an organ removed from a living body. It can exist for a little while by itself, but not indefinitely. He failed to find a new source of life—and he died." I stared bitterly at my fingertips.

"What do we call it in my medical report?" asked Ship Surgeon Thomas, who had been silent up till then. "How can we explain what he died from?"

"Call it *malnutrition*," I said.

THE END

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ROBERT C. SPROUL
Editor and Publisher

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 27th day of September, 1957.

NATHAN POMERANTZ
(My commission expires March 30, 1958.)

SHAGGY DOG

by CHARLES E. FRITCH

Did you hear the story about the dog that went in a bar and asked for a drink? Trouble was this darn pooch just couldn't get drunk.

"A HELL OF A THING," the stranger said irritably. The fat man with the beer looked at him.

"A hell of a thing," he elaborated, hitting the bar with his open palm, "when a decent, respectful law-abiding citizen can't even hang on a good one!"

"Like a double this time?" the bartender said helpfully.

"Sure," the stranger said, waving an amicable hand. "Make it a triple, what do I care."

"You'll care tomorrow morning," the fat man said.

"Not me," the stranger said, sure of it. He squinted at the wall chronometer: hours 2346, day 16, month November, year 1976. "I've been drinking now for two hours and a half, with no success. I'd like to get good

and stinkin' drunk. I'd like to use vile language and sing 'Sweet Adeline' and tell dirty stories. I'd like to have a hang-over a mile long." He shook his head sadly. "But I won't."

The fat man sighed and contemplated his beer. "You're lucky then. I'll feel lousy on this stuff."

The stranger grunted. He waved an arm to indicate the saloon, with its clean mahogany bar, its plush carpeting, its red leather walls. "Don't you guys ever get sick and tired of this?"

The fat man looked blank. "I don't get you," he said. "Sick and tired of what?"

"Yeah," the bartender muttered, leaning forward belligerently. "This's a nice, clean place."

"Sure it is," the stranger ad-

mitted, "and that's just it. You know *why* it's a nice, clean place?"

The fat man shrugged and hazarded an answer. "Well, the Sterilizing Lights are always on, and the Sweepers come out whenever anyone drops anything, and—"

"Sure," the stranger exploded, "because a goddamn system of electronics makes it clean, that's why!"

"So what's wrong with *that*?" the bartender wanted to know.

"So nothing's wrong with it as far as it goes. But it's going too far. Science is doing too many things for a man better than he can do it himself; it cleans his spills, wipes his nose, and spansks his bottom, that's what's wrong. Give me the old fashioned sloppy saloons of the 1950's, with dried beer on the bar and pretzels and cigarette butts on the floor."

He took his whiskey glass and deliberately tilted it. The amber liquid spilled over the edge and dripped on the bar.

"You know what's happening now, don't you?" he said. "Under the bar, little stool-pigeon electrons are rushing around like crazy, sending messages to the Sweepers and the Spongers, and the Polish-

ers, telling them some nasty human spilled something. Now watch."

At the far end of the bar a small door opened in the red leather wall, and tiny metal insects rushed out toward the spilled liquid. Some of them had honey-combed spongeheads which they dipped rhythmically into the whiskey as though quenching a thirst. They drained it, and then others with bristly heads that whirled like brushes whisked past, leaving the now-clean spot for the ones with oilspout heads to spray the bar with a transparent liquid that hardened and gleamed.

The stranger watched the "insects" disappear quietly into the wall. "Disgusting," he said.

"Whattaya mean disgusting?" the bartender said in an unfriendly tone. "I paid ten thousand bucks for that. I like it and so do all my regular customers. This isn't the dark ages, buddy; it's 1976. If you want to be sloppy that's your business, but running this saloon is my business, and I don't need help from you."

"You've already had help from me," the stranger said. "I invented that cleaning system."

"You're kidding," the fat

man said, impressed.

"I wish I were," the man said seriously.

"Say," the bartender said, pointing a finger of recognition, "I remember seeing your picture in the paper a while ago. Yeah, sure, you're Paul Williams."

"Sad, but true," the stranger admitted, staring into his whiskey glass as though it contained some hidden philosophy. He raised the glass and jiggled the fluid in the neon light. "Paul Albert Williams, electronic genius, maker of metal insects." He set the glass down and looked up with sudden determination. "You fellows like to hear a shaggy dog story?"

"Uh, yeah, sure," the bartender said, looking surprised at the question, "I guess so."

"I've heard most of 'em," the fat man said, "but go ahead."

"Not this one, you haven't."

He reached down to the floor beside him and brought up a black satchel, which he placed on the bar. He opened it, and out hopped a small, shaggy dog.

"Forgoshsakes!" the fat man said.

"Hey, hey," the bartender said. "Get that mutt outa here.

We don't allow dogs in here, especially on the bar!"

"How does he breathe in there?" the fat man wanted to know, examining the tight black skin of the satchel.

"He doesn't."

"Now, look, Mac—I mean, Mr. Williams—even if you are—"

"Simmer down, I'm not violating sanitary laws. Fido here doesn't have any fleas."

"No?" the bartender said, unconvinced, "Then how come he's scratching?"

"Because he's a dog, that's why. Here, look at this."

He turned the dog over on its back and parted the shaggy fur.

The fat man leaned forward and nearly toppled from his stool. "Forgoshsakes," he said.

The bartender's mouth fell open. "You mean—"

Williams nodded. "The dog's a robot. Man's best friend here is a machine."

"But it looks so *real*," the fat man said, amazed. The dog righted itself somewhat indignantly, shook, and trotted over to lick the fat man's hand. He felt the fur, ran his finger gently on the damp nose. "It even *feels* real."

The bartender's eyes glowed with wonder. "I never would've

believed it. How did you ever—”

“Hard work, persistence, and clean living,” the scientist said, and drank down the liquid in his glass. “I’ll try another of those. Hell of a thing when a man can’t even get stinking drunk!”

“What about the dog?” the fat man prompted.

“Oh, yes, our shaggy dog story. Well, it’s pretty simple actually. It was a natural step in a whole stairway of natural steps; that’s the way these things happen. You keep going and don’t know when to stop.

“I started out on a small scale, with little blobs of metal, and gave them a sort of electronic life; I guess I was surprised then they actually started taking themselves seriously. Then I started giving them special functions, reasons for existing, by building them with metal legs and brushes and mops; that resulted in the ‘insects’ you have in your cleaning wall there.”

The bartender shoved a full glass on the bar. “This one’s on the house.”

“T h a n k s.” The scientist smiled wanly. “Dammit, but I wish I could get drunk!”

“And then,” the fat man

said, fascinated, “you tried building larger robots.”

“Right. That’s where Fido came in. He had a real-life counterpart, you know.” He sipped slowly at the whiskey this time. “Or no, of course, you couldn’t know. But he did just the same. A small, lovable, shaggy animal that—” He stopped, suddenly embarrassed, tilted his head and the glass, and the liquid was gone again. “Fill it up to the top this time. Maybe I can get psychologically drunk after a while.”

“Lord,” the bartender said, “you’ll be sick as a dog tomorrow.”

“Little Fido here doesn’t ever get sick as a dog.” He ruffled the animal’s fur affectionately. “That’s the advantage of being mechanical. Of course, you don’t feel hungry either, but you eat dog food because that’s what dogs are supposed to do, and you romp around and play like you’re having fun when you really aren’t, and you stop and sniff trees and hydrants without knowing why. Oh, it’s a dog’s life, all right.”

“Uh, what happened to the—uh, real Fido?” the fat man asked.

“Dead,” the scientist said,

looking into his refilled glass and remembering.

"Oh, sorry," the fat man said, and somehow he really was.

"Dead, and it's my fault."

The fat man looked away.

"It was strange. I made a mechanical Fido and then the real Fido ceased to be. Sure, he was hit by a car and that's as good an excuse as any, but there wasn't any *real* reason for it. Apparently this world is set up to accommodate only one Fido, so naturally the less than perfect one—the natural one—couldn't exist. I wasn't very happy to find that out."

"Yeah," the bartender said, watching the mechanical dog thump its furry tail against the bar. He wet his lips. "That's too bad."

"Did you make any more?" the fat man asked.

"Yes. I should have stopped probably, but I wanted to avenge Fido's death, to make it worthwhile. I wanted to lick this thing; I wanted to make mechanical life *supplement* human life, not destroy it." He shrugged helplessly. "So far I haven't succeeded. That's one reason I don't exactly approve of all this. Science is much too capable at replacing human

things with mechanical things."

He shook his head disparagingly, gathered up the wriggling dog and placed it carefully in the satchel.

"It'll stop before it goes too far," the fat man said trustingly. "There're some things they can't replace."

"Sure," the bartender agreed, grinning, "they invented the phonograph, but I still have my wife."

The fat man glared at him.

"Another drink?"

"No, thanks," the scientist said, "I guess there's not much point in it." He put some bills on the bar, and a dozen mechanical insects flew from the wall, picked up the money, and took it away.

"Hey!" the bartender said, too surprised to move.

The fat man guffawed. "Next, they'll be learning to mix drinks and *you'll* be replaced!"

"Sorry," the scientist said, extending more bills, "I guess I've only got dirty money."

"It's better than nothing," the bartender said, taking it. "I guess maybe—nothing personal, understand—but I guess maybe those mechanical gadgets have faults, too."

The scientist nodded. "Keep saying that, friend, and maybe

someday you'll want to tear down that wall." He walked away, then paused uncertainly at the door. He hesitated some more; then he slowly opened his shirt to reveal the skin underneath. "And maybe this'll help you make the decision."

The fat man and the bartender stared.

The man turned and walked out, satchel swinging.

"What do you make of that?" the fat man wondered, after awhile.

"The guy's a crackpot," the bartender said knowingly. "I just remember reading in the paper last night that Paul Williams jumped out of a window. Suicide. This one's a fake. Me tear down a ten thousand buck wall? He's got rocks in his head. You don't suppose a *normal* person would do *that* to himself, do you?"

"I guess not," the fat man said thoughtfully. "No, I guess not. Look, give me another beer will you?"

The bartender gave him one, but he accidentally spilled some on the bar, and the mechanical insects came whirling

out again, sponging and drying and polishing.

"He had enough to make a dozen guys drunk," the bartender said. "The guy just isn't human."

"You know what I'm going to do?" the fat man said with a sudden resolve. "I'm going to do what *he* couldn't do. I'm going to get good and drunk tonight. I'm going to sing songs and tell dirty stories. And I'm going to have myself one lulu of a hangover tomorrow morning and enjoy every painful minute of it."

The bartender stared at him. "But why?"

"I don't know why," the fat man said, "and I'm not going to give myself time to think of a reason. Set up another beer, and make it quick, huh?"

But even later in the night, when he couldn't remember a great many things, he still wasn't able to forget the shaggy dog and its master who couldn't get drunk and who had a screw in his stomach instead of a navel!

THE END

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