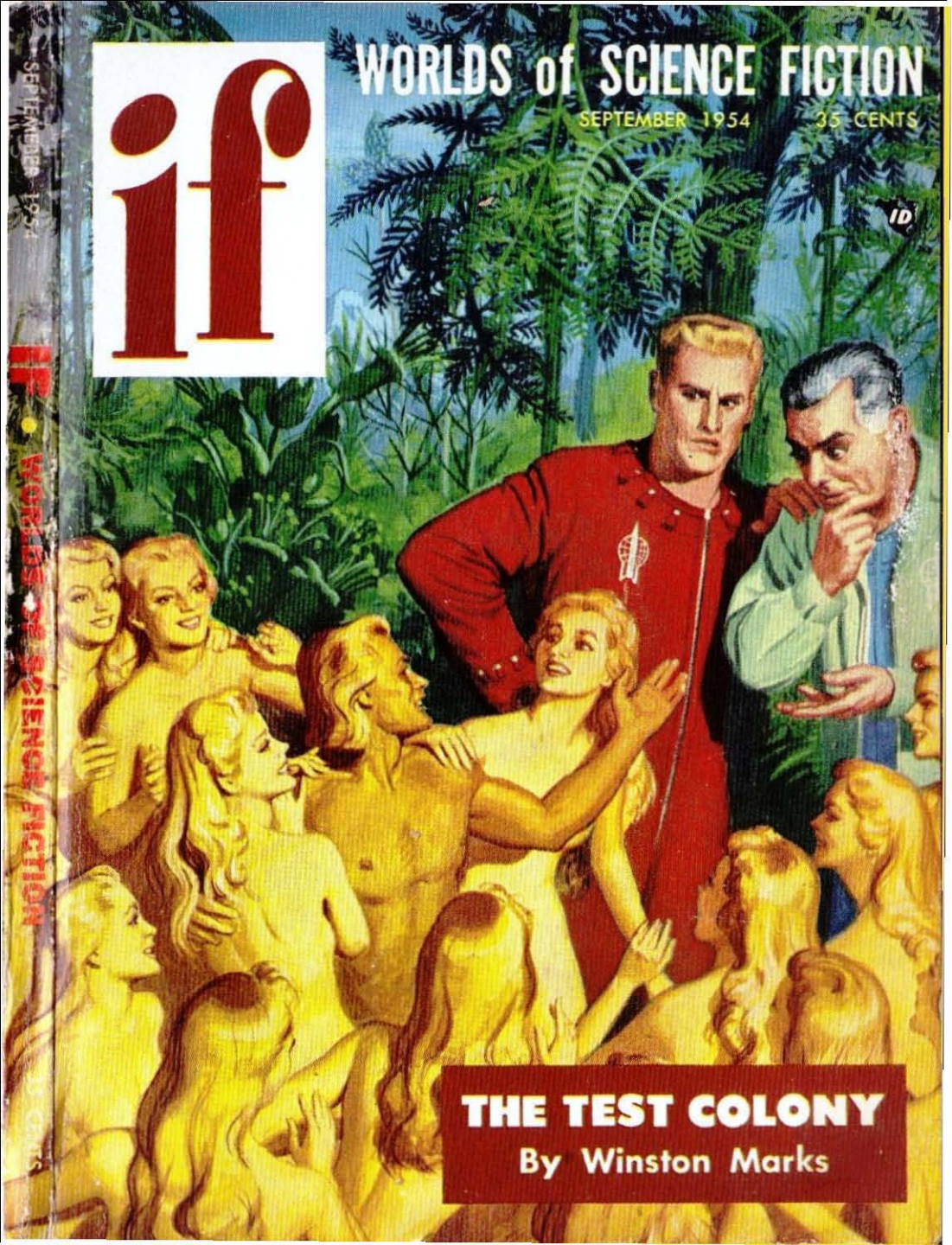
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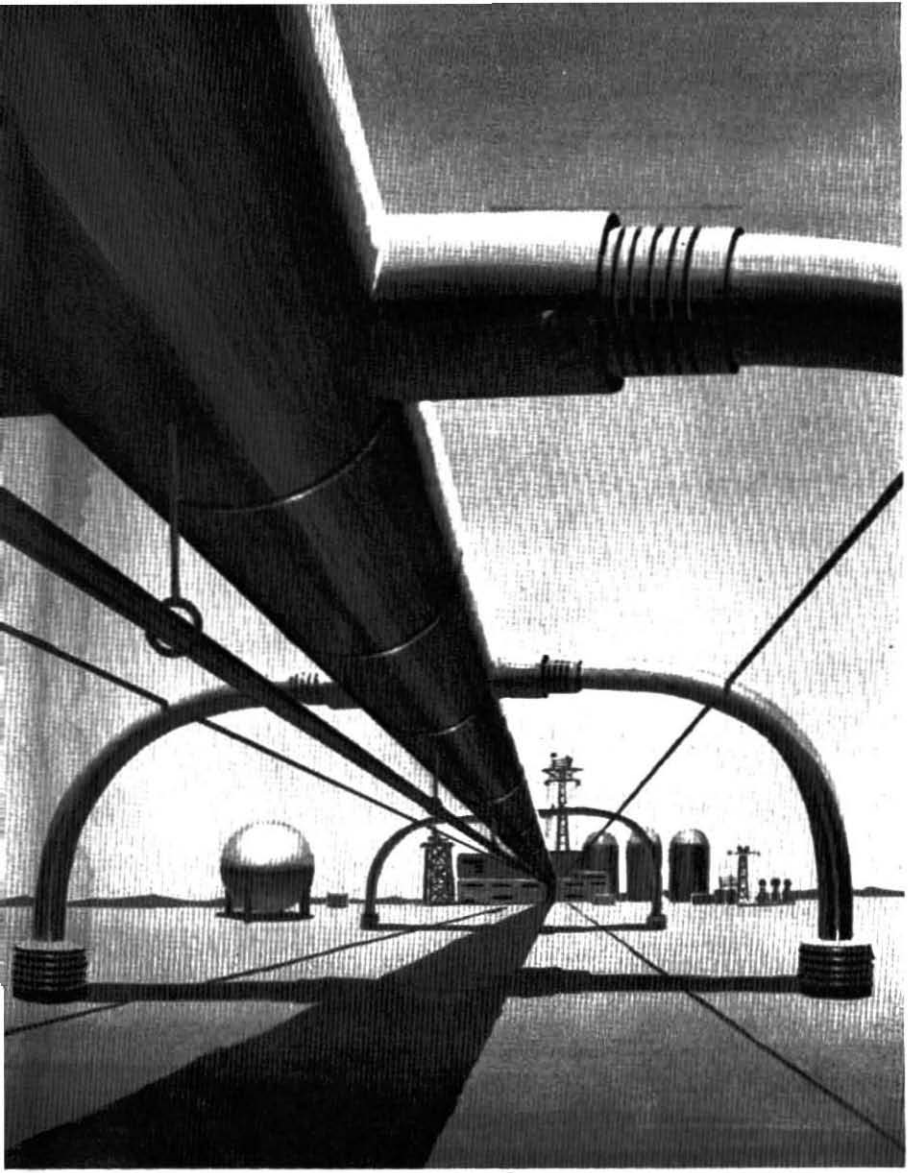

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FEATURES

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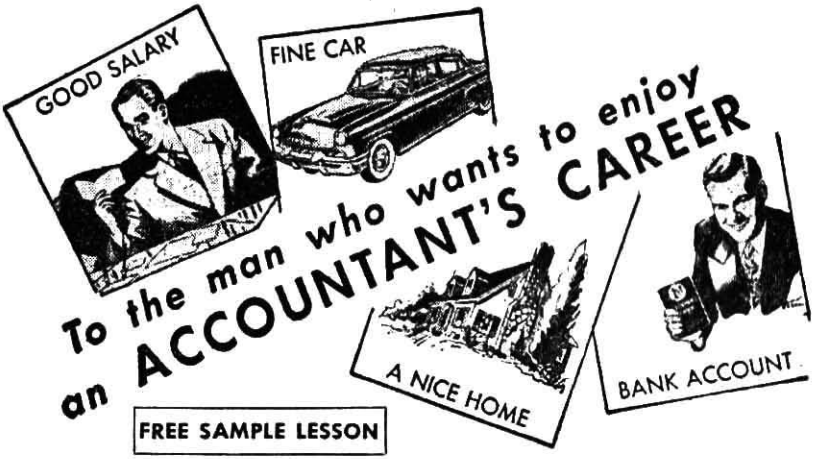

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A CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

SINCE THE first trip into space—science fiction-wise, of course—authors and experts have conceived a multitude of shapes for the space ship. They have been conical, egg-shaped, tubular, spherical and cubicle, while the most popular conception has been that of a rocket, or torpedoe, with fins of varying size and design. In the March, 1953, issue of *The Sooner Magazine*, published at the University of Oklahoma, there appeared an article entitled "The Sky's No Limit", by Dwight V. Swain, professor of journalism and a former science fiction writer, in which the space ship is envisioned as follows:

"A sphere of dully gleaming metal some fifty feet in diameter, it rests on stubby, retractable legs . . . Carriers speed to and fro from refrigerated warehouses, carrying cargo to the conveyor lift built into the ship's base . . ."

The cargo is aboard—

". . . the dozen-odd crewmen at their stations, the hatches sealed. The sphere floats for a moment, barely off the ground, while the stubby stabilizing legs retract. Then, slowly at first (in order to avoid the heat of atmospheric friction), it soars into the sky. No one knows for sure how fast it can go. In theory, gravity acts instantaneously, and even the electro-magnetic waves that carry power travel at up to 186,000 miles per second . . ."

THIS quotation is part of an excerpt from Mr. Swain's article which we ran in the September, 1953, issue of IF, and we waited almost a year before we got a letter which came out emphatically in favor of the sphere. Here it is—from Mr. L. W. Walton, of Bucks, England, who read it in the English edition of IF.

Sir:

It is a pity that most science fiction writers cannot get away from the V2 idea, a most unsuitable form of space ship not likely ever to be of practical use in space travel. From considerations of every aspect, serious space travel is not likely to be achieved until gravity is understood and when nuclear energy is available in controllable amounts from light-weight, compact apparatus.

The super-streamlined, tail-finned, pusher-rocket driven space ship (V2 kind) cannot ever be a practical solution of space travel. It is thoroughly unsafe in take off and more so in landing because it is nose heavy and therefore "ground seeking"; the idea of landing by

standing on its jets is scaring, violent unstable wobbles could not be avoided. It would be much better to have not less than three tractor rockets instead of trail rockets, fins with their weight and atmospheric drag could then be discarded. The center of thrust in front of or at the center of gravity is much better than behind the latter. But the thing that kills the rocket as a means of space travel is the formidable load of jettisonable matter that must be carried whatever the source of energy may be, even if it is atomic.

The spherical form of space ship has a higher strength-weight ratio and relative volumetric capacity than a torpedo form, and apart from the lowest levels of the atmosphere, say about 20 miles, it is not at any disadvantage. In fact, within that 20 miles velocity must be low so streamlining has no real advantage.

In landing, the spherical form is greatly superior, whilst the torpedo form is positively dangerous. The spherical form can take off from and land in water—the torpedo form could not; it could also berth in and take off from mud or dust, snow or frozen gases, in all cases with perfect stability.

Swain, in the article referred to . . . speaks of a "contragravitational device" and though an oar is such a device it is obvious that he means some device which directly counteracts gravity shields after H. G. Wells. I agree with Swain on this point, and that is after some 42 years study of the problems of space travel.

On the other hand, Swain's "wireless power transmission" and "transmutational duplicator" can be dismissed as outside of practical science, i.e., they are pure fantasy. Nuclear energy is apparently the only solution for space ships . . . regeneration of oxygen, water, carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins and body minerals, though most desirable, is not absolutely necessary but given nuclear energy such regeneration is a reasonable scientific probability.

With nuclear energy and regeneration as above described and some means of directly distorting a gravitational field, space travel would not only be a practical but also a commercial success—for the amount and weight of fuel and supplies of air, water and food required would be very small and possible payload high.

It is refreshing to find a science fiction writer having some scientific logic, as Swain has, and science fiction would be much more entertaining if fantasy was barred. In present science fiction it is irritating to bump into scientific absurdities such as time travel, hyperdrive, space warps, telepaths, etc., etc.

—Yours faithfully
L. W. Walton

I disagree with Mr. Walton when he says time travel or telepathy is a scientific absurdity, but I do agree with him in regard to his ideas on space travel. Also, let's not forget that everything we know today rested in our imagination before it ever got to the drawing board. And isn't imagination itself real? . . . Anyhow, what do *you* think? —jlq

THE TEST COLONY

Benson did his best to keep his colony from going native, but what can you do when the Natives have a rare human intelligence and know all about the facts of life?

BY WINSTON MARKS

IT WAS the afternoon of our arrival. Our fellow members of the "test colony" were back in the clearing at the edge of the lake, getting their ground-legs and drinking in the sweet, clean air of Sirius XXII. I was strolling along the strip of sandy beach with Phillip Benson, leader of our group, sniffing the spicy perfume of the forest that crowded within twenty feet of the water's edge.

Half a billion miles overhead, Sirius shone with an artificially white glow. Somewhere on the horizon, Earth lay, an invisible, remote speck of dust we had forsaken 24 dreary, claustrophobic months ago.

The trip had taken its toll from all of us, even tough-minded Phil Benson. We both found it difficult to relax and enjoy the invigorating, oxygen-rich air and the balmy climate. As official recorder, I was trying to think of words suitable to capture the magnificence, the sheer loveliness of the planet which would be our home for at least four years, perhaps forever.

Each absorbed in his own thoughts, Benson and I were some 500 yards from the clearing when he stopped me with a hand on my arm. "Who is that?" he demanded.

Up the beach where he pointed, two naked forms emerged from the calm waters. They skipped across the sand and began rolling together

Illustrated by Kelly Freas

playfully in the soft grasses at the forest's edge. Even at this distance they were visibly male and female.

"I can't make them out," I said. My only thought was that one of the young couples had swum down ahead of us and was enjoying the first privacy attainable in two years.

Benson's eyes were sharper. "Sam, they—they look like—"

Our voices must have reached them, for they sprang apart and rose to their feet facing us.

"Like youngsters," I supplied.

"We have no kids with us," Benson reminded me. He began to move forward, slowly, as though stalking a wild animal.

"Wait, Phil," I said. "The planet is uninhabited. They can't be—"

He continued shuffling ahead, and I followed. Within 20 paces I knew he was right. Whoever they were they hadn't come with us!

Benson stopped so quickly I bumped into him. "Look, Sam! Their hands and feet! Four digits and—no thumbs!"

I could now make out the details. The two forms were not quite human. The toes were long and prehensile. The fingers, too, were exceptionally long, appearing to have an extra joint, but as Benson mentioned, there was no opposing thumb.

They stood well apart now, the female seeking no protection from the male. Curiosity was written in their faces, and when we stopped advancing they began edging forward until they were only five yards away.

Their outlines, instead of becoming clearer, had fuzzed up more as they approached. Now it was evident that their bodies were lightly covered with a silky hair, some two or three inches long. It had already dried out in the warm sun and was standing out away from their skins like golden haloes.

They stood well under five feet tall, and in every detail, except the body hair and digits, appeared to be miniature adults, complete with navels.

Even in the midst of the shock of surprise, I was taken by their remarkable beauty. "They're true mammals!" I exclaimed.

"Without a doubt," Benson said, eyeing the full contours of the lithe little female. Her pink flesh tones were a full shade lighter than those of the male. Both had well-spaced eyes under broad foreheads. Their fine features were drawn into fearless, half-quizzical, half-good-natured expressions of deep interest. They stood relaxed as if waiting for a parley to begin.

"This," said Benson, "is one hell of a note!"

They cocked their heads at the sound like robins. I said, "Why? They don't appear very vicious to me."

"Neither does man," Benson replied. "It's his brain that makes him deadly. Look at those skulls, the ear placement, the eyes and forehead. If I know my skull formations, I think man has met his intellectual equal at last—maybe, even, his superior."

"What makes you think they may have superior minds?" As a psychologist I felt Benson was jumping to a pretty quick conclusion.

"The atmosphere. Forty percent oxygen. Invariably, on other planets, that has meant higher metabolisms in the fauna. In a humanoid

animal that strongly implies high mental as well as physical activity.

As if to prove his point, the two little creatures tired of the one-sided interview, bent slightly at the knees and leaped at a forty-five degree angle high into the tree branches. The female caught the first limb with her long fingers and swung out of sight into the foliage. The male hung by his long toes for a moment, regarding us with an inverted impish expression, then he, too, vanished.

I grunted with disappointment. Benson said, "Don't worry, they'll be back. Soon enough."

AS WE returned to the clearing Jane Benson and Susan, my wife, came to meet us. Although both brunettes rated high in feminine charms among the forty women of our group, somehow they appeared a little ungainly and uncommonly tall against my mental image of the little people we had just left. Their faces were pale from the long interment in the ship, and bright spots of sunburn on cheekbones and forehead gave them a clownish, made-up appearance.

"We've sorted and identified the fruits," Sue called to us. "The handbook is right. They're delicious! We've got a feast spread. Just wait until you—" She caught our expressions. "What's wrong?"

Benson shrugged. "You girls go on ahead and get the crowd together. I have an important announcement to make." Jane pouted a little and hesitated, but Benson insisted. "Run along now, please. I want to gather my thoughts."

We trailed after them slowly. I didn't like Benson's moody reaction to our discovery of an intelligent life-form. To me it was exciting. What fabulous news I would have to send back with the first liason ship to contact us four years hence! And it would be entirely unexpected, because the original exploration party had failed to make the discovery. That in itself was an intriguing mystery. How could twenty-two scientists, bent on a minute examination of a planet's flora and fauna, overlook the most fabulous creation of all—an animal virtually in men's image? The only guess I could make was that they must belong to a nomadic tribe small enough to escape discovery.

Benson broke silence as the narrow beach strip began to widen into the grassy plain where our ship squatted like a hemispherical cathedral. "This poses so many problems," he said shaking his head.

I said, "Phil, I think you're taking your job too seriously. You just can't plan every detail of organizing our community down to the rationing of tooth-powder."

"Planning never hurt any project," Benson said.

"I disagree," I told him. "You've had too long to dwell on your plans. Now the first unpredictable incident throws you into an uproar. Relax, Phil. Take your problems one at a time. We don't even know that we'll ever see the little creatures again. Maybe they're shy."

He scarcely heard me. He was a large, well-muscled man of 46 years, an ex-college president and an able administrator. He and Jane, his wife, were the only two of our party older than the 35-year

age limit. His background as a sociologist and anthropologist and his greater maturity were important factors in stabilizing a new colony, but his point of view had grown excessively conservative, it seemed to me.

A crew of craftsmen with their busy little power saws had constructed a sloping ship's ramp of rough planks sawed from the nearest trees. We stepped through and over the assembled people who were lying around in the grass at the base of the ramp, and Benson mounted twenty feet above us at the entrance to the ship.

Everyone was in high spirits, and a light cheer, rippled through the assembly. Benson, however, ignored it and bent a thoroughly serious gaze out over his "flock".

"Please give me your closest attention," he began and waited until everyone was quiet. "Until further notice, we must proceed under a yellow alert during daylight hours and a red alert at night. All work parties leaving the ship will check with the scribe every hour on the hour. We will resume sleeping in the ship. Women are restricted to within 100 yards of the ship at all times. Men will go armed and will please inform themselves of their position on the security watch list which will be posted tonight." He squinted in the bright sunlight. "For the moment, you men with sidearms, post yourselves around the ship. Sound off loud if you sight anything larger than a rabbit."

The men named got slowly to their feet, fingering their light hunting pistols self-consciously. Benson continued, "You may appreciate these precautions when I tell you that Sam Rogers and I just encountered two remarkably humanoid animals on the beach less than half a mile from here."

Tension replaced levity, as Benson described our meeting with the natives. I thought he gave it a needlessly grim emphasis with such terms as, "*quicker than cats*", and "*devilishly intelligent*", but I held my peace.

He summarized, "I do not want to alarm anyone unduly, but we must face up to the fact that we are totally unprepared for such a contingency. The exploration group failed us badly in overlooking these creatures. They may not be inimical to our culture, but until this is established we must consider them prime threats. That is all," he concluded.

No one grumbled aloud, but their faces showed keen disappointment at the resumption of quartering in the ship. Reluctantly, the women began rolling up the still-deflated air-mattresses that were scattered about the soft, deep grass. Sue complained, "Sam, if these people don't get a little privacy pretty soon we'll turn into an ant colony. There'll be lovin' in the streets."

"It's not my idea," I said. "I'll be nailed to a table at the foot of the ramp all day making check marks. Phil is taking this entirely too big. The little people are really charming. He neglected to mention that they are beautifully formed and quite gentle in their—their actions."

"Actions?" she said. "What happened, really?"

I described the conditions under which we first saw the natives, and

he laughed a little strainedly. "I can just imagine the look on Phil Benson's face."

I knew what she meant. In trying to enforce the shipboard rule of segregation of the sexes, our leader had developed an oversensitive attitude toward certain aspects of modesty. In the unutterable boredom of space, the pledge we had all taken to complete continence for the voyage was a severe test to all forty couples.

Had propriety and space considerations been the only reasons for the infamous "no-romance" regulation, it would never have held up. But all concerned realized the problem of childbirth in space under the jam-packed living conditions, tight water and food rationing and the fetid, recirculated air.

Now the second honeymoons were over before they started. It was back to the ship and the nightlife of monks and nuns.

That night, Sue and I joined the four ship's officers, their wives, Phillip Benson and Jane in the navigation cupola atop our doomed ship that had become a "fortress". The small control room was the only semi-private room in the ship, and even Benson was admitted by invitation only. The meeting was a council of war, so to speak, and the officers were pressed into service to organize and operate the security guard.

When the guard watch was worked out for a week in advance, I spoke up. "I think we're getting off on the wrong foot, Phil. We can't stay penned up like animals at night and expect to function as humans."

Benson argued: "We are a carefully balanced group, Sam. We can't afford casualties. Look at our medical corps, two doctors and four nurses. Suppose we were attacked and lost them?"

Captain Spooner, whose authority had lapsed when we touched down, backed up Benson. "I see no great hardship in the precautions. Inconvenience, yes, but nothing that the danger doesn't fully justify."

He was a cocky, virile, baldheaded little terrier of 35 years. His very young wife and the wives of the other three officers seemed only lightly perturbed at the prospects of continuing celibacy, which confirmed my suspicions.

I said, "That's gritty of you, Captain, but remember, the rest of us haven't had the relative privacy of the bridge. If this restriction continues long I predict violations of the discipline, and probably some serious behaviour problems."

My position as colony psychologist had become somewhat obscured under the snowstorm of paperwork that my secondary job as official scribe had brought. Benson seemed now to recall that mental health *was* my concern. He said, "I thought you reported high morale upon arrival."

"I did, but the tensions are there, and it's foolish to draw them too tightly. We have a well-picked, highly adaptable group of people. Let's keep them that way. The quicker we hit a more normal existence the less risk we run of emotional disturbances."

"They'll take it," Benson said positively, and Spooner nodded in arrogant agreement.

MY 20-HOUR wristwatch, geared to the shorter rotation of Sirius XXII, said nine o'clock, one hour before noon, when the women began undressing.

There had been an air of conspiracy among them all morning, a studied casualness as they wandered around near the ship, forming small conversational eddies, dispersing and reforming elsewhere. I had just finished checking in the 11-man fruit-gathering detail. I looked up from my roster in time to see the first motions of the "great disrobing". Zippers unzipped, snaps popped open, slacks, skirts, blouses and jumpers fell to the grass, and a dazzling spectacle of space-bleached feminine epidermis burst into view.

The ladies were very calm about it, but a chorus of yips sounded and swelled into a circus of cheers from the male working parties.

Before I could fathom it Benson came charging down the ramp followed by his fruit-stowing detail. He stopped at the foot of the ramp, mouth open and eyes pinched with annoyance.

He spotted Jane and Sue. "What is going on out here?" he demanded loudly.

Our two wives waved at us and strolled over, doing a splendid job of acting unconcerned. "Just a little sun-bathing," Jane said, shooing a small insect from a pale shoulder.

Susan refused to meet my eye. She was watching two birds soar overhead. "It's fantastic," she said. "If you don't look at things too closely, you'd never know we weren't at a summer camp up in Wisconsin—except for the fruits. They remind me more of Tahiti. It's marvelous! The mosquitoes don't even bite."

"They will," I said, "as soon as they get a good taste of human blood. And baby, you're sure making it easy for them."

Benson was distracted from the conversation by the converging male colonists, who were whooping and yelling like a horde of school boys. He backed up the ramp and ordered, "Let's get on with the work. You've seen your wives in the altogether before."

The men quieted a little, but one yelled, "Yeah, but not lately!"

Another added, "And not *all together.*"

In spite of the fact that nude sun-bathing was a commonplace, twenty-second-century custom on Earth, by tacit consent clothes had been worn at all times aboard ship. The women had gone along with Benson for two years on such matters, so this was clearly a feminine protest against the spirit of the yellow alert.

Young doctors Sorenson and Bailey came trotting up, grinning appreciatively but wagging their fingers. Without consulting Benson, Bailey mounted the ramp and shouted, "Blondes and redheads, ten minutes exposure. Brunettes, fifteen."

A great booing issued from the men, but Bailey held up his hand for silence. "The medical staff will make no effort to enforce these exposure maximums, but be advised that the radiation here is about the same as Miami Beach in June, so don't let the air-conditioning fool you."

Benson was spared further decisions on the issue, because at that moment one of the sentries remem-

bered to take a quick look at the vector of forest he was supposed to be guarding. Unable to make his voice heard over the hub-hub, the guard fired his pistol in the air.

We all jumped up and stared, and Benson muttered, "Dear God!"

Our people were scattered over an acre around the ramp, and encompassing them was a semi-circle of at least a hundred "savages", frozen like bronze statues at the sound of the gun-shot. They curved in an arc less than a hundred yards from the ship.

Their hands were empty of weapons, and their motionless attitudes were in no way threatening. To the contrary, they seemed small and quite inoffensive except for their numbers.

Acting in my capacity as psychologist, I ran up the ramp and called out as calmly as a shout would permit, "Everybody take it easy! Don't make any quick moves. Above all, don't anyone fire off a weapon again unless there is an obvious attack."

Benson clutched my arm. "Are you mad? We've got to get the women inside."

"That's what I'm thinking," I said. "But if we invite attack by running they won't all make it."

"They aren't armed. The men can stand them off."

"Then what are you worrying about?" I demanded. "Relax for a minute and see what happens."

Benson simmered and reluctantly accepted my logic. Meanwhile, the line of natives became mobile again. They closed in at a casual saunter, rolling off the balls of their long feet with a peculiar, slow, bouncing motion.

A ripple of subdued exclamations ran through our people, and in turn the little natives moved their lips, turned their heads to one another and seemed to be commenting among themselves.

Benson began hissing futile commands for the women to start boarding the ship. No one paid any attention. I could sense no great danger in the situation. In fact I felt more attracted than repelled by the little golden-haired creatures.

Bailey, who was still on the ramp, took a different view. He called out, "They don't look dangerous, but keep away from them. Lord knows what kind of bugs they may have in them."

It was a sobering thought. Their most insignificant disease germ might easily wipe out our colony if it proved contagious.

Yet, how could we stop these natives without inflicting bloodshed? On they came in their shambling, loose-gaited walk. Benson was unsnapping his holster flap, and even the highly curious women were beginning to shrink back toward the gangplank, when a light breeze swept through us from behind. It rustled the grass softly and moved into the natives, only 20 yards away.

The wavering line stopped again. Segments began to retreat, first singly, then in pairs and groups. All but a handful of the most curious suddenly bounded for the forest and disappeared.

The others came forward again, but with increasing bewilderment. Repeatedly, they raised their noses and sniffed the air.

Bailey said from behind us, "They catch our scent and don't know what to make of it. Thank heavens most of them took off. We can handle a dozen of them easily enough."

Our people opened ranks and let the little creatures infiltrate. Sue squeezed my arm. "Why, they're beautiful little things! They make me feel self-conscious with my bleached-out skin. They certainly look intelligent, those eyes—no fear in them at all—look, they're even smiling!"

Indeed, several of the creatures were grinning broadly at the male members of our party. They found our clothing amusing.

Now we could hear their soft voices conversing in a language that was liquid with a great many compound vowel sounds, not unlike Earth's Finnish tongue. Their quick, dark eyes seemed to take in everything. They seemed torn between a consuming curiosity and a strong aversion to our scent. One by one they satisfied the former and yielded to the latter, dropping back and racing for the forest in great, joyous bounds punctuated with happy little whoops of undefinable emotion.

At last only one, chesty little male was left. Benson exhaled heavily beside me. "It's the little fellow we saw on the beach, Sam. Look, he's coming through."

A tawny stripe of brown, furry hair ran from his high forehead, over the crown of his proud skull and down his neck to fade into the typical, deep, golden fuzz of his body. As he approached the ramp I saw that his face was smooth, entirely free of hair as though clean-shaven.

By now Benson was as fascinated as the rest of us. I stepped down in front of him to confront our visitor. I placed a hand on my chest and said, "Sam Rogers!"

The dark eyes swept from my feet to my head and fastened upon my face. He pointed four long fingers at me and repeated distinctly, "Samrogers."

My name is easy to pronounce, but it was a shock to hear it from the lips of an extra-terrestrial being.

Then he placed the same hand on his own chest and said, "Joe!" Actually, it came out with a rapid widening and narrowing of his lips that sounded like a quick version of, "Jo-ah-o-ah-oh," but the vowel echoes were so rapid that for practical purposes it read, "Joe," to me.

I pointed my hand at him and repeated, "Joe!" He looked vaguely disappointed at my crude aspiratory control, but then a bright smile creased his cocky little face. His hand flicked out and back.

"Samrogers—Joe."

Involuntarily I nodded my head. He nodded back and smiled again. Before I could think of what comes after, "Dr. Livingstone, I presume," he wrinkled his nose, squinted his eyes, whirled and darted off for the timber.

We stood rooted for a minute, then Bailey said, "We must really stink. Plucky little fellow took it as long as he could."

Benson looked back at Bailey and me. "Well, what do you think?"

I looked at Bailey, and he looked at Dr. Sorenson. "Lord, I don't know. Except for the possibility of microbe infection, they appear per-

fectly harmless to me," Sorenson said.

I said, "Since they don't like our scent there doesn't seem to be much danger of contact. Phil, why don't we call off the yellow alert with the exception of a rule or two about fraternization in closed spaces?"

Benson looked over his people. All were paired off now, husband with wife. And to a man their arms were wrapped protectively around their respective spouses, watching for the decision. Their faces read, "Is this innocuous little race of people the cause of all the trouble?"

Benson rubbed the gray of his temple with a knuckle. He mounted the ramp and announced, "The emergency is reduced to a blue alert. Women will have the freedom of the clearing and the visible beach, but only authorized working parties will enter the forest. Men will continue to wear sidearms. When outside shelters are complete we will sleep in them, but until then, or until we are better informed about the natives, we shall continue sleeping in the ship."

THE NEW order of the day did nothing to mitigate the resentment and tension, but it did accelerate assembly of the lumber mill and house construction. The little Sirians seemed to have satisfied their curiosity, for they left us to our labors for a whole week.

The first building of our projected village was completed on the seventh day. It was little more than a two-room shanty, but it represented the most sought after prize of the moment, *privacy!*

We drew lots for it, and, with the uncommon justice, one of the hardest working amateur carpenters won. The women brought in armloads of grass for a couch and decorated it with wild-flowers. When evening fell it seemed like an occasion for a celebration, and Benson relented on the evening curfew.

We gathered scraps from the lumber mill, carefully cleared a sandy strip on the beach of all inflammable matter and built a huge bonfire. In the rich atmosphere even the green wood burned merrily, spitting green sap and sending up clouds of pungent, aromatic smoke.

Sue had just curled up in the crook of my arm, and we were working on a case of Earth-nostalgia, when we noticed our visitors again. They came bounding, up to the wide rim of the firelight. They jabbered in excited, ecstatic voices but stopped short of our human assembly. Only one, I recognized him as Joe, picked his way through us and came close to inspect the crackling blaze.

Fascinated, Sue and I watched his profile contort with an expression of immense admiration. It was not the awe of a savage, but the heartfelt appreciation of a human for a rare and beautiful spectacle.

"Fire must be unknown to them," Sue whispered.

"At least mighty rare," I said. "The handbook says no volcanoes and no thunderstorms."

Joe turned at the sound of our low voices. With eyes half-blinded by the glare he searched for me. "Samrogers!" he called clearly. "Samrogers!"

I rose to my feet and answered,

"Joe! Right here, Joe."

He picked his way over to me, smiling broadly and glancing back at the fire every step or two. A pace away he stopped, pointed at me, said, "Samrogers," pointed at himself, said, "Joe!" *then pointed at the fire and waited.*

It was a clearly indicated question. I answered it respectfully, "Fire!"

He repeated, "Fire," and his eyes glowed like sparks. Then he made gestures of picking up some of the fire and taking it away, turning to me to pose the question.

Sorenson, propped up on an elbow, said, "I'll be damned. He's asking you to give him some of the fire."

"No," Benson said. "He knows fire, knows you can't take the flames. He's asking for *the means to build a fire.*"

I faced Joe, shook my head solemnly and said, "No!" To give meaning to the word I sat down and turned my head away for a moment. When I looked back Joe was looking very disappointed. It made Sue so sad that she held out a wedge of sweet melon to him. Joe accepted the gift easily, gracefully and with a small smile of "thank you". He turned back, squatted as near the blaze as comfort would permit and chewed absently at the melon.

Thereafter he ignored the animated conversation that sprang up among us. Jane wanted to know why we didn't give him one of our lighters. "He's just as intelligent as we are," she insisted. She got no argument on that score, but her husband pointed out that the golden people were unaccustomed to handling fire, and that during the present dry season even the green foliage might take off in a holocaust if ignited in this rich, oxygen air.

Even as he spoke, a long, slender pole, flaming at one end, toppled from the settling fire and rolled near Joe. With scarcely a pause to debate, he leaped to his feet, grabbed the pole by the cool end and waved it aloft like a torch.

With a triumphant yell he plunged through us and out across the field bearing his prize aloft trailing sparks.

I tried to shoot low, but my light caliber pellet caught him rather high in the thigh. He dived to the ground senseless in a shower of sparks. His fellow creatures immediately gathered around him. When we closed in to retrieve the fire-wand and stamp out the sparks, the other natives faded away, crinkling their noses. They made no effort to remove Joe, but cast many admiring glances back at the fire he had stolen.

Sue came up storming at me. "You didn't have to *shoot* him." She started to kneel down beside him, but Dr. Bailey restrained her.

"Easy, Susan. Remember the quarantine."

"We can't let him lie there and bleed to death," I said, feeling unaccountably ashamed for my deed, although there was scarcely an alternative.

Benson came up, "Nice shot, Sam."

I said, "Phil, I want permission to enter quarantine with Joe, here. Let me have the instruments, and I'll probe for the bullet and take care of him."

Benson shook his head. "We can't take that chance. We couldn't spare you if you caught something."

"Who could you spare better?" I demanded. "See here, we've got to find out sooner or later whether these little fellows carry anything contagious. If they do, well, then we have a decision to face, but we can't decide anything until we know."

Sue was at my side now. She said. "You have a dozen people who can punch a micro-writer. Sam and I aren't indispensable. Besides, it was he who crippled the poor little fellow."

Without waiting for an answer she called out, "Larson, where are you?" The lucky carpenter tried to draw back in the shadows, knowing full well what she had in mind.

Benson stared at me for a minute. He said gruffly, "Very well, if you can talk Larson out of his cottage, go ahead, play hero!"

I didn't feel very heroic right then. Two hours later, when we had the bullet out of Joe and had him bedded down comfortably for the night, Sue cosied up to me in our double sleeping silks and murmured, "What a guy has to go through out here to get a little privacy!"

Poor Larson!

BAILEY and Sorenson set up their lab outside our cabin door. Joe's wound was seriously infected, and none of our cautiously applied remedies would control the raging fever with which he awoke the first morning. He lay, apathetic, eyes half closed, murmuring, "Tala! Tala!"

The doctors seized the opportunity to launch a study of Sirian microbes, diseases and earth molds. Sue and I took cultures from Joe's wound, and the medics experimented with the effects of local mold products similar to the penicillin series. By force-feeding we managed to keep Joe alive until Bailey, one morning, held up a hypo full of clear liquid and told us how to administer it.

Joe responded at once. The following day he began sitting up and vociferously demanding, "Tala, Tala!"

"Must be his wife or girl-friend," Sue deduced. She was wrong. Joe began making motions of a person lifting a vessel and drinking. When we offered him water he refused, repeating, "Tala!" and making more drinking motions. He tried to rise, but the pain in his swollen thigh stopped him. He sank back licking his lips like a man dying of thirst, and in spite of his general improvement, he stayed in a sullen, subdued attitude.

As his wound closed and the swelling reduced, Joe's temperature, which had reached a fabulous 142 degrees F., stabilized at 137 F., thereby confirming Benson's prediction that the natives would display a much higher metabolism. Sue, who had spent hours stroking the fevered brow, had grown used to Joe's hot-bloodedness, and she teased me about my relative "frigidity".

Until Joe got his "tala" I made disappointing progress at teaching him our language. He picked up our words for those few items that pertained to his comfort, such as

food, drink, bedpan and pillow—he revelled in the luxury of our down-filled pillows. But at first he evinced little interest in communication.

Then one morning we arose to find him standing and clinging weakly to the door jamb, searching the perimeter of the clearing with frantic eyes.

We scolded him, but he ignored us. He spotted a fellow native examining one of the unfinished huts, which were going up at the rate of one a day. He called out in a loud, clear voice, and the little golden creature came running over to investigate.

It was a lovely little female, and and I told Sue, "We have a reunion on our hands. Must be his mate."

But Joe was quite indifferent to her charms. She seemed tolerably happy to see him, touched his bandages with long, gentle fingers, then hurried off to the forest as if in response to his commands. Joe made no effort to follow. He seemed still to realize that he was in good hands and was profiting by the care he was receiving.

However, he chafed for the ten minutes or so before her return. We waited with high curiosity. I bet Sue that we were about to learn what "tala" was. When the female approached again we were mystified. "Why it's just a mango," Sue said. Indeed, the yellow-skinned, kidney-shaped fruit which the little native bore carefully in both hands appeared to be one of the over-sized specimens we had named after its smaller Earth counterpart.

Joe reached greedily for the fruit, poked a hole in the rind with a pointed forefinger and drank deeply. Watching from the door of our bedroom, we could smell a delightful, tangy scent that was only vaguely typical of the Sirian mangoes we had eaten.

To our surprise, as Joe drank, the skin collapsed like a plastic bag. "It must be a different species, or else it's much riper than any we've gathered," Sue said.

When Joe paused to breathe, the female took the fruit from him and sucked at it enthusiastically. They sank down on Joe's bed and took turns drinking the juice until the quart-sized skin was crumpled and empty.

I fear I interrupted an incipient romance in order to retrieve the discarded skin. The female wrinkled her nose and made for the door. I watched her roll unsteadily across the clearing with eccentric little lurches. The bland smile on Joe's handsome face deepened my suspicion. I pointed to the skin and asked, "Tala?"

He nodded, patted his stomach and repeated, "Tala!"

From that moment our relations improved immensely. Joe enlisted the help of various females to keep him supplied with skins of tala, and with the satiation of his craving he took a completely new interest in life.

WE SPENT hours every day working out our language difficulties. He learned so rapidly that I abandoned learning his language in favor of teaching him ours. Even such abstract concepts as time and space proved no ob-

stacles. He grasped the purpose of my wristwatch after a single day's demonstration of its relationship to the passage of Sirius across the sky.

Using a pencil I had managed to convey our symbols for large numbers. Joe could count up to any number now, and he seemed actually to understand the open-end nature of our system of enumeration.

It made possible a mutual agreement on such matters as the number of "days" in a year, which he was mildly interested to learn numbered 440 on his planet. Then a startling piece of information came from him when I asked how long his people lived.

"Two years. Maybe three," he replied. Because of the shorter days, a Sirian year about equalled an Earth year, and I found it difficult to believe that these wonderful little animals lived only two or three years. He persisted until I believed him.

He was strangely vague when I tried to determine the common manner of death. Indeed, personal death was a concept either so hazy or distasteful to him that he refused to dwell on it. The most he would convey was that there were always new faces in the tribe, and the old faces rarely remained more than three years. At this time, he described himself as being more than a year old.

This was only one of several startling items that were revealed in our conversations. The golden people matured in three months to fully grown adults. A female could bear several babies a year and usually did. Yet Joe insisted that his tribe was the only clan on the face of the planet, so far as he knew, and that it numbered fewer than a thousand individuals.

There was no such thing as monogamy or even polygamy. True, at night when the air was cooler, they paired off, male and female, and each male chose from among several favorites. But there was no formal nor permanent mating arrangement.

Benson, who had set up a sheltered desk outside Joe's window in order to listen in with an anthropologist's avid interest, posed the question which grew into quite a mystery. Under such fruitful conditions and ideal environment, why hadn't Joe's people overrun the planet? Even with the brief life-span, each female should produce many babies.

Joe had no answer. The problem didn't interest him, and he refused to ponder it. He'd squat in the corner jealously guarding his limp-skinned mango, nipping at it occasionally when our questions failed to make sense.

We were all, incidentally, quite curious to taste Joe's tala juice, but it was his sole property. His lady-friends would hand it to no one but him, and he guarded it selfishly. Bailey and Sorenson had enlisted the help of our two organic chemists to examine the moist residue of the empty skins, but with their limited lab facilities all they could do was make guesses that the coveted juice was the product of fermentation or enzymic action with which we were unfamiliar.

As a psychologist I knew that Joe responded to the tala similarly to the way a human dipsomaniac

does to alcohol. When he was well-supplied he was cheerful and happy. When he ran out, he became taciturn and irritable. His frequent resort to the liquor, when we tried to force him to answer troublesome questions, confirmed my suspicion that there were certain matters his brilliant mind simply refused to embrace, and the simplest way to avoid worrying about them was to take another drink of tala.

Benson and I discussed this one afternoon while Joe was taking a nap. We sat in the shade of my hut spooning the lush pulp of a mango into our mouths. He said, "Everything points to a race of super-intelligence held down by sheer degeneracy."

"You mean the tala-drinking?" I asked.

He nodded. "For one thing. Our work parties report that they never stop drinking the stuff. The older ones get quite plastered. I've seen it myself. Disgusting. And they have no common sense of, of—well, I shouldn't say decency, because obviously morality as we know it just doesn't exist. But thank heavens they don't care for the scent of humans."

I said, "Don't depend on that too much. I asked Joe about it, and he said that we don't necessarily smell bad to them. It's just so alien to any scent they've known that they tend to shy off. Joe is quite used to it now. He lets Sue rub his back and his head. She's made quite a pet of him."

Benson didn't like this news at all. He pondered thoughtfully for a moment. "That means that they'll all gradually get used to being around us. I don't like it, Phil. They're just human enough to have a bad influence on the colony. They're dissolute and entirely without ambition. In fact they seem to have damned little race survival instinct at all."

I had pondered this many times, but it hadn't struck me as especially dangerous to the colony. Benson went on, "We have a glorious planet here, rich in minerals and other natural resources. By comparison, Earth is so worn-out and depleted and over-crowded that the contrast is almost too great."

"What are you driving at?" I demanded.

"Just this. From the first the biggest problem here has been to prod everyone to work. We have a civilization to build here, and that means clearing more land, breaking the soil, mining, construction, manufacturing."

"Look," I said somewhat impatiently, "you don't expect 80 people to accomplish all this in four years, surely?"

"I expect progress," he said firmly. "Do you realize that when we finished the last of the forty houses that virtually ended the building program? Work on the two warehouses, the water system, sewage disposal plant and the commissary we planned is almost at a standstill."

"The people want time to finish up their homes and make them comfortable," I objected.

"That's what they say," he told me, "but they're fooling away their time."

"Phil, we've only been here a month, and—"

"And if I hadn't pulled a blue alert," he interrupted, "we

wouldn't even have the residentials built yet. Now they've got their precious privacy, and the pressure is off. They'd rather go chasing off into the woods to hunt exotic fruit and peek at the natives than get on with the project."

I hadn't realized things were this serious. "Don't they obey orders any more? What about your work schedules?"

"I've pushed them as hard as I can without forcing a test of my authority," he said. "They claim they deserve time to get adjusted and relax a little before buckling down."

"I agree with them," I said. "They're all serious, industrious people, and this is still an adventure with them. It will wear off pretty soon, and they'll be yearning for comforts of Earth. They'll buckle down when the rainy season hits," I predicted.

"I wonder. Here's one good example. Look over there. Donnegan's food detail is just now returning with its first load. They left three hours ago." He yelled over to the foreman.

Donnegan, a large, pleasant-faced biologist sauntered over to us. Benson said, "Was the *expedition* successful?"

Donnegan brushed off the sarcasm. "Fooling aside, it is getting to be something of an expedition to find fruit. The natives are cleaning it out near at hand."

Turning to me Benson said, "There's another thing. The little devils have settled all around us, and everything is community property with them. Not only do they strip the fruit but they pick up anything that isn't nailed down and wander off with it."

"That's odd," I said. "Joe indicates that they place no value on possessions normally."

"Oh, they don't keep things," Donnegan explained. "They pack them off, fiddle with them and then we find them strewn all over the forest. Sometimes I'd like to wring their little necks!"

Benson looked up at him quickly. "Sounds funny coming from you, Paul. You were one of their chief defenders at the meeting last week."

Donnegan's face darkened. "That was last week, before I found out a few things. As a matter of fact, I think it's time you knew about them, too." He squatted down by us and unburdened himself.

AS IT SO often will, a barrier had erected itself between the colony members and their leader, Phillip Benson. Donnegan somewhat shamefacedly confessed what had gone on behind this curtain of silence.

It seemed that two weeks earlier Bromley, one of the chemists, had contrived some rather crude, old-fashioned, sulphur-and-phosphorus, friction matches. Trading on the native's delight with fire, he had bribed them with matches to give him one of the tala-mangoes which he tasted, then promptly proceeded to swill until he was quite drunk.

In a generous mood he passed out matches to other male members of the colony who, in turn, made the barter and joined the party.

"The stuff is really delicious," Donnegan admitted. "And it doesn't even give you a hang-over."

"Go on," Benson invited coldly.

Within a few days, Donnegan related, everybody was nipping on the tala. Bromley was turning out a steady supply of matches from his lab, and they were now the going currency for trading with the natives. In order to keep their wives quiet the men brought the super-ripe mangoes home and shared them.

The precious fruit, it developed, came from regular mango trees but reached the desired, fermented condition only at the leafy crowns of the trees where even the nimble, light-weight natives found it hazardous and difficult to reach them. Bromley said that he knew of several native casualties from fatal falls that had occurred since the traffic in tala increased.

Benson asked the question that was in my mind. "What caused you to come to me at this late date?" he demanded. "Something more serious must have happened."

"Well, I didn't mind the tala-drinking so much—but, well, Captain Spooner and I came back to his hut one afternoon this week and found his pretty little wife with one of the natives—a male. Spooner thought it was a big joke—he was a little drunk at the time, and so was his wife. But I don't think it's any joke at all."

Benson was on his feet, his face livid. "What else?"

Bromley said, "I checked around a little bit, and I found that quite a few of our people are making pets out of the natives. The little devils have got used to our scent, and they'll do anything just to watch a match burn."

"But the quarantine?" I said.

"I guess they figure it's safe enough. Personally, I don't. But they feel that since you and Sue have escaped any disease there's no reason for the non-fraternizing rule, not even in closed spaces. Several couples I know hold parties every night in their huts after dark. They invite a couple of natives who supply the tala. They all sit around a candle. The natives sleep there."

He kicked at an empty tala skin that Joe had tossed out the door earlier. "Things are out of hand, and I'm ashamed I haven't come to you sooner, Benson."

Phil was so outraged he couldn't speak. I said, "Thanks, Donnegan. You did the right thing."

He left us, and while Benson was struggling to control his anger I said, "It's a wonder they haven't burned the place down. The forest must be damp enough to sustain fire, or they certainly would have set one."

"It might have been better," Benson said, "if they had burned the whole damned planet up! And you thought I was exaggerating! There you have it, a perfect set-up to make beachcombers out of the whole colony. Plenty of free food, liquor, beautiful native girls and a mild climate."

"And native boys," I added, remembering suddenly that I was harboring one of the "pets" under my own roof.

Benson clenched his fists. "From the first I knew what the answer must come to. I just didn't have the guts to face it."

I nodded. "I suppose we'll have to drive them off."

"Drive them off, *nothing!* They're nomads, and they'd be back sooner or later. There will always be people in the colony willing to deal with them secretly, and the natives are clever enough to circumvent any discipline I aim against them."

"What else can you do, short of—genocide?"

"Why rule out genocide? Sam, face it! Race extermination is the only permanent and satisfactory solution."

The thought was abhorrent to me, but he argued, "If we don't eliminate them entirely they'll always be around to plague us. Just picture what this or any future colony would look like after a year or two of uninhibited mingling and loafing and swilling down that tala. Is that the civilization that Earth sent us out here to establish?"

In every part of the universe where living conditions have been too kind and discipline too lax, men have been known to *go native,* and suddenly I felt that Benson had been much more acute in his apprehensions than I, a graduate psychologist who was supposed to understand human nature.

Somewhat subdued I said, "How do you plan to accomplish a complete extermination? If we start hunting them down they'll just fade into the woods. Besides, you'd have a devil of a time getting agreement among our people to take on such a messy project."

"It has to be done, that's all. I want you to keep completely quiet about what we've learned until I can think about it. Bromley should have some ideas. He's a biologist."

When Benson said, "biologist", the obvious solution popped into my head. "If we could sterilize them—all the males, anyway—they have such a short life-span—"

"Too slow. Besides, how are you going to coax all the males to lie down and " His eyes opened wider, "Radiation!"

"Exactly. We take them for a tour of the ship, including the X-ray booth, and pour on the power."

"Might be done at that. But it would be so slow."

SLOW OR NOT, no better plan was conceived among six of us who met secretly that night in Benson's new ship quarters. Donnegan brought his fellow biologist, Terrence Frost, and I had contacted the two medics. We reached swift agreement as to the necessity of taking steps, and decided to work on my rough plan. It was also voted not to divulge our intentions to the others, and then the meeting broke up.

When I returned to my hut, Jane was sitting cross-legged just outside my door visiting with Susan. I thought she would be curious about the confidential nature of the meeting from which she was excluded, but she had other things on her mind. She stood up and said, "I think your patient is recovered, and you've got a problem, mister." She stalked off into the night.

I looked at Sue's pink face and half-guessed the answer before she told me. It seemed that Joe had suddenly developed amorous in-

clinations. Sue had the habit of stroking his head like a pet dog, and this evening, without warning, Joe had begun returning the caresses in a manner so casual and gentle that Sue hadn't noticed the trend.

From a more objective viewpoint, however, Jane had observed the rather unplatonic indications of Joe's attitude and mortified Sue by drawing her attention to it with an acid remark.

In my fury I fancied that Joe had tried to take advantage of my absence. His cleverness in avoiding such advances in my presence was nullified by his error of assuming that Jane would pose no obstacle.

At present he sprawled in his corner beside an empty mango skin, breathing rapidly, innocently asleep. The incident served to drive home Donnegan's story and steel me against the many twinges of conscience I was to suffer in our campaign to wipe out Joe's race.

It also served as an adequate excuse, in Sue's eyes, when I told Joe the next morning that he was quite well enough to return to the forest. This was a fact we both had known for over a week, but Joe in his indolent way, had been quite content to remain and talk with me endlessly. Until now, I had welcomed his presence as an inexhaustible source of information.

He accepted the dismissal without rancor and promised to return and visit us next spring.

"Next spring?" I said.

"We will leave soon," he said. "We go south in the autumn."

"Wait," I said. And I told him that as a gesture of friendship we had decided to take all males of his race for a tour through the ship. Would he take this word to his people?

He said he would, but his face became very thoughtful.

That afternoon they formed a short line at the ramp, and the "tours" began. The line was short because they refused to wait long for anything, but as the line shortened, others came from the woods to take their places. To produce a favorable "press" on our show and thus assure perfect attendance by *all* the males, Benson rigged several mechanical displays of flashing lights and whirling devices.

They were delighted, and when they got to the X-ray booth, to induce them to stand still we set up a gas torch with a beautiful, vermilion, strontium flame. The only problem at this point was to get them to move on after they got their painless dose of sterilizing radiation.

Every tenth "golden boy" was shunted into a small chamber filled with *orgon,* the instant anaesthetizing gas, and Dr. Sorenson, wearing an oxygen mask, would catch him as he fell, take his specimen, hand it through a slot to Dr. Bailey and then drag the unsuspecting victim into the fresh air where the nurses took over with more wonders to distract his attention.

This running spot-check on the collected semen samples assured us that our radiation was effectively destroying the spermatozoa.

I sat at my old place at the base of the ramp, weeding out the occasional females who tried to sneak in and also checking to see that we had no repeats.

Our method was simplicity itself. As each native finished our tour an attendant atomized a faint but very permanent stain of waterproof dye on the hair of the right shoulder blade. It was hardly noticeable unless you were looking for it, and that was one of my jobs.

In two days we "toured" 481 males.

A week later the night rains began, and our unwelcomed neighbors vanished.

BENSON had postponed his little lecture deliberately, and now he called us all together for a fatherly talk which I helped him prepare. He began abruptly.

"Since nature has been so bountiful in providing us with tala, I don't intend to proclaim any silly prohibition regarding its consumption. With a little reflection, however, I hope that all of you can understand that we must have some control. I am fully aware that many of you arranged your own private channels for obtaining this liquor, but with the departure of our tree-climbing friends the easy source has dried up.

"Now, to prevent some of you from breaking your fool necks trying to climb the trees yourselves, I propose that we place tala in the commissary as a normal ration to be issued equitably to all—when it is available. And working together, our clearing parties will, no doubt, fell enough mango trees to give us all a fair taste."

Benson's unexpected tolerance and remarkable proposal was received with mixed embarrassment, relief and enthusiasm. He went on, "We have enjoyed almost two months of rather unrestrained partying, and I'm not going to rail at you for some of the illicit behaviour that came to my attention. So far the intimacies which some of you took with the natives have produced no epidemics nor bastard offspring on either side. However, were I to accept your actions as typical of the future, I would consider our colony doomed already and write off this planet as unfit for further investment by Earth civilization.

"Instead, I feel you will, during the winter months, regain your perspective and apply yourself to the principles which brought us here and must continue to bind us together if we are to survive as a permanent culture."

Benson's speech had the desired effect. Without the little people around to distract us, the colonists plunged into their work, and things got done. True, a rather disproportionate number of logs brought in by the falling crews turned out to be mango-wood, but the tala-rationing program added incentive precisely where it was needed. The perimeter of our clearing advanced rapidly, the cultivating and planting parties followed closely behind, and the sawmill added an industrious sound to the whole operation.

As Benson had hoped, when the people buckled down they once again began yearning for the conveniences they had left on earth. The chemists finally contrived suitable raw materials for the plasticizer and began manufacturing screens for our gaping windows, muchly-needed pipe for our water

and sewage systems and even a few "frivolous" luxuries such as cups, saucers and fruit bowls. The commissary and other public buildings were planked out roughly, and the hospital-clinic was completed before the first two babies arrived.

The history-making blessed event was an honor and an onus to Captian Spooner and his young wife. To father the first human offspring on Sirius XXII was the fond hope of many of us, but Spooner and the Second Officer had something over a light-year head-start on the rest of us.

Infant Spooner arrived just 5½ months after our landing. The Mate's baby came two weeks later. Sue herself was satisfyingly pregnant. By spring it was obvious that Earth's gynecologists had chosen the members of our colony well, and there would be no dearth of young blood. Fully a third of the women were expecting, and Sue's date indicated she would have won the derby if it hadn't been for the ship's officers' perfidy.

The colony as a whole was in good shape. As the most pressing work was disposed of, the men took turns at the pleasant hunting details, and we began enjoying fresh meat from the small game of the forest.

On one such trip I brought back a live little animal that looked like a cross between a three-toed sloth and a teddy bear, except that he had a long, woofly snout like an ant-eater. He seemed to be hibernating in the crotch of a small tree, and when I shook him down he cuddled up and clung to my neck so lovingly that I decided he'd make a good pet for Sue.

The little cub kept nipping affectionately at my neck on the hike back, and he clung so close he was a nuisance, but Sue was delighted. We had to improvise a cage at night to keep him from mauling us and keeping us awake.

Sue named him, "Toots", and we were the envy of all the camp. When Joe and his people returned three weeks later, and we discovered the truth about Toots, the others were happy they hadn't acquired a similar pet.

IT WAS late spring, and the mango trees were rapidly refilling their high branches with the tala-fruit. We now had a roofed central kitchen where the women prepared our meals. We ate at long tables in the open.

Shortly after the noon meal one day, Joe and his people returned. He caught up to Sue and me as were strolling to our hut for our daily fifteen-minute siesta. He appeared tired from the journey but quite glad to see us. I felt the pangs of conscience as I added my hypocritical welcome to Sue's warm greeting.

In his old room we sat on the rough furniture I had fashioned, and Joe eyed Sue's fruitful contours. "A baby soon, eh? We have many babies among us."

"You—have?" I said.

"Many were born on the return trip. They slowed up the females with their sucking. For eight days they are a burden on the mother."

Sue exclaimed, "Eight days? Then what happens?"

The subject did not greatly interest Joe. "Then they find their

own food—if the *koodi* does not find them first."

"What in the world is a *koodi?*" Sue asked with a shiver.

Joe was silent for a minute. He wrinkled his broad brow and looked at me. "Samrogers, you asked me many questions about how we die. I did not understand this death for a long time. Now I know. It is when the *koodi* comes. He comes to the very young and to the old. The babies are too small to hold him off. The old drink much tala, then the *koodi* comes to them. This is my third year, and my thirst for tala is great. The *koodi* will come."

His words painted a clear picture of a superstitious concept of death, personifying it even as humans refer to the "grim reaper". But Sue took a different view. "What does the *koodi* look like?" she persisted.

Joe looked puzzled. He raised a long, four-segmented finger and pointed to a corner of the room where Toots was curled up like a fur neck-piece. "He looks like that. There is a *koodi.*"

My first impulse was to reject the statement as ridiculous. Toots was as harmless as an over-sized kitten. Besides, the manual made no mention of—

Sue made a small sound in her throat. Her face was colorless. "Sam! Get him out of here!"

"But the manual—

"The manual didn't mention Joe's people, either," she said half-hysterically. *"Get Toots out of here."*

Still unbelieving I walked over and hauled the little fuzzy animal up into my arms. Instantly, he cuddled close and rammed his pointed snout under my open collar and began nibbling at my neck. I took him outside, and out of perverse curiosity I let him have his way with my neck. At first it tickled, as always, but instead of batting his head away I let him nibble with his soft, pointed lips.

Sue called out, "Sam what are you doing? Kill him, Sam!"

His lips spread into a little circle on my flesh and began sucking gently. There was no pain, just the throb of my jugular under his mouth. Now his long, soft, hairy arms became firmer around my neck. I jerked back and they gripped hard. A chill of panic stabbed me, and I could feel the taut flesh of my neck drawn more deeply into his puckered lips.

I tugged at him silently, not wishing to frighten Sue. He wouldn't come loose. In broad, noon-daylight I had a Sirian vampire in my arms, threatening to rupture my jugular vein and kill me within speaking distance of half a hundred people. I tried to level my voice. "Joe, would you come out here, please?"

He came at once, stared with a blank expression and said, "You have been drinking much tala?"

"Help me, dammit!" I said, holding my voice down. "I can't shake him loose. He's trying to—" The long, tight arm squeezed off my breath. In turn I tried to strangle him, but under the thick fur was a bony protection where there should have been soft neck.

"It does no good to kill the *koodi,*" Joe said. "There is always another. Once they hold you tightly it is too late."

Sue thought differently. She came through the door like a hell-

cat. Catching up her garden hoe she swung a blow that, had it missed Toots, would have crushed my skull. But Sue didn't miss. I fell on my back, and Toots let go, dead of a broken spine.

THE "LIQUOR control board" was Benson's best idea. Not only did it put tala on a legitimate basis, but it controlled our dealings with the natives. Bromley, the chemist, who was the original offender, was charged with manufacturing the wooden matches, and the medium of exchange was concentrated in the hands of the commissary "purchasing agent".

The reason that Benson sanctioned the controlled tala trade with the natives stemmed from our apparent failure to sterilize the males. There was, indeed, a huge crop of native babies, tiny little dolls that looked like spider monkeys and dropped from their mothers' breasts after little more than a week.

The brisk tala trade was part of our program to keep the natives in close association while we devised ways and means to discover the cause of our failure. All quarantine rules had long since been dropped, and Sorenson and Bailey began inventing ruses to lure the males into the gas chamber again.

Weeks passed while we worked our way through the whole male population again, testing for fertility and X-raying it wherever we found it. Through Joe we advertised new wonders to be seen in the ship, and as the sight-seers left we tagged each with an atomized spot on the other shoulder, indicating that he was still sterile or had just become so.

This time we tallied 496 males which, according to Joe, was certainly the whole masculine population. The mystery of our failure at genocide forced an unpleasant decision on Benson. The biologists and medics insisted that we must win the natives' confidence even further to gain their cooperation. As the heat of summer bore down and the mercury rose, we eased off on the work schedule and deliberately planned social functions to which we had Joe invite a group of natives. There were picnics and beach parties where our guests brought their own tala, and ours was carefully rationed. Group singing entranced the little golden people, and they took remarkable delight in the discovery of their own, sweetly pitched voices. Enterprising Joe, with his remarkable memory, soon became unofficial song leader, and all day long we would hear the natives practicing.

Sue's baby came, a sturdy little boy whom we named Richard Joseph—Sue insisted on the second name, and I couldn't argue her out of it without revealing my reasons. Within two weeks the clinic's nursery was full of babies, and it was at this point that the natives' interest became deeply stirred.

The language barriers were breaking down rapidly. Many of our regular visitors were females, and with Joe's help as an interpreter they were soon able to ask questions. Their greatest curiosity hinged on the fabulous care we gave our infants.

Although I wouldn't permit Sue to do it, several of our women be-

gan using female natives for baby-sitters. This lead to the first basic behaviour change we had noticed. The females began to pay more attention to their own offspring. It was as if they had just discovered the pleasure of fondling their babies and watching them crawl and kick and gurgle. Even after the first week they were still carrying them around, finding choice morsels of fruit for them, fanning off the insects and singing them to sleep with their new-found abilities to make music.

Benson noticed it and called a meeting of the secret six. He said, "Our little program had better work this time or we are in for it. Apparently this *koodi* animal that Sam had the tussle with is the principal population control, and now the mothers are packing their kids around until they're old enough to fight off the *koodi.*"

Donnegan shook his head. "Damned if I can find out where we slipped up. Frost and I just finished a series of tests with native ova and human sperm. They don't mix. Of course, we didn't expect them to, but what in hell *is* the answer?"

I hadn't known of this project. I said, "You didn't think that our male colonists—"

Benson scowled with exasperation. "We don't know what to think, Sam! We sterilized 481 native males last fall, and the babies are just as thick as ever."

I said, "Well, we got to 496 of them this time. That should do it for sure. Joe says he'll keep a lookout for any males without the two stains on his shoulder."

Benson narrowed his eyes. "You know, it strikes me that Joe is being awfully helpful. What reason did you give him for wanting this information?"

"He didn't ask," I said.

OUR 12-MONTH year was composed of 37-day months, except February which we shorted six days to make it come out even.

According to this calendar the "May-flies" came in July, just a month before our first anniversary. The little winged insects were a seasonal life-form, one more item that escaped the exploratory party, and for which we were unprepared.

They came out of the north, and they struck us before we could take shelter in the ship or our plastic-screened huts. They were a little smaller than flying ants, and even their long wings were jet-black. Their bites were infinitesimal, but each one smarted like a prick with a hot needle.

In the midst of the confusion of rescuing babies and herding everyone in doors, I noticed that all the natives had disappeared into the forest. Everyone had suffered a hundred bites or more, and we were sorry, swollen sights. Sue insisted that I cover myself and make a run for the clinic to see if Dr. Bailey had any remedies for the bites. Richard Joseph was crying loudly from the irritation, so I agreed.

It was only 75 yards to the clinic, and I made it without collecting many more stings. But the doctors had nothing to offer. They were dabbing various salves, astringents and pastes on test patches of their own skin, but nothing seemed to

have any effect at all.

"All we hope," said Sorenson, "is that the flies aren't microbe-carriers."

I started out the door to return then stepped back and peered through the screen. The forest was erupting with natives. They staggered into the clearing, headed for the center of it and sank down as if with great weariness. On and on they came until the ground among our buildings was literally paved with their prone bodies.

"Poor devils," Bailey murmured as the clouds of flies continued to sweep through our village. "Nothing we can do, though. I wonder why they come out in the open? You'd think they had better protection in the trees."

I had no answers, so I covered my head again and made a dash for my own hut. Inside I brushed off the clinging flies and stamped on them. "The medics don't have any help for us," I said. Then I saw him.

Sue was struggling to hold Joe on his feet. His arms were draped loosely over her shoulders, and for a second I couldn't decided whether he was ill or making a pass at Sue.

I pulled him off her by one shoulder. He swung around and toppled into my arms. Remarkably few insect bites showed under the transparent haze of golden hair, but he reeked of tala.

"You're drunk," I yelled at him. "A lot of help you are at a time like this!"

"Tala," he said from loose lips. "Much tala."

"You've had much tala, all right!" I said disgusted.

Sue said, "We've got to let him stay in here, Sam. The flies will eat him alive out there." She went to the window and knocked the flies from the outside of the screen. Then she screamed. I thought she had just discovered the massed natives, but she kept on screaming until I went to her and looked out.

In the late afternoon sun, fuzzy little brown animals were waddling out of the forest, closing in on the 900 or more natives lying senseless in the clearing. *Koodi!* Dozens of them.

I forgot my screaming wife, my crying infant, the drunken wife-stealer slumped on the floor. I forgot the torture of my own stings. All I remember is snatching my pistol from its holster that hung by the door and plunging out and pulling the trigger until fire ceased to come out of it. Then I was kicking and smashing with a tree limb, and every blow smashed one of the vile little ghouls into the grass. I thought I saw Benson firing and kicking, but I blacked out before I could be sure.

I regained consciousness with the flies still keening in my ears. Sue was calling my name and slapping me sharply in the face. Joe was trying to pull me to my feet, but the last thing I remember is the both of us collapsing to the ground.

I AWOKE days later with a burning fever and gloriously drunken sensation of floating. Joe brought a fruit to me when he saw I was stirring. I drank the thin, tangy juice in one breath and sank back into a deep sleep again.

My next drink came from the long, slender fingers of a pretty lit-

tle female native. This time it was water, and I stayed awake. Joe came in, saw I was awake and came back in a few minutes with Benson and Dr. Bailey.

They both looked terrible, Benson especially. Bailey said, "Take it easy. Sue's at the clinic. She and the baby are all right, but you damned near didn't make it."

Benson said, "Can you talk?"

I cleared my throat and decided I could. He waved Joe and the female out. Then he and Bailey sat down beside me. I asked, "Any casualties?"

"Two of our babies and thirty-six native babies. Some of the *koodi* came in after dark."

It sounded strange, Benson's listing native casualties with our own.

The memory of the *koodi* attack brought a wave of nausea over me. I said, "Benson, I'm sorry, but I'm all done trying to murder Joe's race. I want no further part of it."

Benson's face was thin and drawn, and he stared at the floor. "If we haven't murdered it already," he said, "there will be no more attempts while I am in charge." He covered his face with his hands. "Bailey. Tell him, Bailey."

The doctor's voice was gravelly and weak. "If it hadn't been for the natives we'd all have died. The venom from the flies paralyzed everyone the second day after the swarm hit us. The flies were gone the next morning, but every soul in the colony passed out. Joe and his friends took care of us, poured tala down our throats and fed us."

"But they were soused," I said.

"Their only defense against the flies. The little black devils left the natives pretty well alone, and it appears that the tala was responsible. Could be that the stuff is what neutralized the toxin, too. They must have poured a gallon of it down me, judging from the empty skins by my bed. At any rate, they kept us alive until we could get up and feed ourselves."

"Why did they come into the clearing when they drank the tala?" I asked.

Bailey said, "Joe told us that the day he saw Sue kill the *koodi* that was attacking you, he got the idea that he should do something about them himself. Through his efforts the natives no longer take the little devils as an inevitable evil. They kill them wherever they find them now. And when they had to get drunk to save themselves from the flies, Joe passed the word for them to hit for the clearing. The *koodi* usually avoid the sunlight, but it was late in the afternoon. They came anyway."

"Phil," I said, "did I see you out there with me, killing the little bastards?"

He nodded silently.

"You had changed your mind about the natives at that time?"

"I—I suppose so. Don't rub it in, Sam. It's hard enough to live with the thought of how wrong I was. All I can do now is pray that whatever failed in our first try failed again. Joe's people have made the human race look pretty dismal. They have every right to their planet, and if we are foolish enough to go native, well—at least we have a stronger survival instinct."

At that point Susan came in carrying Richard. He had the hiccoughs. Sue kissed me. "Richard

just drew his ration of sterile tala from the clinic. He still has a slight fever. But thanks to Joe and Harmony—"

"Harmony? Who's that?"

"The native girl who helped Joe nurse us. Her name is really Hah-ah-arm-ig-hin-ih-hee, or something like that. She answers to Harmony, though."

And she did. Hearing her name the little golden girl came through the door towing Joe by one hand.

I said, "One of your favorites, Joe?"

He ran a caressing, four-fingered hand over her shoulder. "I like her," he admitted. "She wants to call me husband like Sue calls you."

Bailey smiled. "It seems there is a new fad among the natives. Something like monogamy, I understand."

I said, "What do you think of the idea, Joe?"

He thought it over. "I have not made up my mind."

Sue pressed him, "Why not marry Harmony, Joe?"

In the blunt manner in which he so often made his curious revelations, Joe blurted out, "Because I am in much demand among all the females. It is—very pleasant."

Bailey's eyes widened. He ordered, "Bend over, Joe."

Joe obliged so we could all examine his back. There were two brown stains on his shoulder blades as there should be, but Bailey was not satisfied. He poked a finger into them and examined the skin under the hair. "Mango pitch!" he announced. "Stained clean down to the skin. Did you do that, Joe?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I knew you would force me to go into the ship with the others if I didn't have the stain."

Benson looked up, shocked. "Then you—you knew what we were trying to do?"

"Yes. You and Samrogers spoke of it outside the hut one day. You thought I was asleep. Some of your words puzzled me, so I stayed away from the ship. Then I found out what they meant."

"But you helped us get the others to go into the ship!"

"It was what you wanted," Joe said simply. "Later, when we went south, the females saw that only Joe's favorites continued to have babies. So Joe became very—popular."

I said, "You mean they figured it out?"

Joe smiled. "Did you think we do not know about—" he paused to dredge among his amazing store of human idioms, "—the facts of life?"

Bailey shook his head. "What a man! What a race! Think what they would be if they had a human's survival instinct!"

"And thumbs," I added. • • •

Illustrated by Kelly Freas

If Saranta wished to qualify as one who loved his fellow man, he should have known that often the most secretive things are the most obvious.

DISQUALIFIED

BY CHARLES L. FONTENAY

AFTER the morning inspection tour, Tardo, the Solar Council's Planetary Aid agent, and his companion, Peo, were taken to the castle which stood on a hill overlooking the area.

Tardo and Peo were entertained royally at luncheon by Saranta, their host, who appeared to be the wealthy overlord of this portion of the planet. The meal was delicious—tender, inch-thick steaks served with delicate wine sauce and half a dozen of the planet's exotic vegetables, topped off by a cool fruit dessert.

"My recommendation will be of considerable importance to you," said Tardo as they ate. "If it is favorable, there is certain technical

aid aboard ship which will be made available to you at once. Of course, you will not receive advanced equipment from the Solar Council until there is a more thorough investigation."

"I'm afraid our culture is too simple and agrarian to win your approval," said Saranta modestly.

"That isn't a major consideration. The Council understands the difficulties that have faced colonies in other star systems. There are certain fundamental requirements, of course: no abnormal religious practices, no slavery . . . well, you understand what I mean."

"We really feel that we have done well since we . . . our ancestors, that is . . . colonized our world a thousand years ago," said Saranta, toying with a wineglass. A smiling servant filled the glasses of Tardo and Peo. "You see, there was no fuel for the ship to explore other planets in the system, and the ship just rusted away. Since we are some distance from the solar system, yours is the first ship that has landed here since colonization."

"You seem to have been lucky, though," said Peo. He was navigator of the Council ship, and had asked to accompany Tardo on the brief inspection trip. "You could have landed on a barren planet."

"Well, no, the colonizers knew it was liveable, from the first exploration expedition," said Saranta. "There were difficulties, of course. Luxuriant vegetation, but no animal life, so we had no animals to domesticate. Pulling a plow is hard work for a man."

"But you were able to solve this situation in a humanitarian way?" asked Toredo, peering at him keenly. "That is to say, you didn't resort to slavery?"

Saranta smiled and spread his hands slightly.

"Does this look like a slave society to you?" he countered. "The colonists were anxious to co-operate to make the planet liveable. No one objected to work."

"It's true we've seen no slaves, that we know about," said Tardo. "But two days is a short time for inspection. I must draw most of my conclusions from the attitudes of you and the others who are our hosts. How about the servants here?"

"They are paid," answered Saranta, and added ruefully: "There are those of us who think they are paid too well. They have a union, you know."

Tardo laughed.

"A carry-over from Earth, no doubt," he commented. "An unusual one, too, for a culture without technology."

When the meal was over, the two men from the ship were conducted on a tour of the area. It was a neat agricultural community, with broad fields, well-constructed buildings and, a short distance from Saranta's castle-like home, a village in which artisans and craftsmen plied their peaceful trades.

Peo tried to notice what he thought Tardo would look for on such a short inspection. The Council agent, he knew, had had intensive training and many years of experience. It was hard for Peo to judge what factors Tardo would consider significant—probably very minor ones that the average man would not notice, he thought.

Tardo had seemed most intent

on the question of slavery, and Peo looked for signs of it. He could see none. The people of the planet had had time to conceal some things, of course. But the people they saw in the village wore a proud air of independence no slave could assume.

Saranta apologized for their having to walk, explaining that there was no other means of transportation on the planet.

"And, without transportation, you can understand why we have not been able to develop a technology," he added. "We hope transport will be included in the first assistance you will give us."

Tardo asked about the fields.

"I see there is no one working them," he said. "Is that done by the villagers?"

"Our labor supply is transient," answered Saranta after a moment's hesitation. "The laborers who will work our fields—for a wage, of course—are probably in the next town or the one beyond it now."

Alpha Persei was sinking in the western sky when Tardo and Peo took their leave of Saranta and made their way down the road toward their planetary landing craft.

"It looks like a good world to me," said Peo. "If tomorrow's inspection is as satisfactory, I suppose you will recommend the beginning of technical aid?"

"There will be no inspection tour tomorrow, and I shall recommend against aid at this time," replied Tardo. "I've seen enough."

"Why?" asked Peo, surprised.

"There are two classes of people on this planet, and we've seen only one," said Tardo. "Those we have seen are freemen. The others are no better than animals. We give no aid that helps men tighten their hold over their fellows."

"If you haven't seen them, how do you know there is another class?" demanded Peo. "There is no evidence of any such situation."

"The evidence is well hidden. But if you think your stomach can take it now, I'll tell you. If you remember your history, colonizing ships 1000 years ago had no space to carry animals along. They had to depend on native animal life of the planet, and this planet had none."

"Saranta said that. But I don't see . . ."

"Those were delicious steaks, weren't they?" remarked Tardo quietly. • • •

Illustrated by Ed Emsh

CONFIDENCE GAME

Cutter demanded more and more and more *efficiency—and got it! But, as in anything, enough is enough, and too much is . . .*

BY JAMES McKIMMEY, JR.

GEORGE H. CUTTER wheeled his big convertible into his reserved space in the Company parking lot with a flourish. A bright California sun drove its early brightness down on him as he strode toward the square, four-story brick building which said *Cutter Products, Inc.* over its front door. A two-ton truck was grinding backward, toward the loading doors, the thick-shouldered driver craning his neck. Cutter moved briskly forward, a thick-shouldered man himself, though not very tall. A glint of light appeared in his eyes, as he saw Kurt, the truck driver, fitting the truck's rear end into the tight opening.

"Get that junk out of the way!" he yelled, and his voice roared over the noise of the truck's engine.

Kurt snapped his head around, his blue eyes thinning, then recognition spread humor crinkles around his eyes and mouth. "All right, sir," he said. "Just a second while I jump out, and I'll lift it out of your way."

"With bare hands?" Cutter said.

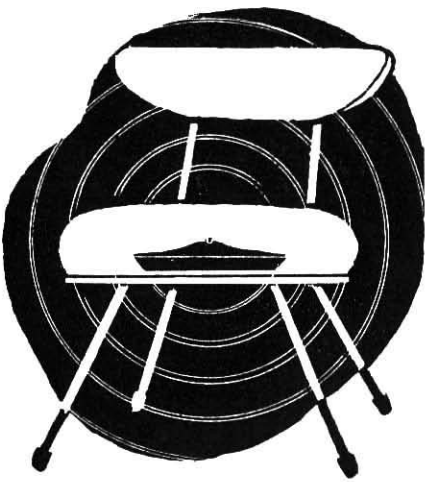
"With bare hands." Kurt said.

Cutter's laugh boomed, and as he rounded the front of the truck, he struck the right front fender with his fist. Kurt roared back from the cab with his own laughter.

He liked joking harshly with Kurt and with the rest of the truck drivers. They were simple, and they didn't have his mental strength. But they had another kind of strength. They had muscle and energy, and most important, they had guts. Twenty years before Cutter had driven a truck himself. The drivers knew that, and there was a bond between them, the drivers and himself, that seldom existed between employer and employee.

The guard at the door came to a reflex attention, and Cutter bobbed his head curtly. Then, instead of taking the stairway that led up the front to the second floor and his office, he strode down the hallway to the left, angling through the shop on the first floor. He always walked through the shop. He liked the heavy driving sound of the machines in his ears, and the muscled look of the men, in their coarse work shirts and heavy-soled shoes. Here again was strength, in the machines and in the men.

And here again too, the bond between Cutter and his employees was a thing as real as the whir and grind and thump of the machines, as real as the spray of metal dust, spitting away from a spinning saw blade. He was able to drive himself through to them, through the hard wall of unions and prejudices against business suits and white collars and soft clean hands, be-



cause they knew that at one time he had also been a machinist and then tool and die operator and then a shop foreman. He got through to them, and they respected him. They were even inspired by him, Cutter knew, by his energy and alertness and steel confidence. It was one good reason why their production continually skimmed along near the top level of efficiency.

Cutter turned abruptly and started up the metal-lipped concrete steps to the second floor. He went up quickly, his square, almost chunky figure moving smoothly, and there was not the faintest shortening in his breath when he reached the level of his own office.

Coming up the back steps required him to cross the entire administration office which contained the combined personnel of Production Control, Procurement, and Purchasing. And here, the sharp edge of elation, whetted by the walk past the loading dock and the truck drivers and the machine shop and the machinists, was dulled slightly.

On either side of him as he paced rapidly across the room, were the rows of light-oak desks which contained the kind of men he did not like: fragile men, whether thin or fat, fragile just the same, in the eyes and mouth, and pale with their fragility. They affected steel postures behind those desks, but Cutter knew that the steel was synthetic, that there was nothing in that mimicked look of alertness and virility but posing. They were a breed he did not understand, because he had never been a part of them, and so this time, the invisible but very real quality of employer-employee relationship turned coldly brittle, like frozen cellophane.

The sounds now, the clicking of typewriters, the sliding of file drawers, the squeak of adjusted swivel chairs—all of it—irritated him, rather than giving him inspiration, and so he hurried his way, especially when he passed that one fellow with the sad, frightened eyes, who touched his slim hands at the papers on his desk, like a cautious fawn testing the soundness of the earth in front of him. What was his name? Linden? God, Cutter thought, the epitome of the breed, this man: sallow and slow and so hesitant that he appeared to be about to leap from his chair at the slightest alarm.

Cutter broke his aloofness long enough to glare at the man, and Linden turned his frightened eyes quickly to his desk and began shuffling his papers nervously. Some day, Cutter promised himself, he was going to stop in front of the man and shout, "Booo!" and scare the poor devil to hell and back.

He pushed the glass doors that led to his own offices, and moving into Lucile's ante-room restored his humor. Lucile, matronly yet quick and youthfully spirited, smiled at him and met his eyes directly. Here was some strength again, and he felt the full energy of his early-morning drive returning fully. Lucile, behind her desk in this plain but expensive reception room, reminded him of fast, hard efficiency, the quality of accomplishment that he had dedicated himself to.

"Goddamned sweet morning, eh,

Lucy?" he called.

"Beautiful, George," she said. She had called him by his first name for years. He didn't mind, from her. Not many could do it, but those who could, successfully, he respected.

"What's up first?" he asked, and she followed him into his own office. It was a high-ceilinged room, with walls bare except for a picture of Alexander Hamilton on one wall, and an award plaque from the State Chamber of Commerce on the opposite side of the room. He spun his leather-cushioned swivel chair toward him and sat down and placed his thick hands against the surface of the desk. Lucile took the only other chair in the office, to the side of the desk, and flipped open her appointment pad.

"Quay wants to see you right away. Says it's important."

Cutter nodded slightly and closed his eyes. Lucile went on, calling his appointments for the day with clicking precision. He stored the information, leaning back in his chair, adjusting his mind to each, so that there would be no energy wasted during the hard, swift day.

"That's it," Lucile said. "Do you want to see Quay?"

"Send him in," Cutter said, and he was already leaning into his desk, signing his name to the first of a dozen letters which he had dictated into the machine during the last ten minutes of the preceding day.

Lucile disappeared, and three minutes later Robert Quay took her place in the chair beside Cutter's desk. He was a taller man than Cutter, and thinner. Still, there was an athletic grace about him, a sureness of step and facial expression, that made it obvious that he was physically fit. He was single and only thirty-five, twelve years younger than Cutter, but he had been with Cutter Products, Inc. for thirteen years. In college he had been a Phi Beta Kappa and lettered three years on the varsity as a quarterback. He was the kind of rare combination that Cutter liked, and Cutter had offered him more than the Chicago Cardinals to get him at graduation.

Cutter felt Quay's presence, without looking up at him. "Goddamned sweet morning, eh, Bob?"

"It really is, George," Quay said.

"What's up?" Cutter stopped signing, having finished the entire job, and he stared directly into Quay's eyes. Quay met the stare unflinchingly.

"I've got a report from Sid Perry at Adacam Research."

"Your under-cover agent again, eh?"

Quay grinned. Adacam Research conducted industrial experimentation which included government work. The only way to find out what really went on there, Cutter had found out, was to find a key man who didn't mind talking for a certain amount of compensation, regardless of sworn oaths and signatures to government statements. You could always get somebody, Cutter knew, and Quay had been able to get a young chemist, Sidney Perry.

"Okay," Cutter said. "What are they doing over there?"

"There's a fellow who's offered Adacam his project for testing. They're highly interested, but they're not going to handle it."

"Why not?"

Quay shrugged. "Too touchy. It's a device that's based on electronics—"

"What the hell is touchy about electronics?"

"This deals with the human personality," Quay said, as though that were explanation enough.

Cutter understood. He snorted. "Christ, anything that deals with the human personality scares them over there, doesn't it?"

Quay spread his hands.

"All right," Cutter said. "What's this device supposed to do?"

"The theory behind it is to produce energy units which reach a plane of intensity great enough to effect the function of the human ego."

"Will it?" Cutter never wasted time on surprise or curiosity or theory. His mind acted directly. Would it or wouldn't it? Performance versus non-performance. Efficiency versus inefficiency. Would it improve production of Cutter Products, Inc., or would it not?

"Sid swears they're convinced it will. The factors, on paper, check out. But there's been no experimentation, because it involves the human personality. This thing, when used, is supposed to perform a definite personality change on the individual subjected."

"How?"

"You know the theory of psychiatric therapy—the theory of shock treatment. The effect is some what similar, but a thousand times more effective."

"What *is* the effect?"

"A gradual dissolving of inferiority influences, or inhibitions, from the personality. A clear mind resulting. A healthy ego."

"And?"

"Confidence."

Cutter stared at Quay's eyes, assimilating the information. "That's all very damned nice. Now where does it fit in with Cutter Products?"

Quay drew a notebook from his coat pocket swiftly. "You remember that efficiency check we had made two months ago—the rating of individual departments on comparable work produced?"

Cutter nodded.

Quay looked at his notebook. "All administrative personnel departments showed an average of—"

"Thirty-six point eight less efficiency than the skilled and unskilled labor departments," Cutter finished.

Quay smiled slightly. He snapped the notebook shut. "Right. So that's our personnel efficiency bug."

"Christ, I've known that for twenty years," Cutter snapped.

"Okay," Quay said quickly, alerting himself back to the serious effort. "Now then, you'll remember we submitted this efficiency report to Babcock and Steele for analysis, and their report offered no answer, because their experience showed that you *always* get that kind of ratio, because of personality differences. The administrative personnel show more infieriority influences per man, thus less confidence, thus less efficiency."

"I remember all that," Cutter said.

"Their report also pointed out that this inevitable loss of efficiency is leveled out, by proportionately smaller wage compensation. The administrative personnel gets ap-

proximately twenty-five percent less compensation than the skilled labor personnel, and the remaining eleven point eight percent loss of efficiency is made up by the more highly efficient unskilled labor receiving approximately the same compensation as the administrative personnel."

"I remember all that nonsense, too," Cutter reddened faintly with a sudden anger. He did not believe the statistics were nonsense, only that you should expect to write off a thirty-six point eight efficiency loss on the basis of adjusted compensation. A thirty-six point eight efficiency loss was a comparable loss in profits. You never compensated a loss in profits, except by erasing that loss. "And so this is supposed to fix it?"

Quay's head bobbed. "It's worth a try, it seems to me. I've talked to Sid about it extensively, and he tells me that Bolen, who's developed this thing, would be willing to install enough units to cover the entire administrative force, from the department-head level down."

"How?"

Quay motioned a hand. "It's no larger than a slightly thick saucer. It could be put inside the chairs." Quay smiled faintly. "They sit on it, you see, and—"

Cutter was not amused. "How much?"

"Nothing," Quay said quickly. "Absolutely nothing. Bolen wants actual tests badly, and the Institute wouldn't do it. Snap your fingers, and give him a hundred and fifty people to work on, and it's yours to use for nothing. He'll do the installing, and he *wants* to keep it secret. It's essential, he says, to get an accurate reaction from the subjects effected. For him it's perfect, because we're running a continuous efficiency check, and if this thing does the job like it's supposed to do it, we'll have gained the entire benefits for nothing. How can we lose?"

Cutter stared at Quay for a moment, his mind working swiftly. "Call Horner in on this, but nobody else. Absolutely nobody else. Tell Horner to write up a contract for this fellow to sign. Get a clause in there to the effect that this fellow, Bolen, assumes all responsibility for any effects not designated in the defining part of the contract. Fix it up so that he's entirely liable, then get it signed, and let's see what happens."

Quay smiled fully and stood up. "Right, sir." He had done a good job, he knew. This was the sort of thing that would keep him solidly entrenched in Cutter's favor. "Right, George," he said, remembering that he didn't need to call Cutter sir anymore, but he knew he wouldn't hear any more from Cutter, because Cutter was already looking over a blueprint, eyes thin and careful, mind completely adjusted to a new problem.

EDWARD BOLEN called the saucer-sized disk, the Confidet. He was a thin, short, smiling man with fine brown hair which looked as though it had just been ruffled by a high wind, and he moved, Cutter noticed, with quick, but certain motions. The installing was done two nights after Cutter's lawyer, Horner, had written up the contract and gotten it signed by Bolen. Only

Quay, Bolen, and Cutter were present.

Bolen fitted the disks into the base of the plastic chair cushions, and he explained, as he inserted one, then another:

"The energy is inside each one, you see. The life of it is indefinite, and the amount of energy used is proportionate to the demand created."

"What the hell do you mean by energy?" Cutter demanded, watching the small man work.

Bolen laughed contentedly, and Quay flushed with embarrassment over anyone laughing at a question out of Cutter's lips. But Cutter did not react, only looked at Bolen, as though he could see somehow, beneath that smallness and quietness, a certain strength. Quay had seen that look on Cutter's face before, and it meant simply that Cutter would wait, analyzing expertly in the meantime, until he found his advantage. Quay wondered, if this gadget worked, how long Bolen would own the rights to it.

Cutter drove the Cadillac into Hallery Boulevard, as though the automobile were an English Austin, and just beyond the boundaries of the city, cut off into the hills, sliding into the night and the relative darkness of the exclusive, sparsely populated Green Oaks section.

Ten minutes later, his house, a massive stone structure which looked as though it had been shifted intact from the center of some medieval moat, loomed up, gray and stony, and Capra, his handyman, took over the car and drove it into the garage, while Cutter strode up the wide steps to the door.

Niels took his hat, and Mary was waiting for him in the library.

She was a rather large woman, although not fat, and when she wore high heels—which she was not prone to do, because although Cutter would not have cared, she kept trying to project into other people's minds and trying, as she said, "Not to do anything to them, that I wouldn't want them to do to me."—she rose a good inch above Cutter. She was pleasant humored, and cooperative, and the one great irritant about her that annoyed Cutter, was the fact that she was not capable of meeting life wholeheartedly and with strength.

She steadily worried about other people's feelings and thoughts, so that Cutter wondered if she were capable of the slightest personal conviction. Yet that weakness was an advantage at the same time, to him, because she worked constantly toward making him happy. The house was run to his minutest liking, and the servants liked her, so that while she did not use a strong enough hand, they somehow got things done for her, and Cutter had no real complaint. Someday, he knew, he would be able to develop her into the full potential he knew she was capable of achieving, and then there wouldn't be even that one annoyance about her.

He sat down in the large, worn, leather chair, and she handed him a Scotch and water, and kissed his cheek, and then sat down opposite him in a smaller striped-satin chair.

"Did you have a nice day, dear?" she asked.

She was always pleasant and she always smiled at him, and she was

indeed a handsome woman. They had been married but five years, and she was almost fifteen years younger than he, but they had a solid understanding. She respected his work, and she was careful with the money he allowed her, and she never forgot the Scotch and water. "The day was all right," he said.

"My goodness," she said, "you worked late. Do you want dinner right away?"

"I had some sandwiches at the office," he said, drinking slowly.

"That isn't enough," she said reproachfully, and he enjoyed her concern over him. "You'd better have some nice roast beef that Andre did just perfectly. And there's some wonderful dressing that I made myself, for just a small salad."

He smiled finally. "All right," he said. "All right."

She got up and kissed him again, and he relaxed in the large chair, sipping contentedly at his drink, listening to her footsteps hurrying away, the sound another indication that she was doing something for him. He felt tired and easy. He let his mind relax with his body. The gadget, the Confidet; that was going to work, he knew. It would erase the last important bug in his operational efficiency, and then he might even expand, the way he had wanted to all along. He closed his eyes for a moment, tasting of his contentment, and then he heard the sound of his dinner being placed on the dining room table, and he stood up briskly and walked out of the library. He really was hungry, he realized. Not only hungry but, he thought, he might make love to Mary that evening.

THE FIRST indication that the Confidet might be working, came three weeks later, when Quay handed Cutter the report showing an efficiency increase of 3.7 percent. "I think that should tell the story," Quay said elatedly.

"Doesn't mean anything," Cutter said. "Could be a thousand other factors besides that damned gimmick."

"But we've never been able to show more than one point five variance on the administrative checks."

"The trouble with you, Quay," Cutter said brusquely, "is you keep looking for miracles. You think the way to get things in this world is to hope real hard. Nothing comes easy, and I've got half a notion to get those damned silly things jerked out." He bent over his work, obviously finished with Quay, and Quay, deflated, paced out of the office.

Cutter smiled inside the empty office. He liked to see Quay's enthusiasm broken now and then. It took that, to mold a really good man, because that way he assumed real strength after a while. If he got knocked down and got up enough, he didn't fall apart when he hit a really tough obstacle. Cutter was not unhappy about the efficiency figures at all, and he knew as well as Quay that they were decisive.

Give it another two weeks, he thought, and if the increase was comparable, then they might have a real improvement on their hands. Those limp, jumpy creatures on the desks out there might actually start earning their keep. He was thinking about that, what it would mean to

the total profit, when Lucile opened his door and he caught a glimpse of the office outside, including the clerk with the sad, frightened eyes. Even you, Linden, Cutter thought, we might even improve you.

The increase *was* comparable after another two weeks. In fact, the efficiency figure jumped to 8.9. Quay was too excited to be knocked down this time, and Cutter was unable to suppress his own pleasure.

"This is really it this time, George," Quay said. "It really is. And here." He handed Cutter a set of figures. "Here's what accounting estimates the profit to be on this eight-nine figure."

Cutter nodded, his eyes thinning the slightest bit. "We won't see that for a while."

"No," Quay said, "but we'll see it! We'll sure as hell see it! And if it goes much higher, we'll absolutely balance out!"

"What does Bolen figure the top to be?"

"Ten percent."

"Why not thirty-six point eight?" Cutter said, his eyes bright and narrow.

Quay whistled. "Even at ten, at the wage we're paying—"

"Never settle for quarters or thirds," Cutter said. "Get the whole thing. Send for Bolen. I want to talk to him. And in the meantime, Bob, this is such a goddamned sweet morning, what do you say we go to lunch early?"

Quay blinked only once, which proved his adaptability. Cutter had just asked him to lunch, as though it were their habit to lunch together regularly, when in reality, Quay had never once gone to lunch with Cutter before. Quay was quite nonchalant, however, and he said, "Why, fine, George. I think that's a good idea."

BOLEN appeared in Cutter's office the next morning, smiling, his eyes darting quickly about Cutter's desk and walls, so that Cutter felt for a moment, that showing Bolen anything as personal as his office, was a little like letting the man look into his brain.

"Quay tells me you've set ten percent as the top efficiency increase we can count on, Bolen." Cutter said it directly, to the point.

Bolen smiled, examining Cutter's hands and suit and eyes. "That's right, Mr. Cutter."

"Why?"

Bolen placed his small hands on his lap, looked at the tapered fingers, then up again at Cutter. He kept smiling. "It's a matter of saturation."

"How in hell could ten percent more efficiency turn into saturation?"

"Not ten percent more efficiency," Bolen said quietly. "Ten percent *effect* on the individual who *creates* the efficiency. Ten percent effect of that which *causes* him to be ten percent more efficient."

Cutter snorted. "Whatever the hell that damned gimmick does, it creates confidence, drive, strength, doesn't it? Isn't that what you said?"

"Yes," Bolen said politely. "Approximately."

"Can you explain to me then, how ten percent more confidence in a man is saturation?"

Bolen studied what he was going to say carefully, smiling all the while. "Some men," he said very slowly, "are different than others, Mr. Cutter. Some men will react to personality changes as abrupt as this in different ways than others. You aren't too concerned, are you, with what those changes might already have done to any of the individuals affected?"

"Hell, no," Cutter said loudly. "Why should I be? All I'm interested in is efficiency. Tell me about efficiency, and I'll know what you're talking about."

"All right," Bolen said. "We have no way of knowing right now which men have been affected more than others. All we have is an average. The average right now is eight and nine-tenths percent. But perhaps you have some workers who do not react, because they really do not suffer the lacks or compulsions or inhibitions that the Confidet is concerned with. Perhaps they are working at top efficiency right now, and no amount of further subjection to the Confidet will change them."

"All right then," Cutter said quickly, "we'll ferret that kind of deadwood out, and replace them!"

"How will you know which are deadwood?" Bolen asked pleasantly.

"Individual checks, of course!"

Bolen shook his head, looking back at his tapering fingers. "It won't necessarily work. You see, the work that these men are concerned with is not particularly demanding work, is it? And that means you want to strike a balance between capability and demand. It's the unbalance of these things that creates trouble, and in your case, the demand outweighed the capability. Now, if you get a total ten-percent increase, then you're balanced. If you go over that, you'll break the balance all over again, except that you'll have, in certain cases, capability outweighing the demand of the work."

"Good," Cutter said. "Any man who's capability outweighs the work he's doing will simply keep increasing his efficiency."

Bolen shook his head. "No. He'll react quite the other way. He'll lose interest, because the work will no longer be a challenge, and then the efficiency will drop."

Cutter's jaw hardened. "All right then. I'll move that man up, and fill his place with someone else."

Bolen looked at Cutter's eyes, examined them curiously. "Some men have a great deal of latent talent, Mr. Cutter. This talent released—"

Cutter frowned, studying Bolen carefully. Then he laughed suddenly. "You think I might not be able to handle it?"

"Well, let's say that you've got a stable of gentle, quiet mares, and you turn them suddenly into thoroughbreds. You have to make allowances for that, Mr. Cutter. The same stalls, the same railings, the same stable boys might not be able to do the job anymore."

"Yes," Cutter said, smiling without humor, "but the *owner* has nothing to do with stalls and railings and stable boys, only in the sense that they are subsidiary. The owner is the owner, and if he has to make a few subsidiary changes, all right. But nothing really affects the owner, no matter whether you've got gentle mares or thor-

oughbreds."

Bolen nodded, as though he had expected that exact answer. "You are a very certain man, aren't you, Mr. Cutter?"

"Would I be here, in this office, heading this company, if I weren't, Bolen?"

Bolen smiled.

Cutter straightened in his chair. "All right, do we go on? Do we shoot for the limit?"

Bolen chose his words carefully. "I am interested in testing my Confidet, Mr. Cutter. This is the most important thing in the world to me. I don't recommend what you want to do. But, as long as you'll give me accurate reports on the effects of the Confidet, I'll go along with you. Providing you grant me one concession."

Cutter frowned.

"I want our written contract dissolved."

Cutter reddened faintly. Nobody ever demanded anything of him and got it easily, but his mind turned over rapidly, judging the increase in efficiency, the increase in profits. He would not necessarily have to stop with administrative personnel. There were other departments, too, that could stand a little sharpening. Finally he nodded, reluctantly. "All right, Bolen."

Bolen smiled and left quickly, and Cutter stared at his desk for a moment, tense. Then, he relaxed and the hard sternness of his face softened a bit. He put his finger on his desk calendar, and looked at a date Lucile had circled for him. He grinned, and picked up the telephone, and dialed.

"This is George H. Cutter," he said to the man who answered. "My wife's birthday is next Saturday. Do you remember that antique desk I bought her last year? Good. Well, the truth is, she uses it all the time, so this year I'd like a good chair to match it. She's just using an occasional chair right now, and . . ."

LIKE EVERYTHING he gave her, Mary liked his gift extremely well, and night after night, after the birthday, he came home to find her at the desk, using the chair, captaining her house and her servant staff. And the improvement was noticeable in her, almost from the first day. Within a month, he could detect a remarkable change, and for the first time, since they had been married, Mary gave a dinner for thirty people without crying just before it started.

There were other changes.

Quay brought in efficiency report after efficiency report, and by the end of three months, they had hit eighteen and seven-tenths percent increase. The administrative office was no longer the dull, listless place it had been; now it thrived and hummed like the shop below. Cutter could see the difference with his own eyes, and he could particularly see the differences in certain individuals.

Brown and Kennedy showed remarkable improvement, but it was really Harry Linden who astonished Cutter. An individual check showed a sixty-percent increase by Linden, and there was a definite change in the man's looks. He walked differently, with a quick, virile step, and the look of his face and eyes had become strong and alive. He

began appearing early in the morning, ahead of the starting hour, and working late, and the only time he missed any work hours, was one afternoon, during which, Lucile informed Cutter, he had appeared in court for his divorce trial.

Within a month, Cutter had fired Stole and Lackter and Grant, as department heads, and replaced them with Brown, Kennedy, and Linden. He had formulated plans for installation of the Confidets in the drafting department and the supply department, and already the profits of increased efficiency were beginning to show in the records. Cutter was full of new enthusiasm and ambition, and there was only one thorn in the entire development.

Quay had resigned.

Cutter had been startled and extremely angry, but Quay had been unperturbed and stubborn. "I've enjoyed working with you immensely, George, but my mind is made up. No hard feelings?"

Cutter had not even shaken his hand.

It had bothered him for days, and he checked every industrial company in the area, to see where Quay had found a better position. He was highly surprised, when he learned, finally, that Quay had purchased a small boat and was earning his living by carrying fishermen out onto the Bay. Quay had also married, four days after his resignation, and Cutter pushed the entire thing out of his mind, checking it off to partial insanity.

By February of the next year, he had promoted Harry Linden to Quay's old job, gotten rid of the deadwood that showed up so plainly on the individual checks, and the total efficiency average had reached thirty-three percent. His and Mary's anniversary was on the fourth of March, and when that day arrived, he was certain that he had reached that point where he could expand to another plant.

He was about to order her a mink stole in celebration, but it was also that day that he was informed that she was suing him for divorce. He rushed home, furious, but she was gone. She had taken her clothes and jewelry and the second Cadillac. In fact, all that she had left of her personal possessions were the antique desk and chair. When the trial was over, months later, she had won enough support to take her to France, where, he learned, she purchased a chateau at Cannes.

He tried to lose himself in his work, but for the first time in his life, he had begun to get faintly worried. It was only a sliver of worry, but it kept him from going on with the expansion. Stocks in the company had turned over at an amazingly rapid rate, and while it was still nothing more than intuition on his part, he began to tighten up, readying himself to meet anything.

The explosion came in July.

Drindor Products had picked up forty-nine percent of the stock on the market, by using secondary buyers. There had been a leak somewhere, Cutter realized, that had told his competitor, Drindor, the kind of profit he was making. He knew who it had been instantly, but before he could fire Harry Linden, all of his walls crashed down. Four months before, to put more *esprit de corps* into Linden,

he had allowed Linden eight shares of his own stock, intending to pick it up later from the market. Linden had coerced with Drindor. Cutter lost control.

A board of directors was elected by Drindor, and Drindor assumed the presidency by proxy. Harry Linden took over Cutter's office, as Vice President In Charge.

Cutter had wildly ordered Edward Bolen to remove the Confidets one week before, but even then he had known that it was too late, and the smiling, knowing look on Bolen's face had infuriated him to a screaming rage. Bolen remained undisturbed, and quietly carried the disks away. Cutter, when he left his office that final day, moved slowly, very slowly.

HE BROODED for many long days after that, searching his mind for a way to counterattack. He still had enough stock to keep him comfortable if he lived another hundred years. But he no longer had the power, and he thirsted for that. He turned it around and around in his brain, trying to figure out how he could do it, and the one thing he finally knew, the one certain thing, was that if he used enough drive, enough strength, then he would regain control of the company he had built with his own hands and mind.

He paced the library and the long living room and the dining room, and his eyes were lost, until he saw, through the doorway of the sewing room, that desk and that chair, and he remembered he hadn't done anything about that.

He paused only briefly, because he had not lost an ounce of his ability to make a sudden decision, and then he removed that disk and carried it to the library and fitted it under the cushion of the large, worn, leather chair.

By fall, he had done nothing to regain control, and he was less certain of how he should act than he had been months before. He kept driving by the plant and looking at it, but he did so carefully, so that no one would see him, and he was surprised to find that, above all, he didn't want to face Harry Linden. The memory of the man's firm look, the sharp, bold eyes, frightened him, and the knowledge of his fright crushed him inside. He wished desperately that Mary were back with him, and he even wrote her letters, pleading letters, but they came back, unopened.

Finally he went to see Robert Quay, because Quay was the only man in his memory whom he somehow didn't fear talking to. He found Quay in a small cottage near the beach. There was a six-day old infant in a crib in the bedroom, and Quay's wife was a sparkling-eyed girl with a smile that made Cutter feel relatively at ease for the first time in weeks.

She politely left them alone, and Cutter sat there, embarrassed faintly, but glad to be in Quay's home and presence. They talked of how it had been, when Quay was with the company, and finally Cutter pushed himself into asking about it:

"I've often wondered, Bob, why you left?"

Quay blushed slightly, then grinned. "I might as well admit it.

I got one of those things from Bolen, and had it installed in my own chair."

Cutter thought about it, surprised. He cleared his throat. "And then you quit?"

"Sure," Quay said. "All my life, I'd wanted to do just what I'm doing. But things just came easy to me, and the opportunities were always there, and I just never had the guts to pass anything by. Finally I did."

Quay smiled at him, and Cutter shifted in his chair. "The Confidet did that."

Cutter nodded.

It came to him suddenly, something he'd never suspected until that moment. There was something very definitely wrong with what had happened to him. The Confidet had effected everyone but him; there must have been something wrong with the one he had been using. It had worked with Mary, but hadn't Bolen said something about the energy being used in proportion to the demand? Mary had certainly created a demand. Bolen said the life of it was indefinite, but couldn't the energy have been used up?

"Ah," he said carefully, smiling, to Quay. "You wouldn't have it around, would you? That Confidet of yours?"

"Oh, hell, no," Quay said. "I gave it to Bolen a long time ago. He came around for it, in fact. Said he had to keep track of all of them."

Cutter left hurriedly, with Quay and his wife following him to his car. He drove straight to Bolen's house.

Fury built inside of him. All this time, Bolen had kept track of his Confidet, the one that Mary had used, and all this time, he had known Cutter still had it. Cutter was furious over the realization that Bolen had been using him for experimentation, and also because the Confidet that he had tried to use had turned worthless.

All his hatred, all his anger churned inside of him like the heat from shaken coals, but when he walked up the path to Bolen's small house, he did so quietly, with extreme care.

When he saw Bolen's face in the doorway, he wanted to strike the man, but he kept his hands quietly at his sides; and though he hated himself for it, he even smiled a little at the man.

"Come in," Bolen smiled, and he spoke softly, and at the same time he examined Cutter with quick, penetrating eyes. "Come in, Mr. Cutter."

Cutter wanted to stand there and demand another Confidet, a good one, and not walk inside, politely, like he did. And he wished that his voice would come out, quickly, with the power and hate in it that he had once been capable of. But for some reason, he couldn't say a word.

Bolen was extremely polite. "You've been using that Confidet, haven't you?" He spoke gently, almost as though he were speaking to a frightened child.

"Yes," Cutter managed to say.

"And what you expected to happen, didn't. That's what you want to tell me, isn't it?"

Cutter's insides quivered with rage, but he was able only to nod.

"Would you like to know why?"

Bolen said.

Cutter rubbed his damp palms over his knees. He nodded.

Bolen smiled, his eyes sparkling. "Very simple really. It wasn't the fault of the Confidet so much, Mr. Cutter, as you. You see, you are a rare exception. What you are, or possibly I should say, what you were, was a complete super ego. There are very few of those, Mr. Cutter, in this world, but you happened to be one of them. A really absolute, complete super ego, and the Confidet's effect was simply the reverse of what it would have been with anyone else." Bolen shook his head, sympathetically, but he didn't stop smiling, and his eyes didn't stop their infuriating exploration of Cutter's face and eyes and hands. "It's really a shame, because I was almost certain you were a super ego, Mr. Cutter. And when you didn't return that last Confidet, I somehow felt that you might use it, after all that nasty business at the company and all.

"But while I was fairly certain of the effects, Mr. Cutter, I wasn't absolutely *sure,* you see, and so like the rest of the experiments, I had to forget my conscience. I'm really very sorry."

The anger was a wild thing inside Cutter now, and it made his hands tremble and sweat, and his mouth quiver, and he hated the man in front of him, the man who was responsible for what had happened to him, the smiling man with the soft voice and exploring eyes. But he didn't say anything, not a word. He didn't show his anger or his frustration or his resentment. He didn't indicate to Bolen a particle of his inner wildness.

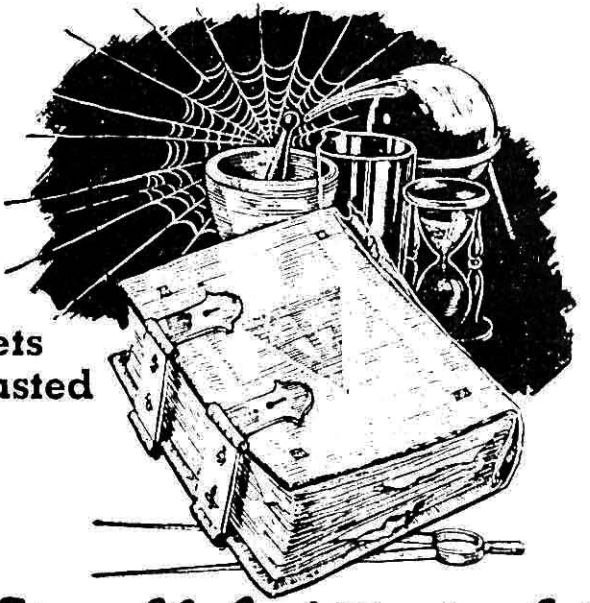
He didn't have the nerve. • • •

WORTH CITING

The story of a woman patient who allowed doctors to graft living cancer cells under her skin was recently disclosed at a meeting of the American College of Surgeons. Hopelessly ill with a widespread cancer, she let doctors at Memorial Hospital in New York City operate to remove cancerous tissue for culture in laboratory animals and in test tubes. Several months later the doctors back-transplanted these cultured cells under her skin. They grew actively, and when removed a second time for microscopic examination they proved to be identical with the cancer cells that had been removed in the original operation.

Scientists who have struggled to control this killer disease have long been hampered by the fact that they must always work with mouse or rat cancers, or cells that have been cultivated outside the human body. Now, thanks to this heroic woman patient, science knows that the cells which have been cultivated outside the body are really human cancer cells, and drugs which work on these cells in test tubes are working on human cancer and can be used on patients with greater confidence.

Nameless though she is, our Citation this month goes to this woman who pioneered so bravely in her desire to "be useful to humanity."



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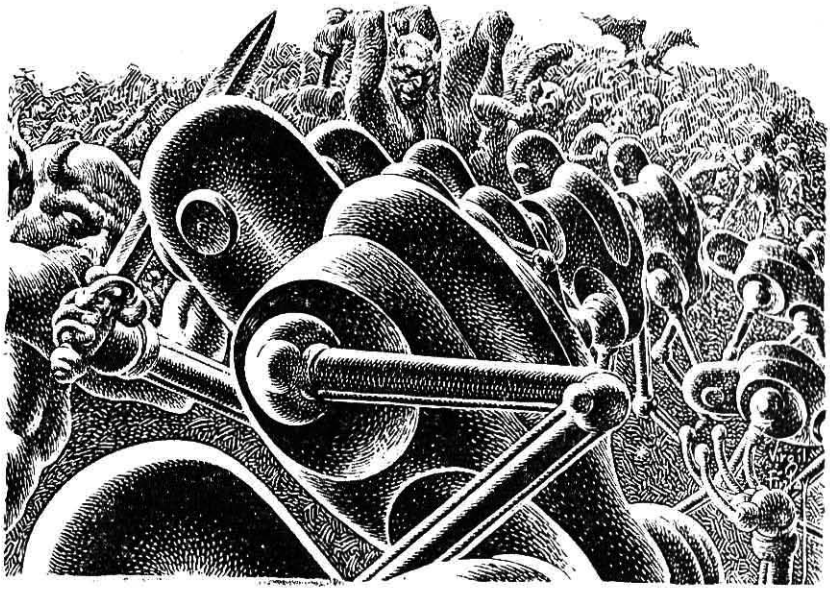
Illustrated by Virgil Finlay

THE BATTLE

It was the Last Battle. The cavalry was ready. The air arm was ready. The troops were ready. Metal shining, relays renewed, energy reservoirs charged. Television for the world was ready . . . Was there anything not *ready?*

BY ROBERT SHECKLEY



SUPREME General Fetterer barked "At ease!" as he hurried into the command room. Obediently, his three generals stood at ease.

"We haven't much time," Fetterer said, glancing at his watch. "We'll go over the plan of battle again."

He walked to the wall and unrolled a gigantic map of the Sahara desert.

"According to our best theological information, Satan is going to present his forces at these coordinates." He indicated the place with a blunt forefinger. "In the front rank there will be the devils, demons, succubi, incubi, and the rest of the ratings. Bael will command the right flank, Buer the left. His Satanic Majesty will hold the center."

"Rather medieval," General Dell murmured.

General Fetterer's aide came in, his face shining and happy with thought of the Coming.

"Sir," he said, "The priest is outside again."

"Stand at attention, soldier," Fetterer said sternly. "There's still a battle to be fought and won."

"Yes sir," the aide said, and stood rigidly, some of the joy fading from his face.

"The priest, eh?" Supreme General Fetterer rubbed his fingers together thoughtfully. Even since the Coming, since the knowledge of the imminent Last Battle, the religious workers of the world had made a complete nuisance of themselves. They had stopped their bickering, which was commendable. But now they were trying to run military

business.

"Send him away," Fetterer said. "He knows we're planning Armageddon."

"Yes sir," the aide said. He saluted sharply, wheeled, and marched out.

"To go on," Supreme General Fetterer said. "Behind Satan's first line of defense will be the resurrected sinners, and various elemental forces of evil. The fallen angels will act as his bomber corps. Dell's robot interceptors will meet them."

General Dell smiled grimly.

"Upon contact, MacFee's automatic tank corps will proceed toward the center of the line. MacFee's automatic tank corps will proceed toward the center," Fetterer went on, "supported by General Ongin's robot infantry. Dell will command the H bombing of the rear, which should be tightly massed. I will thrust with the mechanized cavalry, here and here."

The aide came back, and stood rigidly at attention. "Sir," he said, "The priest refuses to go. He says he must speak with you."

Supreme General Fetterer hesitated before saying no. He remembered that this was the Last Battle, and that the religious workers *were* connected with it. He decided to give the man five minutes.

"Show him in," he said.

The priest wore a plain business suit, to show that he represented no particular religion. His face was tired but determined.

"General," he said, "I am a representative of all the religious workers of the world, the priests, rabbis, ministers, mullahs, and all the rest. We beg of you, General, to let us fight in the Lord's battle."

Supreme General Fetterer drummed his fingers nervously against his side. He wanted to stay on friendly terms with these men. Even he, the Supreme Commander, might need a good word, when all was said and done. . .

"You can understand my position," Fetterer said unhappily. "I'm a general. I have a battle to fight."

"But it's the Last Battle," the priest said. "It should be the people's battle."

"It is," Fetterer said. "It's being fought by their representatives, the military."

The priest didn't look at all convinced.

Fetterer said. "You wouldn't want to lose this battle, would you? Have Satan win?"

"Of course not," the priest murmured.

"Then we can't take any chances," Fetterer said. "All the governments agreed on that, didn't they? Oh, it would be very nice to fight Armageddon with the mass of humanity. Symbolic, you might say. But could we be certain of victory?"

The priest tried to say something, but Fetterer was talking rapidly.

"How do we know the strength of Satan's forces? We simply *must* put forth our best foot, militarily speaking. And that means the automatic armies, the robot interceptors and tanks, the H bombs."

The priest looked very unhappy. "But it isn't *right,*" he said. "Certainly you can find some place in your plan for *people?*"

Fetterer thought about it, but the request was impossible. The

plan of battle was fully developed, beautiful, irresistible. Any introduction of a gross human element would only throw it out of order. No living flesh could stand the noise of that mechanical attack, the energy potentials humming in the air, the all-enveloping fire power. A human being who came within a hundred miles of the front would not live to see the enemy.

"I'm afraid not," Fetterer said.

"There are some," the priest said sternly, "who feel that it was an error to put this in the hands of the military."

"Sorry," Fetterer said cheerfully. "That's defeatist talk. If you don't mind—" He gestured at the door. Wearily, the priest left.

"These civilians," Fetterer mused. "Well, gentlemen, are your troops ready?"

"We're ready to fight for Him," General MacFee said enthusiastically. "I can vouch for every automatic in my command. Their metal is shining, all relays have been renewed, and the energy reservoirs are fully charged. Sir, they're positively itching for battle!"

General Ongin snapped fully out of his daze. "The ground troops are ready, sir!"

"Air arm ready," General Dell said.

"Excellent," General Fetterer said. "All other arrangements have been made. Television facilities are available for the total population of the world. No one, rich or poor, will miss the spectacle of the Last Battle."

"And after the battle—" General Ongin began, and stopped. He looked at Fetterer.

Fetterer frowned deeply. He didn't know what was supposed to happen after The Battle. That part of it was presumably, in the hands of the religious agencies.

"I suppose there'll be a presentation or something," he said vaguely.

"You mean we will meet—Him?" General Dell asked.

"Don't really know," Fetterer said. "But I should think so. After all—I mean, you know what I mean."

"But what should we wear?" General MacFee asked, in a sudden panic. "I mean, what *does* one wear?"

"What do the angels wear?" Fetterer asked Ongin.

"I don't know," Ongin said.

"Robes, do you think?" General Dell offered.

"No," Fetterer said sternly. "We will wear dress uniform, without decorations."

The generals nodded. It was fitting.

And then it was time.

GORGEOUS in their battle array, the legions of Hell advanced over the desert. Hellish pipes skirled, hollow drums pounded, and the great ghost moved forward.

In a blinding cloud of sand, General MacFee's automatic tanks hurled themselves against the satanic foe. Immediately, Dell's automatic bombers screeched overhead, hurling their bombs on the massed horde of the damned. Fetterer thrust valiantly with his automatic calvalry.

Into this melee advanced On-

gin's automatic infantry, and metal did what metal could.

The hordes of the damned overflowed the front, ripping apart tanks and robots. Automatic mechanisms died, bravely defending a patch of sand. Dell's bombers were torn from the skies by the fallen angels, led by Marchocias, his griffin's wings beating the air into a tornado.

The thin, battered line of robots held, against gigantic presences that smashed and scattered them, and struck terror into the hearts of television viewers in homes around the world. Like men, like heroes the robots fought, trying to force back the forces of evil.

Astaroth shrieked a command, and Behemoth lumbered forward. Bael, with a wedge of devils behind him, threw a charge at General Fetterer's crumbling left flank. Metal screamed, electrons howled in agony at the impact.

Supreme General Fetterer sweated and trembled, a thousand miles behind the firing line. But steadily, nervelessly, he guided the pushing of buttons and the throwing of levers.

His superb corps didn't disappoint him. Mortally damaged robots swayed to their feet and fought. Smashed, trampled, destroyed by the howling fiends, the robots managed to hold their line. Then the veteran Fifth Corps threw in a counterattack, and the enemy front was pierced.

A thousand miles behind the firing line, the generals guided the mopping up operations.

"The battle is won," Supreme General Fetterer whispered, turning away from the television screen. "I congratulate you, gentlemen."

The generals smiled wearily.

They looked at each other, then broke into a spontaneous shout. Armageddon was won, and the forces of Satan had been vanquished.

But something was happening on their screens.

"Is that—is that—" General MacFee began, and then couldn't speak.

For The Presence was upon the battlefield, walking among the piles of twisted, shattered metal.

The generals were silent.

The Presence touched a twisted robot.

Upon the smoking desert, the robots began to move. The twisted, scored, fused metals straightened.

The robots stood on their feet again.

"MacFee," Supreme General Fetterer whispered. "Try your controls. Make the robots kneel or something."

The general tried, but his controls were dead.

The bodies of the robots began to rise in the air. Around them were the angels of the Lord, and the robot tanks and soldiers and bombers floated upward, higher and higher.

"He's saving them!" Ongin cried hysterically. "He's saving the robots!"

"It's a mistake!" Fetterer said. "Quick. Send a messenger to—no! We will go in person!"

And quickly a ship was commanded, and quickly they sped to the field of battle. But by then it was too late, for Armageddon was over, and the robots gone, and the Lord and his host departed. • • •

What Is Your Science I.Q.?

IF YOU were going on a sight-seeing tour through space, here are some of the wonderful sights that would be pointed out to you. How many do you know? Counting five for each correct answer, 65 is passing, 75 very good and 85 is excellent. The answers are on page 119.

1. An especially bright meteor or fireball is called a ————.
2. What is the name of the substance regarded as the only form of matter in which the phenomena of life are manifested?
3. Which of the following is not a part of the sun: chromosphere, Baily's Beads, corona, photosphere?
4. In one second a ray of light could travel around the Earth's equator ——— times.
5. Triton and Nereid are the two moons of ————.
6. When we speak of an Earthman we call him a Terran. What other designation is often used?
7. What is the name of the nearest bright star, four light years away?
8. Polaris is the North Star of the present; but in the time of the ancient Egyptians ———— was the North Star.
9. How many constellations are there in the heavens as we know them?
10. The only moon known to us that has an atmosphere is ——.
11. What is the name of the largest known asteroid?
12. Eleven Earth years are equal to one year on ————.
13. According to the Doppler shift a star that is in the violet shift on the spectrum is ———— the Earth.
14. What escape velocity is necessary for a ship to leave the Earth's atmosphere?
15. What have the following in common? Antlia, Volans, Norma, Crater, Pavo, Tucana?
16. The straight line joining the center of an attracting body with that of the body describing an orbit around it is called a ————.
17. What is the name of the comet that returns every 3.3 years?
18. Double stars which revolve around each other are called ————.
19. Which of the following is not a moon of Jupiter? Io, Europa, Mimas, Callisto, Ganymede?
20. Another name for the ionosphere is ————.

BY E. G. VON WALD

World Without War

Cooperation was all right back in the dark ages but this was an era of super culture and hi-psi intelligence. And love was no laughing matter. People who cooperated, even biologically, were unlawful and . . .

MARK KNEW he shouldn't stop. He was already late for Jennette's birthday party, but the sight of three people out in the open like this was too much.

He pulled around and hovered over the undulating flow of glassy magma, frozen on its way to the long, dry Potomac river bed, with its shallow caverns and fascinating mile-wide potholes. Just under an overhanging cliff of half-vitrified soil were two cars, obviously damaged. The three men were standing beside them.

Mark laughed out loud. It was not often that one found three people at once. And so close to each other. The scene there, with the long, slanting rays of milky sunlight glancing off the ribbing of the flats and sparkling through the million brittle shards of collapsed debris, filled him with a certain poetic exultation.

"By the stars," he murmured to himself happily.

Bubbling with good humor, he slipped down a little closer to the hole, staying up hard against the overhanging cliff. He was feeling too cheerful to use his rightful advantage over them, and decided to use a handgun, since they had nothing better.

This was a mistake, of course. He was only moving along at a hundred miles an hour now. Too

slow for safe shooting, particularly with the bumpy air in the hole. But he happily disregarded this, as he pushed open a view port and blazed away with a zuzz pistol.

Almost immediately the ship lurched in the uneven air, and he could see the tiny thin trace of violet as it swept up and away off the targets. One of the men went down, sliced cleanly in two. But the others had seen him.

Mark cursed mildly, some of his high good humor gone, and pulled the car about for another run. The chronometer pinged warningly at him, notifiying him that he was now a full hour late for Jennette's birthday party, but the code required the second try.

There was nothing that required handweapons for this, however, and he slipped his strong young hands around the main gun control. A single burst of violet, and one of the men vanished in a puff of steam. Good and clean, he told himself with satisfaction. But the last man opened his pistol onto broad-beam, burning a red flare of general destruction at him.

Mark veered around and bore down sharply for the last burst. He had to get it over with and on to Jennette. But the deadly broad beam swept below the car, evacuating the air and throwing the vehicle momentarily out of control. Close behind, the cliff became suddenly alive as the beam engaged it, bubbling and spewing out huge gouts of molten rock. The aircar burst into a brief, brilliant, sodium-colored fire and fell, with Mark burning inside of it, yelling and screaming in pain.

It took almost five seconds before

Illustrated by Ed Emsh

the charred brain of Mark's body stopped functioning. Then it released him.

He was conscious of the humming of his transmitter. Almost immediately the remembered pain brought perspiration running down inside the helmet into his eyes. He reached up and removed the headpiece with unsteady hands, groaning softly.

It had been some decades since he had last been involved in trouble like this. Killed, yes—but in a painless, fair fight. Being burned to death was no joke. And that body had been one of his best, with the finest reflex sensory system manufactured.

The machine purred softly beside him. He thought suddenly and emptily of Jennette, and stood up.

"Damn," he muttered, crossing the floor, feeling the pleasant warmth of the soft plastic under his feet. "Damn, damn, damn." He stopped before the transparent cover of a storage cabinet, gazing sourly at its contents.

Eleven humanoid forms were stiffly erect behind the cover, all broadly resembling him in feature, and differing only in such minor things as height, hair, perhaps the color of the eyes. Each bore the scars of some past clumsiness or accident.

"Damn," Mark said again. "That was the only decent body I had to wear. Now what do I do?"

He went into the next room and bathed himself in the tepid perfumed mist that fell perpetually from its domed ceiling. If it were anybody but Jennette, there would be no problem. He just would have to shoot off a quick RT, explaining the situation and excusing himself. Nobody would have minded, least of all himself. Particularly a no-fight affair like this one was supposed to be.

But not Jennette. Ohhh, Jennette.

Mark grinned and rubbed the pleasant fluid over his well-cared-for skin. Oh yes, Jennette. There was something about Jennette that he could not quite put his finger on, but it was good. It was wonderously good. Like the bodies she wore. No matter what it was, it was always perfect. She just had the knack of dressing well.

Idly he wondered what her protobody was like. There must be some resemblance, of course. That was the law. Identification was very important, and few manufacturers would violate that, even as a simple matter of good taste. But there still would be considerable difference.

As he thought about it, he got a strange wistful feeling that he did not quite understand. There was a sort of sadness about it. Jennette seemed oddly different from other people. He liked her much too much.

Guiltily he brushed the thoughts aside. Anyway, it didn't matter, he told himself. Due to his carelessness in that last fight, he probably wouldn't even see her tonight, since he had nothing to wear.

He stalked out of the shower and gazed again at the bodies in the store room. The only halfway decent one there was that six foot black fellow with the little ears. It used to be his favorite, until he got it smashed one night during a

party at his nearest neighbor's. A half smile tugged at Mark's lips as he recalled the incident. That had been a no-fight party, too; but he had managed to smuggle in a small bomb, and set it off right in the middle of the main bedroom. There were at least ten couples there, since it was a big party, and none of them lived. The trouble was, Mark had been pretty badly smashed up himself, and just managed to get away without losing his body.

Now the thing was all scarred up and practically useless for anything except manual labor.

Mark shook his head disgustedly. There was nothing to do but send off the RT to Jennette.

But this was her birthday—

He caught a glimpse of himself in the reflection from his transmitter housing and automatically straightened his shoulders a little, then laughed at his image.

Then he stopped and contemplated himself further. There was one thing he could do. Many years before, he had an exact duplicate of himself produced, when the vogue for copper colored bodies was at its height. Since then the fashion had changed back to the pink, but that old job must still be around somewhere.

He hated to do it, though. He had never liked that body. It had been just too accurate, and every time he wore it, it embarrassed him. It had been almost as if he were going outside in his protobody. Which, of course, nobody did. People used their own bodies hundreds of years ago, but it was most uncivilized. Besides, it was tiring, and dangerous, too. Yet—was it more fun? He wondered.

He simply had to make Jennette's party. Otherwise he wouldn't see her for months at least, and the thought of that made him feel funny in his stomach.

Mark grinned again, admiring her image in his mind, and set about his catalogue to find the fundamental frequency of that old copy of himself. Fuse it, he told himself resolutely. Nobody would know it was an exact duplicate.

He located the data and set it up in the transmitter. He had no idea where the body was, but that would take care of itself if it were still in good shape. Placing the helmet on his head, he punched the controls and relaxed back on the table.

TWO LEVELS below, under a pile of dust-covered trash, the body became suddenly conscious. Mark opened his eyes and looked around, recognition slowly returning. He had forgotten all about this old room, but then—one could hardly remember everything about a full shelter system, what with the hundreds of compartments, endless automatic equipment and innumerable connecting passages. Whoever it was who built this one sure had liked complexity.

He bathed and carefully braided the long, blueblack hair, simulating somewhat the fashion of the day, and spent some time adjusting a purple scarf over his left shoulder. The purple scarf was sort of a trade mark with him, and Jennette always admired it. Purple was her favorite color. He made a joke out of it and called it Their color,

which was typical of the strange, dangerous behavior she engendered in him.

Mark was a little worried as he plunged up toward the stratosphere in his extra car. This time he kept clearly in his mind the fact that this was his last serviceable body, and he could take no chances with it getting ruined. Even if he saw a whole multitude of people, all clustered together, he would ignore them, he told himself.

Halfway there, however, he spotted a peculiar marking on the scope, and detoured. The peculiar marking followed him.

Anxiously, he looked out a clear view panel, but could see nothing in the cold, mist-laden night. The marking grew more definite as he hesitated. It was another car, and there could be no question what it was after. A shot at Mark.

He cursed and sucked in his breath, making quick calculations. There was a rolling billow of cobalt fog off to one side, a whole bank of the stuff. Somebody apparently had been having a little game nearby. It was still hot enough, according to his indicators, to discharge anything the other car sent after him, and he would have the added advantage of being invisible to the other man's instruments. The only trouble was, once in the fog, he couldn't see anything either, and could be ambushed without difficulty on the way out.

The marking on the scope became more definite, and the question settled itself as the other car came between Mark and the cloud. Growling with irritation, Mark swung around and sent a wide angle beam in the direction of his pursuer, watching nervously as the indicators described the pitiful short range of his fire at this setting.

The assailant veered off, however, scurrying into the cobalt cloud. Mark grinned. He knew the man would expect him to wait for him to come out, so he swooped down at max acceleration toward the surface. In five minutes he was signaling into Jennette's shelter for permission to enter.

There were servants everywhere —mechanical things, controlled by electronics and not alive, although they looked it. This was Jennette's specialty. She owned a factory that manufactured them for mining on the scalding plains of Mercury, and these had been superficially remodelled to act as servants. There was the usual government man there, too, running the party. He strutted around under his official sash with ill-concealed self-importance.

"Hey you, there—wait a minute," he called to Mark, waving a zuzz pistol in his direction.

"Yes?" Mark hesitated, eyed the pistol, and obeyed.

"That scarf—get it off," the man ordered sternly as he approached. The zuzz pistol was level and steady.

"Why?" Mark demanded. "It's just a scarf. I always wear one."

"You know why," the other man said coldly. "This is a tetotal party. If I let somebody slip a weapon or something in, it would be an awful brawl in no time. You know how people are."

The man was right, of course. You can conceal a lot of things in the fabric of a sheer scarf. Reluctantly, Mark undid the catch and

handed it over.

"Okay. You can pick it up at the entrance when you leave." The officer's amused eyes wrinkled as he looked Mark up and down. "Say, that's a pretty nice job you've got there, man. Mind if I ask who made it?"

"It's pretty good," Mark said cautiously. "It's custom made to a private specification."

The officer grinned goodnaturedly. "Sure, I understand. That's all right. I'm not from the revenue department. I don't have to do anything about bootlegging."

"I don't mean that," Mark protested. "There's nothing illegal—"

The man waved his disregard anyway. "Forget it. It's a nice one, though. And that copper color is coming back soon, too. These fashions run in cycles, you know."

"Yes," Mark murmured diffidently. "I thought so, too."

"Sure." The officer eyed it speculatively for a moment. "Two point oh one centimeter naval, isn't it? They're the best, of course." Mark nodded shortly, looking away from the talkative officer, hoping he would stop. But the man went on. "And I don't have any use for these new non-feeders they've been coming out with recently."

"No," Mark mumbled.

"It's all right to fix it so that the food is not necessary, and it really is a bother to have to feed those old models whether you want to or not. But sometimes you like to eat something just for the fun of it, and with the non-feeder models there's no receptacle for it."

Mark nodded, his eyes searching the huge anteroom, gazing hopefully between the moving ranks of robot servants. Then he saw her and caught his breath.

JENNETTE. His lips formed a low whistle in time-honored acclamation of excellence. The officer followed his gaze and agreed.

"Yes," he said in a low voice, "that girl is really something. Private spec for everything, and she sure knows how to use it. Take that little golden job she's wearing tonight. Nothing to it. But with her, it's terrific."

He was right. Jennette was wearing a slender, soft-looking golden little body that Mark had never seen before. But it was a real prize. Being hostess, she could have clothes on, and sported a half dozen little bracelets and a jet black bandana around her throat. The thing was draped down over her left breast, and the whole effect was really quite stunning.

"Oh Mark!" she exclaimed, running up with an odd sort of breathlessness. "You're late."

"Sorry Jennette," he replied. "Ran into a little trouble and had to go back for another body."

"You must have missed," she said with amused accusation. "I'm surprised at you.

"Aw, there were three of them," he protested. "And the last one used a broad beam."

"Never mind, I forgive you," she told him. "Come along. Let's go look at my garden."

Mark grinned happily. "Wonderful idea. But what about your guests? Are you just going to leave them like that?"

"This is my birthday," she said. "They can amuse themselves."

Then she pulled him down and put her lips to his ear. "Besides," she whispered. "I've got an identical copy with electronic works. No one will even know I've left, unless they get too friendly with it."

"Pretty clever," Mark admitted thoughtfully. "But I wouldn't always be so ready to break the law like that."

"Who's to know except you, Mark?" She looked up at him with burning, gold-flecked eyes. "You wouldn't tell anybody, would you?"

Mark shook his head uncomfortably.

"All right, then."

They entered the elevator that took them down another half mile to the central living quarters of the ancient shelter. It had been built early in the flux period and remodelled several times. It was one of the best equipped on the planet.

"Tell me," Jennette said, gazing appreciatively at the heavy bronze shoulders, "where on earth did you get that?"

"I—Oh, it was just lying around somewhere," Mark mumbled.

"I bet," she said. "But it's nice. I like it."

Mark just grinned at her, happy for the moment, secure in the knowledge that it would be impossible for her ever to know that it was really identical with his protobody. Not that it would matter, just so long as it was artificial. He listened to the humming of the elevator for a few minutes. When it stopped the door vanished, and the two of them moved out into a sea of wild, colorful beauty. High above them was a simulated sun that made as good a substitute for the real thing as had been developed since the underground movement.

"Bright," Mark commented.

"Oh, that's right. I've been forcing some Venerian puffers and scent flowers, and raised the radiation level ten decibels. They always do well under a strong sun, you know." She left his arm and moved to a control panel beside the entrance to the elevator. She manipulated something and the sun dimmed a little. "There," she turned around. "Better?"

Mark looked at the landscape, then back to her. He grinned. "Too much light."

"Oh you—" she murmured. She touched the controls, and the sun disappeared, being replaced by a huge, mellow moon that sailed majestically on the simulated horizon. It was impossible to tell it from the real thing.

"How's that?"

"A little dark."

Ignoring his comment, she came back and took his arm, and they went strolling across the flowers and grass. "Don't you like my moon, Mark?"

"Sure. It's fine. Sort of aphrodisiac, of course, but—"

"Isn't that what it's for?" Jennette asked innocently.

"I dunno. I never had a moon."

"Let's sit down here," she said abruptly.

THEY WERE eating pomegranates, biting briefly into them and sucking on the sour juices. The moon had risen higher during the past hour, becoming a little smaller in appearance. It was a peaceful, contemplative scene. Jennette snug-

gled up against Mark, thoughtfully tracing a design with fruit juice on his arm.

"This is fun," she said softly. "So much more fun than the usual things a person has to do."

"Mmmm?"

"Oh, you know. Checking reports from the factory, making sure there is plenty of ammunition all the time, pestering the body manufacturers so you'll always have something decent to wear. Always watching or somebody will sneak in and blow up part of your shelter."

"Yeah. Well, guess that's life."

Jennette sighed and picked up another fruit. "It gets so tiresome, always having to keep on the lookout and fighting people. Don't you get bored by it."

"Sure, sometimes. It's gotta be done though. Otherwise you couldn't tell what might happen."

"Mark—" Jennette said hesitantly.

"Yes?"

"Mark, would you shoot me if you found me outside your shelter?" She looked coyly up at him.

"Well, sure, unless you had a proper, government-authorized permit to be there." Mark turned astonished eyes on her. "What else could I do?"

"Oh, but you *know* I wouldn't do anything to harm your place."

"Aw, Jennette," Mark said uncomfortably, "of course you would. Anybody would. If people started acting like that, the whole balance would be upset."

She gently stroked his arm where the fruit juice had dried. Her face crinkled up and she giggled. "Maybe you just don't know me."

"Let's talk about something else," Mark suggested.

"What's the matter? Do I shock you?"

Mark laughed and brushed his lips against her shoulder. "I'm pretty hard to shock. Expecially by you."

"See?" she replied archly. "You're just as anti-social as I am."

Mark's face clouded. "It's nothing to brag about, though."

"I'm not bragging." She sighed again, and resumed her fruit. Eying it speculatively, she said, "I guess I'm just bored with life, that's all. Sometimes things seem so silly. Like all the times you have to get a new body. You'd think the manufacturers were giving them away free."

"Yeah. Not like it used to be. Guess business is pretty good."

"Something ought to be done about it."

Mark grinned mischievously. "What do you suggest? Build another factory?"

"Oh, you know you can't do that. Somebody is always blowing it up."

"Well, don't worry. In another hundred years or so, people will start dying off again. These protobodies aren't as serviceable as the manufactured kind."

"Yes, but if they keep producing new people in the Decanting Centers, what good is that going to do?"

"I dunno. Blow up the Decanting Centers, maybe."

"Maybe," Jennette said, glancing impishly at the man beside her, "we ought to just stop wearing these silly old manufactured bodies entirely."

"Yes?" Mark tasted a pomegran-

ate, made a face, and tried another. "Just what do you suggest people wear?"

"They could go around in their protobodies."

"What?" Mark looked swiftly and searchingly at her, alarm on his face.

"Why Mark," she laughed disarmingly. "You're such a righteous beast, aren't you?"

"Great Atoms, Jennette," he said, gazing intently at her golden-flecked eyes, wondering what strange things went on inside that lovely head. "You mean go around all the time as if we were savages? Why that's illegal, immoral, and besides—besides, it's dangerous. Suppose somebody took a shot at you? You've only got one protobody, you know."

"A clever fighter like you shouldn't have too much trouble with that, if you're careful," she said gaily. "And I'm pretty good at that myself."

Mark took a slow deep breath as he decided that she was just teasing him. "I'm surprised at you, Jennette."

She shrugged. "I'm bored, I guess. I'd like to try something new, just for excitement. Personally, sometimes I think the whole social system we have is pretty silly, anyway."

"Atoms," Mark mumbled.

"No need to swear about it," she chided him. "Come on, Mark. Just think about it for a minute. And be consistant."

"Consistancy is all right for a free psi," he said. "It sure doesn't do a protobody any good."

Jennette laughed scornfully. "I'll bet you believe all that stuff they feed you in the Decanting Center about ancient history."

"'Course not," Mark said defensively.

"All right then. Why follow all these rules of social conduct if there's no good basis for them?"

"Aw, but there is," he replied seriously. "There was a big war—way back centuries before we were decanted out at Center."

"Hah," said Jennette.

"Sure. And it was a whole lot of people who cooperated with each other in it. There must have been hundreds of them—it was an awfully big war. Hundreds of people, all on one side, all fighting together against the other side."

"I don't believe it."

"It's true, I tell you," Mark insisted religiously. "Hundreds and hundreds of people. Maybe even as many as a thousand, all dressed alike—with clothes, I mean. And they didn't shoot each other—they just killed the people they were fighting—the hundreds of people on the other side."

"Other side of what?"

Mark frowned. "Oh, I guess that is just an expression. But that's what happened, anyway. Before civilization got started, people cooperated like that."

"That's just a whole lot of theory," Jennette insisted. "Nobody's going to make me ever believe people used to act like that. Besides, there just aren't enough people around to have all those mythical wars."

Patiently, Mark continued. "I'm telling you, Jennette, this is more than theory. There are still some records left from those days."

"Prove it."

"All right. That's not hard. Somebody had to build the factories, didn't they? And the Decanting Centers?"

"Robots."

"Who built the first robot factory?"

Jennette considered. Then she shrugged petulantly. "Oh all right. Maybe a few people did cooperate. But not hundreds of them. People just don't act like that."

"Well, they did. And, of course, the obvious thing happened. Since they cooperated in some things, they cooperated in a lot of things, even fighting. That's how they could make war, you know—not the nice, social sort of fighting we do now. And you can imagine what happened. You can kill an awful lot of people awful fast, if a gang gets together on it like that. If they didn't have the artificial bodies and the psi transfer transmitters to make them come alive, there wouldn't have been anybody left after a while. That cooperation is rough stuff."

"Obviously," she commented dryly.

"Well, that's the reason for everything, then. Pretty soon the factories couldn't turn out hypnobodies fast enough and people had to fight in their protobodies sometimes. But after a few centuries, the leaders began to get civilized, and decided to put an end to all this cooperative killing. I guess they all got together and agreed not to cooperate with each other in anything in the future."

"It stands to reason," Mark concluded, "people had to learn to be civilized. They weren't just born that way. It's—it's culture."

"Pouf," said Jennette critically.

"All right," he growled, biting viciously into a pomegranate. "Let's hear your big story if it's so good."

JENNETTE stretched out her legs and contemplated her wiggling toes. "Oh, I don't know. I don't have any real ideas. But I know better than to believe that sort of nonsense. People just aren't like that, and you know it." She hesitated thoughtfully, then continued. "Maybe a few of them got together now and then for a party or something like this. But not hundreds of them."

When Mark did not reply, she laughed and said, "I guess I'm just feeling risque tonight."

"You sure are," he mumbled.

"Of course there are parts of the old mythology that seem rather interesting—beautiful, even—"

"It's not mythology."

"Like the part that deals with marriage."

She waited. Mark dutifully echoed, "Deals with what?"

"Marriage."

Mark considered it. Then he shook his head. "What's that?"

"See? she taunted him. "You don't know everything like you think you do. Marriage," she explained, "was a sort of cooperative agreement that the ancient people were supposed to have entered into."

"Sure, just like I said," Mark stated with assurance. "Hundreds of people did it. They got involved in this marriage agreement, and made war on each other with it."

"What a dope. Marriage was an agreement between just two peo-

ple. And that much I might believe. Hundreds is too much."

"It was hundreds," Mark insisted.

"It was not. It was just two. And what's more, it was between a man and a woman. They lived together with their protobodies and agreed to cooperate together, and they made children and took care of them until they grew up."

"Why that's thirty or forty years," Mark exclaimed. "Even the wars didn't last that long. That's really nonsense. Besides, you can only make children in the Decanting Centers. And it's all done by machines."

"Well, maybe it is a little far fetched. But I think it's cute."

"Humph."

There was a few minutes silence. Then Jennette said softly, "Mark—"

"Yes?"

"Mark, you like me a lot, don't you?"

Mark squirmed uncomfortably, and stared at the artificial moon.

"Don't you?" she insisted. "More than you ever have anybody else?"

"Well, guess that's right," he admitted lamely. "A whole lot more than I should."

She reassuringly patted his hand with her little one. "That's all right, Mark. I won't tell anybody. Besides, I feel just the same way about you."

Mark nodded without speaking, worriedly studying the vague markings on the bright luminous disk in the simulated sky.

"Mark, don't you ever want to see the real me?" she inquired urgently. "Don't you sometimes feel kind of empty because you can never really have me—know me, because all you ever see is a manufactured thing that only somewhat resembles what I am really like?"

Mark blushed. She had come a little too close to the uncomfortable truth. But he refused to admit it, at least to her. He mumbled an indistinct denial.

"Are you sure?" she said, grabbing his hands, gazing intently into his eyes, forcing him to look at her. "Wouldn't you sometime like to come down to my transmitter quarters?"

"But—"

"And see and touch my protobody—the thing I really am?"

"Aw—"

"Scared?"

"Maybe I am."

"That's silly."

Mark swallowed and said stiffly, "Just because there is a no-fight clause in your invitation tonight doesn't necessarily mean I have to follow it, you know. You don't need weapons. I could strangle your protobody easily."

"You wouldn't," she said confidently.

"You sure don't think much of me, do you?"

"I think just the same of you as you do of me," she said simply.

With impulsive hunger, Mark threw his arms around her, holding her tightly against him, nuzzling her, smelling the perfume of her hair, incoherently mumbling into her ear. "Jennette, Jennette," he sang, "I think more of you than anything. I love you. I know it's wrong, but I would never even shoot you, because sometimes it hurts you, and I wouldn't want you to feel even the slightest dis-

comfort." He stopped, took a deep breath, and added meekly, "I'm sorry."

"But Mark," she whispered. "Why is it really so wrong?"

"You know."

"Suppose I told you that this body is my protobody right now?" she asked earnestly.

"But it isn't."

"It is," she said faintly.

Mark's breath hissed as he gasped. Jennette was blushing all over her body, heightening the golden color of it. He let her go, and she slid off his lap onto the shadowed grass beside him. She bit her lip. "I didn't really mean to tell you—yet."

There was silence. Mark said quietly, "That's all right, Jennette."

"You aren't angry with me, are you?"

"No," he said slowly. "Not angry."

"Mark—"

"Yes?"

"Now that we're into this thing," she asked hopefully, "why don't we try this marriage agreement—you know, like the ancients did. It seems like such a beautiful thing to do when two people like us—you know."

"I don't know." Mark shook his head doubtfully. "I just don't know about it."

"Why not? You wouldn't have to really stay here. It could be just a secret agreement between us. And you could come and see me whenever you liked."

"It all seems so unreal," he muttered.

They lapsed into thought, both avoiding looking at the other. There was no sound except a faint sighing of wind in the leaves of the well trimmed shrubbery.

"Suppose," Mark said finally, "suppose other people started doing this thing? This cooperative agreement? Lots of people must want to, just like we do."

"I suppose so," she admitted.

"I went through this once before," he went on absently. "About ninety years ago I met this woman—she was awfully nice. Clever. Understood things. Not like you, of course, but still she was very nice. I thought about it then."

"What happened to her?" Jennette asked numbly.

"She died after a while. She was pretty old. Oh, we didn't do anything," he hastened to add. "We kept it all on a perfectly moral and honest plane—never saw each other except at authorized government sex parties, like this, and all. Fought whenever we ran across each other outside. But I remember thinking at the time that some sort of agreement would be nice. We got along awfully well. I could never understand what she saw in me."

"I can," Jennette whispered.

"This is just the same, only a lot more so," Mark went on thoughtfully. "And it's wrong. You know it's wrong. Suppose a lot of people started it. First thing you know, whole groups of people would be cooperating with each other again. And when they got into trouble outside, or planned an innocent little raid on somebody's shelter, they would all work together on it. And pretty soon, there would be other groups cooperating in fighting back again. They'd have to.

"And that, of course, would be the end of civilization. Pretty soon, there would be nothing left, and everybody would be dead."

Jennette did not reply when he stopped. She turned her head away, but Mark could hear her uneven breathing.

"We have a responsibility toward society at large. We know it. We've been well educated and we aren't savages. Neither one of us can get away from it. It might be wonderful at first, but our conscience would come out sooner or later, and the whole thing would be ruined."

She rubbed her face with her cupped hands, shaking her head. "I suppose—" she murmured unhappily.

"You'd hate yourself for it after a while," he said.

For a few minutes, Jennette stared at the grass before her feet, pulling up little blades of it one by one. Then Mark stood up, and she flashed him a small, wistful, damp smile. Together they walked back toward the elevator, stepping quietly and almost furtively on the soft ground. "If it weren't for that—" he started.

"I understand," she replied quickly. Taking hold of his arm, she said, "I'm sorry."

"Sure." Mark grinned affectionately at her. "Come on. Let's see if they've been having any good fights upstairs." They stepped into the elevator and disappeared. The artificial moon continued its regular motion through the simulated sky. • • •

SCIENCE BRIEFS

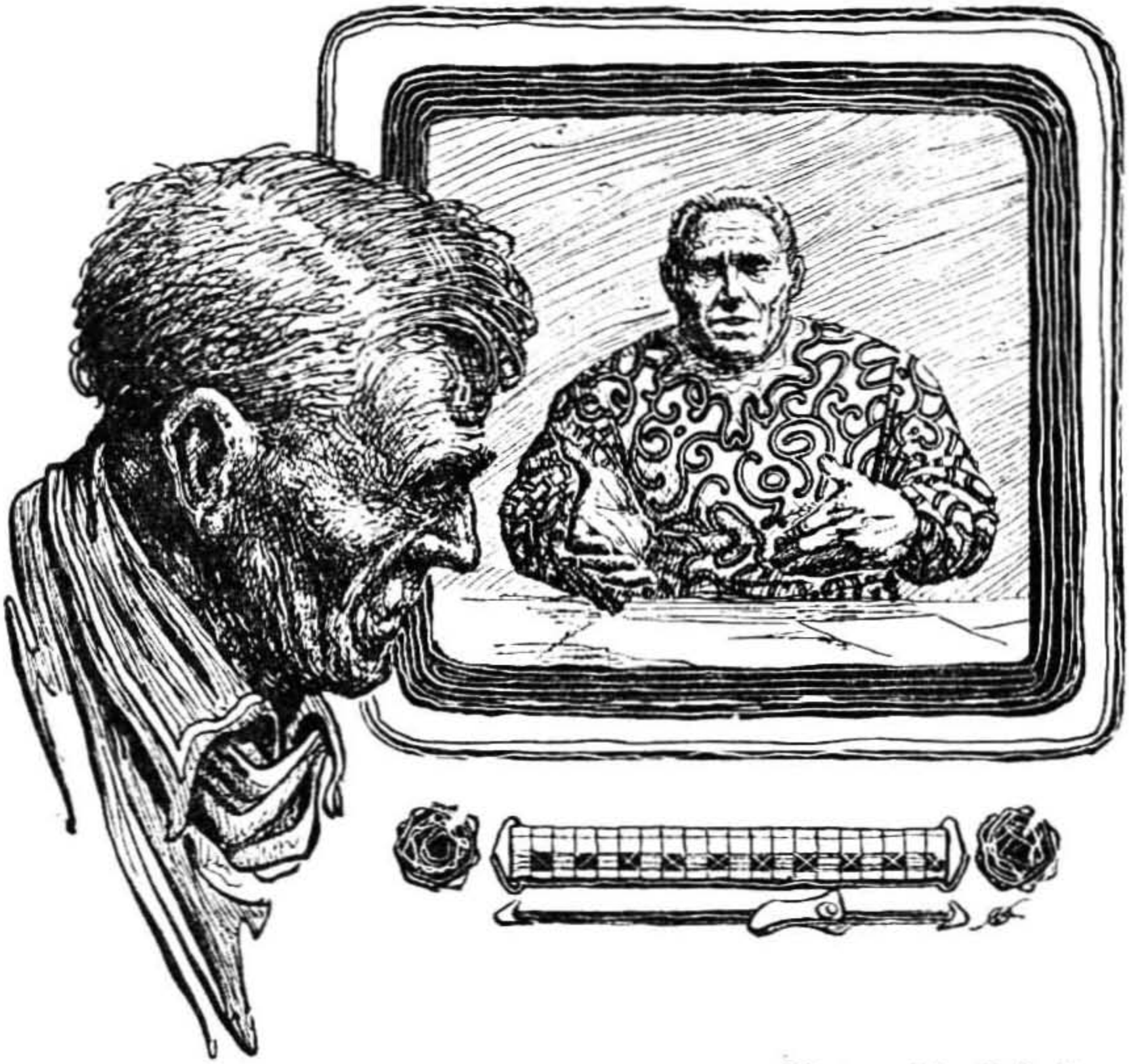
A small machine that guarantees year round air and temperature conditioning at a cost competitive with coal, gas and oil may soon be standard equipment in all homes. This weatherstat which works on the same heat-pump idea as your home freezer or refrigerator to give you freedom from furnace worries and dust, maintains constant humidity despite conditions out of doors.

Gauze bandages on wounds will soon be a thing of the past. New transparent surgical dressings can be sprayed directly on the wound from an aerosol "bomb." The clear plastic bandage will enable surgeons to inspect a wound without removing it and will peel off easily.

An electronic "brain" that scores students' tests at the rate of 1,400 a minute and saves teachers a lot of time has been invented. Installation takes about one year and equipment will soon be available throughout the nation.

Headlights, ten times more powerful than those of today, will be used on automobiles in the year 2003 and will eliminate blinding glare to approaching drivers. More light with less glare will be possible by the use of polarized lenses and windshields. In daytime driving the polarization can be cut out with a flick of the switch.

Exhaust fumes from buses and cars may soon be given their "walking papers". Engineers have found that liquified petroleum gas, such as propane, burns to an odorless, smokeless exhaust, yields quieter bus operation and cuts costs too.



Illustrated by Kelly Freas

WASTE NOT, WANT

Eat your spinach, little man! It's good for you. Stuff yourself with it. Be a good little consumer, or the cops will get you . . . For such is the law of supply and demand!

BY DAVE DRYFOOS

PANIC roused him—the black imp of panic that lived under the garish rug of this unfamiliar room and crawled out at dawn to nudge him awake and stare from the blank space to his left where Tillie's gray head should have been.

His fists clenched in anger—at himself. He'd never been the sort to make allowance for his own weakness and didn't propose to begin doing so now, at age eighty-six. Tillie'd been killed in that crash well over a year ago and it was time he got used to his widowerhood and quit searching for her every morning.

But even after he gave himself the bawling out, orientation came slowly. The surroundings looked so strange. No matter what he told himself it was hard to believe that he was indeed Fred Lubway, mechanical engineer, and had a right to be in this single bed, alone in this house his Tillie had never seen.

The right to be there was all wrong. He disliked the house and hated all its furnishings.

The cybernetic cooker in the kitchen; the magnetically-suspended divans in the living room; the three-dimensional color broadcasts he could so readily project to any wall or ceiling; the solar-tropic machinery that would turn any face of the pentagonal house into the sun or the shade or the breeze; the lift that would raise the entire building a hundred feet into the air to give him a wider view and more privacy—all left him dissatisfied.

They were new. None had been shared with Tillie. He used them only to the extent required by law to fulfill his duty as a consumer.

"You must change your home because of the change in your family composition," the Ration Board's bright young female had explained, right after Tillie's funeral. "Your present furnishings are obsolete. You must replace them."

"And if I don't?" He'd been truculent.

"I doubt we'd have to invoke the penalties for criminal underconsumption," she'd explained airily. "There are plenty of other possible courses of action. Maybe we'd just get a decision that you're prematurely senile and unable to care for yourself. Then you'd go to a home for the aged where they'd *help* you consume—with forced feedings and such."

So here he was, in this home-of-his-own that seemed to belong to someone else. Well, at least he wasn't senile, even if he did move a little slowly, now, getting out of bed. He'd warm up soon. All by himself. With no one's help.

And as far as these newfangled gadgets in the bathroom were concerned, he could follow any well-written set of directions. He'd scalded himself that time only because the printed instructions were so confusing.

He took a cold shower this time.

When the airtowel had finished blowing and he was half dry—not wholly dry because the machine wasn't adapted to people who took ice-cold showers—he went in to the clothing machine. He punched the same few holes in its tape that he put there every day, stood in the right place, and

in due course emerged with his long, rawboned frame covered by magenta tights having an excessively baggy seat.

He knew the costume was neither pretty nor fashionable and that its design, having been wholly within his control when he punched the tape, revealed both his taste and his mood. He didn't care; there was no one in the world whom he wanted to impress.

He looked in the dressing room mirror not to inspect the tights but to examine his face and see if it needed shaving. Too late he remembered that twenty years had elapsed since the permanent depilatories were first invented and ten since he'd used one and stopped having to shave.

There were too many changes like that in this gadget-mad world; too many new ways of doing old things. Life had no stability.

He stalked into the kitchen wishing he could skip breakfast—anger always unsettled his stomach. But everyone was required to eat at least three meals a day. The vast machine-records system that kept track of each person's consumption would reveal to the Ration Board any failure to use his share of food, so he dialed Breakfast Number Three—tomato juice, toast, and coffee.

The signal-panel flashed "Under-Eating" and he knew the state machine-records system had advised his cybernetic cooker to increase the amount of his consumption. Chin in hands he sat hopelessly at the kitchen table awaiting his meal, and in due course was served prunes, waffles, bacon, eggs, toast, and tea—none of which he liked, except for toast.

He ate dutifully nevertheless, telling himself he wasn't afraid of the ration-cops who were always suspecting him of underconsumption because he was the tall skinny type and never got fat like most people, but that he ate what the cooker had given him because his father had been unemployed for a long time during the depression seventy-five years before, so he'd never been able to bring himself to throw food away.

Failure to consume had in the old days been called "overproduction" and by any name it was bad. So was war—he'd read enough about war to be glad that form of consumption had finally been abolished.

Still it was a duty and not a pleasure to eat so much, and a relief to get up and put the dirty dishes into the disposal machine and go up topside to his gyro.

DISGUSTINGLY, he had a long wait before departure. After climbing into the gyro and transmitting his flight plan he had to sit seething for all of fifteen minutes before the Mount Diablo Flight Control Center deigned to lift his remote-controlled gyro into the air. And when the signal came, ascent was so awkwardly abrupt it made his ears pop.

He couldn't even complain. The Center was mechanical, and unequipped to hear complaints.

It routed him straight down the San Joaquin Valley—a beautiful sight from fifteen thousand feet, but over-familiar. He fell asleep

and awakened only when unexpectedly brought down at Bakersfield Field.

Above his instrument panel the printing-receiver said "Routine Check of Equipment and Documents. Not Over Five Minutes' Delay."

But it could take longer. And tardiness was subject to official punishments as a form of unproductiveness. He called George Harding at the plant.

Harding apparently had been expecting the call. His round bluff face wore a scowl of annoyance.

"Don't you ever watch the newscasts?" he demanded angrily. "They began this 'Routine Check' you're in at five this morning, and were broadcasting pictures of the resulting traffic jam by six. If you'd filed a flight plan for Santa Barbara and come on down the coast you'd have avoided all this."

"I'm not required to listen to newscasts," Fred replied tartly. "I own the requisite number of receivers and—"

"Now, listen, Fred," Harding interrupted. "We need you down here so hurry up!"

Fred heard him switch off and sat for a moment trembling with rage. But he ended by grinning wryly. Everyone was in the same boat, of course. For the most part, people avoided thinking about it. But he could now see himself as if from above, spending his life flitting back and forth between home and plant, plant and home; wracking his brain to devise labor-saving machines while at the plant, then rushing home to struggle with the need to consume their tremendous output.

Was he a man? Or was he a caged squirrel racing in an exercise-wheel, running himself ragged and with great effort producing absolutely nothing?

He wasn't going to do it any longer, by golly! He was going to—

"Good morning!" A chubby young man in the pea-green uniform of a ration-cop opened the door and climbed uninvited into the cockpit. "May I check the up-to-dateness of your ship's equipment, please?"

Fred didn't answer. He didn't have to. The young officer was already in the manual pilot's seat, checking the secondary controls.

In swift routine he tried motor and instruments, and took the craft briefly aloft. Down again, he demanded Fred's papers.

The licenses that pertained to the gyro were in order, but there was trouble over Fred's personal documents: his ration-book contained far too few sales-validations.

"You're not doing your share of consuming, Oldtimer," the young cop said mildly. "Look at all these unused food allotments! Want to cause a depression?"

"No."

"Man, if you don't eat more than this, we'll have mass starvation!"

"I know the slogans."

"Yes, but do you know the penalties? Forced feeding, compulsory consumption—do you think they're fun?"

"No."

"Well, you can file your flight plan and go, but if you don't spend those tickets before their expiration dates, Mister, you'll have

cause to regret it."

With a special pencil, he sense-marked the card's margins.

Fred felt that each stroke of the pencil was a black mark against him. He watched in apprehensive silence.

The young cop was also silent. When finished he wordlessly returned the identification, tipped his cap, and swaggered off, his thick neck red above his green collar.

Fred found he'd had more than enough of swaggering young men with beefy red necks. That added to his disgust with the constant struggle to produce and consume, consume and produce. Vague, wishful threats froze as determination: he absolutely wasn't going through any more of it.

He filed a flight plan that would return him to his home, and in due course arrived there.

The phone rang in his ears as he opened the cockpit. He didn't want to answer, and he stayed on the roof securing the gyro and plugging in its battery-charger. But he couldn't ignore the bell's insistent clamor.

When he went downstairs and switched on the phone, George Harding's round face splashed on the wall.

"Fred," he said, "when we talked a few hours ago, you forgot to say you were sick. I phoned to confirm that for the Attendance Report. Did this call get you out of bed?"

He could see it hadn't. Therefore Fred knew he must be recording the audio only, and not the video; trying to give him a break with the Attendance people and coach him on the most appeasing answers.

A well-meant gesture, but a false one. And Fred was fed up with the false. "I forgot nothing," he said bluntly. "I'm perfectly well and haven't been near bed."

"Now, wait," George said hastily. "It's no crime to be sick. And —ah—don't say anything you wouldn't want preserved for posterity."

"George, I'm not going to play along with you." Fred insisted. "This business of producing to consume and consuming to produce has got me down. It's beyond all reason!"

"No, it isn't. You're an excellent mechanical engineer, Fred, but you're not an economist. That's why you don't understand. Just excuse me for a minute, and I'll show you."

He left the field of view. Fred waited incuriously for him to return, suddenly conscious of the fact that he now had nothing better to do with his time.

George was back in less than a minute, anyhow. "O.K." he said briskly. "Now, where were we? Oh, yes. I just wanted to say that production is a form of consumption, too—even the production of machine-tools and labor-saving devices. So there's nothing inconsistent—"

"What are you trying to do?" Fred demanded. Don't lecture me —I know as much econ as you do!"

"But you've got to come back to work, Fred! I want you to use your rations, put your shoulder to the wheel, and conform generally. The policing's too strict for you to try

anything else, fella—and I like you too well to want to see you—"

"I don't need you to protect me, George," Fred said stiffly. "I guess you mean well enough. But goodbye." He switched off.

THE SILENCE struck him. Not a sound stirred the air in that lonely new house except the slight wheeze of his breathing.

He felt tired. Bone weary. As if all the fatigues of his eighty-six years were accumulated within him.

He stood by a window and stared blindly out. Everyone seemed to have been heckling him, shoving him around, making him change all his ways every minute. He didn't want to change. He didn't want to be forever adapting to new gadgets, new fads, new ways of doing things.

He thought of the villages of India, substantially unchanged for three, four, five thousand years. The villagers had no money, so they couldn't be consumers. Maybe they had the natural way to live. Statically. Also, frugally.

But no. It was too frugal, too static. He'd heard and read too much about the starvation, pestilence, peonage and other ills plaguing those Indian villagers. They didn't have life licked, either.

The Indians had not enough, the Americans, too much. One was as bad as the other.

And he was in the middle.

He left the window he'd been staring from unseeingly and walked to the foyer control-panel. There he pushed the button that would cause the house to rear a hundred feet into the air on its titanium-aluminum plunger.

Then he went back to the window to watch the ground recede. He felt a hand on his shoulder. He decided the sensation was an illusion—a part of his state of mind.

A young man's voice said, "Mr. Lubway, we need you."

That was a nice thing to hear so Fred turned, ready to smile. He didn't smile. He was confronted by another ration-cop.

This one was a tall young man, dark and hefty. He seemed very kindly, in his official sort of way.

"Mr. George Harding sent me," he explained. "He asked us to look you up and see if we could help."

"Yes?"

"You seem to have been a little unhappy this morning. I mean—well—staring out that window while your house rises dangerously high. Mr. George Harding didn't like the mood you're in, and neither do I, Mr. Lubway. I'm afraid you'll have to come to the hospital. We can't have a valuable citizen like you falling out that window, can we?"

"What do you mean, 'valuable citizen'? I'm no use to anybody. There's plenty of engineers, and more being graduated every semester. You don't need me."

"Oh, yes, we do!" Shaking his head, the young ration-cop took a firm grip on Fred's right biceps. "You've got to come along with me till your outlook changes, Mr. Lubway."

"Now, see here!" Fred objected, trying unsuccessfully to twist free of the officer's grip. "You've no

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The Work-out Planet

Colonial life on Mars with a "chicken" like Shirley was enough to make any Earthman shudder. But what can you do when you are mentally incompetent and legally trapped?

BY R. E. BANKS

IT WAS Saturday afternoon and I was in our study-lab working on my home cyclotron. The cyclotron was so new that Nora hadn't paid for it yet, but at least the solution to my troubles was at hand. Now I could finish my einsteins.

That year I had been unable to find work for more than six weeks —all because I hadn't finished my einsteins. Most people these days finish them by the age of twenty-one or two, but I was thirty-two and beginning to worry. So was Nora. It was more than a little embarrassing that the greatest female scientific theorist in New York City had a husband with a low IQ. So after having held my last job for only two days—a job which was hardly more than an office boy's—I had gone out and bought the home cyclotron. I thoroughly intended to put an end to this nonsense about my being an intellectual lightweight. I had taken a vow not to leave home until I had finished my einsteins and though Nora lifted her brows at the cost of the machine, she had said nothing. Perhaps because she was too wrapped up in her work on the "Mathematical Point-Count of the Surfaces of Great Paintings."

"Doesn't anyone answer doorbells on earth, Mr. Singer?"

I turned in surprise to see a young woman standing in the door. Then my heart sank. It was Nora's cousin from Mars, Shirley Remington. She looked very odd indeed. She wore a light wool dress that outlined her body instead of a leisure-work smock or the standard female coveralls. Her hair was too long and waved, a mass of bronze, making her head look heavy to me

because the female butch haircut hasn't changed in fifty years. She wore archaic lipstick on her mouth and her eyebrows were neat and plucked which stamped her as a Colonial.

I had seen pictures of her when Nora's uncle Remington had visited Earth about three years before. At that time he had the crazy idea that she should come to Earth to find a husband, since men were so short in the colonies, but we'd talked him out of it then.

"Hello," I said, trying to hide my shock at her ugliness. "What brings you all the way from Mars?"

"Didn't Nora tell you I was coming?" she asked in surprise.

"No," I said. Her face showed no signs of work at all; no lines on her skin, no red veins in the eyes. A smooth, shiny complexion like the ugly, unmarked petal of a garden rose. She even had a tan from being outdoors and not working very hard.

"Quite frankly," she said, "I've come to New York to find a suitable and pleasing mate. We've had the usual cosmic ray storms on Mars and the male situation is fantastic. So when Nora said for me to come on ahead and see what I could do in New York, I came flying—or rather rocketing."

That struck me as queer. Of course Nora would be mildly interested in the marital success of her cousin, but Nora has very little time for such foolishness and trying to introduce this ugly girl (nylon hose!) around in New York would be a sheer waste of effort.

"Excuse me for sounding doubtful, Miss Remington," I said, "but you don't have a line on your face.

Illustrated by Paul Orban

Your figure is too youthful. It's too curvy to be frank with you. No man on Earth would look at you twice."

"I realize my shortcomings," she said with an undisturbed grin. "But Cousin Nora is a very smart person and she told me to come. I'm leaving the answers to her."

Disgusted that I had to interrupt my work, I led the girl to the spare room. There was the smell of flowers about her, some artificial concoction she called "perfume" and a long way from the socially acceptable aroma of perspiration that every attractive young Earth girl favors. I accidentally touched her while picking up her luggage and shuddered at her softness.

NORA was in her lab behind the garage. Dr. Ryder was there also. I knew they were very busy, working on Nora's demonstration to be given that evening before the Society of Electrostatic Engineers. But I couldn't help puzzling over Nora's intentions. Certainly she knew that my work on the einsteins had to be gotten through with at all possible speed and she couldn't expect me to jockey her unattractive cousin around the city on a fruitless hunt for a man.

Dr. Ryder was in the harness that Nora had designed. It was a very clever contraption, destined to open a whole new field of leisure-work. Nora had an original Rembrandt on the scanning surface and her computer was scanning the work of the old master carefully, reading each and every brush stroke he had made. She had a photospectrometer set up alongside—one of those devices which can distinguish over two million shades of color. The paint was mixed to the proper shade by automatic devices. The artist—in this case Dr. Ryder—was standing before a canvas with his arms locked in a sort of harness. As the scanner read out each brush stroke Rembrandt had made on that original painting centuries ago, the harness duplicated the stroke in terms of motion on Ryder's arms, controlled by an analog servomechanism loop. Ryder was painting a Rembrandt which, when finished, would be indistinguishable from the original except for age effects.

No value in duplicating Rembrandt, of course. The value was in training the artist's muscles. After Ryder had painted Rembrandt and Van Gogh and a half-dozen other great artists for hour after hour, he would have some concept of how the masters worked. In six months he would know more about painting techniques than a man could learn in ten years under the old system. This exciting technique, designed for leisure work, was just another brilliant idea of Nora's—Nora Remington Singer's Art-Aid, she called it.

"I thought I told you we were busy," said Nora.

Nora turned off the Thompson Probe and Ryder slipped out of the harness with a sigh, exercising his tired arms.

"Your cousin from Mars is here," I said. "I deem that important enough to interrupt you. Especially when she tells me you encouraged her to come to Earth on a fool's errand."

Nora looked at Bob Ryder and

he looked at her. I didn't like that look. "I think she's very wise to come to earth to find a man," said Nora.

"Her looks are all against her."

Nora is conscious of her own great beauty. She's lived a full life. Though only three years older than I, she looks fifty. The hard lines of her face, the deep pouches under her eyes, and the bent posture of her body give her a great animal attraction. I have seen men stop in sheer astonishment at her admirable work-worn figure.

"Standards of beauty are different on Mars," said Nora.

"If she's brought money, she has a chance," said Bob.

"And I suppose I'm the one to take her around and introduce her—"

Nora laughed. "Now, Hal, don't get excited. You *are* out of a job—"

"I'm working hard on my einsteins—"

"And you completely ruined my digital read-outs on the 'Mathematical Point-Count System' last week, and so I'd think you could make yourself useful to *someone* in my family."

"For years," I said angrily, "you've complained because you've practically supported me. Now with the new home cyclotron I can get my einsteins done and maybe find a decent job. That's all I'm trying to do and each day's delay means another day that I'm a stone around your neck."

"Oh, now, Hal, you mustn't feel that way."

"Having a low IQ is no crime," smiled Bob Ryder. "Why, if I had a 120 I'd be proud. At least it sets you apart in a city where the dull normal is 160."

"The Thompson Probe gives me headaches and so I work slower, Mr. Scientist," I said. "Someday I may surprise you all."

"Someday," said Nora with a sigh, "you may even be smart enough to figure out how to distinguish molecules of dust from paint molecules on my Mathematical Point-Count System of Art. That's more than I can do. But meanwhile Shirley is here and she's brought quite a large sum of money with her which has to be taken care of and you can make yourself useful by taking her to Mr. DuPres."

I felt a wave of relief. Smart Nora! Mr. DuPres was our lawyer and the logical man to handle Shirley's problem. As a member of one of the professions he was in the bottom quarter of society, for on Earth the technical skills predominate. Therefore he would be glad to handle Shirley for a fee. And being acquainted with lawyers, teachers, divines, doctors and other riff-raff, he could probably find somebody for Shirley, someone of low taste who would accept the Martian idea of beauty.

"That's different," I said.

"Well, be off with her!" cried Nora with enthusiasm. "And after the lawyer's show her some of New York, if you want. I'll not be home for supper anyway, since Bob and I have to leave early for the demonstration."

My relief changed to anxiety. Nora was too cheerful about the whole thing.

"DuPres may not be at his office. It's Saturday afternoon."

"DuPres will be at his office," said Bob. "I don't know of a lowly

professional in New York who can make a living on a five day work-week."

"I'll call just to make sure," said Nora. "I wanted to talk to him anyway."

I left them. I paused to make the complicated signal that brought the car out of the garage automatically, and I thought I heard a burst of laughter from the lab. My uneasiness grew. I'm not a jealous man, but Nora and Bob make a fine couple, he with his white hair and lined face and Nora with her work-seared body.

And when they get together they seem to talk down to me like a couple of parents to a simple-minded child. It would be well for me to get my einsteins done as soon as possible.

AS WE drove downtown I had to explain to Shirley about our work-week. No one considers their job as important as their leisure-work any more. In fact, employers have been trying to push through the 4½ day work-week. I had to explain that to Shirley, because on Mars the employers want to get the most out of their workers and the workers want to give as little as possible.

"It's simple," I said. "On Earth, leisure-work and hobbies increase the efficiency of the person. Take a man on a straight office job. In the office he may be merely shuffling papers around. But in his leisure-work he may be doing garden chemistry or a study of the molecular structure of plastics. His leisure-work is so difficult that ordinary office work becomes very easy for him and he can do twice as much in half the time—because his leisure-work teaches him to think. Today work is the chief pleasure of mankind. At his office. Around the home. And in the all-important leisure-work that used to be called hobbies."

"All because of the Thompson Probe?"

"All because of the Thompson Probe. It has made the final revolution in mankind—the greatest since the Industrial Revolution. For centuries mankind complained that the layman could never catch up with science. Today all is changed. By the time he's reached his majority the average man (or woman) has become the equivalent of a graduate physics major in the old days. Science has a pretty hard time keeping up with us today," I said proudly.

We went past a large building that hummed with activity.

"What's that?" she asked pointing.

I laughed. "The public library."

"The library! It looks like a mob scene. Why, back home on Mars you'd see a crowd like that in front of the theatre but there's never a crowd at the library."

"They keep the libraries open all night long," I said. "They have had to cut book loan time to one week so that everybody will have a chance at them. Study is an important part of leisure-work, especially the classics and heavy scientific literature. A book can't be a best-seller any more unless it's pretty meaty on science."

A traffic policeman had his head bent over an experiment he was doing with a vacuum jar, and so I

scooted across on a changing light and ended up in a mob that overflowed the sidewalk.

"What's that crowd for?"

I shot a sidelong glance at the girl and felt a tingle of pleasure. Living with a scientist of Nora's mentality, I am usually the one to ask questions. Despite the girl's naiveté, she really wanted to know, and I didn't give her the look of impatience that Nora and her friends are always giving me when I ask questions.

"This is a work-out," I said, stopping our vehicle. "Leisure-work has its bad features. But we can expect this, the old principle of loss and gain, you know. For every advantage there is a disadvantage. To the truly objective mind, there is no purpose in hiding the bad features of our lives."

The man was doing his last work-out. For thirty or more years he had been using a Thompson Probe. He had worked hard for each 16 hours out of 24 under the Probe, every day of his life. The energy released by that machine had finally set its pattern on his nerve cells. The day finally came when he turned off his Probe—but couldn't stop working. He had to keep going, burning himself out.

He had been digging a patch of ground with a pick. The pick pounded the dirt with sludding blows and at each stroke the man gave a half-cry of anguish because the rest of his body was tired—abnormally tired after the years of ceaseless activity. The crowd about him was patient, grim-faced and respectful. Since no one has time any more for funerals, it is social custom to attend any work-out you see and pay homage to the dying with applause.

The man raised his pick, gave a shriek and dropped to his knees as his heart exploded inside of him. He made some futile, erratic gestures, patting the ground and crawling for a moment in a spasmodic fashion, then he shoved his face into the dirt, quivered, and lay still.

The crowd applauded sombrely for his soul and then began to melt as a woman came out of the house with a home embalming kit and began to arrange his limbs. . .

SHIRLEY shuddered, reminding me again of her repugnantly soft body.

"Do people just die like that?"

"He led a happy, full life," I said. "He was probably fifty-two, three. No one lives any longer any more. Last year a man of fifty-eight was discovered and he caused a sensation. But in terms of work we accomplish four, five times as much as our ancestors who lived to be sixty-seventy. And we're not as neurotic."

She sighed. "Doesn't anybody have fun on Earth?"

"What kind of fun?"

"Oh, you know. Parties, and the beach and going to bars. Eating fine dinners and going to concerts and shows."

I was in a hurry to get rid of her, but I couldn't pass that remark up. Chuckling, I swung a couple of blocks out of the way to show her the largest movie theatre in New York. It's hidden between the 22-story All-Centuries Art Museum and one of the hundreds of build-

ings of the enlarged New York University. It has one hundred seats.

"Martin and Lewis," she said in surprise.

I smiled proudly. "We don't make fictional movies any more," I said. "Not since the Thompson Probe. This film is over two hundred years old and the only people who come to see it are the very young children and off-planet visitors."

"But I saw a TV set in your living room."

"Sure. Most of the programs are put on by the universities and the scientific institutes. Last year the convention of the Institute of Applied Science had an all-time record audience of 200 million. But there were some really fine papers—"

"On Mars people watch baseball," she said frowning. "Don't you even have that?"

"Baseball? Sounds familiar," I said. "Wasn't that the game they played on ice with skates and sticks?"

She made a sound of protest in her throat. Suddenly she put her hand on my arm. "Stop! There's a bar. My God, I could stand a drink—"

I stopped reluctantly. I hadn't been in a bar since I met Nora. Drinking fuddles the mind and prevents clear thinking necessary to work. There aren't very many bars, and they're mostly attended by antiquarians. This one was dimly lighted in the true tradition, repulsively inefficient. Shirley was sighing for the nostalgic New York of magnificent bars and restaurants she'd read about in history books. She fell to talking to the bartender who was a hoarse-voiced old baboon of an Irishman, who obviously drank his own wares.

"Look what this dag-nabbed Thompson Probe has went and did," he said. "It's went and eliminated sex." He leaned over the bar and winked at Shirley and pinched her soft arm. "Take you now, Ma'm. In the old days you would've been a knockout."

"How did they went and eliminate sex?" asked Shirley, innocently cuddling forward on the ancient bar stool.

"Like Freud went and said," said the bar-keep. "You take a baby, well, that little child is curious about hisself. Right?"

"Right?" asked Shirley of me, sipping her drink.

"Right," I said glumly. I was thinking back to the day I met Nora. She was doing a study on "Stimulants and the Creative Mind." In those days ten years ago she was merely a bright student and I was a thorough-going antiquarian. I spent a lot of time in the bars. I had a chip on my shoulder against the world. The Thompson Probe that everybody used gave me a headache and I was way behind my friends in achievement. I was probably headed for a Clinic, but Nora saved me. She was always one to improve the world. Maybe she thought she could remake me. Anyway, she tried hard for ten years. . .

"That baby is curious about his body," said the bartender. "Then about his mother's body and finally about others. So he goes and grows up and this curiosity went and got sublimated."

"At Sublimation Junction," I said remembering an old tune and

letting the bubbles from the drink ping at my nose.

"You know a big joke?" said the bartender. "You take an adult, a scientist. You take a big-dome, like Dr. Devering or even this Nora Remington Singer dame—these giant brain types, all they're doing is being sublimated. Scientific curiosity is just a final result of the same old curiosity the kid had in his cradle. So what do they mean, giving papers on how to count up the paint dots on some picture, painted by some old-timer?"

Shirley grinned at me. "So what do they mean, Hal? These Nora Remington types?"

"The Thompson Prove allows total sublimation," I said defensively. "Freud pointed out the loss and gain factor in sublimation. Without sublimation, civilization couldn't exist. Of course, the primitive instincts continue to exist. Except that now the sex-drive is mostly swallowed in the curiosity sublimation. That's why a body that shows the effect of work is attractive, and a smooth, unmarked one like yours isn't."

"You're mighty ugly, sister," said the bar-keep, chucking Shirley under the chin.

"You're pretty ugly yourself, Grandpa," said Shirley. She sighed and took my arm. "Come on, Hal, let's go."

For a minute in the dim light she looked pretty good, and I thought that maybe she had a chance, but when we came out into the sun again, the clean, wind-blown look spoiled it.

"What about marriage and children," she said. "Gosh, I hope the Earth men still believe in children."

"Of course we do," I said. "But the begetting is unimportant. It is simply inefficient to make such a fuss over mating as our ancestors did. Think of the total loss in terms of wasted work hours. Today those hours are more reasonably spent in either job work or leisure-work or in a dreamless sleep."

"No dreams, Hal?"

"No. After a day under the Thompson Probe, you sleep like a stone."

She looked disturbed. "I see it," she said. "A New York as neat as a pin, efficient and happy. But I still don't see why—why do you revel in work?"

"Read history," I said. "There was a time when our technology exceeded the knowledge of the man on the street. Finally, beginning with the atom, it got so bad that the average man no longer trusted himself to make decisions in his own environment. He had a desire to know as much as the scientist himself knew. So science gave him the Thompson Probe."

She wrinkled her nose and showed her provincial prejudices. "Probe-smobe. I'm glad the Probe is outlawed on Mars."

"When Mars has enough books, labs and libraries they'll come to use the Probe," I said.

WE FOUND Mr. DuPres in. He was shuffling some papers on his desk and he looked very grave. For the hundredth time that day I had a feeling of misgiving. I didn't like the legal looking documents he had in front of him.

"I'm afraid I have some bad news for you, Mr. Singer," he said.

I waved a hesitant Shirley into the chair. After all, she was one of the family.

"Go ahead, DuPres."

He had a cringing look on his face. He handed me a paper. It was a divorce notice. It said that, due to my failure to support her, Nora Remington Singer, plaintiff, had decided to terminate our marriage and that she wished to collect fifteen thousand dollars from me which was the basic amount I should've brought home to support us in the ten years of our marriage. Fifteen hundred a year isn't very much but the law set the base very low and then insisted on it. In a world of work, of course, non-support is an ugly word, and I felt a cold clutch of horror.

"Nora wanted me to break the word to you," said DuPres. "She just called me a few minutes ago."

"I'll fight it!"

"You can't," he said. "The evidence is all here. Affidavits from her friends telling of her mental distress at having a stupid husband. Why, it isn't even a case for a human judge. I'm putting the evidence into the Computer Court at nine Monday. By ten-thirty she'll have her final decree."

"I'll cross-file!" I cried.

"The machines would throw out your case as soon as it scanned your salary reports. No, your marriage is dead. The important question now is—how can you raise the fifteen thousand dollars you owe Nora."

"It's Ryder," I fumed. "He's a high-erg man. That's all she wants. A goddam high-erg man."

"The court will most certainly demand fifteen thousand dollars of non-support money for Nora," said DuPres insistently. "Have you any ideas, Mr. Singer?"

"I can lend you fifteen thousand dollars," said Shirley impulsively.

"Don't be ridiculous," I said.

"I don't think she's ridiculous," said DuPres. "Why don't you borrow the money from her?"

"I couldn't pay it back. I can hardly support myself on Earth."

"On Mars it would be different," said Shirley. "If you decided to come to Mars, you could get a fine job. . ."

"No. I don't want to go to Mars. Besides, you've brought your money as a dowry, in hopes of finding a young man."

DuPres cleared his throat. "As a matter of fact," he said, "I believe my client, Nora, had something like this in mind. She mentioned to me something about your coming to Earth to find a husband. And she mentioned the money you had. And Mr. Singer will be free of all marital engagements, effective at ten o'clock Monday morning."

We both stared at him in amazement. Shirley blushed. Nora had fit the pieces together in a very efficient, non-emotional way.

DuPres now brought out another piece of paper. "This marriage license is properly filled out," he said, "and needs only the signatures. I have a friend, a parson, whose offices are in the next building. We could wrap this whole thing up in a matter of minutes."

He smiled benignly as if he had just put over a big deal.

"You forgot one thing," I said.

"Oh, don't worry about the license," said DuPres. "It's dated for Monday. The law will recognize

the principle of convenience of ceremony, regardless of the stream of time."

I stepped up and let him have one on the jaw. He went over backwards in his swivel chair.

"My compliments," I said, "and you forgot that people have feelings."

Shirley and I stood on the sidewalk outside.

"Sure you won't borrow?" she asked.

"No. I'm not through with Nora yet."

I made a signal for the car and it came gliding up. I got in the car and she squeezed my arm. "Take care of your good right arm. The way you hit that man was the finest thing I've seen on Earth."

"Aren't you going back?" I asked.

"No," she smiled. "I've got a date with an old-fashioned bartender and a bottle of liquor."

I watched her go, head back, her ugly, over-womanly body swinging in a hippy walk. Let science pile invention on invention, I thought, there is always the earthy primitive oriented to breeding.

I was half-way home when a brilliant idea hit me with a flash. It was so good that I cried out in amazement. There was still a way to prove myself to Nora, better than finishing my einsteins or better than cornering her with an emotional appeal. She hated the waste energy of an emotional appeal anyway.

Nora was stumped on how to distinguish the dust molecules from paint molecules on her Mathematical Point-Count System.

"Hal," I told myself, "Hal you've never done well under the Thompson Probe. But now, son, you've got to come up with it. You've got to show them this time, or else—"

A LOT of poetics have been devoted to the Probe because of the marvelous things it's done for humanity. Actually it always looked to me like no more than a paint spray gun, and it worked as simply.

The Thompson Probe is a practical solution of man's oldest wish —to make available to himself the enormous mental energy he knows lies sleeping below the surface of every human mind. It emits non-thermal radiation which is played on the head and shoulders. This radiation is on the wave scale somewhere between visible light and ultra-violet. Thompson's spectrum, if you prefer, in which visible light is beginning to turn into something else before it becomes ultra-violet. It is very unstable, but it will radiate up to several hundred feet and for x number of hours before it loses shape and falls back into light rays or gains pulsations and moves up to ultra-violet.

(Is there anyone who hasn't experienced the foolish feeling of being in the middle of serious work and having the commutator in the Probe fail? Then your desire for work drains out of you and you're staring foolishly at a beam of useless light. Or, on the other hand, your commutator goes wild and burns the hell out of you—you get a sunburn strong enough to send you to bed for days.)

But when the Probe works properly it literally forces increased activity in the atoms of the brain. Perhaps the molecules creak and snap a bit, perhaps that's why we don't live as long—but to feel the pure energy of your full mind released for work—Ah, that is life's greatest pleasure!

I took out the set bar and moved up the generator. I moved it way up. The Probe is theoretically safe to handle the high metabolism rates of the very quick-minded, but any child can kick off the governor. No one in our intelligent world does, of course. But this was emergency. I set up the power level as high as it would go, way beyond the last safety factor, even for the highest metabolic genius. I felt some misgivings, but I had gotten myself into an all-or-nothing situation, and I restrained an impulse to fudge a little.

I rushed in and got Nora's papers on the dot count of the surface of pictures. She had all of her papers out, because, she had told me, she had been asked to donate them to the Museum. Now I knew better. She was simply breaking up housekeeping.

I went to the study and turned on the Probe and stepped into its rays. By midnight when Nora and Bob got home from the meeting they were going to find a little surprise waiting for them.

I'm used to standard Probe effects as is everyone on earth. But the blue-white jolt I got dazed me, even while I felt my mind turn over and the racing energy come with a jolt. I yapped and yammered like a lap dog because I was so jagged up. The thoughts cascaded in my mind and the headache-producing equations seemed to draw up on the paper and resolve themselves into marks as simple as "if I have four apples—"

Experiments were called for. All of the stuff was within the ray's beams, and I set up and activated a dozen different experiments at once. My hands flew as fast as my mind. I could feel my mind racing past the first fatigue and slipping down into a vast void of concentration. I worked like a very demon and muttered and laughed and quivered all over from the unaccustomed heavy charge of the Thompson Probe.

I got some of the feeling a work-out must have. The human mind-body stretched to the very limit of endurance. The nausea of fatigue grew like a round, black balloon. Yet I drove myself forward. Lights blurred in my eyes and I was blinded and yet I could still work and I worked—

NORA and Bob discovered me around midnight when they got home. I was lying twitching on the desk while my experiments rattled on unheeded and the paper tapes I had fed into the machine went on rattling out long equations. I had received an overload of energy and run into a sort of human short-circuit, being too young for a real work-out to death. But not, I thought with pleasure, before I had done some considerably good work. The last thing I remembered was when they put me to bed.

We are all doctors because everything short of surgery is fairly

easy for an alert mind to pick up. When I awoke about noon on Sunday, I instantly knew that it was going to take me a long time to recover from my efforts. Nevertheless, I was content. I crept downstairs in anticipation.

I found Shirley in the living room assembling her luggage. She looked very white and used up. "Try to find a hangover remedy in this lousy city," she moaned. "I'm glad I can still make the two o'clock rocket."

"Leaving?"

"I've gotten everything I wanted out of my trip. So I leave."

"How was last night?"

"We got drunk and sang old songs," she said, "and I flirted with an antiquarian."

"Where're Nora and Bob?"

Shirley shook her head. "I don't know. But there's a note on the breakfast table."

I crept into the breakfast room. Nora's note was to the point:

Dear Hal: A noble try. In all your years you've never done such a brilliant piece of work. But in your usual unobservant fashion you picked the wrong set of equations. You solved a problem I worked on years ago which has to do with paint coatings on buildings and the weathering effects. If you had the intelligence to have read my books, you'd have known.

P.S. Shirley has given me the non-support money. I think she was drunk. She murmured something about buying a man with a good right arm. I hope you'll be very happy together.

P.P.S. You're wrong about Bob and me. I've always envied Bob his freedom of living alone. I'm going to be a bachelor too. You can get more work done. Goodbye —Nora Remington.

I dragged myself into the living room where Shirley had just finished calling for a cab.

"You gave Nora the money," I accused her.

"I saved enough for your ticket to Mars," she said.

"I'm not going to Mars."

She grinned and waved a paper at me. "This says you have to. Old DuPres came in this morning and drew it up. You owe me fifteen thousand. I can offer you a job from which you can pay it back. The law says you either have to have your own job or take the job I offer or go to a readjustment Clinic for mental incompetence. And I don't think you can find a job here very easily, nor allow yourself to be sent to a Clinic."

I groaned. "I won't be bought like a side of beef!"

"Now, Hal, what a thing to say! Your bags are packed, thanks to Nora. Do you want to come quietly or shall I send for the police?"

What could I do? I was legally trapped and physically weak.

MY SEATMATE on the Mars rocket was an antiquarian. Each day Shirley brought me to the Solarium to enjoy the sun and left me neatly tucked in under the blankets. Each time this fellow would stare at her and then at me and then dig into the books and magazines he carried. Finally he spoke.

(Continued on page 102)

Illustrated by Paul Orban

DP

Once upon a time life was perfection. Government made sure its citizens were supplied with every comfort and pleasure. But sometimes perfection breeds boredom and . . .

BY ARTHUR DEKKER SAVAGE

ALLEN KINDERWOOD slowed his pace so his forelock would quit bobbing. The damn thing wasn't supposed to bob; it was supposed to be a sort of peaked crest above rugged, handsome features—a dark lock brushed carelessly aside by a man who had more important things to do than fuss with personal grooming. But no matter how carefully he combed it and applied lusto-set, it always bobbed if he walked too fast.

But then, why should it matter now? He wasn't looking for a woman tonight. Not when his appointment with the Social Adjustment counsellors was tomorrow morning, and he would get a Departure Permit. *Should* get one, he corrected himself. But he had never heard of a petition for a DP being refused.

He wanted to spend his last night in the city over here in the main park of C Sector, walking in the restless crowds, trying to settle his thoughts. He moved through slow aimless eddies of brightly appareled citizens, avoiding other pedestrians, skaters and the heavy, four-wheeled autoscooters. Everything was dully, uncompromisingly the same as in his own sector, even to the size and spacing of the huge, spreading trees. He had hoped, without conviction, that there might be some tiny, refresh-

ing difference—anything but the mind-sapping sameness that had driven him to the petition.

Allen was careful not to brush against any girl with an escort. Since he wasn't on the make, what would be the use of fighting? Kind of an odd feeling, though, to know you'd never date or fight again, or. . . . Or what? What else was there to do, if you hadn't the luck to be a jobman or a tech? You ate, and slept, and preened, and exercised, and found what pleasure you could, and fought mostly because it was momentarily stimulating, and, eventually, after a hundred and fifty years or so, you died.

Unless you were a tech. If you were a tech, Government gave you stuff to keep you alive longer. A jobman got a somewhat different deal—he got nothing to keep him alive abnormally, because ninety percent of Earth's population was waiting for his job anyway.

Allen skirted a huge fountain throwing colored, scintillant spray high into the dark summer sky, stealing a glance backward over his shoulder. That girl was still behind him. Following him? It wouldn't be anything new, in his case—especially in his own sector—but maybe she just happened to be going his way.

It would be easy to find out. He circled the fountain twice. With

her looks she should have been picked up before she'd left her compartment building block—except that whoever got her might have to fight more than once during the evening to hold her. Definitely a young man's darling.

And, the way it began to look, definitely Allen's darling. On the second trip around, she had backtracked to meet him face to face—her purpose obvious.

He tried to dodge, but there was no way it could be done without insult. Damn. . .

"Hi, brute. Nedda Marsh. Alone?" She ran soft hands along the hard biceps under his short jacket sleeves. The motion threw open her shriekingly bright orange cloak, displaying saucy breasts, creamy abdomen and, beneath her brief jeweled skirt, long smooth thighs. And the perfume assailed his nostrils with almost physical force.

"Hi, Nedda. Allen Kinderwood. Alone, natch." Natch, hell. But what could any male do to combat Government perfume? He smiled, his pulse suddenly quickening. "Date, darling?" She *was* a beautiful thing.

Her large, sparkling eyes showed pleasure. "Take me, Al." She touched vivid red lips lightly against his. And the formula was complete. Private citizens Allen Kinderwood and Nedda Marsh were dated at least until dawn—or a better man did them part.

He squeezed her arm where she'd snuggled it against his side, starting with her away from the fountain. "How come the most gorgeous thing in Kansas City wasn't dated earlier?"

She looked up at him, and the passion in her gaze made his heart skip like a teener's. "Could be I'm very particular, darling, but," her look was suddenly beseeching, "the truth is, I'm protected."

A slow, tiny fire of distaste fanned itself alive in Allen's brain. Why in the name of World Government did every other girl who made first play with him have to be protected? But there was his out. By unwritten social code he could declare the date off. Except that he had grown to increasingly hate the spiteful practice of 'protection'. It meant Nedda had peeved some local lothario who, along with other males in his clique, was going to damn well see she wasn't intimate with anyone else until she begged another date with the original one. If you had a sadistic turn of mind, it meant you could keep a delectable bit in freeze until her natural inclinations forced her into your arms. But you'd have to fight any man who tried to date her in the meantime.

Fighting was legal, of course, as long as the loser was surgically repairable, and it was considered a normal catharsis for strained relationships between males.

Not, Allen thought glumly, that he had any stake in the future of frantically weary society, but he had reached the conclusion long ago that a man without the courage to back up his personal convictions wasn't worth the energy it took to down him.

He stopped and held Nedda against him protectively. "I still want the date, sprite," he said. "I have to leave early tomorrow, but

I'll try to get you out of protection —okay?"

Her lips trembled. "Oh, yes. If you knew how it's been, these last few days—"

He shook her again, but more tenderly. "Deal. We'll try to reach your compartment." Living quarters were a sanctuary no one but a medic could legally enter without invitation. He removed his stainless indentification plaque and slipped its chain about her throat. "If you see any of the guys who're watching for you, tell me but don't look at them." He took her arm again and alertly began to work through the throng. "Describe your protector."

"Jeff Neal-Hayne. He's big, Al. Bigger than you. Heavier, but you've got muscles like he never saw. You look faster, too."

Allen didn't know him, but the name was revealing. Not that anything but your Earth society number was official, but use of a double surname meant your father had elected to stay with your mother for at least a while after you were born. Most babies, of course, were immediately turned over to a Government creche, but it had always seemed to Allen that kids raised by one or more parents had other advantages too, although he had never been able to figure out just what they were. Maybe it was only his imagination.

AT THE edge of the park they chose the nearest double scooter which showed full battery charge.

Allen leaned against the forward rail. "Herd it, will you, Nedda? Every time I think of the hundreds of hours I've spent plowing air with one of these gut-weighted things I want to break one. Hell, I can run faster. Anyway, you know where we're going."

The girl smiled, pushed the power lever into forward range and steered into slow-moving traffic. "I saw a man lift a single, once, but that's all he was able to do with it."

The lighted street seemed intensely bright after the dimmer reaches of the park. "Ever think of running one into the river?"

She looked at him in amazement. "Fright, no. Why—you'd have to drive along a pedestrian path for at least a block to reach the bank!" Nedda spun the steering wheel to avoid a long string of solemn teeners playing follow the leader on singles. "You have funny thoughts, Al."

"I'm laughing." He flexed his muscles, impatient, as usual, with another citizen's sluggish mentation. "I suppose the damn music never gets on your nerves, either?"

"Music? Oh—the music." She listened as though for the first time to the muted strains which played continuously throughout the city—calming, soothing, lulling. "Of course not. Why should it?"

"They've got it synchronized," said Allen. "Government's got it synchronized so you hear it just the same volume no matter where you are outside. You *have* to listen to it."

"Darling, your boredom's showing."

He squeezed her hand reassuringly. "Don't let me spin you, lovely. I've got the answer."

"Oh?"

"Yeah. I applied for a DP this morning."

"Al—*no!*"

"Why not?" He put it like the needle thrust of a fighting knife, daring her to find a reason, half hoping she could.

"I—" She glanced at him once, quickly, then away. Then she drew a deep breath and let it sigh out. "How about Mars, Al? There aren't many service machines, and they even let women do lots of little detailed things. I almost went, once."

He was watching her shrewdly. "Why didn't you?" He had fought this one out with himself before.

"Oh—I don't know. Just never did."

"I'll tell you why you really didn't. It'd be too different. When the Government provides every convenience, every comfort you can think of here, you can't stand having to work in a mine, with an oxygen helmet, stuffed into heavy clothes. You can't stand the danger and the fear—and somehow, inside, you must know it. I'm pretty strong, and I never met a man I was afraid of, but I know I couldn't stand Mars." He gripped the rail and stared out over the wide, swarming street. "But Earth is a trap, Nedda. A big, comfortable trap where you walk around endlessly without being any use at all."

She trod the brake and barely missed bumping a couple who had stopped to embrace. "*I'm* some use, hon. Wait'll we get home." Her eyes held a promise she could barely restrain.

Automatically, he caressed her with a practiced hand—and grabbed the wheel when she suddenly strained against him, trembling, pressing eager lips against his neck.

Christ, how long had she been protected? He felt a mounting anger against the social ennui which drove men's minds to such inhuman activity. Departure was the only escape from this kind of thing, and from the city—from any city.

But the Departees had always been only a tiny minority. Did that mean they—and he—were wrong? He brooded about it for seemingly the googolth time, guiding the scooter without conscious thought, turning as Nedda directed.

A trap, he'd told her. Well, he could see no reason to change that. The blazingly glorious sensotheaters, cafes, gymnasiums, dancing salons, amusement rides and hypnodream houses, crowding every main thoroughfare with their fantastically ornate architecture, were —when you thought about it—designed to trap people's minds, keep them from thinking of anything but a gossamer, useless pursuit of personal pleasure. And wasn't the design faulty when everyone was bored, when some chose Departure and others sank to the unnatural practice of protection to whet their sated appetites?

Nor was there any apparent hope for the future. Theatre productions, dream tapes, even the elaborate home teleview shows were all historical. Why? Was Government admitting there was nothing but staleness in the present? Why the concern with backtime?

Because of Government entertainment diet, Allen could prob-

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ably, with a bit of practice, fish skillfully from an outrigger, make and use a longbow expertly, run a store profitably in the Money Ages, weave cloth correctly, build complete wooden houses—oh, any number of ancient things.

But he couldn't even talk the same language as the relative handful of trained men who built and operated the unbelievably intricate robomachinery which activated and maintained the complex cities of Earth.

NEDDA'S soft voice broke into his thoughts. "Al—Dan Halgersen's coming up behind us on a single. He's one of Jeff's—"

"Hold on." Allen swung the scooter hard right and adroitly darted across traffic toward an emblazoned theatre entrance. Here, now, was a situation he knew how to deal with. He said rapidly, out of the side of his mouth, "Jump off when I stop at the entry and kiss me like good-by. Register your plaque in the ID slot and head for the door—then look back. If I'm down, go on in and lose yourself. If he's down, come back."

He made a wrenching stop at the very edge of the crowd, swung Nedda through the opening between front and side rails and gave her a hard, sterile kiss.

She clung to him a moment. Without letting her eyes stray she said, "Slowing down right behind you. Luck, lover." Then she turned and started to pick her way across the walk.

Allen swung the scooter in a fast, tight circle to the left. Assuming his opponent to be right-handed, this would help avoid a knife slash from the rear if the other rammed his scooter—further assuming the man had *not* been tricked into thinking his presence was unnoticed.

He hadn't. When Allen whipped his head around to look at him, there was barely time to brake the heavier double to avoid a shrewdly planned collision. Halgersen, Nedda had said. He was thick-set, with heavy brows and large jaw. The type Allen had learned to associate with power and endurance but not too much speed.

Halgersen was holding a knife in his right hand. Allen quickly slipped his own blade from the sheath conveniently held at the front of his belt. They cut intricate patterns of feint, attack and withdraw, using passing vehicles as buffers. But not for long.

A voice from the crowd called, "Fight!" and space grew miraculously about the combatants, leaving a huge clearing in the street rimmed solidly with scooters and pedestrians. A few shouts of encouragement began to be heard as individuals selected one or the other of the men as a likely winner.

Allen dodged a sudden attempt at a side-swipe collision and the attendant vicious swipe of Halgersen's blade—and then drew first blood by a lightning riposte to the arm. Legal knife target was arm, leg, abdomen and a forehead cut without thrust—which would obscure vision with blood without doing organic damage.

The bright yellow luminescence of a police copter dropped and hovered as Allen tried to follow up his momentary advantage. The scene, he knew, would now be

simultaneously filmed for possible legal record and broadcast on all teleview news programs. Entertainment for adults, education for the teeners.

A feminine voice in the front ranks called, "Two stunts to one on green jacket!" and was immediately taken up by another girl near by.

He had little time to think with satisfaction that no female had ever been forced to pay off a bet of some ingeniously embarrassing public behavior on his account. Halgersen was now trying to maneuver him for a straight ram which would bring them definitely together. He wasn't being weakened by the slow drip of blood from his arm and he didn't seem to be bothered by pain.

And then they were close to the circle rim. Allen swung his scooter so the cooling downdraft from the copter—coming from above the center of the cleared area—was directly against his back, a method he had devised for knowing his position without having to take his eyes from a close opponent. He let his shoulders droop suddenly, as though he was tired, and at the murmur of disappointment from many onlookers he began to back slowly away from Halgersen.

The blue-jacketed figure rolled into the trap scowling. He tried again for a head-on ram. Allen let him come, and at the last possible instant, when Halgersen would be unable to reverse, stop, or even swerve, he flipped the bar to full power ahead. And braced himself accordingly.

The scooters met with a bone-jarring thud of perimeter rubber. Halgersen was hurled neatly over his own guard rail to land gaspingly across Allen's.

Allen grasped the back of the other's belt in a grip that had dismayed many a combatant, hauled him into position and hamstrung both legs with two dextrous thrust-and-cut movements. It took but a moment longer to leap above a desperate slash at his own legs, drag the heavier man to the thick floor of the scooter and render him unconscious with a stamping kick of one sandaled heel. It left an easy repair job for the medics, but would keep one Dan Halgersen from fighting again for more than a week—and maybe make him think twice about joining in another protection pact.

Allen leaped up and balanced on two guard rails while the police copter settled down to pick up Halgersen. He signaled Nedda to move on along the walkway.

While the onlookers were clapping approval of the show, he removed Halgersen's plaque, leaped down and dodged an attempted kiss from the girl who had given odds on him—glancing back warily in case her escort felt insulted—then pushed through the mob to join Nedda.

She hugged his arm ecstatically. "Darling, every woman should have a guy like you."

"Yeah." He felt no sense of triumph. It had happened too many times before. Everything had happened too many times before—repetitive, palling and purposeless. He tucked the won plaque into her decorative belt. It was Nedda's proof that protection was ended, and Halgersen would have to call for it accompanied by a witness.

"Where the hell is your place?" he asked. For a moment he wondered why he didn't just turn abruptly and leave her, social mores notwithstanding. Then Nedda's perfume began its chemical magic again, and he carefully straightened his jacket and set his forelock in its proper place.

"NEDDA," he accused lazily, "you're a nymph. Ever tried psychoconditioning?"

She gave him a tender, lingering kiss and burrowed more comfortably in his arms. "Not yet, darling. Would you prefer me less —responsive?"

Allen patted her as carefully as possible to show approval without arousing her again. "No man would. But it must be rough between dates, isn't it?" And just why should he be worrying about anyone else at this stage of the game? Maybe he wasn't. Maybe he was just curious now that it no longer mattered.

She avoided his eyes in the cool semigloom of the compartment. "I —usually manage to have enough dates. Until some moron like Neal-Hayne puts me under protection."

He disengaged himself gently, rolled off the pliant couch and increased the room's light with the wall knob. "You should register a complaint, Nedda. After three he'll be forcibly psyched, you know." He dialed the servoconsole and focused a morning meal menu on the viewscreen. "Ready for breakfast, pip?"

"Mmm—if you are." Nedda came over and lifted the phone from its panel recess. "That number six algal protein is supposed to be a new taste sensation. Like?"

He shrugged. "Let's try it. It'll be my last go at this robot feed."

When the meals had been deposited in the service chute she looked at him pleadingly. "Hon, why don't *you* try being psyched? They could make you satisfied with —things as they are."

Allen lifted a thin transparent food cover while he shook his head. "Maybe they could, Nedda. But it would have to be almost total erasure to change my slant on everything, and being forced to accept what I hate is worse than anything else I can think of. It wouldn't be me when they got through. Whatever causes me to think like I do is the *me,* and that'd be gone."

Some of the resentful animosity surged up in him and he had to talk about it. "Look at your compartment. The same as every other single in the city—or any city. The walls are the shade of green that's best for the eyes. Furniture and fixtures are always the same colors. Every compartment has a servoconsole to condition the air, control the temperature and humidity, bring you food or any other standard service, provide teleview shows, music or requests. You could live your life inside this square hole. Everybody has everything and nothing means anything —can't you see that?"

She came around the table and sat on his lap with her head against his neck. "No, presh, but if you'll change your mind about a DP you can date me any time, always. I'd like to share a double with you forever."

He traced soothing circles on her smooth back with his finger-

tips. "That's the closest I've ever come to *owning* anything," he mused.

"But hon, Government owns everything and takes care of everything. When you can always use a thing, how could it be better if you owned it?"

Allen held her against him tightly, fighting the old fight to find words. How could you explain how you *felt* things to be right or wrong, without really knowing the reasons?

"Maybe," he said slowly, "it's as though I wanted to keep you for myself alone. But Nedda, if another man made the right approach, could you refuse him?" After a minute he repeated, "Could you?"

Eventually, she made two answers.

They were warm and wet and dropped onto his chest.

THE ADJUSTMENT Building was a soaring, chastely white structure of silicoid plastic, dazzling in the hot morning sun. It crossed Allen's mind fleetingly that everything built nowadays would long outlast the builders. That seemed right, but he didn't know why.

He took his ID plaque from Nedda and kissed her. He had tried to dissuade her from coming with him, but she had merely smiled and held his arm and urged him toward a double scooter.

"This is it, beautiful," he said shortly, at the entrance. And, with an attempt at levity, "Don't take any more protection." Actually, what could you say? He went inside quickly, without looking back.

At the door marked *Kansas City Department of Social Adjustment* he slipped his plaque into the correct slot for a moment and was admitted directly to the waiting room for those who had appointments for the day.

There was only one other waiting—a handsome blond youth whose knife was new. Allen sat down in a lounge chair across the room.

And Nedda came in and sat down beside him.

He could have understood almost anything but that. "How in the name of fear—"

"Do you think," she said mischievously, taking his hand, "the B Sector champ is the only one who can get an appointment?"

Before it could more than flash through Allen's mind that he'd not told her that, the blond youth was standing before them, his eyes hotly on Nedda. Then, obviously confused that she was already holding hands, he addressed himself to Allen as though it was what he had intended doing.

"Marty Bowen, sir. Uh—I'm going to see if they'll let me have a double compartment with some gym apparatus in it." He shifted his weight to the other foot and hung a thumb nervously in his belt, unable to keep from darting glances at Nedda.

Allen noted, with rising anger and some other unpleasant emotion he couldn't define, that she hadn't dropped her eyes. He said curtly, "'Fine, kid—hope you make it." The youth mumbled something else and went back to his chair.

He had barely seated himself when a voder speaker crooned a

number melodiously. With a quick backward glance at Nedda, the blond lad went on into the counsel room.

Allen's mind remained in confusion, shot through with anger at himself that he should waste thoughts now on anything but the coming interview. The room was beginning to fill quietly with others.

His number was called a few minutes later.

And Nedda's was called along with it.

Well—the place to get the answer was the counsel chamber. He got up slowly, barely noticing that Nedda continued to hold his hand as they went in.

The brilliant room was two stories high, with fluted walls and no windows. Obviously the size was to impress interviewees. But why should they have to be impressed? Wasn't the wisdom of the five tech doctors sufficient by itself? Wasn't it?

He sat in a chair indicated by the dark-skinned one, and listened while the very old one in the center talked to Nedda.

Had dating the B Sector park champion solved her difficulty with the man she had reported? Fine. It was the second such report about him in a year—the other also coming from a girl who was highly sexed. Did Nedda not consider herself to have a problem which required psychoconditioning? No? Well, perhaps in later years, when her beauty and her mind were somewhat changed. . . . No, there would seem to be no justification for giving her a compartment in another sector, unless she had persuaded the champion or another to share a double with her. Would that be all? Much happiness to her.

Abruptly, Allen realized Nedda had left and that the frail old man was talking to him.

". . . unusual to have joint interviews without a more definite emotional tie, but we felt you would like to know how you had rendered civic aid."

So pitting him without choice against any of several men was their idea of civic aid. No wonder he'd met so many protected girls in the past. This time, they'd harnessed Nedda's restless passion to the task of dissuading him from a DP. Very neat.

It made him feel better to know they'd failed where he was concerned, and his resentment abated somewhat. He said, "Glad I could help," careful to keep his voice emotionless. Then, determined to have no further subtleties, "If I can have my departure permit, I won't trouble you further."

Maybe his approach wasn't right, but all they could do would be to refuse him. In which case there were other ways—and the hell with legality.

"We hope," smiled the old doctor benignly, "there may be another way. Perhaps, if we discuss your problem, we can find a solution which won't cost the city a handsome young citizen."

Allen made it a direct attack. "Why should the city miss any citizen? In fact, what good is the city itself—what good is any city?"

And almost, the techs seemed startled. But a younger one said easily, "A city, Mr. Kinderwood, permits a maximum of efficient service and pleasure, with a mini-

mum of waste and discomfort."

Allen leaned back and stubbornly folded his arms. "I've had enough of pleasures and comforts without meaning, and I've nothing to do, and it doesn't look like anyone's making any progress anywhere. Even on the planets they're just repeating backtime stuff with modern equipment."

The old man waved a hand at the others and looked at Allen intently. His voice was softly insistent. "The one continuous thread in human history has been the seeking of more pleasure and greater comfort for all members of the race. Our technology gives us a maximum of both. No one labors, and the few who work prefer to do so. No one is diseased, no one stays in pain longer than the time necessary to reach a medic. Everyone can have everything he needs, without striving and without debt. And as technology advances, there will be even greater benefits for all. What more can be done to make the citizens of Earth happy?"

For the first time, Allen felt confused. "I don't know," he said slowly. "The way you put it, it sounds right. But where does it all lead? What reason have I got for living? What reason does the human race have for surviving?"

The sociologist looked even older. "In all seriousness, sir, can you answer the questions you have just asked?" His eyes were expectant—but there didn't seem to be much hope reflected in their depths.

Allen noted a tenseness around the table. Why were they asking him for answers they were supposed to know? Or was it another of their subtleties?

"No," he said curtly, "I don't know the answer to any of them. Has it got a bearing on my getting a DP?"

The central figure sighed. "None at all." He pressed several tiny buttons on the polished table and an inscribed card rose halfway out of a slot. "We merely hope that some day a man will come along who can tell us—before someone who may not be a man comes along and makes the answers futile." He handed Allen the card. "Here is your permit. You may take it to the third office south on the corridor through that door. We don't feel it is the answer to your prblem, but we admit we don't—"

"Pardon me, sir," interrupted Allen. He wet his lips. "Did you say 'someone who may *not be a man*'?"

"Yes. It is an aspect you have not considered, Mr. Kinderwood." The sociologist's face seemed haggard. "Even a few generations ago, Earth as it is today would have seemed like a concept of heaven. We know now it is not enough, but we don't know why. Perhaps, if we can reach the stars the problem will cease to be critical. By the same token, life from the stars may come here first.

"We have no remotest idea what such an eventuality would entail. It may provide a solution. It may quite conceivably send man back to the forests and jungles.

"You have experienced our only answer to the latter possibility. While providing man with everything to which he has aspired for milleniums, we instill in him, through the media of entertainment, knowledge of all the survival practices known to the backtimers

who painfully nurtured civilization from an embryonic idea to its present pinnacle. We can do no more."

Allen flexed his arms involuntarily at the sheer enormity of the idea. It was one thing to let a useless race expire, quite another to think of its being forced back to—"But—can't anyone think of anything else to do?"

"Whoever is capable of devising anything else," the old doctor said resignedly, "will undoubtedly be able to carry it out with or without our assistance." He pressed more buttons and there was a muted sound of the voder calling a number. "The exit over there, Mr. Kinderwood. And—much happiness."

Allen's thoughts swirled in tumultuous confusion. Dimly, he realized that man had outstripped himself, and saw with intense bitterness that there was no answer on Earth for any ordinary citizen. Or was there? And if there was, was it worth trying to find? He flung open the door to the corridor violently, as though the force could quiet his mind. Maybe, if he didn't use the permit, he could stay and figure out an answer. Nedda would be sympathetic and patient while—And then he stopped. Across the wide hallway, Nedda stood beneath a window, looking at him. And the blond youth held her with flushed understanding, impatiently waiting, caressing her arm with his hand, binding her to him with the one bond she could not break.

She watched Allen start slowly down the corridor. Once, when he stumbled, she gave a stifled sob, and tears brimmed and spilled silently when he passed through the door marked *Kansas City Department of Euthanasia.* • • •

THE WORK-OUT PLANET

(Continued from page 89)

"This chicken is your wife?" he asked.

"Chicken?"

He handed me an ancient Earth magazine. On the cover was the picture of a very ugly woman. She had been called Marilyn Monroe.

"That's a chicken," he said, "like yours."

I shrugged. "No, she's not my wife."

"If I'm not too curious, what are you going to do with her?"

"It's what she's going to do with me," I said glumly. "Her father is rich and I have to go to work for him. As for her, she has a great enthusiasm for archaic items like baseball, fine restaurants, bars, parties and—uh—breeding. I will probably have to escort her on these functions."

His eyes lighted up. "Rich dame, good-looking and sexy, likes a good time and gets a kick out of breeding. Brother, some people have all the luck!"

I sighed. "No. I'd give anything to be back in New York, working again, doing my einsteins and putting in a useful eighteen hours a day."

My seatmate gave me a look of disgust and pulled his blankets up over his face. He never spoke to me again. I can see it's going to be hard to get used to colonial thinking. • • •

BY FOX B. HOLDEN

A GIFT FOR TERRA

The good Martian Samaritans rescued Johnny Love and offered him "the stars". Now, maybe, Johnny didn't look closely enough into the "gift horse's" mouth, but there were others who did . . . and found therein the answer to life . . .

HIS HEAD hurt like blazes, but he was alive, and to be alive meant fighting like hell to stay that way.

That was the first thing returning consciousness told him. The next was that his helmet should have been cracked wide open when the bum landing had wrenched the acceleration hammocks out of their suspension sockets and heaved his suited body across the buckled conning deck. It should've been, but it wasn't.

The third thing he knew was that Ferris' helmet had been smashed into a million pieces, and that Ferris was dead.

Sand sifted in a cold, red river through the gaping rent in the side of the ship, trying to bury him before he could stand up and get his balance on the crazily tilted deck. He shook loose with more strength than he needed, gave the rest of the muscles in his blocky body a try, and there wasn't any hurt worse than a bruise. Funny. Ferris was dead.

He had a feeling somewhere at the edge of his brain that there was going to be more to it than just checking his oxygen and food-concentrate supply and walking away from the ship. A man didn't complete the first Earth-Mars flight ever made, smash his ship to hell, and then just walk away from it. His astrogeologer-navigator was dead, and the planet was dead, so a man just didn't walk away.

There was plenty of room for him to scramble through the yawning rip in the buckled hullplates—just a matter of crawling up the river of red sand and out; it was

as easy as that.

Then Johnny Love was on his feet again, and the sand clutched at his heavy boots as though to keep him from leaving Ferris and the ship, but it didn't, and he was walking away . . .

Even one hundred and forty million miles from the Sun, the unfiltered daylight was harsh and the reflection of it from the crimson sand hurt his eyes. The vault of the blue-black sky was too high; the desert plain was too flat and too silent, and save for the thin Martian wind that whorled delicately-fluted traceries in the low dunes that were the only interruption in the flatness, there was no motion, and the planet was too still.

Johnny Love stopped his walking. Even in the lesser gravity, it

Illustrated by Paul Orban

seemed too great an effort to place one booted foot before the other. He looked back, and the plume of still-rising smoke from the broken thing that had been his ship was like a solid black pillar that had been hastily built by some evil djinn.

How far had he walked; how long?

He turned his back on the glinting spec and made his legs move again, and there was the hollow sound of laughter in his helmet. Here he was, Johnny Love, the first Martian! and the last! Using the last of the strength in his bruised body to go forward, when there was no forward and no backward, no direction at all; breathing when there was no purpose in breathing.

Why not shut off the valves now?

He was too tired for hysteria. Men had died alone before. *Alone, but never without hope! And here there was no hope, for there was no life, and no man had ever lived where there was not life!*

But he had come to see, and he was seeing, and in the remaining hours left to him he would see what no man had seen in a half a million years.

Harrison and Janes or Lamson and Fowler would not be down for twenty days at the inside; that had been the time-table. Twenty days, twenty years . . . he heard himself laugh again. Time-table!

He and Ferris first. Then Harrison and Janes. Then Lamson and Fowler, all at twenty-day intervals. If all landed safely, they would use Exploration Plan I, Condition Optimum. If only two crews made it down, Plan II; Condition Limited. And if only one made the 273-day journey from the orbit of Terra—that would be Plan III; Condition Untenable, Return. The twenty-day interval idea had come from some Earth-bound swivel-chair genius who had probably never even set foot in a Satellite operations room. Somebody had impressed on him when he was young that egg-carrying was a safer mission with a multiplicity of baskets; it was common sense that if anything happened to Mars-I touching down, at least it wouldn't happen to II and III at the same time.

Common sense, Johnny thought, and he laughed again. Space was not common, and it was not sensible. And nobody had ever taught it the rules men made.

He kept walking, seeing, thinking and breathing.

For a long time. He fell once or twice and picked himself up again to walk some more, and then he fell a final time, and did not get up. Red sand whispered over him, danced lightly, drifted . . .

THE FLAT, wide-tracked vehicle swerved in a tight arc, throwing up low ruby-colored clouds on either side. Its engines throbbed a new note of power, and it scuttled in a straight line across the desert floor like a fleck of shiny metal drawn by an unseen magnet. Behind it rose a thinning monument of green-black smoke, and between its tracks was a wavering line of indentations in the sand already half-obliterated by the weight of their own shallow walls. But they became deeper as the vehicle raced ahead; and then at length they

ended, and the vehicle halted.

There was a mound of sand that the winds, in their caprice, would not have made alone, for they sculptured in a freer symmetry. And the child-like figures seemed to realize that at once.

With quick precision they levelled the mound and found Johnny Love. They took him into their vehicle, and deftly matched and replenished the waning gas mixture in the cylindrical tanks on his back.

Then they drove away with him.

"Ferris?"

"Ferris was your astrogeologer-navigator. He died when you crashed."

"Harrison . . . *Janes?*"

"Harrison and Janes are not due for nine more days. But you are in no danger."

There was darkness and warmth; his throat was dry and it burned. It was hard to talk, and Ferris was dead. Harrison and Janes were not due for nine more days. Somebody said so. Nine more days and then everything would be—

Panic shook him, sent blood throbbing to his head and brought consciousness back hard. His eyes opened and he was suddenly sitting bolt upright.

"But Lamson, you were twenty days behind—" And the racing thought froze solid in his fumbling brain. Then there was a torrent of thoughts and memory overran them, buried them, and red desert was rushing up to engulf him. He screamed and fell back with his hands clawing at his eyes.

"You are in no danger. You had thought our planet lifeless; it was an error. We live underground, John Love. That is why you did not see us, or surface indications of our existence. A group of us speak your language, because for eleven days we have been studying your brain and analyzing your thought-patterns."

Johnny was bolt upright again, and now his eyes were wide and his hands were knotted, and where there had been only light and shadow before there was full sight now. Swiftly he was off the low cot and on his feet looking for the speaker, arms ready to lash out and hit.

But he was alone in the small, sterile-looking chamber, and his muscles were so much excess baggage. He tried to recover his balance; he had forgotten about the slight gravity. He tried too hard, and his body crashed, confused, into a wall. A—damn them, a *padded* wall!

He regained his feet. Stood still, and raced his eyes about him. There it was—above the cot. A small round, shuttered opening—some sort of two-way communication system. He wondered if they could see him, too. If they could, that part of it worked only one way.

"All right, whoever you are, so you've analyzed me!" He had to direct his sudden anger at something, so he shouted at the shuttered aperture. "Now what . . ."

There was silence for a tiny eternity, and he could feel them probing, evaluating him, as a human scientist would study a rare species in a cage. The feeling ignited a new anger in him, and made him want to curse the teachings that had conditioned his lifetime of thinking to the belief that Man *was* more than an animal.

He'd been sold short . . .

"Damn you! God damn you, what are you going to do to me?"

In a corner of his mind he was aware of a gentle hissing sound, but he did not listen. The fear and terror had to be broken. Make them tell, *make* them tell . . .

His muscles grew heavy and his face was feverish with his effort, and his eyes stung. Something . . . like roses. But there were no roses on dead planets—

"Earthman, can you still hear?"

"I can hear," Johnny said. It was suddenly easier to talk. Even easier to understand. They had done something . . .

"We are surprised that your state of shock was not more severe. In the process of analyzing you, we discovered that you were totally unprepared for Space-flight, and therefore—"

"Unprepared? What do you think all those months of physical conditioning were for? Yeah, and all those damned textbooks? You think that barrel I cracked up was built in a Kindergarten class—"

"Space-flight requires but a relative minimum of those things, Earthman. Required most is psychological and philosophical conditioning."

"To what?"

"To all things unreal. Because they are the most real; infinity applies to probability and possibility far more directly than to simple Space and Time. But—are you calm now?" The voice was growing deeper, and seemed almost friendly. Johnny tried his muscles; they weren't paralyzed—he could move easily, and his head was clear. And there was no anger, now. No "shock."

"Go ahead," he said.

"Our examination of you has indicated that your race is a potentially effective one, with a superior survival factor. We feel that, properly instructed and assisted, such a race might be of great value as a friend and ally. In short, we receive you in peace and friendship, Earthman. Will you accept us in like manner?"

Johnny tried to think. Hard thoughts, the way men were supposed to think. What kind of game was it? What were the strings? The angles . . . the gimmicks. What did they really want?

His lips were dry and barely moved over his teeth, but the words came easily. "Who says you're a friend?"

"We would have learned as much about you by examining your corpse, Earthman."

So he was alive, and that had to prove something. And it might have been a lot of trouble to keep him that way. The hell of it was you couldn't *know* . . . *Anything* . . . you couldn't know anything when you were tossed into the middle of the impossible. He felt the skin on the back of his neck chill and tighten.

But who held out their hand like this?

Whoever did anything like that?

No.

"We wish to help you, Earthman, and your race. We have observed your kind at close quarters, yet we have never landed among you nor attempted communication because of fear for ourselves. But with proper help, there need be no fear between us. We offer you

friendship and progress."

"You keep talking about what *we* get out of it." Johnny stared upward at the ceiling, got his eyes off the little shuttered aperture. He wished he had a cigarette. "You sound too damned much like a politician."

"Perhaps at this point you should be informed that your ship is completely repaired, and ready for your return to Earth whenever you desire."

"So, it's— You said Harrison and Janis would be here in nine days! That means I've been out for nearly two weeks! For a nap that's a long time, but nobody could get that bucket back in one piece in eleven days! Not after what I did to it—"

"Your ship is completely repaired, Earthman."

Johnny knew somehow that the voice wasn't lying. So maybe when you got off of Earth miracles did happpen. He just didn't *know* enough.

"We wish to give you data to take back to your Earth which will banish disease for you—*all* disease. Data which will give you spacecraft that match our own in technical perfection. Data that will make you the undisputed masters of your environment. We offer you the stars, Earthman."

He shut a thousand racing thoughts out of his head. "Maybe I'll believe this fairy tale of yours on one condition," Johnny said, "because I can't intelligently do otherwise."

"And that—condition?"

"Tell me *why*."

There was a pause, and it was as though something forever unknowable to men hung in the silence.

"Picture, if you can, Earthman," the answer came at last, "several small islands in the center of a great sea; all without life, save two. The men on one have learned to build boats which can successfully sail the sea within certain limits—they can visit the other islands, but are too frail and too limited in power to venture past the horizon. It is infinitely frustrating to them. The only places to which they may go are dead places. Save for one—only one, and it becomes magnified in importance—it becomes an entire *raison d'etre* in itself. For without it, the men with the boats sail uselessly . . .

"We are old, Earthman. We have watched you—waited for you for a long time. And now you have grown up. You have burst your tiny bubble of human experience. You have set out upon the sea yourselves . . ."

"You guys should give graduation talks. I didn't ask for a scaled-down philosophy. You tell me that you want to give us every trick in your hat—for free, no questions asked. So I asked why. And the question isn't changing any."

"The answer should be self-evident, Earthman. We are old. And we are lonely."

THERE was a logic at work somewhere in his brain even during the dream. It told him that he was exhausted from the day's tour with the child-like men of Mars, and that the dream was only the vagaries of a reeling, tired mind of a badly jarred subcon-

scious. It told him that the things he had seen had been too alien for his relatively inflexible adult Earth mind to accept without painful reaction, and this was the reaction.

This, the dream. That was all it was; his logic said so.

Earth spread out before the undisciplined eye of his dreaming brain, and the near-conscious instant of logic faded. The fertile plains that once had been yellow desert-land mounted golden fruits to a temperate sun, and beyond the distant green of gently-rolling hills spread the resplendent city, and there were other cities as gracefully civilized beyond the untroubled horizon.

And in the dream, these were all things men had done, as though sanity had invaded their minds overnight. It was the Earth that men had intended, rather than that which they had built.

The sun dimmed. The air chilled, and the grains and fruits wilted, and the rolling hills were a darker hue than green as the shadow lengthened, spread to the gleaming cities beyond and then as it touched them and ran soundlessly the length and breadth of their wide malls, there were other changes . . .

Skeletons, reaching upward to a puffy, leaden sky.

The horizon split into jagged, broken moats of dark flame, and Earth was no longer what men had built, but what they eternally feared they must one day create . . .

Then Johnny Love was suddenly awake bolt upright in his cot and his eyes were open wide. His muscles were taut and cramped. And he was afraid although the men of Mars had offered friendship and told him that there was nothing for him to fear.

Slowly, he lay down again. And gradually, the cold perspiration that had encased him vanished; his body relaxed, and the fear subsided.

The day's tour had been exhausting both mentally and physically, and there was the excitement of knowing that in five more days Harrison and Janes would land. If they did not, his own ship would carry him safely back to Earth on the day following, for the little men had miraculously repaired it; they had shown him. They had shown him, and he wanted to go home.

Johnny Love rolled over on the wide, soft cot, sighed, and went back to sleep.

"He sleeps again, Andruul."

"Yes, but the damage is probably done."

"No, or he would not sleep again so easily. His kind do not have such emotional control."

The two turned away from the fading transparency of the sleeping-room wall, and their short, thin bodies were in incongruous contrast to the spaciousness of the metal-sheathed corridor down which they walked.

"Psychoanalysis showed up the difference in his brain structure—that apparently accounts for the poor efficiency our screens are showing. What does Kaarn say?"

"He says we should never have allowed the theft."

Andruul cursed. "Allowed it! Those nomadic scum are like flies! No matter how many you exterminate, they never fail to come back

in double their number. And they strike at the precise moment you are certain the bones of the last one are sinking beneath the sand. Somehow Central Patrol has got to get that unit back."

You're certain it was *a theft, then?"*

"Don't be an idiot. Since when can those gypsies build anything more complex than a crude electrical generator? Let alone a psibeam unit? They've forgotten what little their civilization ever knew."

"They are clever enough at evading directed over-surface missiles."

Andruul muttered something, and lapsed into silence.

"Well there is one thing for certain at any rate . . . A psibeam unit is unaccounted for, and despite our protective screening, the Earthman was visibly disturbed in his sleep. His encephalotapes show that clearly. They know about him, Andruul, and they're making their bid. Central Patrol had better be quick and certain this time."

Andruul kept his silence. But he thought. He thought Central Patrol was getting less efficient and more stupid every day.

It was a strange feeling; a feeling with which no human was emotionally equipped to deal.

Johnny looked at his flawlessly renovated ship, poised like a snub-nosed bullet against the blue-black brittleness of the Martian sky, and then looked behind him at the crescent-shaped formation of tracked vehicles that had escorted him back across the sucking red sand to this place. With each heavy-booted step away from them he closed the short distance between them and his ship, and there was not enough time to think about the feeling. Or about the heavy sealed tube they had given him to take back to his people.

Usually, when a man ventured beyond the bounds of familiar existence, there was conflict. Either a struggle to win, or, immediately recognizable success, with no struggle or hint of conflict at all.

But not this. Not this success that seemed—what was the *word?* Hostile? That was ridiculous. These people were friendly. *But somehow —there was an empty ring—*

Hell! They had saved his life. Rebuilt his ship. Given him the tube that contained transcriptions, in his own language, of every scientific secret his people could ever hope to learn for themselves in the next thousand years! And, they had even buried Ferris . . .

Use the brains of a mature man, Johnny Love! You've pulled it off without even trying! The most stupendous thing any man in any age has ever pulled off . . . without even trying! For God's sake don't question—don't question things you don't understand! Take the credit and let the soul-searching go!

He looked behind him again. They were still there. A special, smiling farewell escort, watching a single, solitary figure cross a short expanse of sand to a towering, glistening thing of power.

He raised a booted foot to the bottom fin-step, hauled himself up by the stern mounting rungs, hammered the outer lock stud with his gloved fist and the hatch swung open. Like a trap.

He could feel the skin at the back of his neck tighten but he

forced himself to ignore it. The lock cycled up to thirteen psi and the inner port swung automatically inward, and then he was inside, clambering up the narrow ladder past the titanium alloy fuel tanks and the spidery catwalks between them to the tiny control room in the forehull.

He would not be waiting for Harrison and Janes. He would get the hell out of here and then radio them and let them make all the decisions from there. Earth for him. Home. He ached for it.

He strapped himself in the hammock, punched the warming studs for each engine, and there was a dull, muffled throb below him as each jumped into subdued life. The banks of dials that curved in front of him glowed softly, and he started an almost automatic blast-off check. It took twelve precious minutes.

Then he was ready. Scanners on, heat up . . . ready.

The Martian sky was like frozen ink above him and his hands were wet inside his gloves and there was a choking dryness in his throat. *Now . . .*

And he could not move. There was a sudden, awful nausea and his head spun, and before his eyes there spread a bleeding Earth; the sun dimmed, and fertile plains were cast in sudden shadow . . . The air chilled, the shadow spread, and there were skeletons reaching upward to a puffy, leaden sky!

And Earth was no longer what Men had built!

Then the horror in his head was gone, and he felt an awful pressure on each side of it. His hands . . . he had been pressing with insane strength at both sides of his skull as if to crush it with his bare hands . . . His face was wet, and he was breathing, choking, in strangling gulps.

A scanner alarm clanged.

He forced his eyes to focus on the center screen.

"Earthman! Emergency! There has been a flaw discovered in the repair of your ship! Do not blast off! Do not . . ."

The other image caught him as his arm was in mid-flight toward the control bank. Sweet and warm . . . the fertile plains mounting their golden fruits to a mellowed sun, and beyond the distant gently-rolling hills spread the resplendent city, and there were other cities . . .

But his arm kept going, its muscles loose, and it fell. Heavily. Squarely on the stud-complex toward which its fist had been aimed a split-second before.

The engines roared, and the ship lurched upward from the red sand.

The command flicked into the Captain's brain like a lash of ice.

"Slaazar! Converge sheaf!"

"Converging, sir . . ." It would be no use, of course. If the high brass had been content to rely on the beams rather than on their own subtlety in the first place, the Earthman would never have fallen prey to the Nomads, even for a second. But they had wanted to be as forthright as possible—force, they said, would only arouse suspicion. Psibeam units only as a last resort . . . The lowliest Patrol Lancer could have told them the folly of that!

Hastily, Slaazar issued orders to his battery crews tracking the ascending Spaceship, their units al-

ready nearing overload potential. But the desert-scum would see some real psi-power now! They'd see it wasted completely if they saw it at all . . . Because they'd outmaneuvered the brass again!

"Convergence impossible, sir."

As he had expected.

"Colonel Truul, this is Captain Slaazar. Target has passed critical planetary curvature. Convergence impossible. Standing by, sir."

For several moments after that, the thin atmosphere of Mars was warmed a little . . .

ACCELERATION blackout had not been total; leaving Mars was even easier than leaving the surface of Earth for the orbits of the Stations. But there was a period of no-thought, no-time, no-being. And then full consciousness seeped back slowly. But not as it was supposed to.

Johnny Love knew he had come to because he could see the banked instruments glowing palely before him; because he could realize from reading them that his ship was doing its job to perfection. Almost ready to complete the blastoff ogee, and—

Angrily he belted the scanner switches off and the dull red sphere faded from the viewplates.

And he could feel the sweat start again all over his body. No, the returning consciousness was all wrong . . . All wrong, and the image wouldn't go away . . .

Red desert he had seen before, yet had not seen. There were dark ridges of brown-green at its horizon; oddly-formed crater-places that might once have held placid lakes. And on all the vast surface there was no hint of the Patrol tracks, no sign of—anything.

But he had to descend to the place.

He did not know how to locate it, but the image told him that it did not matter. The image said merely that he must begin cutting his power.

There was no strength in his arms and hands, yet they moved in front of him as though things detached from his body; skillfully, surely, playing deftly across the colored studs.

Scanners on. Scanners on, kid . . .

He watched the screens again, unconscious of what his fingers did on the panels. The dull red sphere loomed large once more. The picture was off-center; without knowing what he did he rectified course with the bow jets; it was centered again. But it was a different place. Still the desert, but with ridges of brown-green at its horizon; oddly-formed crater-places . . .

It was coming up fast, now; faster, until the horizon was only a gentle arc against a thin span of blackness, and the rest was cold red.

Hardly knowing what he did, his fingers suddenly raced over the control console, even before the scanner-alarms began their ear-splitting clanging!

The ship lurched into a direction-change that threatened to wrench the hull apart, and the picture in the scanner reeled crazily. He knew his own brain was not dictating the commands of control to his fingertips, nor was it evaluating for itself the madly fluctuating values indicated on the panels. A human brain could not have done

it, he knew that . . .

He had cut power. At least there was no power. He was falling at a crazy angle and the desert was rushing up now, hurtling up to smash him. They'd hit him, then, yet he'd felt nothing . . .

It was getting hot. His hull must be glowing, now, even in the thin atmosphere of Mars—it was a long fall. Slower than a fall on Earth, through thinner air layers, yet he was glowing like a torch.

The ocean of sand rushed up.

And suddenly his left hand rammed the full-power stud.

It was as though he'd been hit from behind with all the brute force of some gigantic fist, and there were two things. There was the split-second glimpse of a crescent formation suddenly wheeling toward him and there was the clang of the scanner-alarm. There were those two things his brain registered before the titanic force of full power squeezed consciousness from it and left him helpless.

He was running. In a nightmare of a dead planet that was not dead, he ran, away from something.

That was how his consciousness returned. While he ran. He stopped, stumbling, turned to look behind him.

And the ship was there. Landed perfectly, stubby bullet-nose pointing to the sky. And above it—

Run!

The command hit his brain with almost physical force. A will that was not his own took hold of his whole being, and he was running again, plowing his way through the sucking sand with strength summoned from a well of energy within his body that had never been there before.

Through the thin glassite walls of his helmet he could hear the *thuk, thuk, thuk* of his boots as they pounded somewhere below him, and there was another pounding, a deadly rhythmic bursting pressure in his chest. And a whine in his ears . . .

The wind-strewn sand stretched flat and infinitely before him. Then leaped at him headlong and there was no horizon; there was only the sudden awful wrench of concussion, a tremor of pure sound which would, in denser atmosphere, have destroyed him with the inertia of his own body.

He could not move. Only cling to the shifting desert floor that rocked sickeningly beneath his outstretched body . . . cling to it for dear life.

There was no thought, no understanding. Only a sensation which he could not comprehend, and the sure knowledge that none of this was real. Not real, but the end of survival nonetheless.

PAIN, and seeing two bright objects transiting the darkness at which he looked; seeing something then between.

His brain began identifying. The darkness; sky. The bright objects; Diemos, Phobos . . . And the something between—

It was a transparency of some sort; curved, or he would not have been able to detect it at all. A vaulted ceiling through which he could see . . .

His full consciousness came flooding back, then. He tried the

muscles in his neck, they hurt, but they worked, and he could move his head from side to side. There was the same transparency, as though he were covered by some huge, invisible bowl.

And there were men. Big, muscular creatures, yet thin, tall . . . Not like the others at all . . .

He sat bolt upright, and they did not move. It was not the same as before. No small room. No voice that he could not see. They had not even removed his suit or his helmet, and he was lying on a hard, cold substance.

Then he saw what they were doing. There were two of them apart from the others, working to bring a compact-looking machine into position near him. A gleaming, short cylinder, swung on gymbals between slender forks, mounted on a thin wheeled standard. They were aiming it at him.

"No! *No*—" He tried to get to his knees, but it was as though there were no muscles in his body.

"Man of—Earth! We are friendly. Is that understood?"

The thought-words formed in his brain as the strange images had before, and then he knew. *Should have guessed it,* part of his mind was telling him in a fantastically detached way, *the dreams . . . the compulsions over which he had had no control in the ship . . . This—thing. It probably—*

"You are quite astute, Earthman. But it is not our technology which created this device. To save you and the civilization which you represent—and ultimately, our own—it was necessary for us to steal it. It cost six lives."

"Steal. . ."

"From your former captors. It is

their invention, as are so many things with which they destroy. With this instrument, they have succeeded in taking one of Nature's more subtle phenomenon—psychokinesis—and amplifying its energies nearly a million-fold. Those stepped-up energies can then be projected in a tight or fanned beam at will.

"They can make a man 'dream,' as you did—or they can destroy him outright, depending on which of the 'psi' factors, ESP or PK, is given dominance during projection. But we are not skilled in its operation—they detected our use of it on you while you slept, and from that moment on you were so well screened that even at the risk of burning this unit out, we were not able to project powerfully enough to do more than merely touch your brain—"

THERE WAS a strange calm in his mind, now. He undestood the words and accepted them as matter-of-factly as they were given. Even now they were manipulating him like some intangible puppet, yet he was convinced it was not a malevolent manipulation. Convinced. The conviction—manipulation, too. . .

"Only partly, Earthman. We said we are friendly, and we are. We have calmed you and erased your fear. From this point on, we will use this instrument only for communication.

And then he felt the fear in him again, gnawing, and his body was again damp and cold. But he had control, now. Control enough to speak.

They stood before him, immobile, watching.

Somewhere, Johnny Love found his voice.

"Look, I've been through this 'friendly' act before . . ." He hesitated, and they did not try to interrupt him. "Well don't just stand there!" The fear was suddenly turning to the bitter anger of frustration, they had him whipped, and he was tired. "Tell me why! You stick that thing into my head when I'm blasting for home. You force me to drop back. You blow up my ship. Real friendly! Real sports!" For a moment he had run out of words, and again they made no effort to answer him. "All right! I don't understand you—I don't know what you want. But nobody is trying to hurt you, nobody's after your little desert paradise. We had an idea, that's all. We thought we could make it work. People have been talking 'go to Mars' on my planet for longer than most of 'em can remember. So we finally gave it a whirl! Sorry!"

He looked at them hard, then, and thought that there was something almost like a smile on the face of one. Smile, then, damn you. . .

"We want nothing, Earthman, but to prevent from happening on your planet the thing that happened on this. If they succeed in destroying you as they have us, then this System will always be under their heel, and we shall never be rid of them. Understand, their numbers were too few ever to conquer a planet with a civilization as large and as highly organized as that of Earth, by physical means.

"Knowing that, we—they call us gypsies, nomads, desert-scum today—we were not too alarmed when they landed here two centuries ago. We were glad to take from them, without paying a price. We were awed by their gifts. Their papers and their books, which would show us how to rebuild our waning civilization—advance us a thousand years in less than fifty; restore to us our lost arts . . . And compared to you, we were so very few.

"In return, they said that all they wanted was permission to set up a research site. They told us they were a scientific expedition from far out-System. Aldeberan, they said. Part of a vast exploratory program which they had been conducting for centuries.

"We believed them—why not? One day, we thought, we too will be in Space. And with that day would begin one of the greatest projects of exploration that our race had ever known. So we agreed, and gladly."

"Hold it, hold it! 'They'—who the hell are 'they'? You can spare the suspense . . ."

And then there was no more words. The pictures formed in his mind as before, only stronger, now, and there were no details left out.

The weapons of war had been built, not by the out-System men, but by their hosts. The plans had not proven too difficult to follow . . .

The new knowledge was not hoarded, was not held under jealous guard by those who had given it, but by those to whom it had been given. One man from another; one group of men from another.

States and nations from each other.

Until there was no trust left on all the planet.

There were the wars, then.

And when they were over, the new masters had established their first beachhead in the new System.

"But, it was only a beachhead, and had been only intended as such—" The pictures broke off; the unspoken words resumed. "Your planet was the ultimate target, but at first, your civilization was not adequately advanced to fall prey to their technique. Their weapon is knowledge, but the potentialities of that knowledge must be understood by a people before it can be effectively used to destroy them.

"The rest must be self-evident. After we destroyed ourselves, they sank their infectious, hollow roots into our planet. And from then, investigated your Earth from time to time . . . and waited . . .

"Waited, because they knew you would be coming. And they knew what kind of men you would be. Strong men, with the light of the stars in your eyes. Yet confused, weak men, with the darkness of suspicion and jealousy still in your souls. Such are humans, after all. . .

"That is why we stopped you, Johnny Love. Once your blast-off ogee had carried you beyond the curvature of their horizon and brought you over us, our psibeam was effective and theirs were not. We are sorry about your ship. Once they realize that you were under our influence, and were returning rather than taking their precious data to your people, they zeroed-in with those damnable guided juggernauts—"

"It wasn't you, then. You mean they—"

"There is little that they cannot do. Destruction is their forte. They could not keep us from preventing your taking their 'gift' to your people, but they could keep that 'gift' from falling into our hands—and they did. They do not always win. But they never lose."

"But I—" Johnny's thoughts raced. The ship, gone. And Harrison and Janes, Lamson, and Fowler. They would be landing in a few days. They—

"Yes," the thoughts of the true Martians before him answered. "And they will be given a 'gift' for Terra as you were. If your friends return successfully to your planet with that 'gift'—then—"

The thought was not completed. But it did not have to be.

A beachhead was one thing. These scattered, struggling people who had once been masters of Mars might one day unseat it, for they were not yet beaten people, and their will to survive was yet strong. But beyond that—

Earth taken, the System taken.

There it was.

There was a sudden coldness inside him now that the fact had crystallized, had become real. Here was no fantasy; no wild surmise.

They left him in silence while he thought, their psibeam turned away, now.

Harrison and Janes. Lamson, and Fowler. Had to stop them. Stop them, and then somehow, get home. He ached for home.

He thought about Ferris, who had given his life for this thing.

No, Ferris would not be going home. Ferris was dead.

He signalled for the psibeam to

be turned toward him again.

"You'd have to know their positions out there to make contact, wouldn't you?" They did not answer. He worked to get the words formed, and there was a fleeting thought of a green, lush planet far away, its wide streets and rolling fields bathed in warm sunlight. "I can figure 'em," he said. "I know blast-off schedules, speeds. I know the works! *Those* things they had in the books. Then you guys can do the rest with—that thing. Right?"

They answered him, then.

"Thank you," they said. And that was all.

"Answer me!" the General barked again. "You, Janes! Lamson! Fowler—Harrison! For the last time, what happened out there?"

The four stood silently before the nervous figure of their commander, and it was Fowler who finally spoke.

"Plan III, sir, as we've already said. Condition Untenable—Return . . ."

"That is all you can say?"

"That is—all, sir."

The General turned away. There was frustration and anger in his face, and it hid the fear beneath it like a mask. Plan III. It would be Plan III for a long time yet.

It was the thing he saw in the faces of the four men that told him that. There had been too many giant steps, too fast. He had seen this thing in the faces of men before, but never so nakedly.

One day, perhaps, men could think of Plan I again. One day, but not now.

He turned back to the four, and looked once more into their faces.

Plan III. Condition Untenable.

"Dismissed!" the General said.

• • •

WASTE NOT, WANT *(Continued from page 77)*

call to treat me like a criminal. Nor to talk to me as if I were senile. My outlook won't change, and you know it!"

"Oh, yes, it will! And since you're neither criminal nor senile, that's what has to be done.

"We'll do it in the most humane way possible. A little brain surgery, and you'll sit in your cage and consume and consume and consume without a care in the world. Yes, sir, we'll change your outlook!

"Now, you mustn't try to twist away from me like that, Mr. Lubway. I can't let you go. We need every consumer we can get." • • •

ANSWERS to Quiz on page 57: 1—Bolide. 2—Protoplasm. 3—Baily's Beads. 4—7½. 5—Neptune. 6—Tellurian. 7—Alpha Centauri. 8—Thuban. 9—Eighty-eight. 10—Titan. 11—Ceres. 12—Jupiter. 13—Approaching. 14—25,000 m.p.h. 15—All constellations. 16—Radius vector. 17—Encke's comet. 18—Binaries. 19—Mimas. 20—Heaviside Layer.

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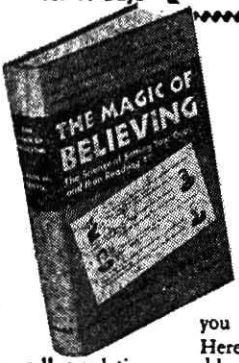

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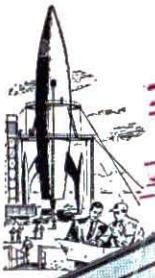

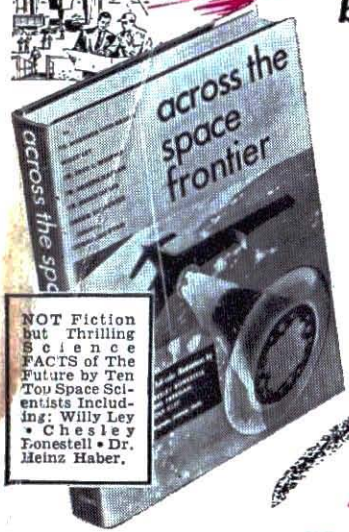

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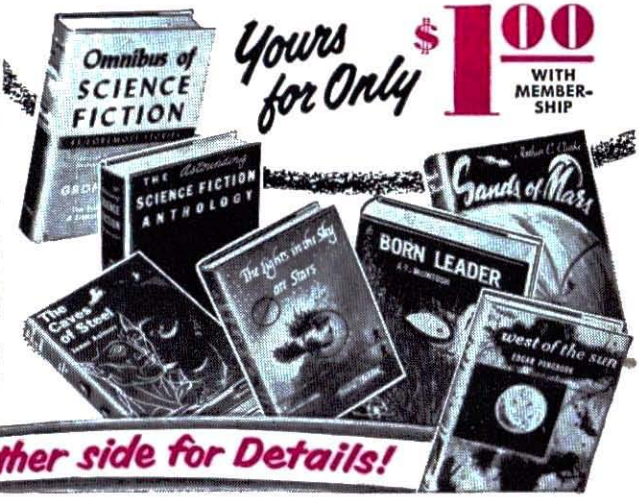

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