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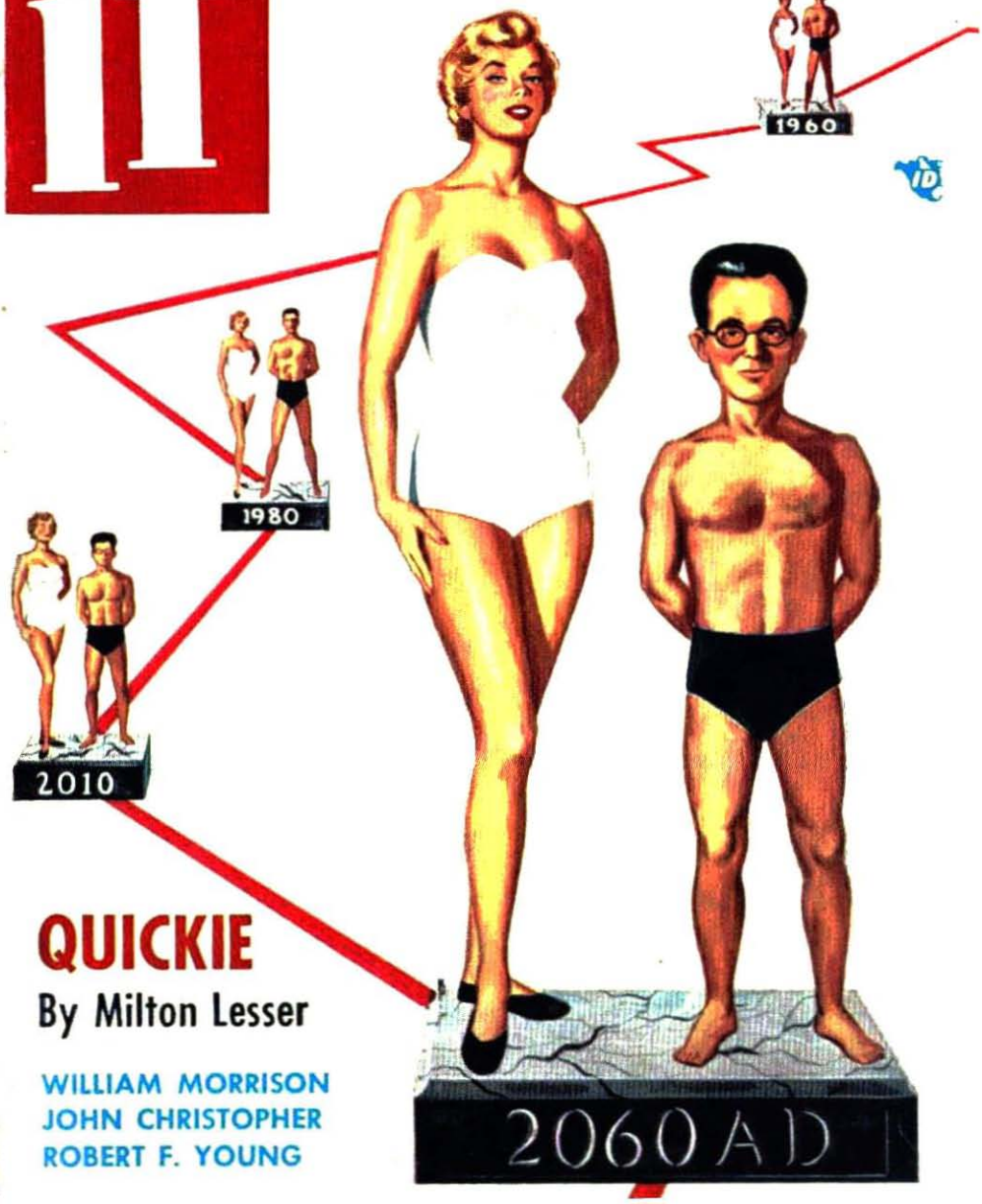

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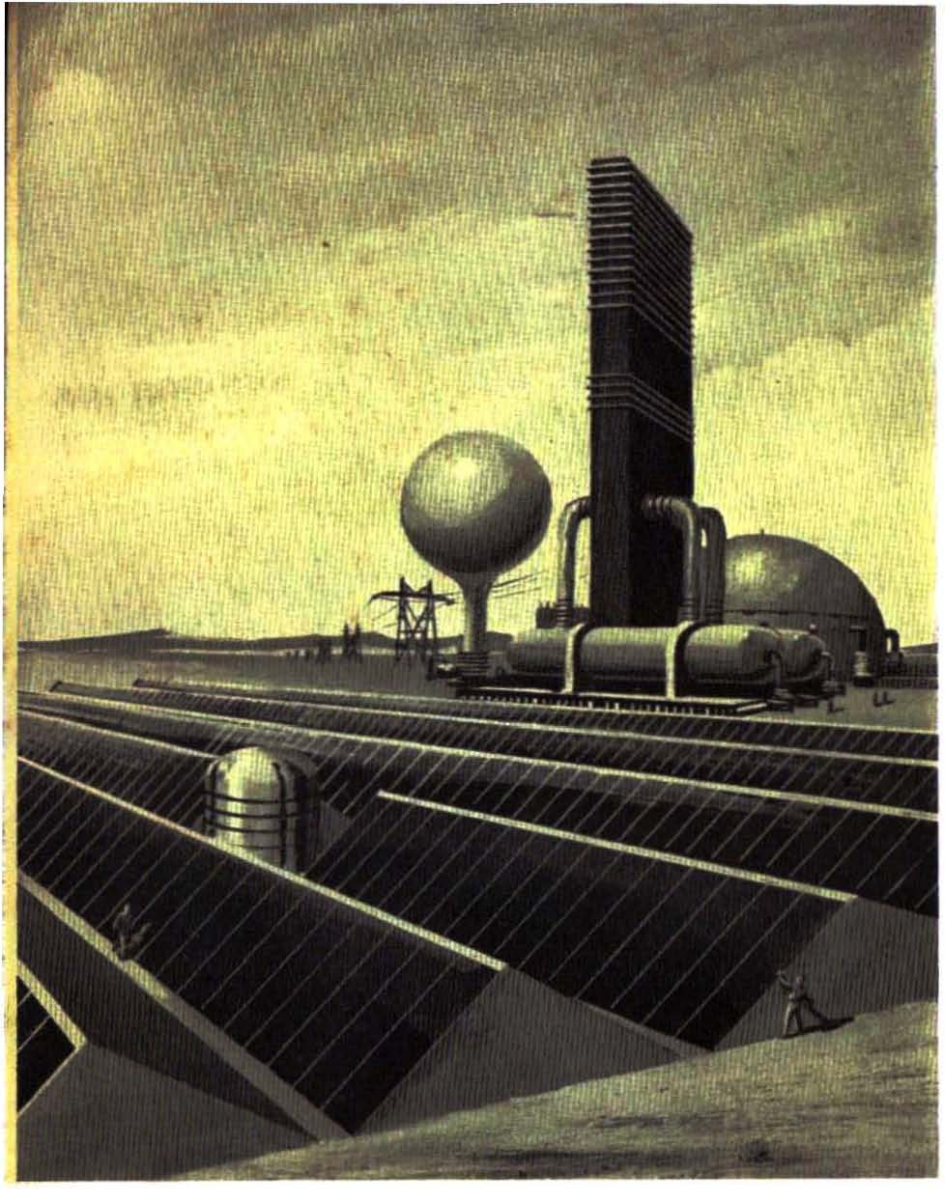

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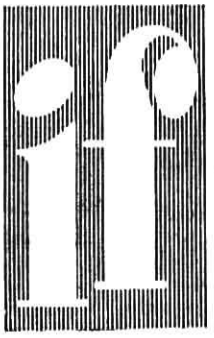

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OCTOBER 1954

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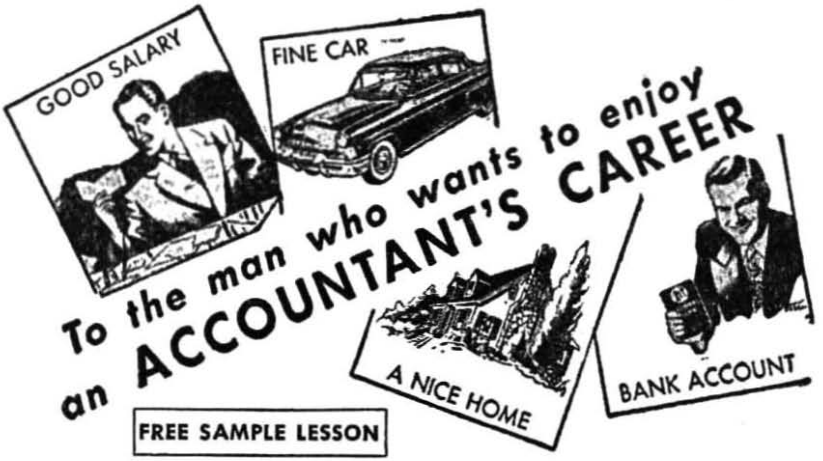

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A CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

THE WORD "successful" is something of a "gimmick", and the definition in the dictionary is rather ambiguous, too. "Resulting or terminating favorably or as desired; also, achieving success, wealth, position or the like. *Syn.* Prosperous, fortunate, thriving, flourishing." It's a popular definition, of course, but if you look at the word long and thoughtfully, you begin to see loopholes in the dictionary definition —and after awhile (maybe years) you wind up with a definition all your own.

What does "successful" mean? And to that question you might add: "Successful in what?" From that point you can go into a multitude of definitions and near-answers and generalities. Like the person voted by his or her class to be most successful. Like the twenty or thirty or some-number of men or women voted by some people to be the most successful in the country or the state or something.

But you can't measure success that way. You can't use a given yardstick; it is a nebulous quality and it must be broken down many times to get its shades of value. Like successful in *what?* Then: "*Who* is successful in what?" And still: "Who *considers* himself successful in what?" That which the public considers successful is entirely different from what the individual might consider success for himself.

Let's go back to the old phrase, "there goes a successful man". How does anyone but that person know he's successful? Oh, you say, he's president of the bank. Or, he made a million dollars last year. Or, he's got fourteen children and feeds them three square meals a day. Or, he's the world's champion boxer or swimmer or golfer. Sure, that's got it square on the head—*if* being president, or having a million bucks, or having fourteen children or being champion—if *that* is what he or she wants and it makes him happiest, then that person is successful. But it's pretty safe to venture that—nine times out of ten—this isn't always the case, at least as far as the indivdual is concerned.

A man's life is made up of many facets and intangibles and if he's happy or successful in one of them he's lucky or fortunate.

Some years ago I met a blind man who raised strawberries on a little patch of ground less than an acre in size. They were wonderful strawberries and he was happy

raising them. Some people considered him unfortunate. He considered himself successful. Another time I met a retired railroad engineer whose worldly goods were certainly not pretentious. But after hearing him tell of his experiences during the early days of railroading and brag about bringing in his train on time through some of the difficulties he faced and seeing his face light up with each story—you couldn't doubt that his life had been a success. What was even more important, *he* thought it was. Conversely, you can talk to people in the limelight, famous people who have been successful by the general yardstick, and they'll sometimes open up and say "hell no! what I wanted was something else." Sometimes people who haven't got it, have it more than you think. And sometimes those who seems to have it, haven't got it after all.

It is the inner success of the individual upon which hinges the ultimate success of mankind. Now, *what* is the ultimate success of mankind?

I would say that mankind has been successful, so far, in many ways. Simply propagating and living in such close quarters on this globe may be one. Gaining new knowledge of the universe and its components may be another. Beating some diseases and lengthening the life of individuals may be still another. In these things we cannot doubt that mankind has been successful. But are these individual successes enough? There are other goals to strive for—and *there* is the fly in the ointment. Shadings and meanings that were part of each man's personality have gone into making up the individual successes, and they color world leadership too. In leadership, personal success is not enough, yet the shadings enter into—let's say—statesmanship. Whether war is avoided or plowed right into is a part of a personal or patriotic desire to achieve success. And the immediate success becomes the goal. But the ultimate success of mankind is a larger goal than that. What is that goal? And, having attained the goal, will mankind be "successful"?

Let's say the goal is the welfare of *all* the peoples of the world . . . and start all over again with statesmanship.

Or—with human nature?

FOR SOME TIME now we have been reading some of the most interesting manuscripts that have ever come into this office. Not by professional standards, of course—but because they represent the ideas and imaginations of students in colleges all over the United States and Canada. These manuscripts are their answers to the theme question in IF's first nationwide College Science Fiction Contest: "What Will Life In America Be Like 100 Years From Now?" When the winners have been selected, seven young men and women will receive $2,000 in cash prizes, with $1,000 going to the author of the manuscript judged the best. The awards will be announced in next month's issue (November), with the winning stories appearing in subsequent issues. Don't miss them; they contain some refreshingly new approaches to science fiction. —jlq

ESCAPE VELOCITY

It was a duel to the death and Kraag had all the advantages, including offense and defense. Jonner had neither, but he employed an old equation peculiarly adaptable to the situation. And the proper equation properly worked . . .

BY CHARLES L. FONTENAY

MURDERING Stein was easy. Kraag waited until Jonner donned his spacesuit and went out to have a personal look at the asteroid. Even then Kraag held his patience, because he wanted Jonner to come back to the ship unsuspecting.

Kraag sat tensely at the back of the control room while Stein, the navigator and communications man, operated the radio. There was a brief period when Stein talked with Marsport, then he got in touch with Jonner. Until Jonner got some distance from the wrecked ship, most of their conversation was an argument.

"I still think two of us ought to go out and one stay at the ship," argued Stein. "Kraag agrees with me. What if you fall into a crevice?"

"There's not much danger, and you've got a directional fix on me," replied Jonner's voice through the loudspeaker. "If we had a large crew, I'd agree we ought to explore in pairs. Since there are just three of us, only one ought to be endangered at a time. I'm the captain, so I'm it."

"Well, don't get out of sight," warned Stein. "We don't have an atmosphere here to bounce radio waves over the horizon."

Through the glassite port, Kraag could see Jonner poking around at

Illustrated by Paul Orban

the asteroid's surface with his steel probe. Against the incredibly curved horizon, Jonner's suited figure leaned at a slight angle under the black, star-studded sky. The distant sun gleamed from the sphere of his helmet.

"Pretty smooth terrain," remarked Jonner. "It's not much of a planet, but it seems to have enough mass to pull down any mountains. Looks like there should be some hills, though. It must have been in a molten state when the original trans-Martian planet was broken up."

"That ought to mean high albedo," said Stein. "Higher than it ought to be."

"Sounds more like Vesta," said Jonner. "Sure we're on Ceres?"

Stein looked at the notes he had made from the ship's instruments, before the crash.

"The escape velocity was 1,552.41 feet per second," he said, "and the diameter 0.06. I figure the mass at .000108."

"All those figures are off according to the latest table for Ceres," said Jonner.

"The fellows that made that table were on Mars," reminded Stein. "Vesta doesn't have a 480-mile diameter. It must be Ceres."

"You're the navigator," surrendered Jonner. "I'll take your word for it."

The personnel sphere of the ship rested on the ground, tilted at almost a 20-degree angle from the horizontal. The tilt was no inconvenience, however. Each of the men weighed only five or six pounds here, and slippage was hardly noticeable.

"I'll turn you over to Kraag," said Stein at last, glancing up at the chronometer. "It's my day to fix supper, you know."

It was the signal Kraag had been waiting for. He reached behind him and fumbled in the rack for a gun.

The one he brought out was Jonner's, and it wasn't a heat-gun but the ancient pistol Jonner swore by. Kraag put it back hurriedly, but not before Stein had turned in his chair and seen it.

"What's up, Kraag?" asked Stein without alarm. "Why the gun?"

Kraag pulled a heat-gun from the rack.

"Nothing's up," he said, and shot Stein.

The ray burned into Stein's shoulder, and Kraag swung it down across Stein's chest to his stomach before relaxing his pressure on the trigger.

"My God, Kraag!" gurgled Stein. Summoning a last effort, he croaked into the microphone: "Jonner! Watch out! Kraag shot. . . ."

Kraag blasted him in the face, cutting him off. Stein's body floated forward and upward out of the chair and began to settle slowly toward the slanting floor.

"What's going on, Stein?" came Jonner's alarmed voice over the loudspeaker. "Stein? Stein!"

"It's all right, Jonner," said Kraag as calmly as he could, when he could reach the microphone. "Stein just fainted."

There was silence from Jonner.

"I'll take care of Stein and then take over the mike till you get ready to come in," said Kraag into the microphone.

"I want to talk to Stein when he

comes around," said Jonner. His voice sounded cold.

So Jonner suspected something. Well, that couldn't be helped. Maybe he could be talked around.

"All right, Jonner," agreed Kraag soothingly.

Stein's body had to be hidden from Jonner, just in case Jonner got into the personnel sphere alive —something Kraag did not intend for him to do. When he had taken care of Jonner, he could dispose of both bodies before the rescue ship got there.

Dragging Stein's body was like towing someone through water. It floated through the air of the sphere at Kraag's tug, settling slowly. His only problem was getting good leverage for pushing. After some cogitation, he jammed the body into an empty food compartment two decks below the control room.

Back in the control room, Kraag looked out the port. Jonner was closer to the personnel sphere now, looking toward it but not moving.

Other portions of the ship, some jettisoned, some crumpled and broken apart by its crash, lay at varying distances from the personnel sphere. Some of the parts were scattered out of sight beyond the horizon, a mile away.

Kraag had not wanted to fool with the asteroid. There had been no question that they had to swing back off their original orbit toward Titan when the meteorite slashed open both of their hydrazine tanks. But Kraag's idea had been to stay in space and try to turn back toward Mars before the fuel gave out.

As the engineer, Kraag resented Jonner overruling him. Jonner had felt it safer to take an orbit around the asteroid and wait for rescue. But the fuel pumps had failed before they could adjust to the orbit. Kraag would never forget that helpless waiting as they circled and circled, spiraling downward to the inevitable crash.

He went back to the microphone.

"Okay, Jonner," he said. "What's going on out there now?"

"Where's Stein?" countered Jonner. "I want to talk to him."

"He's not feeling so good. Said he'd rather not try to get back up to the control room right now."

"Tell him to come to the mike anyhow. I don't want to talk to you till I talk to Stein."

"Stein can't talk, I tell you. If you don't want to talk to me, then are you ready to come in?"

"And get shot?" retorted Jonner.

So Jonner's suspicions were that definite. It was to be expected after the words Stein had been able to shout into the microphone. Jonner was nobody's dumbbell.

Kraag tired once more.

"That's a ridiculous idea, Jonner," he said. "I can't figure why you'd say such a thing."

"You shot Stein," said Jonner positively. "There's no use your denying it. I know you shot Stein, and I'll know it until Stein himself tells me it isn't so."

Kraag knew Jonner too well to try to keep up the pretense any longer. He tried another tack.

"Okay, so I shot Stein," he admitted. "That doesn't mean I'll shoot you. Come on in and talk it over. We can make a deal."

"If you shot Stein, why wouldn't you shoot me?" asked Jonner logically.

"There wasn't enough air for

three. There is, for two."

Jonner was silent for a moment.

"So that's why you did it," he said then. "Figured it pretty close, didn't you, Kraag?"

"I'm the guy who has to watch supplies on this boat. I checked the oxygen after the crash broke open those three compartments on the supply deck. There's 3800 pounds of oxygen left. It'll take about 22 months for the rescue ship to get here from Mars. At 2.8 pounds of oxygen a day, you and I can make it, but it would have lasted the three of us only 15 months."

Jonner cursed him for a full minute, not loudly but with such intensity that Kraag felt his face getting warm.

"You damn murderer!" finished Jonner. "You damn cold-blooded murderer!"

"Cut it out, Jonner," growled Kraag. "I can't understand you and Stein. What were you expecting to save us? A miracle?"

"I don't feel like talking about it now," said Jonner warily. "If you had only . . . Hell, Kraag, we'd been together a long time. Even if all of us had thought we were going to die, I didn't think we'd kill each other off like animals."

"Self-preservation is the first law of nature," said Kraag cynically. "Better that two should die than three. Come on in, Jonner."

"That's self-preservation? No thanks, Kraag. You know I'll turn you in as a murderer when the rescue ship gets here. I have no hankering to walk up where you can burn me down."

"Okay, stay out there till your air gives out."

The airlock was not a comfortable place to spend one of the asteroid's seven-hour nights, but Kraag was afraid not to stand guard there with his heat-gun. He was afraid to sleep, too, for the airlock combination was virtually noiseless and Jonner could open it from the outside. Jonner was unarmed, but Kraag had no hankering for a hand-to-hand fight with the powerfully built captain inside the personnel sphere. Because the air would swish out of the lock instantly if Jonner opened it, Kraag had to wear a spacesuit.

He tried to talk to Jonner several times, but got no answer. Toward dawn, Kraag dozed off, only to be brought awake with a start by Jonner's voice in his earphones.

"Good morning, Kraag," said Jonner. There was iron in his voice. "Have a good night's sleep?"

"About as good as yours, I'd say," retorted Kraag, wishing he could get his hands inside his helmet to rub his eyes.

"I slept fine. Found me a good foxhole just beyond the horizon."

"Damn you, Jonner! Where are you now?"

"Go on and have breakfast, Kraag. I'm far enough away for you to see me. Take a look."

Kraag peered out of the uppermost airlock ports, one by one. They slanted at a bad angle, but through one of them he made out Jonner, standing half a mile away. Uncannily, as though he could see Kraag's helmet at the port, Jonner waved.

Kraag was afraid to take off the spacesuit now because the supply deck had no ports and Jonner could get to the ship in a hurry if he wanted to. He took off the hel-

met, though, and went up to the center deck. Hurriedly, he opened the cover of the port in the direction he had seen Jonner. Jonner was still in the same place, sitting down.

Kraag heated breakfast and ate it with an eye on the port. Jonner didn't move. Kraag felt better when he had eaten, and went up to the control room.

"Why don't you give it up and come on in, Jonner?" he asked. "The oxygen in that suit's not good for more than another 15 hours."

"That's where you're wrong, Kraag, and that's what's so tragic about your murdering Stein," said Jonner quietly. "You either forgot that we carried oxygen instead of nitric acid as the fuel oxidizer this trip or, being an engineer, you didn't think of it except as fuel.

"There's enough oxygen in the tanks scattered over the landscape to keep a dozen men alive until the rescue ship gets here. It's hard for me to get at, but I've already found I can manage it."

Kraag was profoundly shocked. For a moment the enormity of what he had done in killing Stein almost overwhelmed him. It had been completely unnecessary.

Then his self-reproach turned into a growing anger against Jonner. Jonner was always so reticent, always required his orders to be obeyed without explanation. During the whole argument about taking an orbit around the asteroid, during the whole time it had taken to spiral down to a crash, he had not told Kraag how he expected them to stay alive until they were rescued.

Kraag hadn't asked him, of course. Kraag had assumed Jonner was thinking in terms of his own figures.

"I'm sorry about Stein," said Kraag, and meant it. "But it can't be helped now, Jonner. There's enough air for both of us, if you'll keep your mouth shut when the rescue ship gets here."

"If I promised, I still wouldn't trust you and you wouldn't trust me. No, Kraag. The only way it'll work is for you to come out unarmed and let me go in and get the guns. Then I'll lock you in the control room till the rescue ship gets here."

"One of us is a fool, Jonner, and you seem to think it's me. I'm not going to burn for murder. I've got the whip hand. You may have oxygen, but you've got to have food and water, too."

Jonner laughed, without humor. "I've got enough of that for three Earth days and I can last longer," he said. "Before that time, I'll come and get you, Kraag. Don't go to sleep!"

Kraag cursed and switched off the loudspeaker. But he kept an eye on Jonner through the glassite. Always, he had to watch Jonner—or stay on guard in the airlock.

If there were only some way to lock Jonner out! But the only real lock was on the control room, and a man couldn't live in the control room with an enemy below who could cut the water and oxygen lines.

Kraag would have to sleep some time. Jonner couldn't know when, but Jonner already was seven hours sleep up on him. Jonner could pick his own time to slip up to the sphere under cover of darkness, he

could pick his own time to come through the lock. Maybe Kraag would be awake and could burn him down—but maybe not.

There was only one thing to do. He'd have to take the attack to Jonner.

STILL watching Jonner through every port he passed, always watching Jonner, Kraag hung a heat-gun on one of the hooks at his spacesuit's belt. He went back below, put the helmet on, and went out through the airlock.

The shadow of the sphere stretched away toward his left. He was in sunlight.

Jonner, still in the same spot, got to his feet but made no move to approach.

"Welcome to the great outdoors," said Jonner.

"I'm going to get you, Jonner," said Kraag grimly. "One way or another, I'm going to get you."

He moved toward Jonner. Each step was a long, floating leap and it was hard to stay balanced before landing. Jonner moved, not away from him but sidewise.

Kraag stopped. The effective range of the heat-gun was no more than 100 feet. If he tried to get close enough to Jonner to use it, Jonner could circle and get to the personnel sphere.

There were the oxygen tanks, the big ones used for fuel. If Kraag could get to them and burn them open, Jonner couldn't last long outside. But they were scattered pretty far from the personnel sphere. Jonner would get to the sphere for sure if he tried that.

"Okay, Jonner, I know when I'm licked," said Kraag. "Come on in."

"I'm not too far away to see the gun, Kraag."

"I'll take it back to the sphere and leave it."

"Why not just toss it away?"

"And have you beat me to it and get the drop on me? We'll leave the guns in the sphere and I'll meet you on even terms."

"I'll believe it when I see it."

Kraag went back to the sphere. He couldn't stand in shadow without looking suspicious, but he took the heat-gun from his belt ostentatiously and swung it in an arc, apparently tossing it through the open outer lock. Instead, he held onto it and hung it by the trigger guard to a belt hook at the back of his suit.

"I'm all clean, Jonner. Come on up," he invited.

"Let's see the hooks, Kraag," said Jonner.

Kraag held his arms aloft, wriggling the empty steel fingers of the spacesuit. Jonner came toward him, floating high above the surface with each step. At just about the extreme range of the heat-gun, he stopped. Kraag kept his arms outspread, but tensed himself.

"Clean, so far," said Jonner drily. "Now turn around, Kraag."

"And have you jump me from behind? Not hardly."

"Gun on the back hook, eh, Kraag?"

"Damn you, Jonner!" Kraag reached behind him for the gun and at the same time leaped toward Jonner. Jonner, ready, jumped back, and Jonner was a

more powerful man. Handling a heat-gun with the hand-hooks of a spacesuit is awkward business, and by the time Kraag could bring the weapon to bear on Jonner and press the trigger, Jonner's distance was such that the ray obviously did no worse than make things uncomfortably warm for him.

"I didn't think that surrender rang true," commented Jonner. "If you'd been level, you'd have tossed away the heat-gun."

Then Jonner revealed that he was not entirely weaponless. As he hit the surface, his arm moved in an arc and a good-sized rock came hurtling through space toward Kraag.

Kraag writhed frantically, two feet off the ground, and the stone missed him by inches. Kraag landed on his side and bounced again. Jonner hit once more and hurled another rock. Evidently he was armed with several of them. This one ricocheted off the ground near Kraag just as Kraag finally slid to rest.

Getting to his feet and turning to flee was agonizingly slow, when every frantic movement lifted him off the ground. Another stone came sailing by, to strike the personnel sphere and rebound at an angle, before Kraag could jump back, away from Jonner.

Perspiring and panting, he clambered hastily back into the safety of the airlock.

Jonner's rocks were a better weapon than a heat-gun, Kraag realized. They weighed only a fraction of an ounce and Jonner could fling them an amazing distance. But their mass was just the same as ever, and a jagged one could rip a fatal hole in a spacesuit. He had no intention of engaging in a stone-throwing duel with Jonner, in which Jonner would be at least on equal terms with him.

On the other hand, it was even more imperative than before that he eliminate Jonner as soon as possible. A rock could be a deadly weapon if Jonner got inside the sphere, too.

At any rate, there was no point in concealing Stein's body from Jonner any longer and Kraag couldn't take chances on it polluting the atmosphere of the sphere. He dragged the corpse from the food compartment, down to the airlock, and pushed it out onto the surface of Ceres. The body settled stiffly to the ground a few feet away.

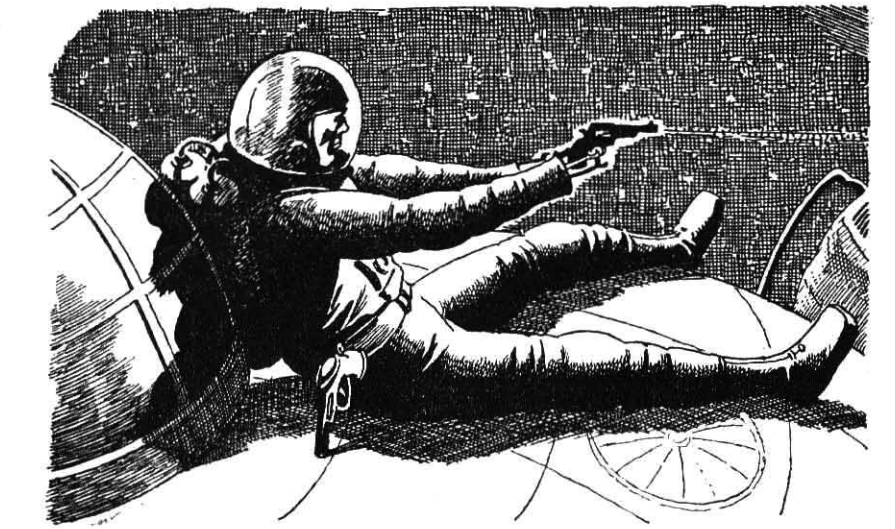
Kraag removed his helmet and hand-hooks, went back up to the control room and settled himself to watch Jonner. Jonner walked around freely, periodically hurling rocks at the sphere. The rocks bounced off without damage, but every time one of them hit the hull, the sound of it rang through the sphere.

Kraag switched on the communications system.

"Do you have to do that?" he demanded in irritation. "It's not doing you any good."

"Keeping me in practice," replied Jonner cheerfully. "I developed a pretty good arm throwing grenades in the Charax Uprising."

Jonner was a veteran of that brief but savage war on Mars, and sometimes reminisced about it. It was there he had developed his preference for the old-style projectile pistol over the heat-gun.



KRAAG'S eyes lingered on Jonner's pistol, hanging in the rack with the heat-guns, and slowly an idea spread through his mind. The heat-gun range was the same anywhere, but the range of a projectile weapon should be greater here than on Mars or Earth. Its range should be far greater than Jonner's rocks.

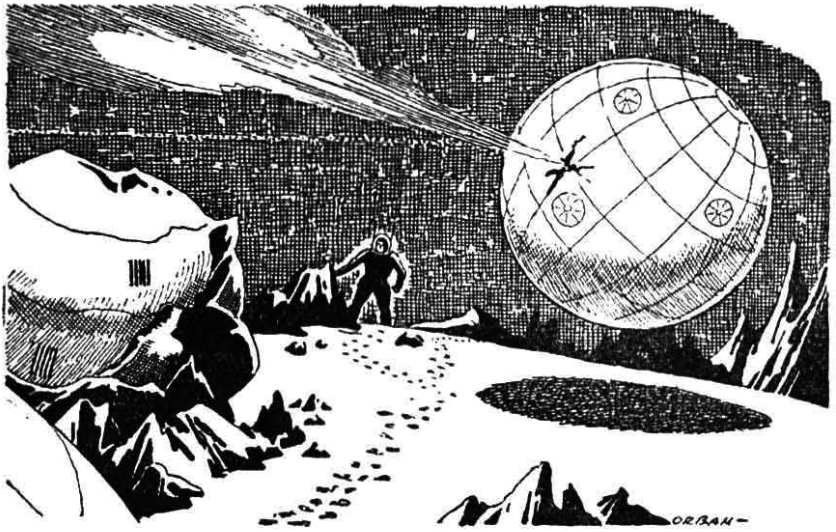
Kraag took it from the rack and turned it over in his hand, studying it. He wasn't sure of its principle, but thought it was something on the order of rocket fuel. It should fire without an atmosphere around it.

There were some figures stamped on the barrel: "COLT 1985, Cal-.45, MV-1100, Ser-45617298." Kraag puzzled over them. He knew the first one was the make and year and the last undoubtedly was the serial number. He deduced that "MV-1100" probably was a figure showing the relationship between the projectile's mass and velocity. But it had been a long time since projectile weapons were common.

He called on the memory of a demonstration of the weapon Jonner had given his companions once on Mars. There was something that had to be done to prepare it for firing. Holding it in his right hand, Kraag grasped the barrel with his left. After a moment of hesitant tugging, he hit the right movement and the whole outer casing of the barrel slid backward and clicked. It snapped back into position as Kraag released it, and he remembered.

The gun was primed now. All he had to do was press the trigger and it would fire. It would automatically prime itself again after firing. It would fire each time he pressed the trigger now, until it exhausted its projectiles.

Exultant, he laid it carefully in a contour chair, where it wouldn't



slide out. He put his helmet back on and replaced the hand-hooks of his spacesuit.

He looked out several ports before he found Jonner. The captain was not more than 150 feet away, casually lobbing rocks at the sphere.

Kraag picked up Jonner's pistol and made his way down to the airlock. He emerged and walked around the sphere to the side where he had located Jonner.

Jonner was moving away now, though he couldn't have known Kraag was coming out. He was about 300 feet away—too far for a heat-gun, but certainly within range of the projectile weapon. He seemed to be headed toward one of the big fuel tanks.

Kraag levelled the pistol toward Jonner and pulled the trigger. To his astonishment, he was hurtled backward, heels over head.

The kick of a .45 on an asteroid is pretty powerful. Kraag must have bounced 50 feet backward over the terrain before he slid to rest on his stomach. But he held on to the pistol—and, since he never had a chance to release the pressure of his hand-hook on the trigger, it did not fire again.

When he struggled upright, Jonner was standing at the edge of the fuel tank, watching him.

"Using my gun now, eh, Kraag?" Jonner said. "You'd better stick to weapons you know something about."

With that, he disappeared behind the fuel tank.

Kraag got to his feet and advanced confidently. His heat-gun was still hanging at his belt if he got close enough to Jonner to use it, and he could fire the projectile weapon at Jonner when Jonner was out of heat-gun range.

He was learning. One had to point the projectile gun accurately before firing. It couldn't be swung

around and focussed while pressing the trigger, like a heat-gun. He might miss a few times, but he ought to be able to hit Jonner at least once before the ammunition was exhausted. Once should be enough.

Heat-gun ready in his left hand, projectile gun in his right, Kraag circled the fuel tank. Keeping it between them, Jonner had headed straight for the horizon, running in long, shallow leaps. He was at least half a mile away.

Kraag pointed the projectile pistol and pulled the trigger. Nothing happened. Then he realized that he had never released the pressure of his hand-hook on the trigger after firing the first time. He let up on it and pressed it down.

And again Kraag was hurled backward, but this time he was smashed against the fuel tank and rebounded forward, falling on his face. By the time he reached his feet again, Jonner had vanished over the horizon.

Cursing softly, Kraag made his way back to the personnel sphere. He had hoped to get Jonner with that shot. He was very sleepy, and now he was faced with another night on guard.

He entered the airlock, pushed himself gently upward to catch the rungs of the metal ladder and turned the wheel of the airlock's inner door.

Nothing happened. The door did not open.

Fear gripped him like a paralyzing hand. For a moment he thought Jonner had managed to get to the sphere ahead of him and somehow had locked him out. But that was impossible. Then he thought the inner door might be jammed, and he and Jonner locked out together.

He glanced frantically below him, then broke into relieved laughter. He had left the outer airlock door open. As a safety measure against the sphere's accidentally losing its air, neither door would open unless the other was shut.

And that meant he could lock Jonner out of the sphere simply by leaving the inner door of the airlock open!

His laugh was full and genuine now as he pulled the outer door closed.

"Having fun, Kraag?" asked Jonner in his earphones.

"Just looking forward to a good night's sleep, for a change," retorted Kraag triumphantly. "Prowl around all you want to, Jonner. I can wait you out, now."

"The airlock, eh? I wondered when your guilty conscience would settle down and let you remember about that airlock," said Jonner phlegmatically. "You know, Kraag, I had no idea you wouldn't think about a simple thing like that, till I looked through the airlock port last night and saw you huddled up there with a heat-gun. You should have turned out the light."

Jonner was silent for a few minutes. Then he added:

"I don't think I'd laugh yet, though, Kraag. Remember, you're fighting with my weapons."

Kraag wasn't sure what he meant by that: whether he was talking about Kraag's using the projectile pistol or the fact that they were in space, Jonner's natural element. Kraag himself had been in space 10 years, most of it with Jonner, but before then he had never left

Earth. Jonner had been born and raised on Mars, where a man needed a suit to go to the next settlement, and he had been on a ship since he was 15.

As for using the pistol, Kraag could see danger for no one but Jonner. He had proved, twice, that he could fire it. He was quite sure the old-fashioned weapon was no more likely to explode than a heat-gun. The only trouble he foresaw was figuring how to reload it if he used up all its projectiles before hitting Jonner.

Kraag shrugged and removed his suit. He was hungry, and he was looking forward to a supper better than Jonner had available in the concentrated supplies in his space-suit. Jonner's food and water by now had dwindled to less than 60 hours' supply, unless he was weakening himself by going on slim rations.

AS HE wolfed down his supper, Kraag took stock of his situation. He could see no flaw in his position. All he had to do was sit back and wait.

He decided not to destroy the tanks that were Jonner's supply of extra oxygen. After all, Jonner could not last beyond his food and water supply. The presence of the oxygen made his case airtight. He could dispose of the bodies of Stein and Jonner and tell the crew of the rescue ship they had wandered off on an exploration tour and never returned. With plenty of oxygen for the three of them, no motive could be established against him for the murders.

He began to feel rather sorry for Jonner. They had been companions, and Stein with them, for a long time.

After eating, he went up to the control room and turned Jonner in on the communications system. He was genuinely regretful that Jonner had to die so soon. It would be lonesome on the asteroid with no one to talk to.

"I hope you've been keeping the radio open to Marsport, in case there were any inquiries," said Jonner. "If they get the idea we're all dead out here, they may call off the rescue."

"The last time they called was right after you left the ship," said Kraag. "Stein was going to tell you, but I suppose he forgot it. Marsport knows where we are. A rescue ship should have blasted off by now."

"That's the advantage of being on Ceres instead of in space," Jonner pointed out. "They know Ceres' orbit, but they'd have to have several directional fixes on us, spaced several days apart, to pinpoint us if the ship were in space. What did Stein say the escape velocity here is?"

Surprised at the unexpected question, Kraag consulted the notes Stein had left lying in the control room.

"EV 1,552.41 feet per second," he replied. "Not figuring on jumping off the planet, are you, Jonner?"

"Maybe," said Jonner.

"Well, don't wake me up if you do. I'm really going to pound the pillow tonight."

Jonner laughed shortly, and Kraag heard the click as the captain switched off his helmet radio. He grinned.

Kraag was asleep almost as soon as he hit the bunk.

He came awake slowly, reluctantly, knowing he had not had all the sleep he needed. Something was pounding noisily somewhere, ringing through his head.

He shook his head to clear it. For just an instant there was silence in the utter darkness. Then:

CRASH!

Like a clap of thunder the noise reverberated through the metal hull of the sphere.

Kraag started violently, and only the bunk straps kept him from rocketing to the ceiling. Again:

CRASH!

And Kraag could feel the sphere shiver with the blow.

He switched on the lights just as another terrific crash sounded. This time he could see everything on the central deck quiver with the impact.

One of the four small ports around the central deck was uncovered, and the light threw a beam out into the black night of the asteroid. It brought a temporary cessation of the regular blows. During the interval, Kraag unstrapped himself and tumbled up to the control room, to switch on the communications system.

"Jonner!" he shouted. "Jonner, what in hell?"

"I'm not deaf," said the loudspeaker resentfully. "Give me a chance to turn down my volume, if you're going to holler."

"What the devil are you doing out there, Jonner?"

"What I promised you. I'm coming in after you."

Kraag swore.

"I'm going to blow you off the damned planet," he threatened, and leaped for the gun rack.

"You'll have to come outside to do it," reminded Jonner. "If you try to shoot through the ports, you'll save me a lot of work."

Kraag raced up and down the sphere twice before he had sense enough to turn out all the lights and use the searchlight. Then he located Jonner, clinging to the sphere outside the astrodome on the navigation deck. Jonner had a sledge hammer from the ship's cargo section in his hand.

Jonner grinned at him and moved quickly out of the searchlight's beam. Ten seconds later, another thunderous crash sounded, apparently from the other side of the sphere. Kraag swung the light in a circle, but Jonner could move faster than the beam.

Hastily, Kraag made another tour of the sphere, this time closing all the metal covers over the ports. When he reached the control room, Jonner's voice was calling him over the loudspeaker, repeating his name every few seconds.

"What do you want?" demanded Kraag, panting.

"Just wanted to tell you I could have knocked out the astrodome or one of the ports before you woke up," said Jonner cheerfully. "I don't want to kill you, Kraag. I just want you to surrender, and if you don't I can eventually batter through the meteor shield and the hull, and ruin the sphere for you."

"We'll see about that," gritted Kraag. Hurriedly he donned a spacesuit. Hanging Jonner's pistol at his belt, he took a heat-gun in his right hand and a flashlight in his left and ventured out through

the airlock. He did not make the mistake of switching on the airlock light, but Jonner seemed to know when he emerged, possibly from the vibration when the lock opened.

"Nice night out, isn't it, Kraag?" Jonner welcomed him.

Kraag grunted. The night was black as pitch. The only way he could tell where the ground ended and the sky began was that the sky was jewelled with stars.

He turned the light on and flashed it over the sphere. No sign of Jonner. But a rock struck his helmet and bounced off with a clang that nearly knocked him down and left him momentarily dizzy.

"I'm behind you, Kraag," said Jonner pleasantly. "Better go back inside. I promise not to break your shell open tonight."

Kraag twisted around and fired the heat-gun even as he searched for Jonner with the flashlight. Both beams pierced emptiness. Jonner just laughed at him.

Afraid now that Jonner would get into the sphere, Kraag scuttled back around to the airlock. Heat-gun ready, he turned on the light before closing the outer door, and breathed a sigh of relief at finding it empty.

Trembling with reaction, he closed the outer lock, left the inner one open and made his way up to the center deck. He needed coffee.

"I see you've gone back to the heat-gun," said Jonner. "That's smart."

"You'd like to see me exhaust the fuel tank of your pistol shooting it in the dark, when I can't hit you, wouldn't you?" retorted Kraag. "No, thanks. I'll keep it for long distances."

"Fuel tank? Oh, you mean the magazine." Jonner laughed. "I'd stay away from that old .45 of mine if I were you, Kraag. It's been with me too long. It's a lot more likely to turn on my enemies than to do me any harm."

"Rot!" snapped Kraag. "It's a gun. All I have to do is get the hang of aiming it properly."

"I wouldn't use too much power tonight, either," warned Jonner. "You don't get much with the solar mirror this far out. Anyhow, I took the mirror off while you were having your nap. The batteries should give out in a few hours."

Without answering, Kraag switched off his radio and removed his helmet. That last bit of information was a blow. Gradually, Jonner was stripping Kraag down to his own subsistence level.

Power or not, Kraag was determined to have his coffee. But first he went over the sphere again and switched off all unnecessary lights.

Jonner was a man who kept his word, but Kraag couldn't afford to trust him. Jonner might change his mind and try to break open the sphere again before morning. Kraag kept his spacesuit on. He did not sleep too well, for about once every 30 or 40 minutes something—either a large rock or Jonner's sledge hammer—would strike the sphere a resounding blow.

WHEN Kraag's watch told him it was morning, he opened the ports of the center deck and let the weak sunlight stream into the sphere. Off to the east, he saw Jon-

ner digging with a pick from the cargo. Jonner was far enough away for his legs from the knees down to be hidden by the extreme curvature of the little planet.

Kraag's first impulse was to go out and take a pot shot at him. Instead, he switched on the short-wave cooker and prepared some breakfast. Taking it up to the control room, where he could switch on the communications system, he opened the eastern port and watched Jonner. This high, he could see Jonner's feet and the hole he was digging—and Stein's body.

Jonner had taken Stein's body from the spot outside the sphere where Kraag had pushed it. He was burying Stein.

Jonner finished his excavation and laid Stein gently to rest in it. He pushed rocks back in to fill it up, and wrested a boulder that would have weighed a ton over it for a monument. Then he murmured a brief prayer over the grave.

Kraag was ashamed and then, unaccountably, angry. But he stood at the port, drinking his coffee and watching Jonner, and said nothing.

Either with chalk or with some soft rock he had found—Kraag could not tell which—Jonner wrote something on the big stone that was Stein's monument. Then he stood up and turned toward the sphere.

"Kraag," he said. "Kraag, are you tuned in?"

"Yes," replied Kraag shortly.

"You have today to surrender. Tonight I'm going to hatch you out of your comfortable egg."

Kraag switched off the communications system and paced the room, anger burning slowly inside him. This was ridiculous. He held all the cards. He had the guns, he had the sphere. Jonner was outside, weaponless, with a limited supply of food and water. Yet Jonner had him on the defensive.

How had it happened? How could it happen? Kraag lit a cigarette and puffed at it slowly, applying his mind coldly to the situation.

He didn't doubt that Jonner would do as he threatened, but he didn't think it was the recklessness of desperation. More likely, Jonner deliberately, calculatingly, planned to reduce his own chances for comfort, in order to bring Kraag down to more even terms with him.

If Jonner broke the hull of the sphere, it could be repaired—by someone working outside, free from interruption by an enemy. Until it was repaired, it would mean that Kraag, too, would have to live in a spacesuit. And Jonner might knock open a hole, or more than one, big enough to permit him to enter the sphere and attack Kraag in the darkness.

If only he could surround the sphere with light at night, he could keep Jonner at a distance. But with the solar mirror gone, the searchlight, on top of the sphere's other electrical requirements, would discharge the batteries before the night was half gone.

Kraag knew Jonner's stubbornness, his resourcefulness, his raw courage. Jonner was the one of them who was really at bay, when you considered it. Yet Kraag felt that Jonner was closing in on him, gradually, inexorably.

Facing this, Kraag felt the steel

enter his own will. He wasn't a coward. He had just been expecting this to be too easy. If Jonner would force him to fight, he would fight. He still had the advantage.

He must abandon the sphere as an asset. Jonner could take that away from him anyhow. On the other hand, if Jonner took over the sphere, Kraag could use the same weapon against him. He could break open the sphere.

So the sphere was no longer a factor. The food and water were no longer a factor, for food and water went with the sphere. He would admit Jonner to equality in those supplies—not full equality, for he could provision himself now more fully than Jonner had been provisioned two Ceres days earlier. He still might pin Jonner down as Jonner tried to get to the sphere for more supplies.

Then Kraag's remaining advantage lay in the guns. They should be enough. If he could get close enough to use a heat-gun, he could blast Jonner. Jonner's own projectile weapon would keep Jonner out of rock-throwing range, and sooner or later he would hit Jonner with it. He couldn't keep on missing; the law of average would give him a hit sooner or later. And all he needed was just one . . .

Kraag provisioned his spacesuit and hung all three of the heat-guns at his belt. In one of the capacious outside pockets he put two spare flashlights and half a dozen of the extra fuel packets—What was it Jonner had called them? Magazines, that was it—for Jonner's projectile pistol. He took that pistol in his right hand and sallied forth to do battle.

JONNER was nowhere in sight. Kraag shut the outer lock to make it appear he might be still in the sphere if Jonner happened not to spot him. He went over to Stein's new grave.

Jonner had written on the stone: REST IN PEACE. R. STEIN MURDERED BY A. KRAAG. DEC. 12, 2057.

Angrily, Kraag burned the lettering off in a 30-second blast with his heat-gun that left the face of Stein's gravestone cherry red.

He turned to survey the terrain, and saw Jonner. The captain was crouched half a mile away, apparently writing more on a flat rock or on the ground itself.

Jonner was facing him, but his head was down and he hadn't seen Kraag. If Kraag fired the projectile pistol, he probably would miss and might warn Jonner with the shot. He was sure of his accuracy with a heat-gun. Kraag took a heat-gun in his left hand and ran toward Jonner.

Possibly the vibration of the ground warned Jonner. He looked up, jumped to his feet and fled. As soon as he could stop and get his feet planted firmly on the ground, Kraag fired the projectile pistol after him. He was still shooting low and to one side.

Kraag picked himself up from the ground, where the backlash of the weapon had knocked him, and went up to the spot where Jonner had been writing. A mathematical problem had been scratched on the surface with a sharp rock. Kraag had interrupted Jonner in the middle of it.

The figures that had been written were:

$$
\begin{array}{r}
11 \\
1.141\overline{)1552.41} \\
141 \\
\hline
142 \\
141 \\
\hline
1
\end{array}
$$

Kraag stared at it, carrying out the rest of the simple mathematics in his head. The answer was 1101. But what was the problem?

The figure "1.41" was familiar enough. It was the square root of two, carried to two decimal places. But what was Jonner dividing by it, and why?

He frowned in concentration. There was something familiar about the numbers, something that had to do with him and Jonner, and Jonner wouldn't be working arithmetic just for amusement.

He saw Jonner moving on the horizon, just his head visible against the black sky, his body hidden by the curve of the planet. Jonner was circling.

The sudden realization of danger wiped other thoughts from his mind. Until he saw the epitaph Jonner had written for Stein, Kraag had thought Jonner looked at this as he did: one man against the other, and winner take all. But Jonner intended to win even if he lost, because Jonner was not fighting just for Jonner's survival but for due process of law.

Jonner was trying to make certain that, even if Kraag killed him, Martian law would punish Kraag for Stein's death. And if Jonner got into the sphere, he could get his message to Marsport or the rescue ship simply by turning on the radio.

Kraag turned and raced back to the sphere. He arrived, panting heavily. Jonner was nowhere in sight, but he knew Jonner, circling, could not have gotten there ahead of him.

He must kill Jonner before nightfall, if he could, but he must not get far enough from the sphere to let Jonner slip in behind him. He was not ready, yet, to destroy the radio to keep Jonner from it.

He walked around the sphere. There was Jonner on the other side, only his head above the horizon, moving clockwise. The sun flashed and gleamed from Jonner's helmet.

There was no sense in shooting at so small a target as a head. A mile away, Jonner's whole body was a small enough target. A carefully gauged leap carried Kraag to the top of the sphere. Here, 40 feet higher, his range of view was increased considerably. He could see Jonner well.

Jonner could see him, too. Jonner stopped to hurl a stone. It took a while for the missile to cover the distance. It passed below Kraag's level, some distance away from him.

"Why don't you give it up, Jonner?" asked Kraag. "You can't hurt me with a rock, at this distance."

"Why should I?" retorted Jonner. "All I have to do is wait till night."

"Sure, wait. But I'm not waiting, Jonner. One of us is going to win this thing before night, or I'm going to blast the radio so you can't reach Marsport. If I have to do that, I'll track you down tomorrow —and I think I can stay outside and fight you away from the sphere tonight."

"Getting desperate enough to fight like a man now, aren't you, Kraag? If you want a showdown today, I'm willing."

Kraag's mind was clear now. He had the situation under control. He glanced around the landscape at the scattered portions of the wrecked ship. There was the cargo hull, burst open, where Jonner had gotten his sledge hammer and the pick to bury Stein. Over there was a red sphere, ripped by the jagged gash of the meteor collision—one of the two hydrazine fuel tanks. The yellow sphere 30 degrees away from it was an oxygen fuel tank.

Kraag leveled Jonner's gun and fired at the yellow sphere. The kick knocked him off the sphere, but as he somersaulted backwards he saw the projectile hit the ground. Still low and to one side. But he noticed something on the gun he hadn't seen before.

There were ridges for sighting along the barrel of Jonner's pistol. Regaining his position atop the sphere, Kraag pressed his back against the observatory dome, to brace himself against the gun's backlash. He aimed carefully at the yellow sphere and fired again.

The yellow tank jumped—not from the impact, but from the spout of freed, expanding oxygen through the hole the bullet made. It moved and wobbled about in the weak gravity, like a dying balloon. When it stopped, Kraag knew he had destroyed half of Jonner's oxygen supply.

"Good shot, Kraag," congratulated Jonner, with fatalistic irony in his tone. "Of course, I'm not as big a target as the tanks."

"Each target in its own time," replied Kraag triumphantly, and looked around for the other yellow sphere.

He had been afraid it might be one of the parts that had fallen over the horizon, but it wasn't. It was behind him, a little closer than the first. He hit it with one shot.

Now Jonner had only the oxygen in his spacesuit tanks.

Jonner had made no effort to move farther away. He was still visible on the horizon, from the knees up, moving in a great circle around the personnel sphere.

Kraag aimed carefully and fired. He did not know the projectile's speed, but certainly it would be much faster than Jonner's rocks. After half a minute had passed, he knew he had missed.

There was only one thing to do. He settled himself and fired again, trying to lead Jonner slightly. Again he missed.

Methodically, taking his time, Kraag fired. Jonner walked on unconcernedly, circling. Kraag tried to fire so the path of his projectile would strike at the top of Jonner's strides, for then Jonner rose several feet into the air and his whole body was visible.

Occasionally, Jonner would stop and hurl a stone at Kraag. One man was as inaccurate as the other. Jonner's stones went wide at that distance, and Kraag obviously had not hit Jonner with a bullet.

At last Jonner stopped. He seemed to be fiddling with something that was right on the ground, below Kraag's line of vision. Then a tremendous stone, bigger than Kraag's head, came hurtling toward the sphere. Kraag ducked instinctively, but the missile passed

10 feet above him, still going well.

"What in the devil!" exclaimed Kraag.

"A little innovation of mine, to make things more interesting," said Jonner. "In case you ever want to use the idea, I made me a super-slingshot out of two of the jeep inner tubes from the cargo, and a couple of crowbars I could drive into crevices. Fixed it up yesterday for bombardment purposes."

The duel went on.

There came the time when the hammer of the pistol clicked on an empty chamber.

"How do you refuel this thing, Jonner?" asked Kraag pleasantly. The sun was still high. He could retreat to the interior of the sphere and figure it out if he had to.

"It's pretty hard to do with spacesuit hooks," replied Jonner. "Be glad to demonstrate, if you'll toss me the gun."

Kraag laughed, a laugh with more triumph in it than humor, because in his fumbling he had just hit the button that ejected the magazine. To push in a fresh one was the matter of a moment.

He had hoped Jonner would move in closer when he knew the pistol was empty, but no such luck. Jonner stayed put.

Kraag's first effort with the new magazine brought no results, for he had neglected to prime the weapon by pushing the outer covering back on the barrel. He did this, and resumed his methodical firing.

As the time wore on, Kraag began to appreciate the difficulties involved in hitting a moving target, even a slowly moving one, when the marksman was as inexperienced as he was. The trouble was that, at that distance, he could not see where the bullets were striking and had no way of knowing how wide of his mark he was shooting.

He was on the fourth magazine and the sun had passed the meridian when he felt the sphere vibrate faintly and momentarily beneath him. He twisted around, alarmed. He could see nothing. It wasn't one of Jonner's rocks, because a big one had just missed.

His eye detected a shining streak that stretched a few inches along the curve of the sphere's meteor shield, at about the level of his feet. He bent to examine it. Something had struck it at high speed, a glancing blow.

It couldn't be one of Jonner's rocks. Small meteor?

A jagged hole suddenly appeared in the observatory dome near him. Kraag moved up and examined it closely. It had been made by some small object. Through the glassite he could see a similar hole in the other side of the dome.

Did Jonner have some sort of new weapon? He couldn't. Even Jonner wasn't resourceful enough to invent a high-powered weapon with the innocuous cargo they were carrying for the Titan colony.

Something struck Kraag a powerful blow in the left chest, a blow that hurled him sideways, to tumble off the sphere and fall slowly to the ground below. There was a great pain in his chest, and he released his hand-hooks in agony, so that the pistol fell away from him.

Kraag gasped for breath as he struck the ground and bounced. He coughed up blood.

He fell slowly again, and bounced again. The third time he settled jarringly, prone on his back.

He couldn't understand what had happened to him. He pulled his right arm inside the suit with an effort and probed the painful area on his chest. He felt the hot wetness of flowing blood.

He would have to get to the sphere. He tried to move. He couldn't get off his back. He lay there and writhed in pain.

Jonner's voice was in his ears, saying something.

"I knew it would get you," Jonner said. "It was my only chance. But it got you at last, Kraag."

"Come help me, Jonner," whimpered Kraag weakly. "I've been hit by . . . I don't know. It must have been a meteor."

"I'm coming as fast as I can, Kraag, but it was no meteor. It was my gun."

"Gun?" repeated Kraag wonderingly.

"I warned you about that gun of mine, Kraag. If you'd looked at the figures on the barrel, the muzzle velocity of those .45-calibre bullets is 1100 feet a second. With Ceres' escape velocity, that's almost exactly the circular velocity at the asteroid's surface."

Jonner was standing over him, and then was lifting him gently, to carry him to the sphere.

"I deliberately got just out of your range of vision, from the ground, so you'd climb to a high spot," said Jonner. "You had to be high, so the bullet would clear the irregularities on the planet's surface, and I knew that sooner or later you'd shoot a bullet or two high enough not to hit the ground.

"When you were firing at me, your bullets weren't describing a trajectory and falling to the surface, as they would on Earth or Mars. They were taking an orbit that brought them all the way around the planet to the same spot, to hit you from the other side two hours later."

Kraag tried to look up at him. Something was going wrong with his sight, and everything outside his face plate was a blur. Must be the oxygen . . . maybe his suit didn't seal the bullet hole properly.

"I thought . . . ." Kraag began, and choked. He coughed, slowly and painfully, then tried again: "I thought that . . . . problem on the rocks . . . . looked familiar."

"You've always done it with a slide rule. That's probably why the long division didn't register," said Jonner. "The equation is one every spaceman knows: the circular velocity equals the escape velocity divided by the square root of two."

• • •

QUICKIE

Dr. Kinsey, meet Mr. Grover, the amorous adventurer. Even in a world of polygamous sexual relations and legal multiple marriages, here is the nation's champion philanderer!

BY MILTON LESSER

SIMON GROVER always felt like a goldfish in a coptercab. The plexiglass bubble afforded full 360 degree vision, but people could also see you from the crowded traffic lanes above a big city.

"Hurry," said Simon Grover, a small, energetic man with close-set hazel eyes and a stubborn chin.

"I'm hurrying," the pilot told him with frustrating indifference.

In another few moments he would be safe. He squirmed around and saw another copter rise above the express lane and close the gap between them. It had never been this close before. The aquamarine roof of the Marriage Building loomed ahead, then swelled up at them. The other copter buzzed closer.

"Don't see any landing space," the pilot said laconically.

Simon squinted down anxiously. The copters were lined up in neat but crowded rows on the rooftop, with hardly more than walking space between them.

"Hover," Simon pleaded. "I'll jump."

"I could lose my license."

Simon reached into his pocket and drew out a handful of bills. "This is important to me," he said.

The pilot pocketed the money, then swooped down toward the roof. Suspended grotesquely eight feet above the aquamarine surface, blades whirling, the coptercab hovered. Simon grunted his thanks and slid back the door. The other copter was fanning air above them and dropping fast when Simon jumped.

His left leg struck the side of a parked cab and threw him off balance. He landed on his shoulder, rolled over and scrambled to his feet. He darted between the rows of copters, thankful for the partial

Illustrated by Ed Emsh

protection their blades offered him. A parabeam zipped down at the long shadow he cast in the late afternoon sun, but in another moment he had reached the roof entrance to the Marriage Building and flung himself inside.

Breathing hard, he smoothed his rumpled clothing with shaking hands. That had been entirely too close. They thought he was fleeing because he did not want to work for a living. Rot. If he were ever captured, all the romance would go from his life.

He sauntered down the long, pleasant corridor lined with murals of domestic tranquility—family gathered around the dining table, father and son raking leaves in the front yard, graceful elderly couple entertaining children and grandchildren at a merry hearth, young husband and wife going to bed. He was in no hurry now, for the Marriage Building was legal sanctuary.

He passed the long lines of registering Quickies, men filing into one room, women into another. He let his glance rove the line of female Quickies, wondering if his new wife would come from this group. They ranged in age from eighteen to about sixty, he guessed, and naturally they were of all conceivable types. He caught himself in time and stopped looking. It

was not considered proper etiquette.

Rounding a turn in the corridor, Simon took the slidestair down one level to where Transients registered and attached himself to the end of a long line of men which was swallowed slowly by a doorway above which was the legend:

MARRIAGE COUNSELORS

Simon checked his counterfeit registration papers and was aware of the old, familiar feeling of uncertainty. His heart bobbed up into his throat and pounded there. His palms were clammy, his fingers wouldn't keep still. Would the papers pass inspection? He was almost certain they would. But he savored the other possibility although he hated its ultimate consequences. As some people craved security, so others thrived on adventure.

Simon lit a cigaret and waited while the line crawled forward, parallelling a line of female Transients moving through another doorway.

"Sit down, Mr. Grover," the Counselor said as Simon entered the room. It was a large place with a central aisle and a dozen private cubbies on either side, each one with celotex walls, a desk, two chairs, the latest in marriage literature, and a Counselor.

Simon eased his small frame into a comfortable chair and handed his papers to the Counselor. "I see you have come from Philadelphia," the man said, smiling not quite professionally—which, Simon knew, was the best of all professional smiles. "Were the accommodations satisfactory? Of course, you don't have to talk about them."

"They were fine. Just fine." Naturally, Simon did not tell the Counselor about his flight from the police.

"How long will you be with us in New York?"

"I figure about three weeks. It depends on business, though. Might be a little longer, I guess."

"We'll say three weeks." The Counselor scrawled something on Simon's registration form. "Now, Mr. Grover, exactly what kind of wife are you looking for?"

"To tell you the truth, I haven't given it much thought yet."

"Splendid," the Counselor was delighted with the opportunity to expound on his wares. "As you know, we have six basic types." He removed six colorful folders from six stacks on his desk and handed them to Simon.

"The first," he went on, "is the newlywed Quickie. The red folder, Mr. Grover. She has just completed her honeymoon, is not pregnant, and has been married for no more than six months."

Simon examined the folder. On the cover was pictured a young man carrying his bride, complete with bashful smile, across the threshold of their home. There were suggestive dining room, patio and bedroom scenes inside, with appropriate captions.

"The second type," explained the Counselor, "is the new mother." The folder showed a charming young woman breast-feeding an infant. The Counselor went on to the other types: the middle mother, a woman of about thirty with two children, one of pre-school age and

one in the first three grades; the teener, with from two to five children in their teens or early twenties; the pre-gram, with any number of married children living away from home, but no grandchildren; and the grandmother.

"You understand," the Counselor said, "we have all types in between as well. These are merely the basics." He surveyed Simon's registration papers again. "You're thirty-five, Mr. Grover. A fine age, I might say. You'd be suited to any type, with the exception of the grandmother."

"I don't want the grandmother, anyway," Simon told him. "You know, I think I'll take the newlywed this time."

The Counselor winked knowingly. "Still a lot of get-up-and-go in the old copter, eh?"

"It's spring," Simon said.

"Yes. We find it most interesting, that certain types are favored in the various seasons. Newlyweds in the spring, pre-grams in the summer, middle mothers in the fall, new mothers and grandmothers in the winter. Confidentially, Mr. Grover, I've always longed to be a Transient myself. But you have to be a Quickie to hold this job, since you're in one place for such a long period of time. Well, what type of newlywed did you have in mind?"

Simon licked his lips eagerly. In Philadelphia the last time he had come close to learning the parting ritual. But it tripped him up, as usual, and he reached New York one step ahead of the police. "She must be very impressionable," Simon said, "and very talkative. She must be eager to discuss the theories of multiple marriage—"

"Most newlyweds are," the Counselor pointed out.

"Well, particularly so. And, of course, she must not be carrying a torch for her honeymoon husband."

"That's rare these days, Mr. Grover."

"It happened to me once, in St. Louis. Had an awful time."

"Then she probably was a misfit. After all, the institution of multiple marriages is almost eighty years old, and the *only* form of marriage in the United States today. If we were still in the early pioneering days you might have cause to worry. Ideas of propinquity still seemed important then, and people were concerned with such things as lasting relationships, though for the life of me I can't see why."

"They thought it was more secure," suggested Simon.

"But it isn't. In the old days, statistics proved that if a man or woman was saddled with one mate too long, it often led to trouble. The old *Et al* report of 1979 shocked the world with its figures: ninety five percent of all married men had illicit relations with other women, and the figure was almost as high for women. Relations with unmarried people. It's rather horrible, isn't it, Mr. Grover?"

"I suppose so," said Simon, half-listening. All he needed now was the parting ritual. A nice, impressionable, talkative newlywed girl . . .

As usual," the Counselor continued in a dedicated voice, "man had leaped ahead of his outmoded institutions without realizing it.

The notion of marriage based largely on propinquity and permanent relationship just didn't fit the modern tempo of civilization, where transient workers dart across the continent constantly, always on the move, hardly staying in one place long enough to hang their hats, as the expression goes. Marital infidelity in the old days led to crimes of passion, to divorce, to unsettled families, to children reared in orphanages or by strangers—perfect strangers, mind you—to divorce and re-marriages and so much energy and time and money wasted on second and even third courtships.

"Fortunately, the social institution fits the tempo of the culture today. A Transient—man or woman—gets married and provides for one spouse, one family, but has the pick of the nation to choose from. Even a Quickie like myself is stimulated by constant variety and change. No one is ever bored. You don't have to see your original mate ever again, as long as you, as a Transient, provide for her. The Quickies, in their turn, will provide for you in all your subsequent marriages. You have the novelty and satisfaction of a true change in environment every time you travel, but you also have the comfort and security of a home."

"This newlywed girl must also be naive," said Simon. "That's important."

The Counselor made another notation. "You know," he said, "there is one small school of thought which claims the novelty, the verve and sparkle are lacking because the constant variation is perfectly legal. Perhaps they have a point there: secrecy *is* stimulating. But they refuse to admit we even provide for that. After all, a Transient assumes the name of his temporary spouse, his Quickie. No one, not even the Quickie, knows his real identity. The Marriage records are available to no one, not even the government, not even the police, thus preserving the sense of—well, freshness for the Transients.

"But I digress. Have you any physical preferences, Mr. Grover?"

"I'm not very tall. Keep her down to my size, please. And I want a pretty wife."

The Counselor made his final notations, rolled Simon's registration papers and stuffed them into a pneumotube which he dropped into a wall slot. The tube, Simon knew, was being whisked to Quickie Records, Newlywed Division, where identification of the girl fitting his requirements would be made by the machine records unit of available newlyweds. Last time, in Philadelphia, he had selected a garrulous old grandmother and hated every moment of the two weeks he had spent with her. It had been against the recommendations of the Counselor there, who had claimed the age difference would not make for harmony. The man had been right, but worse yet, the old hag had been too wily to reveal what Simon had to know.

"Congress is considering a law," said the Counselor as they waited for the return of Simon's registration papers, "which would permit Quickies and Transients to alternate year after year. It would cause social upheaval at the beginning, but it's only fair to us Quickies, don't you think?"

Simon shrugged. The man was starting to bother him. "I'd rather be a Transient," he said. "I'm for the *status quo*."

"But Quickies have no choice in the matter, don't you see? We have to marry whoever comes along. My last wife—"

"As a Quickie, you're not supposed to talk about her."

The Counselor blanched at what had almost amounted to a sin. "Thank you," he said, and waited in silence for the pneumotube.

Finally, it came, popping out of the wall slot and alighting on the desk. The Counselor removed Simon's papers and unrolled them, revealing a set of similar papers rolled tightly within. These he opened and spread on the desk, beckoning Simon to come around behind him and take a look.

The first thing Simon saw was the snapshot, in the latest trivision process. The girl looked pretty enough, with a pale, heart-shaped face set off against short-cropped, shining black hair. She had enormous, child-like eyes.

"How do you do?" the picture said. "I am Jane-Marie Paige. I miss you."

"See," said the Counselor, "she has a lovely voice."

Simon nodded, picked up the trivision snapshot and held it under his nose, sniffing delicately. He liked the scent of Jane-Marie's perfume—not too musky, not too flowery, but that ideal compromise which indicated she would be neither too sultry nor too fragile.

The Counselor wrote in Simon's name on her papers, printing "approx. 3 wks" under the column for time, and handed both rolls to Simon. "Her address is in the second column," he said. "Visit us again on your next trip to New York, Mr. Grover. And good luck."

BY THE time Simon took the tubeway out to the suburban Long Island community in which Jane-Marie Paige lived, the bright spring afternoon was fading into dusk, tinting the western sky with bands of color ranging from deep blue and purple through mauve to delicate, dusty pink. The smell of spring was in the air, but with the coming of night the lingering chill of winter was still apparent. It would be great, coming home again to a new wife, to a drink and an excellent home-cooked dinner, to a cozy fire perhaps—especially when you could have all that and still retain the pulse-quickening feeling of adventure.

Whistling, Simon found Maple Lane and walked by the rows of spherical houses which could rotate with the sun from equinox to solstice and back again. Simon could tell it was a development of newlywed homes by their small size, by the absence of baby carriages and toys on the front lawns, by the small clumps of white birch trees and windows with their curtains drawn.

He found the address listed on Jane-Marie's registration papers and turned up the walk, noticing the small, ranch-type name post with "Mr. and Mrs. Jane-Marie Paige" on it in big gold letters.

"It's Simon," he said as the door slid soundlessly into the curving wall. "I'm home."

Suddenly, Jane-Marie appeared

there in the doorway. She must have been at one of the curtained windows, peeking out at him. There were soft lights behind her and a delicate halo circled her dark hair from the raditiara she wore.

"Simon," she said, barely above a whisper, a radiant smile on her face. "They called me. Come in, darling."

But she still barred the doorway. When he came in he came into the arms of his waiting wife, his newly-wed wife, his Jane-Marie. "I missed you ever since they sent your picture," she breathed, while he kissed the lobes of her ears, the tip of her nose, her eyes, her warm, eager lips.

"Jane-Marie," he said. It was genuinely thrilling to her, he sensed. It was more than that to him. It was—it was illicitly thrilling, worth all the quick exits and close calls with the police.

"You'll muss me," Jane-Marie scolded him, drawing away and rearranging her hair under the tiara. "There. Are you hungry?"

"Honey, I'm famished."

"Well, I'm making no promises. I'm not much of a cook, really. They didn't tell me how long you were going to stay, but I should improve enough so when the next—"

"Sh. I'll be here three weeks."

"Come in, come in." She took his hand in her own warm one, pressing the door button and dimming the hall light as they walked into the house. "Tell me about yourself, darling. What do you do? How are you going to spend your time in New York? Oh, I'm so excited. There's so much to talk about, so much to learn about each other. Do you play bridge? There's a couple down the street, the wife's a Transient and just got here today, but I know the husband, who likes to play bridge. Do you like music? I'll turn some on."

She was talkative, all right. Soon Simon heard the lilting strains of a Strauss waltz. Jane-Marie pirouetted happily about the dining room table in three-quarter time and sat down, motioning Simon to sit near her and not on the other side. As he adjusted his napkin she leaned her head on his shoulder and said, "I like your eyes, darling."

He smiled. "They're close-set."

"They are not. They're very intelligent-looking. I'll bet you're an engineer or something. I'll bet you're going to help design that new construction project in Brooklyn. Gee, I like your eyes." She gazed up at them demurely.

The robot server wheeled in the first course along with a frosted bottle of champagne leaning gracefully in a silver chilling urn. Simon popped the cork expertly, filled both glasses and raised his. "To us," he said.

"To us, darling. Forever and ever three weeks. I hope you like chopped liver salad," Jane-Marie added nervously. "I had no way of knowing, but from now on you'll get whatever you like, I promise."

"It's delicious," Simon said, beginning to eat.

Other courses followed. There was jellied consommé, roast, stuffed chicken and sweet potato pudding, a salad which Simon tossed with an enthusiasm and expertness that Jane-Marie said was a joy to behold, dessert of brandied bing cher-

ries, coffee and pie. And a constant stream of chatter from Jane-Marie.

"Well," said Simon, patting the bulge at his waistline and sliding his belt-clasp an inch or two looser with the comfortable informality only a married man can display (and in his own home, thought Simon). "I must say that was good."

"I'm so glad you liked it. Do you want to sit around the fire and talk, dear?" She flavored the term of endearment once more. "Dear."

The robot server had begun to remove the dishes from the table. Simon stood up and was followed by Jane-Marie into the sunken living room, where he began to pile wood and kindling on the andirons in the raised-hearth fireplace. As she bent to watch him, the *décolleté* hostess gown revealed a breathless amount of lovely white skin. "Maybe we'll retire after that," Simon said, trying not to sound the way he felt, which was more than mildly lecherous.

Jane-Marie smiled a secret, small-girl smile and pulled him down on the cushion in front of the hearth, on which a bright fire was now crackling. "It's so good to have you home, darling, all to myself. Will your work keep you away much? I hope not."

"To tell you the truth, I'm on vacation."

"That *is* nice," Jane-Marie murmured dreamily. "And flattering, too, because you selected me to share your vacation."

"Could it be anyone but you?" Simon said. "As if it could be anyone but you." Which was perfectly, beautifully, delightfully true—for three weeks. "You married rather young, I see."

Jane-Marie stroked his temples with long fingers. "Oh, now, don't be so sure," she smiled. "Maybe I'm older than I look."

"No. You're about twenty. I guess you like marriage."

"I love it. It's too early to tell, but—well, it agrees with me."

"I'm glad."

"Glad of what, darling?"

"That you married early. Come here."

She came and sat in his lap. He blew in her ears and at the short hairs on the nape of her neck until she laughed. "I love you," she said. "I love you so."

He loved her too. It was right. She was the girl he had selected. But a sense of urgency swept over him, not only for the love they would consummate as the night grew longer, but for what he hoped to learn from her so he could have the name as well as the game—as well as that feeling of adventure which sharpened his senses so acutely. He said, "Do you ever think of the times before multiple marriage became the accepted social institution? Do you ever think of how those people must have felt?"

"I knew you were an intellectual!" Jane-Marie cried instead of answering his question. "I just knew it. I could see it in your eyes, darling. Oh, I do love you."

He kissed her tenderly, then with fire. He could feel the passion mounting between them, but tore himself from its grasp. "Don't you ever think of it?" he asked again.

"Well, I read a book about it once, Murray's *The Decline of Monogamy*. They must have felt

simply awful, darling. I mean, I love you, but to have to spend all that time, season after season, year after year, with the same person would—would drive you crazy. You'd get to know him so well, everything he did, the way he thought and all. Oh, with you it's different. I could spend forever with you three weeks, but—"

"No, Honey. I mean the others. The outcasts. Those who carried on adulterous relationships."

Jane-Marie frowned in thought. He could tell the conversation interested her but thought she would have preferred to drop it. Still, the conversation was flowing more smoothly than he had dared hope, and in the right direction.

"I don't know," Jane-Marie finally admitted. "I suppose they were pioneers, sort of. I mean, flaunting social custom the way they did because they were willing to fight for a better way of life."

"I agree with you," Simon said. "Sometimes convention restricts you and doesn't allow you to live the fullest life. You should then flaunt convention by all means, don't you think?"

"I do. I do."

He sighed gratefully. The seed had been planted. He now had to cultivate it for three weeks. A word here, a gesture there, a suggestion, twenty-one days of marital bliss, of gaining her confidence, of impressing her with everything he did.

"Well," he said, "shall we go upstairs?"

He watched the color rise from Jane-Marie's throat and soon suffuse her face. "I was thinking Mr. and Mrs. Busby might want to play some bridge—"

"There are other nights," he said. He scattered the embers of the burning logs with the poker and went into the dining room after the bottle of champagne. With Jane-Marie at his side he climbed the stairs.

THE SHOWER had stopped. He could hear Jane-Marie humming to herself in a nervous falsetto. He didn't know whether to get under the covers or not, and finally decided Jane-Marie would be more at ease if he did. He had already combed his hair and brushed his teeth.

At last, she came. She was lovely, his wife, in a daring black negligée. She stood there in it for a long, wonderful moment, then plunged the room into darkness.

You could be a newlywed over and over again, Simon thought happily. You could taste the joys of brand new parenthood not once but a hundred times. You could see the kids off to school on that memorable first day as often as you liked, see your grandchildren that first glorious time through the glass window also as often as you wished, or taste many times of an old, established relationship which was yet mysteriously new, despite the gray hairs and conditioned familiarity.

It was a full life, but something was lacking. Did it make him a misfit? Probably, but he had his own life to lead, his own fulfillment to achieve, his own strange kinship with the early rebels who had blasted monogamy from the pages of social history.

"You'll think this is silly," Jane-

Marie whispered in the darkness.

"What's that, dear? What will I think is silly?"

"What I'm going to ask you."

"No I won't. Honest."

"Well—"

"Go on, if it will make you happy." He could sense her presence near him.

"Well, it isn't that I don't trust you, but there's so much of it going on lately that I thought—"

"What did you think?"

"The—the parting ritual. You know what it's for, darling. A safeguard."

Simon plunged from zenith to nadir in seconds. He would never spend those three weeks with Jane-Marie. He would be running again, running until he could board the tubeways in anonymity from the basement of a Marriage Building in some other city. But it had never happened so quickly before.

"Can't it wait for three weeks?" he asked, knowing the request was futile.

"Then it's hardly a safeguard for me, just for—for the next one. It's just lately that all those misfits have started . . . I guess some people will never be satisfied."

Her hand touched his hand in darkness. There were finger movements. She began to chant meaningless syllables.

This was it, Simon knew in despair. He could not respond. It was a simple thing, but people were sworn to absolute secrecy. It was changed every few months and he had never been able to learn it.

A sob escaped Jane-Marie's lips. Simon," she gasped. "Simon, you aren't . . . you're not doing . . ."

"No," he said wearily. He sat up quickly in the darkness and dressed. He could hear her reaching for the phone. He stood up and went to her, but she turned away.

"Don't you touch me. Go away, leave me alone. Of all the despicable . . . and I thought . . . I almost . . . Hello, police? This is Mrs. Jane-Marie Paige on Maple Lane. I want to report. . ."

"Goodbye," he whispered softly.

"I hate you!"

He left quickly, double-timing down Maple Lane between the rows of spherical houses. He didn't belong. He was an outlaw, a criminal, a maladjusted misfit—or worse. Some people are never satisfied. The police failed to understand. To them his type was lazy, shiftless. They were drones, parasites who could reap all the advantages of multiple life without working a day. They had no one to support.

But that isn't it at all, thought Simon as he ran. He could hear the approaching wail of police sirens. He must hurry. Perhaps in Boston he would get the one stroke of luck he needed, if the police didn't catch him first. It wasn't that he was lazy and lacked the sense of responsibility which would make him support a family. Everything was too patterned, too set-out-for-you, too prosaic. In his own way he courted danger and was hated for it. He sought the spice of an illicit relationship which he supposed some people always needed.

He could picture pretty Jane-Marie crying out the whole story to the police. "That man—he was a *bachelor!*" • • •

Money Is the Root of All Good

Urgent! Class AA emergency for Universal Relief! Stock market crash on planet Lyrane, where people live by economy based on good deeds. Cause unknown. Suspect galactical manipulators of watering stock.

BY PATRICK WILKINS

Illustrated by Ed Emsh

KALGOR, capital of the Galactic Empire, is not, as one would expect, one solid city. As a matter of fact, it is more surburban and rural than many farming planets.

The reason is obvious if but considered. The galactic government and the equally large galactic businesses are so immense that they must be distributed throughout the whole galaxy, with only the very cream of the hierarchy located on Kalgor. Thus, each company would have only one small building—but with a communication web that enfolded macroscopic enterprises.

Universal Relief Incorporated was typical of this arrangement. Although its warehouses and offices throughout the Empire could form a megalopolis in themselves, the fountainhead on Kalgor was a two story building.

In that building there was excitement. People were rushing frantically—the teletypes chattered in a frenzy—the air was static with urgency. It manifested itself in the quick jerky motions, in the voices held just below the cracking point.

Universal Relief served the function that used to be handled by the Red Cross. They were disaster rectifiers, succor and reconstruction was their business. But they

were a business—declaring annual, taxable profits and dividends and, in general, a profit-seeking firm.

They received regular payments from planetary governments, much like premiums with insurance, and in case of emergency they were to provide complete relief as swiftly as possible. There was no chance for graft in their business, for they were closely checked by the government and competing organizations like Galactic Aid, their closest rival.

This business was now apparently faced with a crisis and its staff was feverishly trying to cope with it.

Roald Gibbons, President of Universal Relief, was the only person not affected—at least not apparently. His indolent posture, his quiet grey eyes reflected nothing of the hectic activity.

This made Kim Roger nervous.

"I don't think you comprehend the seriousness of it, Mr. Gibbons," he was saying.

"I am not thinking of the seriousness of it. I just want the facts."

"Very well, sir. Two days ago, the Lyranian stock market crashed."

"You will have to go back further than that. I can't possibly know the history of all the planets in the Empire. That's what I pay you for. Give me some background."

This little speech made Kim lose his clutching hold on his patience. Roald Gibbons had just taken office after the death of his father, who had managed the galactic firm for twenty years. By merely being the boss's son, Roald had achieved the reputation of being an ignorant, careless playboy. His professed ignorance of the planets confirmed, in Kim's mind, this reputation.

With an effort, Kim resumed. "The planet of Lyrane, the only habitable one in the system of Lyrane—Copernicus sector—was colonized by a socio-economic sect for the purpose of testing its slightly radical beliefs.

"This sect maintained that an individual should not be paid on the basis of the work he did, but for the good deeds, or good thoughts he had. A small stipend was paid for actual work or production, to establish a workable basic economy and trade. This stipend was enough to cover all the basic wants of the individual.

"To procure luxuries, a citizen had to use the money he received for his good deeds or thoughts. Every time a man helped an old lady across the street, or came up with a bit of philosophical wisdom, he could record it with a central office and receive his luxury pay from the government.

"The purpose of the system was to make people emphasize virtue and quality in their lives. Instead of concentrating on profit for profit's sake, they would have to consider the inherent rightness and beauty of what they were doing."

"In such a system," Roald asked, "how could such a thing as a stock market possibly develop?"

"Very simple, sir. This luxury pay, issued in a different currency than the commodity pay, could be used in any way a person saw fit. Some people naturally developed the idea of investing stock in a particularly virtuous or intelligent person. Every time that person did a good deed, the stockholders

received a dividend from his luxury pay. All of the scientists and philosophers, therefore, became corporations in themselves, with as many as five thousand people holding stock in one man."

"Sorry, Kim, but I don't get it. How could these incorporated individuals get any luxury pay for themselves if they had to hand it out to their stockholders?"

"The administration would allow for that. A person received luxury pay in proportion to the number of stockholders that he claimed. The government had to do this since they indirectly were investing in these corporation men—but I'll explain that later.

"The corporation-man lived off the original investments of stockholders, with some of the stock solvent for sales. In this way, the individual would profit from "good-doing" by receiving many new investments."

"What is the social makeup of this Lyrane? It seems to me it would be a lunatic fringe de luxe, with every hack writer, thaumaturgist, or evangelist climbing aboard the gravy train."

"On the contrary, it is a social structure of the finest minds in the galaxy. The rest are all weeded out. Although the motives of the system are idealistic, they are enforced with a rigid practicality. They demand quality and truth, and gauge it with the revealing yardstick of public consumption and approval as measured in sales and polls."

Roald gazed out at the pastoral countryside surrounding this vital little nub of a billion-credit business. He swung back to Kim, and said, "But the basic difficulty would be determining just what a good deed or thought is. How in God's name could they determine that, when every act or word that anyone ever commits or utters is open to judgment by so many different standards. For instance, what about the case of the man who trespasses to save a person's life. How are you going to rate that sort of thing?"

"Mr. Gibbons, I am an economist, not a philosopher. It is the wonder of the galaxy that these people did establish and maintain this system, in spite of obstacles such as you mentioned."

"All right, we'll discount the philosophical angle. I still don't understand it. How about big business? How could that develop with this system? They certainly need it to support a planet."

"That's the easiest part of it. People would use their luxury pay to establish businesses. At these businesses men could work their five hours a day to get their commodity pay. It was not only possible, but mandatory that such businesses develop. There were two types: mass production of commodities, with a regulated profit in commodity pay; or specialization and production of fine merchandise that was sold at cost, but which the government paid for in luxury pay in proportion to its quality as thoroughly tested.

"However—all big businesses were closely controlled by the government. They would grant franchises so that there would be no cutthroat competition, and supply was regulated to meet demand. Therefore, business itself was stable,

and there was no opportunity for speculating in its stock market. That left only the variable corporation-men for actual stock market trading—and that is what crashed.

"Let's take a writer, for example. He writes a book, and a publishing house prints it. The people buy it—spending luxury pay. The publishing house has to convert that luxury pay to commodity pay to cover costs and payroll. They make no profit, the book being sold at cost.

"That book has to sell so many thousand copies to receive luxury pay from the government. Then both the author and the publisher receive luxury pay in proportion to its sales, which is the indication of its merit. The luxury pay that the publisher receives goes in the pockets of the executives. The luxury pay that the author receives—which is much larger—goes to his stockholders.

"Since the author is the source of this transaction, the people invest in him and not the publisher, for they can't get any great return from investing in the publisher, but they can from the author.

"Actually, what the whole thing amounts to is a complete shift of emphasis from big business and its speculations—which is what we've always known—to individuals and the intangibles and variables of their ideas and deeds."

"There is only one question left," Roald said. "The government doles out all this luxury pay. Pray tell, where do they get it?"

"There are two parts to the government. There is the actual administration, with its members drawing set salaries and unable to draw luxury pay, to prevent graft; and then there is the Economics Commission, which controls luxury pay.

"This Economics Commission is a business. They invest in galactic corporations, such as ours, and make a profit. That's part of their money. Then—and here's the secret—any time a book is written, or fine merchandise produced, it must be sold on Lyrane at cost. But the government sells it throughout the galaxy for a profit, and keeps that profit to redistribute in luxury pay to Lyranian citizens.

"Anyway, the system finally blew up, and now we're holding a messy bag."

"But how could it? Why?"

"That's just it. Nobody knows what brought it about, but suddenly the men who were corporations just stopped producing. They stopped doing good deeds, stopped writing, stopped research, and what-not and, consequently, stopped drawing luxury pay.

"Naturally, their stockholders got mad and wanted to sell, but incorporated men couldn't liquidate and the values of the stocks dropped to zero, along with the value of the luxury pay. The result was a depression and a lot of angry people."

"A planetary depression is not such an outstanding emergency that it should cause Universal Relief to be in such an uproar. I believe that it is merely a Class B emergency, with complete regulations on proper handling."

Kim was so earnest in his reply that he leaned over and almost rubbed noses with his superior.

"On the contrary, sir. There are other factors, so its not so simple. This Lyranian system has been working for ten years now, and the Lyranians want desperately for it to succeed. They are almost fanatics on it, trying to prove the value of their system so that other planets will adopt it—which God forbid.

"Naturally, the resentment against the corporation-men for betraying them has turned into hatred, with murder, riots and a civil war in the offing. Yes, their politics were unitary and stable until this emergency, but you'd be surprised at the number of political factions that can be formed and develop hostilities in a period of crisis."

"Could it be an attempt by some faction to seize power?"

"Impossible. The way it was set up, political power was not desirable, being unprofitable and mostly drudgery. If they upset the applecart, the balance was so fine only chaos would result and there would be nothing to take power over. The only reason parties have developed now is due to differing views on how to rectify the situation, and blaming different things for being responsible. But no power motive."

"Very well then, the situation is a Class A emergency, but we've handled them before."

Kim allowed one fleeting sigh of despair. He had thought for a while that this Roald could take hold, could be competent, but—

"If you have ever consulted our financial records, sir," he said with heavy sarcasm, "you would find that our largest contribution comes from Lyrane. They have established our organization as tops in the good-deeds field, and nearly every person on Lyrane has stock in us, along with a sizable payment since we threw a high premium at them, fearing just this eventuality."

Roald appeared thoughtful, then said, "Well, continue with standard procedures for a Class A emergency. I'll see what can be done."

Kim made one last desperate appeal. "I firmly believe that this should be a Class AA emergency!"

"Your field of specialization is overriding your business sense, Kim. You are fascinated, as an economist, by this Lyrane system, and you would like to see us put it back on its feet so you economists would have a live experiment to observe. I'm sorry, but it isn't practical. You know how fantastically expensive a Class AA is, and no one planet is about to get it."

Kim cowered mentally. This wasn't the indolent playboy, but the Old Man, giving him a good dressing down. He left the office with restored faith, but a faith that was interlaced with doubt in regard to Roald Gibbons.

Roald appeared to Kim to be uninformed and incompetent; but on the contrary, he had learned the business thoroughly from his father. There was one division of the company that he knew especially well.

This division was known to only a few people in the company, and no one outside knew it existed. Roald managed this special division, and left the rest of the management to the routine procedures and junior executives.

While the rest of the company was in a state of organized hysteria,

with great ships loading from the massive warehouses of food, medicine, and other relief supplies, and heaving into the sky bound for Lyrane, Roald was having a quiet conference with the members of his special division.

Roald's father had known that the cheapest way to relieve an emergency was to alleviate the causes behind it, unless it were a natural disaster. For this reason, he had organized a corps of special agents to penetrate behind the scenes to straighten out the causes and cut short the emergencies that Universal Relief had to pay for.

"Apparently there is a definite force operating on Lyrane," Roald was saying to his elite corp, "that caused these men, who had been living by the standards of that civilization and becoming rich from it, to cease the activity which they had profited by."

"Could it be a religious doctrine?" one of them asked.

"Possibly. It could be anything. The fact is we don't know—and we should. So we're going to Lyrane. For the Main Office, this is a Class A; but for us it is a Class AA!"

EROL GARBIN sat on the cool stone terrace of the mountain lodge, gazing out over the small valley with the golden orange sun of Lyrane setting behind the mountains. The cool evening breeze gently rearranged his white hair and brushed over the creased forehead and the worried eyes.

He looked up to see his daughter come out on to the terrace. She was a comely young woman of slight build and apparently sensitive nature as vivified in her piquant features. He gave her a wistful smile, at which she rushed into his arms and buried her head in his shoulder, which was still powerful despite his age. Her body quivered with muffled sobs.

"Yma, my dearest Yma," he said tenderly. "Why didn't you marry, so that you would have none of this? You could be leading your own life, instead of bearing my burden."

"You are no burden, Father. You are my life. And now that your life is threatened—"

He knew what had upset her. He had heard the newscasts too—yes, the video still operated, controlled by the people. He had heard the names of his old friends—Fredrikson, Tomlin, Masschau—all dead by violence.

"Why do you keep silent?" his daughter asked with a little child's pleading. "Where is the protection you were offered? Why don't you tell the people?" The world was mad and destructive in the eyes of the child—the woman who was a child in the face of this dilemma.

He gently quieted her with a large, steady hand that pressed her head to him.

"It would do no good. Arnson tried it."

She looked up with hope in her eyes.

"He spoke to a special meeting of his stockholders and tried to tell them. They scorned it as a wild fantasy to excuse his betrayal. They issued him an ultimatum—work! He said that they would have to believe him; he couldn't work. They killed him."

The hope slid away and her eyes assumed the depths of despair and bitterness.

Despair for the future, and bitterness for the past. And she thought of the past—for she dared not think of the future.

Where does violence start, she wondered. Trace it to its roots; what's its source, what's its manifestation?

It starts with one man and an idea. Many men may have had the same idea, but it takes one man to express it at the right time, to apply it. Then the planning, by many or by one.

And, finally, the last step is persuasion. The man who had the original idea must convince others. He must indoctrinate them with this new concept so that they believe. No more.

For once a man, who has been a stable entity in a stable organization, develops and believes a strange and contradictory idea—the result is inevitable. Misunderstanding, resentment, hate, violence. The cycle carries on from there with its own momentum.

And the people who are swept up in it, and that may include anyone from the most innocent to the perpetrator himself, are as helpless to control its outcome as are the atoms helpless to control the nova they started in a sun.

So this violence on Lyrane had begun, with one man, then a group of men, and then had come the misunderstanding, resentment, hate, violence cycle. It manifested itself in the offices of Universal Relief as a logical study in sociology and economics.

But to Yma Garbin and her father, it was pure hell.

When had it all started, and when would it end?

Did it start that first day when an orphanage in the capital city burned to the ground, and not one of the many philanthropists made a move or an offer to aid or restore?

Yes, that was when it started for the public, but it had really started in midnight conversations in locked rooms. Words, an idea, then the act—and who is to say which is more real?

But there was no questioning the reality of what she had seen at Tomlin's house. That was yesterday.

Tomlin, the greatest living biochemist in the empire, was nothing but a sad, huddled corpse. His beautiful mansion was slashed and looted, and then fired to the ground. The air was filled with the odor of burning, of death—but especially the mentally sickening, defeating odor or violence.

This was true of the whole planet, especially in the cities. The great houses beseiged by furious mobs, shattered. Night full of stray shots and casual death. Every man with that cold gleam in his eye when he looked at even his best friend.

"Did you cause it?"

Yma lay in her father's arms, her mind reeling through this wax works of personal horror and death.

This scene was interrupted by a gyro landing on the lawn.

EROL WATCHED it curiously; his daughter, tensely. A man emerged and strode towards them.

He was a young man, with good and intelligent features, and Erol felt no fear.

"Dr. Garbin," the man addressed him, "I'm delighted to find you. I tried to see others—I was always too late." He paused, then said, "If anyone should be able to tell me what has happened, you should."

A slight suspicion showed in Erol's face while Yma looked as wary as an animal.

"If I can help you in any way, sir, I shall be delighted," Erol said.

The young man sat down. His eyes told of bewilderment and horror, and Erol guessed that he had been in the cities.

"My name is Florin Brite," the man said after a long silence. "I was a student of Tomlin, the biochemist, who was, I believe, your friend. I left over a year ago to study at the Institute of Klynos. I heard of trouble here and grabbed the first ship home.

"I never dreamed I'd find such violence.

"When I tried to find out what happened, I only found that all the great men that I knew were murdered, or in hiding."

"How did you find where I was?" Erol asked.

"I talked to one of Tomlin's servants, an old fellow—scared silly—but he remembered me and he told me."

Erol seemed to accept this. "What do you want to know?"

"Sir, I just want to know what happened. Why do the people feel they have been deceived, and by whom? Why are all the incorporated men in danger of their lives?"

"It is the corporation men who have deceived the public." It was a flat statement by Erol, without rancor or sympathy. "They are, in consequence, subject to the wrath of the people who relied upon them."

The bewilderment in the young man's eyes deepened. "How could they deceive the public? Why? They had everything to gain from earning luxury pay for their stockholders. Why did they stop?"

As if at a signal, Erol relaxed and his weariness became evident. Yma relaxed somewhat but remained alert.

"Why they did," Erol replied, "is a private matter that only each of those men knows. The fact is that they, myself included, did—and now we must pay."

"You sir? But you were always such an eminent figure. I've admired you from childhood as being one of the best of the planet's many scientists. Your researches in sociology have led the empire. Why should you suddenly stop your writing?"

"Fine flattery, son, but it will not avail you. I also see that you are not completely in the dark. You must have been investigating or you wouldn't know that I have a half-finished book that never got to the publisher on time.

"Anyway, the reasons are inconsequential, now. It is done, and we must consider the consequences. And we must consider you. What do you intend to do, return to Klynos, or stay here?"

"You don't get out of it that easily," Florin said. "Yes, consider me. Consider me as a citizen of this planet, a believer in its principles.

I am no idiot that can't understand or won't accept the truth.

"You are a sociologist. Here we have one of the most paradoxical sociological situations imaginable on our planet. There obviously are many unknown factors. You know them—you must. Just consider me a student and explain the functionings of these phenomena."

"You try my patience, Mr. Brite. I am accepting you at face value, but you are a stranger to me. What I wish to keep to myself is entirely my business. As I say, I am accepting you, and trying to help you—as we all must do in this mess. Now what do you intend to do?"

With a fatalistic shrug, Florin replied, "I cannot go back to Klynos. My education was paid for by my stock in corporation-men here. That is now, as you know, worthless."

Yma spoke to him for the first time. "Then don't you feel resentment towards the men who—who betrayed you?" Her eyes awaited his answer.

Florin smiled. "I do not feel that I have been betrayed. I know that the corporation-men, representing the most intelligent element of Lyrane, wouldn't do this thing without a sound reason."

Erol said, "Apparently you wish to throw in your lot with us, rather than the mob."

"My loyalty to my teacher and his associates compels me to do so. It is also my personal desire."

"You won't get any luxury pay for that loyalty," Yma snapped.

"That's unfair. You know Tomlin always advocated proper living from a moral obligation rather than for mercenary reward."

Their conversation was interrupted by a faint humming. Out over the valley three gyros were approaching at a low altitude.

Bitterly, Yma said, "Apparently Tomlin's servant has talked to other people—or perhaps Mr. Brite here—."

Florin shrugged again. "I have no defense except to say that I talked to no one. Either you believe me or you don't."

Erol chimed in, "You'll have to excuse my daughter; she's upset. I expected them to discover me long before this. This abandoned hunting lodge was too well known."

Yma's mind jumped on that. Yes, she thought, How well it is known—to me. My childhood is stuffed full of memories of this place, all pleasant. I know the woods around here better than the streets of the city. Now it will be the scene of this furtive hiding, suspense, and God knows what new violence.

While she was thinking, Erol was still talking. "I will ask you, since you are young and more adept in this sort of emergency. What shall we do?"

Florin glanced at Yma, and saw that the bitterness had left her in the face of danger. She too looked anxiously to him for help.

"If we stay here," he said, "we will be killed without question. I have no doubt that those ships are part of the mob. Even if it is the police, and I doubt there are any left after the rioting, they will imprison us."

Erol said, "This is a hunting lodge. There are some weapons here. We have nothing but your gyro to escape in, and it's too slow.

I can see that those are police gyros."

"Then we'll fight," Yma declared and rushed inside, with Florin and Erol following her.

"This place is not much for defense," Florin said while they rummaged for rifles, for nothing more deadly was allowed outside the hands of the Galactic Patrol. "I suggest we make it seem peaceful and surprise them."

"Good idea, boy," Erol said. "If you want, I'll sit outside as a decoy."

"That's great!" Florin said quickly, ignoring Yma's protest. "If they see you, they will probably land and talk; but if nobody's in sight, they might bomb us."

The three worked well together, swiftly and efficiently. Erol sat on the veranda, in the open, with a pistol under a lap robe, while Yma and Florin stationed themselves inside.

The three gyros approached cautiously. They were the large black type used by the planetary police, but from the inexpert way they were handled all three at the lodge knew they were not bearing police. They carried bombs, the one weapon allowable to planetary police by the Galactic Patrol, but the men in them would have nothing more than firearms. Therefore it was imperative to get them on the ground.

They circled over the lodge, with two finally landing and one remaining aloft. Florin padded over to Yma, and whispered for her to station herself in some bushes by the lodge. He told her to try to shoot down the gyro above when firing began.

Men piled out of the ships which had landed, and approached the lodge. They spread out and swiftly encircled the building. They all carried rifles. Florin estimated that there were about twenty of them. Three of them approached Erol.

"Are you Erol Garbin?"

"Yes. What can I do for you?"

"We are arresting you."

"What for?"

"For betraying the confidence of the people."

"May I see your warrant?"

"We don't need a warrant. We are a people's committee, come to take you to a people's court, where you will undoubtedly be found guilty and executed."

"And what if I refuse to recognize your authority?"

"We will have to kill you. Resisting arrest—"

What happened next surprise Florin with its swiftness. Erol flipped the gun from under the robe and with three snap shots dropped all three men.

Florin did not let surprise hamper him, for Erol's shots were echoed by his own rifle, which caught two men who were further away.

As the rest of the attackers dove for cover, Florin was pleased to hear the blast of a rifle from the side of the lodge, and the whine of a shattered blade as the gyro plummeted to the ground.

Yma had done well, hitting where he told her, at the base of the props. The moment of victory was rudely shattered by a volley of fire from the men around the lodge.

As Erol sprang from his chair and dove towards the door, he was hit and fell outside. Ignoring his wound he kicked over a table and

used it as a shield, returning fire. Florin's thought of rescuing him, was cut short by Erol's yell, "Get to the back of the lodge. They may rush it."

Florin made a dash for it, finding Erol's words true. The attackers were moving in. He still heard firing from the front and side, so he felt reassured.

He was lost in the blind ritual of firing at moving objects. His whole mind was devoted to the problems of loading clips, changing windows to keep everything covered, and trying to stay out of the path of the viciously whining bullets.

This was adventure and excitement. There was the crash of the rifles, the nasty whistle of ricochets, the moving bodies, sometimes jerking ludicrously when hit. Yet, to Florin, it was just a job, as it always is in the face of danger with every man. Just a specialized job with a very high incentive.

Staying alive.

Florin was surprised when he realized that he had disposed of all the attackers on his side. Despite their numbers, they were no match for the trio in the lodge. Florin was an expert marksman, and Erol and Yma had done enough hunting to be quite proficient. On the other side of the ledger, the people's committee were completely new to the business, some of them never having held a gun, and certainly not used to combat in woods.

When he went up front, he found that Erol had done a magnificent job despite his wound, beating back several attacks, and killing or wounding all his men. But he had received two more wounds and he was lying on the flagstone terrace in a litter of blood and cartridge cases.

The firing from the bushes at the side had stopped too, and Yma came rushing up, to kneel beside her father. She screamed at Florin to get bandages, but it was too late.

In the pastoral woods, men had fought and died, and now they felt tragedy. But the sky was still blue, and in a nearby dale, a bird warbled freely.

LATE that night, Florin and Yma stopped at a small cabin in the mountains, finding it deserted. They had been travelling on foot since the fight, leaving the gyros as too obvious a method of travel.

Yma was still upset over her father's death, and Florin had remained quiet in consideration. The mountain paths were rocky and steep, and they were both exhausted. After a cold meal, they sat in the gathering darkness in the cabin and talked.

"I know it's inconsiderate of me to talk of it," Florin said, "but don't you feel resentment against the men who killed your father?"

She shook her head and said, "I can't feel resentment, I know that it was just circumstances. Those men felt justified in what they did —and maybe they were."

"How can you be so cold-blooded?" he said half-angrily. "Killing is never justified, and ignorance and violence against intelligent and kindly men are the supreme injustice."

"Why bother discussing the right and wrong of it," she said wearily. "It is all over with, all so meaning-

less—and easily forgotten."

"That's just it," Florin said earnestly. "You've got to think about it, decide who was right and who was wrong. You've got to decide so that you can base your future actions and attitudes on that. You can't just mark it off the books, for it will still be in your head, all jumbled emotion and no sense."

He was trying desperately to bring her out of apathy. He knew that the incident and all of its contributing factors must be clinically analyzed, for both their sakes.

Again she shook her head. "No, they were right, they were betrayed. Some of those people had their life's saving of luxury pay invested in the corporation-men, and when those men failed them, they lost their savings and their futures. Poverty is a treacherous catalyst, it makes men do weird and horrible things. Common tricks of psychology added to that, make the whole mess into a primitive society of revenge and hatred."

Florin saw he had her on the right track, but ran his hand through his hair in bewilderment as he asked, "But why? We can see the result, but nobody is willing to tell the cause. I've got to know."

She looked at him, barely discernable in the dark cabin, then said, "Why are you so interested? Why did you help us?"

"I told you. I was a student of Tomlin, and a believer in the principles of this planet. I saw it produce a society where intelligence and virtue were manifest—whether for mercenary or other reasons is inconsequential. It worked, and it made a wonderful world. I wanted to do my part in that world—my world.

"Now I want to know *why* my world has crumbled into a screaming madhouse of violence."

"Yes, I can understand all too well how you feel. It's really horrible when you have grown up in a society, learned about its every intricacy, its principles, and come to have faith in it—then see it suddenly disintegrate.

"You come to think of your society as the universe, nothing else is as permanent as your world, your people. You make plans and move through that society, believing in it with a faith stronger than any religious faith—for you can see and understand it constantly.

"Then something like this happens. The familiar still exists, but palled with suffering and horror. People you have known suddenly become beasts. Your world has collapsed. And even if you know the reason, it doesn't seem possible, the reason is out of a textbook and unreal, but the disillusionment and despair are all too real.

"And from such a disintegration, you learn one important thing—how abysmally ignorant you are of the society that you've lived in, and of people in general."

There was a long silence.

Finally she said, "I believe in you, and I believe you should know the reason."

It was a strange scene as the two people, dirty and tired, sat in the crude cabin by the moonlight and discussed the fate of a world.

"When this planet was colonized," Yma began, "everyone laughed at us, and said that our radical socio-economic system couldn't work. All types of people

started here. Some were merely looking for a final refuge, some were criminals and confidence men out to 'take' this 'starry-eyed flock of crackpots'. Most of them, though, were solid citizens, who believed that this system of paying a man for his intelligence and virtue on a carefully regulated basis was the proper compromise between reality and altruism to achieve a Utopia.

"As you know, it did produce a peaceful, cultural world that has few if any equals in the galaxy. There was one dangerous element in the plan though. Men were paid for their ability and it was money that was used; and wherever there is money there is dishonesty and greed. We had security and precautions against such things disrupting us internally, but we never counted on outside interference.

"We joined that galactic company known as Universal Relief. Our government maintained that it performs the highest type of good deeds, they do it for profit, nevertheless it was still a beneficial organization. Its motive of meritorious work for profit was quite similar to our own economic structure, so we invested heavily in the company, both on an individual and a governmental level. We also gave them a large premium, because of our—well, our eccentricity. We were considered unstable, and I guess the company knew what it was talking about." The last comment was with a wry bitterness that stung Florin.

"Anyway, in the last few years a rival company has sprung up. This company, Galactic Aid, has made great strides and is a serious competitor to Universal Relief.

"—The managers of Galactic Aid thought that if they could take our account and investment from Universal, Galactic Aid would have a distinct advantage and eventually break their competitor. They tried salesmanship first, but we were loyal to the original company.

"Then they tried other means."

Until then her story had been told in the dispassionate voice of a mechanical reader, but when she continued, there was vehemence.

"In a galactic company there is inconceivable power, and inconceivable greed. They are willing, and able, to go to any lengths to gain an economic advantage over a rival. The fate of one planet, more or less, is irrelevant.

"Galactic Aid's method of destroying us for that advantage was very crude and very simple; but effective because of its simplicity.

"As you know, the ratio of corporation-men to citizens here is very disproportionate, and the economy of the planet is vested in comparatively few individuals. These few people were the ones Galactic Aid attacked.

"They sent their agents to the corporation-men, my father included, and told them to stop research, writing, art, or whatever they were doing to earn their luxury pay. They promised protection if they were threatened by the people, and also promised full re-instatement after normalcy had returned, plus a sizeable bonus for co-operating. The ones who refused this offer, were threatened, each one personally and their families. It was mass terrorization, and they actually killed a few to prove

their seriousness.

"Because of our social structure, this plan could, and did work. There are only 224 corporation-men with over a hundred stockholders. These people are, of course, quite clannish and have little actual contact with the masses. Therefore, this mass threat was heightened by the unity of the small group that it affected.

"You know the rest. Under this pressure the incorporated men stopped producing, the economy crumbled, and the riots began.

"We have developed a peaceful, cultural society, but no matter how civilized and stabilized a society is, once you knock out the financial props, the populace is going to go mad.

"The corporation men didn't receive the promised protection. They soon realized that they had been tricked, but it was too late. Galactic Aid wanted them destroyed by the mob; they wanted murder and riots; and they wanted a Class AA emergency which would drain Universal Relief's resources.

"They wanted an economic debacle on Lyrane, thus cutting off a large source of Universal's income.

"When the corporation-men tried to tell the people the truth, the mobs called them liars and killed them."

Yma appeared to be more relaxed after she had relieved her burdened mind. Florin, however, was stunned.

"I know it's terrible," she said, "but what can we do? What can anyone do? Their plan has succeeded, and the planet is too far into chaos to patch up things.

"There is nothing that can be done, so we have only individual survival to consider."

Florin said, "I don't know what your personal plans are, but I've got to go back to the cities. I've got work to do." She didn't question him.

The next morning, after a solid night's sleep, they separated. Yma headed through the mountains to some relatives, while Florin struck out for the capital.

THE OFFICE of the new, self-appointed Planetary Governor of Lyrane was quite busy. It was the disorganization of a new office, set up during an emergency. And yet, it was an office, a recognizable political mechanism.

Considering the murderous imbroglio that this planet had been facing, such an office, even in disorganized form, was quite surprising.

Due to the confusion and a knack for bluffing, Florin Brite was able to gain admittance to the Secretary-Governor's office. This official, a former municipal police chief, was obviously impressed with his new position. He was quite brusque to Florin.

"What is it man? I hope that it's important—don't want my time wasted. We're frightfully busy."

"I can see that, sir. I merely wished to establish my classification in the new administration."

"Good grief man!" the Secretary-Governor exploded. "We've published classification lists. Do I have to tell every man, woman and child their classification? Are you blind—or just too lazy to read?"

"My classification isn't listed,"

Florin said mildly.

"Isn't listed? What classification is that?"

"A scientist—and a former corporation-man."

Years of police work and interrogation had steeled the official. There was no surprise shown. "We handle those cases directly, Mr. ah —ah—"

"Florin Brite."

"Mr. Brite, there is a feeling of —uh—well, touchiness about such individuals so we handle their cases in confidence. I'm glad you came here—"

"Yes, you're quite delighted," Florin was no longer mild. "You're also quite amazed—for you had no idea that there were any corporation-men left after the 'purge', a very thorough purge, I might add."

"Now, see what I mean about touchiness? We were not responsible, not even involved in that mess. This new government is composed of citizens who merely wish stability and sanity. Co-operation is our keynote—"

"Cut it. I don't need the party platform, I've read your handbills. I just want to know, what about me?"

"Well, you will undoubtedly have to be put under some sort of protective custody. There is still strong feeling—"

Their tete a tete was interrupted by a rushing clerk shouting wildly.

"They did it! Universal Relief finally declared it a Class AA!"

The clerk was brandishing a sheet of paper, which he proffered to the Secretary, who took it with an expression of pleasure. His reading was interrupted by Florin's voice.

"It seems highly unnecessary that we be declared Class AA now. You people have done such a marvelous job of organizing an emergency government that everything seems to be well under control."

"Nonsense man," the Secretary declared. "There is still isolated fighting and rioting, even murder is not unusual."

"I merely wished to congratulate you on your speedy action. It was almost as if this government was waiting to spring into existence." The irony was very thinly veiled.

The Planetary Governor himself had entered the office while Florin was speaking.

There was ice in his voice as he said, "What do you mean by that, sir?"

Florin turned and bowed to him. When he spoke again, the veil was torn off and the irony was as flagrant as a dead rat—and as fragrant.

"Good day sir. I'm delighted to meet you. I was merely commenting to your Secretary on your efficiency and speed which has so helped this planet in its hour of need."

The Governor's eyes ossified. "Just words. What do you want?"

The irony disappeared, and Florin's voice transmuted to a tone of accustomed authority. "I want to find out just how you were able to organize and take over so quickly in this emergency. With this planet's economy completely shot after the corporation-men quit producing and with stocks down to nothing, I am fascinated by the problem of how you got financial backing."

"That is none of your business."

"On the contrary, it is very much my business. You left your offices in rather a turmoil in your rush to take control. Since you haven't had the time to security screen your governmental employees, the files were as open as if they'd been set on the sidewalks.

"From those files, my agents have procured some interesting items, such as—" and he paused to pull out a sheaf of papers—"cancelled checks made out to officials of your new government from Titanic Food Distributors, a subsidiary of Galactic Aid.

"Also a detailed plan of organization for this government, outlining each step for acquisition of power during the emergency. This plan is dated two years ago and is initialed 'CRS', which, I believe, are the initials of the president of Galactic Aid Incorporated. Handwriting analysts will sew that one up.

"The plan is quite fascinating. It gives the procedure for your present establishment: the vigilantes gradually converted to city councils, local governments, consisting of confused and unprepared citizens gullible to the suggestions of agent provocateurs, regional then international conventions to formulate the new government. And at every turn, every election, guided by citizen-agents who would never have seen political power under the old status quo.

"The future of this plan is even more fascinating—putting Lyrane on an industrialized economy, when Lyrane has never had industrial potential, gumming up the works with embargoes and tariffs; and a bureaucratic, leech-like government that will sop up everything in taxes.

"It's a masterpiece of planning—of planning the permanent financial and moral destruction of a planet."

The planetary officials had suddenly been confronted by a master duelist, this stranger was a swordsman with complete command of riposte, parry and thrust. All they could do was try a few clumsy lunges.

"Just who the hell are you to take charge this way and say these preposterous things?" the Governor asked.

Florin replied. "You, I know, are a minor executive of one of Galactic Aid's subsidiaries. I happen to be Roald Gibbons, head of Universal Relief.

"And since you want the cards on the table—here they are.

"We have this evidence that I have mentioned, and much more, all under lock and key now. We will use that evidence to prove that this planetary government was and is sponsored by Galactic Aid for the purpose of exploiting this planet in a negative sense and thereby removing it from the accounts of Universal Relief.

"We also have a solid case to prove that you, or some of your cohorts, incited the original treason and violence that caused this whole mess. My special investigators have unearthed the cobra nest of your government, while I personally had the satisfaction of gathering proof of your hand in the corporation-men purge."

From a casual administrative difficulty, Florin had turned the conversation, since he entered, into a venomous attack. Florin had re-

mained standing, but the two officials had retired to chairs. As opposition, they were discouragingly silent, but Florin had more than enough to carry the conversation alone.

The two governors were just listening, appalled, but as all men do when they watch their world crumbling, figuring angles, escapes, explanations. But Florin, or rather Roald, was smashing angles faster than they could think of them.

"Furthermore," he continued to the silent men, "if you will read that bulletin declaring this planet under Class AA emergency, you will find some interesting facts. As you may or may not know, when a planet is declared Class AA by a relief company, that company is empowered by galactic law to have several controls.

"Those controls consist of complete administration of the planet until status quo is resumed, establishment of martial law with the right to arrest and confiscate any persons or things that may have caused the emergency, confiscation of all planetary currency to be retained and re-issued at face value when normalcy returns and, of course, the right to bring charges in Galactic Court against individuals or organizations that have caused the emergency.

"On that last point, we, Universal Relief that is, have many charges to bring against Galactic Aid and its agents on this planet. First there is the charge of coercion, readily proved by the testimony of the corporation-men . . . yes, there are some left. *We* protected them. Other charges will include inciting planetary revolution, establishing a false government through outside sources, and—oh, just lots of others.

"Since you are an executive in Galactic Aid's organization, I will speak for your benefit now." Roald moved over and faced the Governor.

"You were pulled in from some desk job to handle this fledgling government. You had your orders, and for you it was mostly a paper operation. You understand what I have just been talking about, because you know galactic law.

"But now, let's talk about something you aren't familiar with. Let's talk about violence, death, and a sick planet—the things that your company planned and executed.

"For that your company will stand trial and be found guilty. It will probably be outlawed, and certainly bankrupt once fines and reparations are paid. Meanwhile, this planet, under the guidance of Universal Relief, will be helped to recuperate and the people will be informed of the gross injustice they have suffered. I am sure they will then desire to return to their previous system.

"But so much for the future. What about the past? Do you fully realize the enormity of the crime that your company has committed?

"Of course you don't. You weren't with me when I saw a nice old gentleman, one of the most brilliant minds of the age, blasted down with primitive rifles and even more primitive rage. You haven't heard the screams at night, have you? You weren't around, and neither was I, thank God, when Gerta Robin, that beautiful woman physicist was caught by the mob.

(Continued on page 119)

A Pattern for Penelope

Here is the story that tells us why *the first day of February, 1956, was a very significant day for Miss Haskell, her cat Penelope and—the entire Universe! . . .*

BY ROBERT F. YOUNG

THE FIRST of February, nineteen hundred and fifty-six was a date of considerable significance on Miss Haskell's calendar. It marked the day on which she discovered that she needed new eyeglasses.

Galactically speaking, however, the first of February, nineteen hundred and fifty-six, was significant in quite another way. Its equivalent on the galactic calendar, which takes such factors as relative axial rotations and relative orbital velocities into consideration, marked the "day" on which a new quality emerged from behind the crude pillars of Arrogance and Conceit, which hitherto had supported the galactic credo, and stepped into the civilized radiance of a quarter of a million suns. Due to the fortuitous circumstances of its introduction it captivated the entire galactic civilization in a matter of galactic minutes, undermined the whole socio-centric structure, and led ultimately to the recognition of a number of primitive cultures which the Supreme Council had steadfastly snubbed for galactic centuries.

It was a quality that was only relatively new. On primitive Earth it had been around for centuries and Earth philosophers were still vying with each other in their various attempts to name it. Some of them called it "naive sentimentalism" and one of them in particular called it "reverence for life". Earth poets, who were supposed to be well versed in such phenomena, were wont to call it "humility" . . .

In its nascent phase, the first of February, nineteen hundred and fifty-six—insofar as it applied to

Illustrated by Kelly Freas

Miss Haskell—gave no intimation that it was going to be noticeably different from its predecessor, the thirty-first of January, nineteen hundred and fifty-six. She got up at her usual hour, hurried downstairs and dressed in the warmth of the kitchen the way she always did during the winter months. She put the teakettle on and made a few typical remarks to Penelope on the subject of New England winters. Then, unsuspectingly, she went out to get the milk.

The milk bill regarded her bleakly when she opened the lid of the small insulated milk box. The "Please" written diagonally across its white countenance was what she noticed first, and small wonder since there were four lines under it this time instead of the three she was accustomed to. Reluctantly, she lowered her eyes to the total.

$23.17, she read. She knew then that the day wasn't going to be an ordinary one after all, despite its deceptive beginning.

She shivered in the cold wind. Fine snow was blowing in from the ocean, slanting across the low hills that lined the shore, finding the house and sweeping unchecked from one end of the open back porch to the other. There was a small boy standing on the summit of the highest hill, staring out at the somber restless mass of water. She noticed him subconsciously just before she turned and re-entered the kitchen.

"I don't know what we're going to do, Penelope," she said, setting the single quart of milk on the kitchen table and laying the bill beside it. "I simply don't know what we're going to do!"

Penelope yawned. She stretched her sleek gray body luxuriously, then she jumped down from the rocker and confidently approached the saucer behind the stove.

"Oh, I know *you're* not worried," Miss Haskell said. "*You* don't have to try to stretch *your* pension. All *you* have to do is sleep and drink milk, and I never did see a cat who could drink as much milk as you do!" She turned back the tinfoil cap of the milk bottle and went over to the stove and filled the saucer. "Just the same," she added softly, "I don't know what I'd do without you."

She returned the milk bottle to the table and procured a tea bag and a cup from the cupboard. Passing the window she noticed the small boy again, consciously this time. She paused, staring out into the wind-slanted snow. He was standing motionlessly on the hilltop, looking out across the foreboding waste of snow-pocked waves and troughs as though he were confronted with the most intriguing vista of his lifetime. Why, Miss Haskell thought, he'll *freeze* standing out there! He'll catch his death of cold standing out there in that cold wind without even a coat on!

She opened the door and stepped out on the back porch. She called out, her thin voice fighting valiantly with the wind. "Little boy," she called. "Little boy!" After a moment he turned around and faced her. Even at that distance she noticed that there was something unusual about him.

She beckoned to him. After hesitating a moment he started walking toward the house, down the white hillside and across the windswept patch of ground where last summer Miss Haskell had raised string beans and red potatoes. He walked lightly over the uneven, slightly tumbled earth, not stumbling once, and he stopped at the foot of the porch steps. He looked up at her questioningly.

He had the largest, widest eyes that she had ever seen. Looking down into their gray depths she had the vertiginous feeling that she was standing on the brink of an abyss, staring into misty concepts that were far beyond her ken. For a moment her composure deserted her, then her eyes dropped to the open collar of his strange jacket, dropped still farther to the whiteness of his bare hands, and it returned abruptly, accompanied by indignation.

"Young man, you get into this house right this minute!" she said,

in a manner reminiscent of Aunt Polly laying down the law to Tom Sawyer. "Standing out there in the wind on the coldest day of winter without even a coat on. Why, you're liable to catch your death! The *idea!*"

She thought his eyes widened slightly, but she wasn't sure. It didn't seem possible that they could get much wider. His expression, which reminded her of the expressions she used to see long ago when she had been a country school teacher and had found it frequently necessary to interrupt her charges in the midst of their grandiose daydreams, changed appreciably. It became friendly and disarming. "I'm not really very cold," he said in an astonishingly pleasant voice, "but I'll come in if you like."

"Not really very cold indeed!" Miss Haskell said, holding the door open for him. "Why you look as though you're half frozen!" (He really did: his face and hands were almost shockingly white.) "You sit down now, and I'll fix you a cup of tea. What's your name?"

"Otelis." He looked around him as though he were intensely interested in every detail of the small crowded kitchen. He paid particular attention to the position of the several chairs. (Penelope was out of sight behind the stove, still preoccupied with her milk.)

"Why what an odd name!" Miss Haskell said, getting another tea bag and another cup from the cupboard. "What won't people be naming their children next! Live near here?"

"Yes, in a way." He sat down in the rocker which faced the window and from which a view of the ocean could be obtained. "Relatively speaking, I live quite close."

Miss Haskell wondered why he didn't take his hat off. People simply didn't bring up their children the way they used to, she thought, and they didn't dress them snug and warm the way they used to either. The hat, for instance, was a flimsy little thing consisting of nothing but silvery wirelike threads woven loosely together, and it didn't even come down far enough to cover his ears!

She sighed. "I guess I just can't keep track of my neighbors any more," she said. "A body gets old so fast it seems like the years just fly by!"

"You're not so very old, are you?" Otelis asked.

"I'll never see sixty-five again!"

"But that's not old at all. Why—"

Miss Haskell had gone to the cupboard drawer for spoons. When she turned around, the aspect of her small guest startled her. He was sitting stiffly in the rocker, his mouth partly open, his eyes focused on something moving towards him across the kitchen floor. They had definitely widened this time. "What in the world is the matter?" she said.

He did not answer. Miss Haskell followed the direction of his gaze, expecting to see nothing less than a saber-toothed tiger, but all she saw was Penelope who had emerged from behind the stove and was approaching the rocker with an air of adamantine proprietorship. When she reached it she paused for a moment and regarded its occupant contemplatively. Otelis shrank back, his gray eyes enormous.

"Why you act as though you never saw a cat before!" Miss Haskell said.

Penelope leaped then, landing softly on his lap. For a while he seemed incapable of movement. He sat there rigidly, leaning as far back in the rocker as he could, his white hands tautly gripping the arms. It wasn't until he realized that Penelope didn't intend to proceed any farther than his lap that he began to relax. Presently, after she had curled up comfortably and closed her eyes, he released one of the rocker arms and very cautiously moved his hand to the gray, softly pulsating body.

Wonderment suffused his face. "Why," he said, "it makes a noise!"

"She's *purring!*" Miss Haskell said. "For heaven's sake, didn't you ever hear a cat purr before? Are you a city boy?"

"I—I'm afraid I neglected to learn about cats. I must have missed them somehow. But oceanography's my speciality. That's the main reason my planet paper received merit-classification."

"You must be a city boy, studying such outlandish subjects and not knowing anything about such ordinary creatures as cats!" Miss Haskell got the kettle from the stove and filled the two cups. "I drink mine plain," she said, sitting down, "but you can have some of Penelope's milk in yours. And of course you'll want sugar. All boys do."

"No, I'll drink mine the way you do," Otelis said quickly, watching her closely as though he were waiting to ascertain just the way she *did* drink it.

"Well, be careful then. It's awfully hot." She raised the steaming cup to her lips and took a careful sip.

Otelis followed suit. He set the cup down very quickly, Miss Haskell thought. When he did so his hand happened to touch the milk bill, and he picked it up, as though he were eager to occupy his attention with something other than tea. "What's this?" he asked.

"It's the milk bill, but I'm afraid it's Penelope's death notice, too." Miss Haskell slumped a little in her chair. "If I can't pay it this month they aren't going to write 'Please' any more. They just aren't going to leave any more milk."

"Then why don't you pay it?"

"I can't. Not till my pension comes, and that's a long ways off."

"You mean Penelope will *die?*" His gray eyes had attained their maximum circumference.

"She will without her milk."

He looked down suddenly at the cat curled up in his lap. He ran his fingers gently up and down her back and the purring crescendoed, filling the kitchen. "Why," he said, "she's beautiful in a way. She shouldn't have to die. That's wrong."

"Lots of things are wrong in this world," Miss Haskell said, "but I guess there isn't very much we can do about them. But I shouldn't be talking like this," she added quickly. "Carrying on like a lonely old woman, telling a little boy all my troubles. You just drink your tea now, and forget about Penelope."

"Funny how I missed cats that way," he said abstractedly. Abruptly he raised his eyes and stared through the window at the somber expanse of ocean that showed darkly beyond the thickening snow.

Miss Haskell saw an expression of boyish yearning settle upon his face, saw a far-away look come into his eyes. He sat there immobile for a long time, his eyes lost, and then, slowly, the expression faded and his eyes returned from wherever they had been and dropped gently back to Penelope.

"I always sort of liked oceans," he said. "I don't know why. Because they're so big, I guess."

"What do oceans have to do with cats?" Miss Haskell asked in bewilderment.

A smile flickered at the corners of his mouth. The word "wistful" entered Miss Haskell's mind, then ran quickly out again when she saw how serene his eyes had become. "Quite a lot," he said. He stood up, first lifting Penelope from his lap and depositing her carefully on the kitchen floor. He seemed taller somehow. "I have to go now. Thank you very much for the tea."

"You're very welcome," Miss Haskell said, "although I don't believe you touched a drop of it."

He picked up the milk bill once more and stared at it very intently. The silvery threads of his ridiculous hat seemed to glow. Finally he laid the bill down again and he walked over to the door.

"Make sure you go straight home now," Miss Haskell said, getting up and opening the door for him. "Don't let me catch you standing out there in that cold wind again!"

"I won't be standing out there any more," he said.

He paused for a moment on the porch steps, staring across the field and the snow-blurred hills at the leaden grayness of the ocean. Then he went down the steps and started across the field toward the highest hill. "Goodbye," he called over his shoulder.

"Goodbye!" Miss Haskell shouted into the wind.

She watched him from the window. It was snowing harder than ever now and by the time he reached the hill she could barely see him at all. He probably lived in one of the winterized summer cottages that stood a short distance down the beach, she thought. She wished suddenly that she had asked him specifically, and wished too that she had thought to ask him why he wasn't in school. But it was too late now. He was climbing the hill now, a vague blur of a little boy in a New England snowstorm. Just before he reached the summit a gust of wind sprang up in a wild white flurry and engulfed him, and by the time the flurry had died away the hill was empty.

Miss Haskell sighed, more aware of her loneliness than usual. But of course there was Penelope, and as long as she had Penelope she could never be completely lonely. Thinking of Penelope reminded her of the milk bill, and with a shudder she went over to the table and picked it up, intending to put it it away somewhere where she wouldn't have to look at it. But before she put it away she looked at it once more, and that was when she discovered that she needed new eyeglasses.

THE M.C. waited until the last child had stepped out of the vertical halo of the matter transmitter and had taken his assigned seat upon the studio stage. Then

he stepped before the gargantuan eye of the tele-camera and faced the galaxy-wide audience. Beside him the Alterator scintillated like a complex silver web.

"You have just witnessed the winners of the 'My Favorite Primitive Planet' essay contest returning from their sojourns on the planets which they selected as the subjects of their winning essays," he said. "During these sojourns they have instituted the temporal alterations granted to them as a reward of merit, and in a moment they will come forward singly and validate those alterations before the Alterator.

"This contest has been sponsored by the Society for the Encouragement of Youthful Confidence in an attempt to impress upon the minds of our galactic-citizens-to-be some idea of the omnipotence to which their scientific heritage entitles them, and to give them some conception, through studying the language, customs and literature of inferior cultures, of the supreme superiority of our own culture. Naturally, due to the serious ramifications that might result from tampering with certain integral time patterns, the winners were instructed to confine all alterations of a geographical nature to nominal patterns only, and those of an historical nature to events which did not involve strong philosophical or ethical trends. Each winner was limited to one alteration."

The M.C. turned toward the stage where the children sat waiting, their white faces shining, their little alterator helmets twinkling brightly in the radiance of the studio lights. "You will come forward one at a time and orally submit your alterations for validation," he said. . . "Alesa, would you like to be first?"

Alesa walked demurely across the stage and stood before the intricate web of shining thread-like wires. "The name 'Tekit,' most magnificent city on Tarth 7, to 'Alesa'," she said.

The Alterator hummed. Alesa returned to her seat.

"Voris?"

Voris came forward a little shyly. " 'Liliel', largest continent on Fruith 3, to 'Voris'."

"Stris?"

"The 'Metnumen' system of government of Matnanet, Sairis 12, to the 'Stris' system of government."

"Elora?"

"The river 'Tib', on Tranuska 2, to the river 'Elora'."

"Otelis?"

He felt ashamed at first, standing up there in front of all those famous children whose names were already integrated in geography textbooks all over the galaxy. And then, suddenly, he didn't feel ashamed any more at all. He felt proud instead, and he stood up very straight before the dazzling web of the Alterator and he said what he had to say with quiet dignity.

" '$23.17' on the milk bill of Miss Abigail Haskell, Rural Route No. 4, Smithport, Massachusetts, America, Sol 3, to '$00.00'," he said. "and the word 'Please' on same bill to the word 'Paid'."

The North "Otelis" Ocean wouldn't have sounded right anyway. • • •

THE NAME OF THIS CITY

The rebellion of Mankind was successful, and the fate of Loki, Lakkuret Administrator, rested with the rebel leader. Skelling, the rebel leader, didn't know it but in his decision also rested the fate of Mankind.

BY JOHN CHRISTOPHER

HUMAN servants admitted Henry Skelling, Advisor for Putnek, to the presence of the Lakkuret Administrator. Skelling, as was necessary, bowed to the Administrator in the presence of the servants. Then the Administrator dismissed the servants. It had been an innovation of his own to do this during routine interviews. Skelling, who had been Advisor for Putnek for a very long time, could remember the previous Administrator; he had always kept the servants by him except for top-secret discussions, and they were rare.

The Administrator's name was Loki—on Lakkuret, at any rate, the Mirmi never owned to more than one name. There was a title, of course. Sir Loki. It was odd, Skelling thought, that they kept the vernacular for a thing like that.

Loki spoke. "Well, Skelling, how are things?"

He spoke a clear precise English, clearer, Skelling knew, than his own.

"They might be worse. At least there isn't quite as much unrest as there was a couple of days ago. But things are hanging fire now, waiting on the Berlin news."

Loki looked up at Skelling. "Yes, the Tulinn business."

It was difficult to be sure whether there was a snub intended in his correction of Berlin to Tulinn or not. But Skelling had stopped looking for snubs a good many years before. It was the essentials he went for now.

He said, "If the sentence is carried out, the rising won't be confined to *this* continent."

Loki looked at him; hailing from

a smaller planet his bones were longer and more fragile, his muscles more easily wearied; he drooped languidly in his special Mirmi chair.

"For other continents I have other advisers, Skelling. As you know."

"As I know. All the same, when there's the possibility of a really big fire, the man who knows the dryness of the local tinder is as good a guide as any . . . What do they say, by the way?"

Loki smiled wearily. "You still try to persuade me that you don't know exactly what advice I get from the others? Skelling, let's stop fooling each other."

Skelling looked at him a moment, and they both laughed.

"Skelling, the original regulation made any unauthorized entry of a Mirmi building punishable by death. Two years ago, there was the Dietle case. He got a very light sentence."

"We didn't think so. Five years —and he was shown to be as mad as a hatter. To us, it was savage."

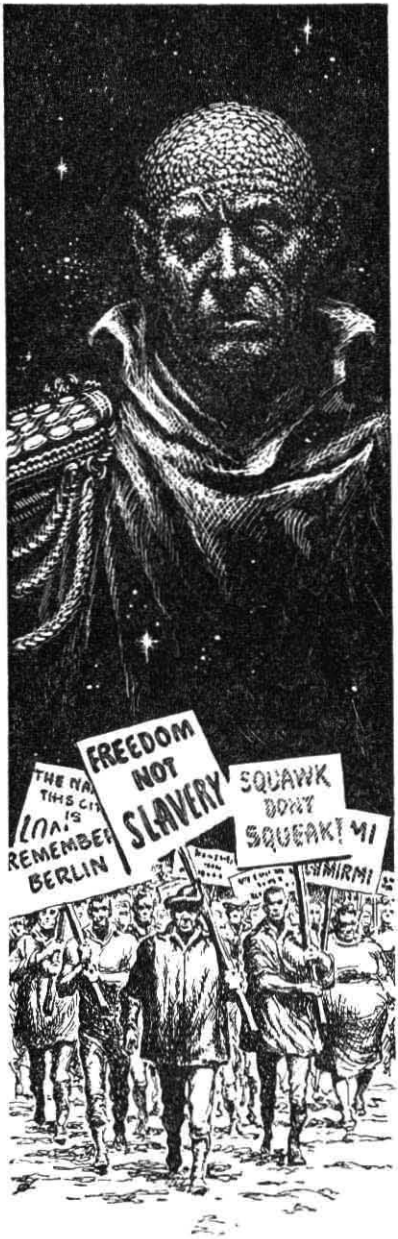
Loki shook his head. "I'm not sure you know as much about the Dietle case as you think you do . . . This new affair at Tulinn. Three men caught in the Mirmi building by night, with equipment for circumventing the alarm system—and *armed!* What verdict can your people possibly expect? What—"

"Sir Loki," Skelling interrupted. "When a planet, an entire race, is kept in subjection—what do your people expect?"

"What we can command. That only. Obedience."

"By what right?"

Loki laughed. "We've travelled



Illustrated by Kelly Freas

a long way. Had your first predecessor put that question to my first predecessor, what would have happened?"

Skelling said evenly, "A public flogging, I imagine."

"And you imply that the simple carrying out of a law, for whose breaking the penalty is well known, would be brutal?"

Skelling looked at him warily. They had become respectful adversaries, in a way friends, but he still felt, at times, that he was treading dangerously. That did not stop him from putting his foot down with some weight.

"We've civilized you, but not to the extent we would like. Yes, it would be brutal."

Loki laughed quite a long time. Skelling waited for him to stop.

Still smiling a little Loki said, "I've been looking through some of our early administrative reports. They're interesting. Those for the administration of my predecessor Skrutt particularly."

"Locally known," Skelling remarked, "as Satan Skrutt."

"In one year," Loki went on, "Administrator Skrutt ordered more than eighty-four thousand executions. And the result?—calm over the planet from Surrint to Tolda. In my four years there has not been a single execution. And now, when it looks as though I may be forced to act—not harshly but, shall we say, firmly—you tell me I am threatened by a planet-wide wave of revolt."

"I tell you the truth."

Loki glanced at him. "I don't disbelieve you. My other sources, you will be glad to hear, confirm it. But tell me, what will be the reason for the revolt—excessive harshness or excessive laxness?"

"Neither. That calm—in the year of the eighty-four thousand executions—did that mean defeat? That was Skrutt's last year. His successor found as many willing to be martyrs; only he didn't have Skrutt's stomach for the job. Nor did he have Skrutt's instructions; your government fell over those eighty-four thousand victims. Skrutt's successor came out with the first glimmering of Mirmi conscience behind him."

Loki's look was tired. "Don't lecture me, Skelling. You can't imagine that all this hasn't been the basis for a lot of discussion back on Mirma. Something happened to us when we conquered this planet. It was not our first conquest, but it was the first time we had encountered a continuing resistance. We met it, with a policy of repression—Skrutt had his orders just as Nemmin who relieved him had his. It failed. There are differing opinions as to why. Our liberals claim that you taught us a lesson in ethics. There is another party that talks of a failure of nerve—and believes that the failure can be retrieved."

"And which party—?"

"Do I belong to? I am a professional administrator, Skelling. Like Skrutt, like Nemmin. I take my orders, and carry them out to the best of my ability."

There was a moment's silence. Skelling broke it.

"Well," he said, "has the government fallen?"

"Tell me," Loki countered. "How do you come to be so well informed on Mirmi politics?"

Skelling allowed a slight trace of contempt to enter his voice. "Why has the Mirmi term of service here been reduced, from five to three years? We corrupt your troops within a twelve-month of their posting here. You know very well that if the revolt comes your own troops will not be united."

"If the revolt comes, I should not be too confident that reprisals will be confined to the use of Lakkuret-based troops. We can have a battle squadron here within two weeks. This time it will not be just one city; they will all feel it."

Skelling half smiled. "Will Mirmi fire on Mirmi?"

Loki's look to Skelling carried something that was vague, but it might have been an appeal. It was incredible that it should be so, but it looked that way.

"We've known each other some time, Skelling. It was not I who sealed your appointment as Adviser, but I've come to rely on you. Frankly, I don't know what the result of repressive action would be. Neither do you, so we're equal. But one thing you must understand—I obey orders. If I am told to use the battle fleet, I will use it. I was trained from childhood for this kind of job. Throughout my career I have never failed my superiors. I won't fail them now, either. Whatever it involves, I shall do my job."

Skelling spoke softly. "I'll tell you what it will involve. Evacuation. It will be better for you Mirmi if you evacuate without bloodshed, but evacuate you must. We have won already, Sir Loki. It only remains for your people to recognize it."

Loki drummed his seven fingers on the desk. The screen that was set into it was blank. Skelling had seen it on other visits covered with the blunt clumsy characters of the Mirmi language. Loki caught his glance.

"The news should have been here by now."

"The government will fall," Skelling said.

"Yes, but to be replaced by which party? The government is a coalition. What will take its place —a government of liberals, or of repressives?"

"Our information says Allef will head the new government."

"Your information!" Loki's eyes were on the blank screen. "Camp gossip. Sometimes you overestimate your powers, Skelling."

Skelling said indifferently: "Perhaps."

Eyes still on the screen, Loki continued: "I hear rumors of Lakkuret politics, too. I hear that, on this evacuation supposition, you have been created World President-Elect. Congratulations."

"You know our proverb," Skelling said, "about the possible slips between cup and lip. A President-Elect is not a President."

"No, and may never be. But congratulations, all the same. Should we have to abandon this planet, I would prefer to think of the administration being in good hands after we had gone; and with you I know it would be."

"Thank you," Skelling murmured. Then in a firmer tone, "I would return the compliment but for one minor detail—that the worst man on Earth would fit your place better than you do. Nothing personal, you understand."

"I understand."

The small screen flashed into activity, and they both tensed. Skelling knew enough Mirmi to pick out certain words—"demonstration," "crisis" and "Surrint." It was not the message from Mirma that they were waiting for.

Loki pressed a button, and the message was transferred to the large screen on the wall. "Local," he murmured. He pressed another button. The writing gave place to a street scene.

"Here," Loki said with some astonishment. "In Surrint itself!"

The camera closed in. The marching column was very orderly and very steady, though some of the faces looked nervous. They were singing the old song, part march, part dirge, that dated back to the time of Skrutt. They were carrying banners: FREEDOM NOT SLAVERY—THE BERLIN PATRIOTS SHALL NOT DIE—and, more roughly done but in bigger letters: THE NAME OF THIS CITY IS LONDON.

"I think," Loki said, "that the imposition of Mirmi names on your cities may have been a serious mistake."

Skelling pointed to the screen. "And—what do you propose to do about that?"

Loki smiled. "Ignore it. It isn't relevant to the main issue. I take it you knew this would happen?"

"I advised against it." Skelling smiled ruefully. "Even a World President-Elect does not always have his wishes respected. It seemed to be a pointless provocation while we were waiting for the big news from Mirma."

A man in the front rank shook his fist towards the watching camera. He was a little man, and he looked scared.

"If we go," Loki said, "*if* we go, our stay here will not have been quite without advantage to you."

"We shall have interstellar travel, and a few other gadgets!"

"No, I didn't mean that kind of thing. You know that. We came to a planet that had learned nothing from two shattering wars, and was preparing to plunge itself into a third. We brought you peace."

"We remember that propaganda," Skelling said bitterly. "We remember that we believed the talk of benefits—and found ourselves slaves."

"All the same," Loki said emphatically, "there were benefits. If we went, we should leave you a united planet."

"A benefit," Skelling said, "but we've paid for it. Another civil war might not have been worse."

"Civil war? Your ancestors would not have called it that. Perhaps you needed the Mirmi to bring these things home to you."

"Perhaps."

"And us, what becomes of us, the Mirmi?"

"How many planets do you claim to have colonized—two hundred, three hundred? You have living space enough. You don't want us to feel sorry for you, do you?"

"A millenium of expansion," Loki said quietly. "Almost exactly a millenium. A thousand years of expansion, the creation of a stellar empire extending over five hundred light years. You could spare some sympathy for us, Skelling. Because once we begin to retreat, what follows? Once our hegemony

cracks, it's an open ring. You aren't the only race to which we've given interstellar travel. At least, our rule brought peace."

"The word 'peace,' Skelling said, "is beginning to hypnotize you. Peace . . . peace . . . peace. I told you we had won already. As for what follows—that can wait on events. If your grip breaks, I presume some other race will supply the deficiency."

Loki looked at him. "Some other race? Men, perhaps?" The Administrator shook himself out of his languor and sat upright, as upright as any of the Mirmi could sit. "You know, I have a feeling we have allowed our conversation to become somewhat unreal. We are not here to discuss the way your people propose to take over our empire, but the measures to be adopted against the Tulinn saboteurs."

"Not that, either. We are here, Sir Loki, to pass the time while the government falls on Mirma."

Loki had left the receiver switched onto the big screen, though he had cut out the view of the demonstration. Now while Skelling spoke a message began to form. Without letting his attention become distracted from what he read there, Loki murmured tensely,

"The Government has fallen."

"And . . . ?" Skelling looked not at the screen but at Loki's face. "And Allef . . . ?"

The message had ended. Loki looked at him. "No, not Allef. Mered is the new Chief Minister."

FOR A moment Skelling let the crushing weight of despair master him. Bitter news, and unexpected. Mered was the leader of the repressives; translations of his speech calling for racial regeneration and reassumption of the mission of conquest had been widely disseminated on Lakkuret, which had once been known as Earth.

Gently Loki said, "The Tulinn case. I've put it up to Mirma Command, and there will be no final decision until I hear from them. But, in view of the change of government . . . I don't think there can be any doubt as to what the decision will be."

Skelling had recovered himself. "What I told you earlier was no bluff, Sir Loki. The whole planet will rise against you. You have been Administrator here for a long time; you can't look forward with any pleasure to what is going to happen. If you were to resign rather than carry out the decision . . . there must still be a delicate balance on Mirma . . . it might make the difference."

Loki's face was expressionless. "I told you, Skelling—I obey orders. I was trained for this duty; to carry it out, not to shirk it. Let me give you some advice instead. Tell your people to behave themselves. There will be some new regulations, but providing they are obeyed there is no reason to expect harsh measures. I warn you—it is your only hope."

"That is not hope," Skelling said tersely. "That is resignation to slavery."

Loki smiled; the contemptuous-looking smile of the Mirmi, but there was sadness in it, and wry humour.

"There is a barrier between us, Skelling. I have enjoyed your company, as I think you have mine,

and if the barrier were not there we might have been friends. You are human, and determined to rebel. I am of the Mirmi. That separates us."

"Look at it from our point of view, Sir Loki."

"Look at it from ours. A thousand years of empire is not put aside in a moment. Had it been Allef, I would have carried out my different orders, but at heart I would have been ashamed. I have been here a long time, and grown to love Lakkuret, but there would have been the shame of defeat—nothing could have prevented that"

"And there is no shame at the thought of the bloody fighting that is bound to come?"

"No shame, Skelling. Regret, but not shame. If you humans do rebel and I am still Administrator after the rebellion is crushed, I shall try to mitigate the conditions that will be imposed. It will not be easy, but I shall do my best."

"This rebellion will not be crushed."

"You have forgotten our power," said Loki. "You have grown used to concessions and the presence of garrison troops. It will be a different matter when the battle squadron darkens your skies. Then your people will look for holes in the ground, as they did before."

Loki stood up. He stretched his hand out.

"Goodbye, Skelling. I shall try to stop the bloodshed. There will be planet-wide telecasts about the new government. Your people will be warned by us, if not by you."

They shook hands. Skelling spoke quietly now.

"It will do no good."

"I shall try, anyway. If I fail . . . I hope that it will soon be over."

In the outer rooms there were the human servants who had been dismissed by Loki at the beginning of the interview. One of Skelling's own men was among them. He came close to Skelling as he went out.

"Well?"

"Mered," Skelling replied. "War. But we shall win."

He hoped he sounded more confident than he felt.

THEY wanted Skelling to leave London; the other members of the secret World Council had left their cities to take up their prearranged duties as resistance leaders—cities were potential deathtraps. Skelling, however, would not leave. Loki was still in London, although on the day that he ordered the execution of the Berlin rebels he dismissed his human serving staff; their purpose had, in any case, been no more than decorative—the work was done by robots. As Skelling pointed out, Loki's presence was a fair indication that, whatever happened elsewhere, London would not be bombed.

By and large, events fell out as planned, though there were nerve-racking setbacks. The first wave of revolt spread from Berlin, and the Mirmi garrison there went over to the rebels in a matter of hours. There was a counter-drive from France, and another from Russia which tried to pincer with the first, but they collapsed separately, and within three days the continent of Europe was in the hands of men

and the rebel Mirmi.

A week after the insurrection began, only South America and the islands of Britain were still ruled by Mirmi loyal to their own planet. The situation had consolidated, and both sides sat back to await the intervention—decisive one way or the other—of the battle squadron from Mirma. Fighting ceased; an armed truce took its place.

There had been relatively little bloodshed. No bombing had occurred; the rebel Mirmi held nine tenths of the local space fleet. Their units paraded over the centers of resistance—Skelling watched them hail low over the huddled roofs of London—but there was no combat. A good sign, Skelling thought at first; for men, everything depended on the reluctance of Mirmi to fight Mirmi. But reflection showed him the unwisdom of his confidence—these were all Earth-garrison Mirmi, sharing the bond of having been under human influence. It had been that weapon—the human power to sway their conquerors—which had brought the present temporary success, but there was no reason to think that it would apply against the Mirmi in the battle squadron. They would be coming, flushed with that atavistic yearning for power which even Loki had shown, probably only too ready to kill their fellow-Mirmi whom they saw as traitors. The game was far from over.

The battle squadron arrived two weeks, to the day, after the revolt. Somewhere beyond the moon it emerged into three-dimensional space, but the first that was known of its presence was when New York was obliterated. Then the telecasts carried scenes of the smoking slagheap that had been the city, round the entire earth. To reinforce the impression the battle squadron itself cruised through the lower atmosphere, showing itself above the major centers of population. It was a grim and impressive sight; the great cruisers looming monstrously in comparison with those ships which men had been accustomed to see, the pitiably small patrol vessels on which the hope of liberation now rested. Why should the local Mirmi defenders pit themselves against such odds, against their own kind? There was no logical reason for it.

But they did. The battle was joined in atmosphere, above the Pacific Ocean. The small patrol ships, capable of so much greater speed and manoeuverability in the confinement provided by air pressure, launched their attack directly at the ponderously cruising armada. They tore through the loose formation, lancing it again and again. Some of their electro-corrosion charges got through the defence; when the battle squadron rose clear into free space it left one ship behind, rolling helplessly on the waves of the Pacific. Three patrol ships had gone down with it.

The battle squadron did not again venture into the atmosphere. Instead, lying just off the planet in space, they destroyed Leningrad, and dealt Rome a blow that was near mortal. The new tactics were clear—a progressive destruction of the cities of the Earth until the rebels begged for peace.

And the patrol ships went for them again. In space they were hopelessly ineffective against the

great cruisers. They attempted only diversionary attacks, flipping up through the stratosphere and launching their charges, then away back to their relative haven. But their losses were heavy. Skelling, in radio communication with the fleet of patrol ships, saw a meteor glow red, plunging towards the distant Welsh hills, and knew with sadness what it was. They were a wonderful race, the Mirmi. Men might have taught them some things, but there were other respects in which men could only, humbly, learn from them.

For several days the dwindling number of the rebel ships continued their hopeless struggle. Skelling, extrapolating on the course of events, could fix a term to the possible continuation of resistance. Even if the Mirmi who had allied themselves with men fought to the bitter end, to the last patrolship, within a week all would be over.

But the war was over the following day, and the rebels had won.

The message came over the telecast blanket channel, in Mirmi first and then in English:

"The 23rd Battle Squadron salutes the garrison of Lakkuret. The Admiral Besson has been deposed; the fleet takes commands from Commodore Atark. The blood of our brothers has gained the freedom of the humans of Lakkuret; to our brothers we surrender the fleet and this planet. Mirmi shall not slay Mirmi, in an unjust cause. We come in peace now, and bring liberty."

Skelling saw the great armada, a menace no longer, sink through the English clouds; the surrender was being made, reasonably enough, at the old center of government. He was called then, and told the other news: Loki's personal retinue, joining the winning side, had turned him over to the Earthmen.

TO MEN the Mirmi all looked alike. Skelling's first impression was that it was Loki who was sitting as usual behind his desk. Then he saw Loki held prisoner on the far side of the room. There were two other Mirmi present, and three of his own men. The Mirm behind the desk made the movement with his hand which was the greeting between equals; Skelling had never received it before.

"Greetings, President. I am Atark, Commodore of the Fleet."

"Greetings," Skelling replied. "The men of Earth offer you their duty, Commodore, and their gratitude for liberation."

"Peace between our races."

"Peace," echoed Skelling.

Atark permitted himself to smile. "Earth," he repeated. "Men of Earth. A word dies. Lakkuret exists no longer."

"Many words die," Skelling said quietly. "Surrint dies. The name of this city is London."

"London? I had not heard that. Lakkuret—you knew what that means, in our speech?" Skelling shook his head. "It means Fair Haven. The Admiral of the First Fleet gave it that name. The Mirmi, in all their wanderings, had never found so lovely a world."

Skelling looked at him curiously. "But you never made any serious attempt to colonize it? Only troops —no settlers."

"There were to have been set-

tlers. But if our troops, under discipline, succumbed so quickly to this Earth"—he pronounced the word clumsily—"what would become of settlers? The idea was never abandoned; only postponed. And now . . ."

"And now . . . ?"

"Our first duty is to Mirma. The fleet is reforming. Tomorrow we return home, to depose Mered."

"You can do that?"

"Mirmi do not fight Mirmi," Atark replied, "in an *unjust* cause. That accomplished . . . many of us will wish to come back to Earth—as friends, as guests. We do not seek your good lands. Give us your deserts, and we will make them bloom. Will you take us?"

"I cannot speak finally until the Council has met," Skelling said, "but I think you can take it the answer is yes; we shall be glad to have the Mirmi as friends."

"It is a lovely world," Atark said wistfully. He stood up, stooping under his body's greater weight. "We will leave now. We have much to do."

Skelling gestured towards the bound Loki. "And Loki?"

Atark looked at his fellow Mirm indifferently. "He is yours. I understand your people hold him guilty of the death of the men of Tulinn, and perhaps of the death and destruction that followed. Do whatever is necessary."

After all these years, Skelling reflected, he still knew very little of Mirmi psychology. "Mirmi do not fight Mirmi, except in a just cause." But they abandon them. There was a curious logic in their minds, difficult for men to grasp. The human mind was so much more flexible and, he thought, more petty.

Skelling said: "And should our decision be not death but banishment?"

"Send him back to the fleet." Atark smiled grimly. "But we shall be surprised to see him."

When the Mirmi had gone, Skelling indicated Loki. He said to his men, "Untie him."

As they obeyed, one of them commented:

"That was a funny thing to say, President—about banishment. We know what the sentence will be."

Skelling answered softly: "No one know that, until it's pronounced. You can go now."

They did not look very pleased about going. Loki glanced after them.

"I prefer men when they aren't exercising their unique talent for claptrap. Your followers are quite right. We do know what the sentence will be. Behind the spurious liberalism your race has an odd vindictiveness, especially when acting in the mass."

"Perhaps." Skelling looked at him. "Well? I told you we had won, even then."

"Not by your own qualities, by ours."

"A catalyst," Skelling suggested, "to help the Mirmi on the right course."

Loki continued, "You are not childish enough to believe that, Skelling. Unless you regard defeat and decadence as the right course for the Mirmi."

"There can be no defeat in civil war. Why should there be decadence?"

"Lakkuret," Loki said. "Fair Haven. You will let the Mirmi

come here to settle. Noble generosity—and meanwhile men will be voyaging through the stars, taking the place of the Mirmi as rulers of the Mirmi empire."

"It might happen," Skelling admitted. "But by consent."

Loki said admiringly: "Nothing will stop men; they have a hypocrisy which will win them the galaxy."

There was an irony in his voice which was different from the irony of defeat; it had an edge of satisfaction. It was difficult to imagine what Loki could have to be satisfied about. His side had lost, his race he saw as foredoomed to lotus-eating exile, and his own life was forfeit. And yet there was satisfaction in his voice, ironic triumph.

"You did your duty," said Skelling.

"I haven't stopped doing so. The duty of a Mirm continues to death."

"There is not much you can do now."

"Duty has its negative side. The things not to do, as well as the things to do."

"A witness to the past greatness of the Mirmi?"

"A witness for the prosecution," Loki said, "not for the defence."

Skelling looked at him with admiration and some affection.

"There will be no trial."

For the first time, Loki was thrown off balance. He looked uncertain. "You have no choice in that," he said.

"Our casualties numbered more than ten million. If there is a trial, there will be a verdict of guilty, and a sentence of death. It would be unfair, but that is what would happen . . . So I shall release you."

"Release? To what?"

"To the fleet. You have your patrolship on the roof, and you can have my signature on a pardon."

Loki looked at him for some moments without replying.

"That would be a breach of your duty to your people."

Skelling nodded. "In a sense, yes. I don't think it's important."

"You would be deposed as President."

"Possibly."

"Not possibly—certainly."

"Certainly, then. That's not important either. There would be no pleasure in a presidency built on such a foundation."

"You *are* serious about this! You surprise me. More than that—I am confused."

"I should waste no time," said Skelling. "We have talked long enough. My men may get suspicious and come back. It may be impossible for you to get away then."

"So there can be friendship," Loki murmured, "between you and me, between man and Mirm."

"It was never my view, Sir Loki, that there could not be."

Skelling saw Loki come to a decision; his expression changed and he smiled.

"I accept your offer—and I find that I can betray my duty, too, for friendship."

"Your duty—as a witness?"

"More than that. Before he was deposed Admiral Besson sent me something—the Weapon."

Skelling felt horror crawl in his mind. It had been his over-riding fear, that the Mirmi might, in their desperation, use their ultimate weapon—the hydrogen chain-re-

action bomb—against the rebel planet. Activated, the earth's atmosphere would blaze, the world burn like a tinder. He saw now what Loki's duty had been—the duty of keeping silence while the slow fuse burned.

Loki went on, "It seemed to us that Earth had been a curse on the Mirmi, and that if it were destroyed the curse might lift. I don't think that now and anyway . . . it doesn't matter."

Skelling said urgently: "When is it set for?"

"There's time enough. Tomorrow morning. It was necessary to destroy the battle squadron along with the planet. It was that which was the hardest to bear, but there seemed to be no choice."

"And it's . . ."

"On the roof. In my patrolship. Set to explode prematurely if tampered with, of course."

"I'm exceptionally nervous," Skelling said. "Shall we go up now?"

SKELLING watched as Loki unlocked the fuse mechanism and put it out of action. Loki tossed the fuse away. He looked round, at the other roofs of the city and at the distant sunlit hills.

"Surrint," he said. "Goodbye, Surrint."

"Come back some time," Skelling said. "Come back here to London."

"No. I shall not come back. But it is a lovely world. Perhaps for the Mirmi the empire is well lost."

"Lovely," Skelling asked, "or corrupting?"

"Both. Perhaps loveliness always corrupts. I never thought I would disobey instructions; and yet now it doesn't matter."

Loki stood by the door of the patrolship, ready to enter. "Remember us," he said. "Remember the Mirmi when your great ships are probing the darkness beyond the galaxy."

"That will be after my time," Skelling said. "I will remember you, Loki."

"And I, you."

The patrolship climbed into the blue sky towards the great poised shadows of the battle squadron. Skelling watched it out of sight. Then he went downstairs, to confront outraged humanity. • • •

DON'T BE SURPRISED if you see a small moonlet with flashing lights whizzing around the Earth one of these evenings. Scientists are urging the launching of a small 50-pound moon now, instead of aiming at a "super-satellite." It would flash across the sky for about three weeks and then gradually slow by friction and spiral down to Earth with its load of instruments. The "new look" in proposed satellites has been named "MOUSE". The name stands not only for size, but for "Minimum Orbital Unmanned Satellite Earth."

AIRPLANE BODIES, boats, and automobiles in the future may be made of glass and plastic chemically bonded together. New bonding compounds which will unite chemically with plastics and glass in combination have been discovered. The bonded materials can be made into laminated panels that combine the flexibility of plastic with the strength of glass fibers.

LITTLE BOY

There are times when the animal in Mankind savagely asserts itself. Even children become snarling little beasts. Fortunately, however, in childhood laughter is not buried deep

BY HARRY NEAL

HE DROPPED over the stone wall and flattened to the ground. He looked warily about him like a young wolf, head down, eyes up. His name was Steven—but he'd forgotten that. His face was a sunburned, bitter, filthy eleven-year-old face—tight lips, lean cheeks, sharp blue eyes with startlingly clear whites. His clothes were rags—a pair of corduroy trousers without any knees; a man's white shirt, far too big for him, full of holes, stained, reeking with sweat; a pair of dirty brown sneakers.

He lay, knife in hand, and waited to see if anyone had seen him coming over the wall or heard his almost soundless landing on the weedgrown dirt.

Above and behind him was the grey stone wall that ran along Central Park West all the way from Columbus Circle to the edge of Harlem. He had jumped over just north of 72nd Street. Here the park was considerably below street level—the wall was about three feet high on the sidewalk side and about nine feet high on the park side. From where he lay at the foot of the wall only the jagged, leaning tops of the shattered apartment buildings across the street were visible. Like the teeth of a skull's smile they caught the late afternoon sunlight that drifted across the park.

For five minutes Steven had knelt motionless on one of the cement benches on the other side of the wall, just the top of his head and his eyes protruding over the top. He had seen no one moving in the park. Every few seconds he had looked up and down the

street behind him to make sure that no one was sneaking up on him that way. Once he had seen a man dart out halfway across the street, then wheel and vanish back into the rubble where one whole side of an apartment house had collapsed into 68th Street.

Steven knew the reason for that. A dozen blocks down the street, from around Columbus Circle, had come the distant hollow racket of a pack of dogs.

Then he had jumped over the wall—partly because the dogs might head this way, partly because the best time to move was when you couldn't see anyone else. After all, you could never be *sure* that no one was seeing *you*. You just moved, and then you waited to see if anything happened. If someone came at you, you fought. Or ran, if the other looked too dangerous.

No one came at him this time. Only a few days ago he'd come into the park and two men had been hidden in the bushes a few yards from the wall. They'd been lying very still, and had covered

Illustrated by Paul Orban

themselves with leaves, so he hadn't seen them; and they'd been looking the other way, waiting for someone to come along one of the paths or through the trees, so they hadn't seen him looking over the wall.

The instant he'd landed, they were up and chasing him, yelling that if he'd drop his knife and any food he had they'd let him go. He dropped the knife, because he had others at home—and when they stopped to paw for it in the leaves, he got away.

Now he got into a crouching position, very slowly. His nostrils dilated as he sniffed the breeze. Sometimes you knew men were near by their smell—the ones who didn't stand outside when it rained and scrub the smell off them.

He smelled nothing. He looked and listened some more, his blue eyes hard and bright. He saw nothing except trees, rocks, bushes, all crowded by thick weeds. He heard nothing except the movement of greenery in the afternoon breeze, the far off baying of the dog pack, the flutter of birds, the scamper of a squirrel.

He whirled at the scamper. When he saw that it was a squirrel, he licked his lips, almost tasting it. But it was too far away to kill with the knife, and he didn't want to risk stoning it, because that made noise. You stoned squirrels only after you'd scouted all around, and even then it was dangerous—someone might hear you anyway and sneak up and kill you for the squirrel, or for anything else you had, or just kill you—there were some men who did that. Not for guns or knives or food or anything else that Steven could see . . . they just killed, and howled like dogs when they did it. He'd watched them. They were the men with the funny looks in their eyes—the ones who tried to get you to come close to them by pretending to offer you food or something.

In a half-crouch Steven started moving deeper into the park, pausing each time he reached any cover to look around. He came to a long green slope and went down it soundlessly, stepping on rocks whenever he could. He crossed the weedgrown bridle path, darting from the shelter of a bush on one side to press against the trunk of a tree on the other.

He moved so silently that he surprised another squirrel on the tree trunk. In one furious motion Steven had his knife out of his belt, and sliced it at the squirrel so fast the blade went *whuh* in the air—but the squirrel was faster. It scurried up out of reach, and the knife just clipped off the end of its tail. It went higher, and out onto a branch, and chittered at him. It was funny about squirrels—they didn't seem to feel anything in their tails. Once he'd caught one that way, and it had twisted and run off, leaving the snapped-off tail in his hand.

Dogs weren't that way—once he'd fought a crippled stray from a pack, and he'd got it by the tail and swung it around and brained it on a lamppost.

Dogs . . . squirrels . . .

STEVEN had some dim, almost dreamlike memory of dogs that acted friendly, dogs that didn't

roam the streets in packs and pull you down and tear you apart and eat you alive; and he had a memory of the squirrels in the park being so tame that they'd eat right out of your hand . . .

But that had been a long, long time ago—before men had started hunting squirrels, and sometimes dogs, for food, and dogs had started hunting men.

Steven turned south and paralleled the bridle path, going always wherever the cover was thickest, moving as silently as the breeze. He was going no place in particular—his purpose was simply to see someone before that someone saw him, to see if the other had anything worth taking, and, if so, take it if possible. Also, he'd try to get a squirrel.

Far ahead of him, across the bridle path and the half-mile or so of tree-clumped park that lay beyond, was Central Park South—a sawtoothed ridge of grey-white rubble. And beyond that lay the ruin of midtown Manhattan. The bomb had exploded low over 34th Street and Seventh Avenue that night six years ago, and everything for a mile in every direction had been leveled in ten seconds. The crater started at around 26th and sloped down to where 34th had been and then up again to 40th, and it glowed at night. It wasn't safe to go down around the crater, Steven knew. He'd heard some men talking about it—they'd said that anyone who went there got sick; something would go wrong with their skin and their blood, and they'd start glowing too, and die.

Steven had understood only part of that. The men had seen him and chased him. He'd gotten away, and since then had never ventured below Central Park South.

It was a "war", they'd said. He didn't know much about that either . . . who was winning, or had won, or even if it was still being fought. He had only the vaguest notion of what a war was—it was some kind of fight, but he didn't think it was over food. Someone had "bombed" the city—once he had heard a man call the city a "country"—and that was about as early as he could remember anything. In his memory was the flash and roar of that night and, hours before that, cars with loud voices driving up and down the streets warning everybody to get out of the city because of the "war". But Steven's father had been drunk that night, lying on the couch in the living room of their apartment on the upper west side, and even the bomb hadn't waked him up. The cars with the voices had waked Steven up; he'd gone back to sleep after a while, and then the bomb had waked him up again. He'd gone to the window and climbed out onto the fire escape, and seen the people running in the street, and listened to all the screaming and the steady rumble of still-falling masonry, and watched the people on foot trample each other and people in cars drive across the bodies and knock other people down and out of the way, and still other people jump on the cars and pull out the drivers and try to drive away themselves until someone pulled *them* out . . . Steven had watched, fascinated, because it was more exciting than anything he'd ever seen, like a movie. Then a man had stood un-

der the fire escape, holding up his arms, and shouted up at Steven to jump for God's sake, little boy, and that had frightened Steven and he went back inside. His father had always told him never to play with strangers.

Next afternoon Steven's father had gotten up and gone downstairs to get a drink, and when he saw what had happened, he'd come back making choked noises in his throat and saying over and over again, "Everybody worth a damn got out . . . now it's a jungle . . . all the scum left, like me—and the ones they hurt, like you, Stevie . . ." He'd put some cans of food in a bag and started to take Steven out of the city, but a madman with a shotgun had blown the side of his head off before they'd gone five blocks. Not to get the food or anything . . . looting was going on all over, but there wasn't any food problem yet . . . the man was just one of the ones who killed for no reason at all. There'd been a lot like that the first few weeks after the bomb, but most of them hadn't lasted long—they wanted to die, it looked like, about as much as they wanted to kill.

Steven had gotten away. He was five years old and small and fast on his feet, and the madman missed with the other barrel.

Steven had fled like an animal, and since then had lived like one. He'd stayed away from the men, remembering how his father had looked with half a head—and because the few times men had seen him, they'd chased him; either they were afraid he'd steal from them, or they wanted his knife or belt or something. Once or twice men had shouted that they wouldn't hurt him, they only wanted to help him —but he didn't believe them. Not after seeing his father that way, and after the times they had tried to kill him.

He watched the men, though, sneaking around their fires at night —sometimes because he was lonely and, later on, hoping to find scraps of food. He saw how they lived, and that was the way he lived too. He saw them raid grocery stores—he raided the stores after they left. He saw them carrying knives and guns—he found a knife and carried it; he hadn't yet found a gun. They ran from the dogs; he learned to run from them, after seeing them catch a man once. The men raided other stores, taking clothes and lots of things whose use Steven didn't understand. Steven took some clothes at first, but he didn't care much about what he wore—both his shirt and his heavy winter coat had come from dead men. He found toy stores, and had a lot of toys. The men collected and hoarded wads of green paper, and sometimes fought and killed each other over it. Steven vaguely remembered that it was called "money", and that it was very important. He found it too, here and there, in dead men's pockets, in boxes with sliding drawers in stores —but he couldn't find any use for it, so his hoard of it lay hidden in the hole in the floor under the pile of blankets that was his bed.

Eventually he saw the men begin to kill for food, when food became scarce. When that happened—the food scarcity, and the killing—many of the men left the city, going across the bridges and

through the tunnels under the rivers, heading for the "country".

He didn't follow them. The city was all he'd ever known.

He stayed. Along with the men who said they'd rather stay in the city where there was still plenty of food for those who were willing to hunt hard and sometimes kill for it, and, in addition, beds to sleep in, rooms for protection from the weather and dogs and other men, all the clothes you could wear, and lots of other stuff just lying around for the taking.

He stayed, and so he learned to kill, when necessary, for his food. He had six knives, and with them he'd killed men higher than he could count. He was good at hiding—in trees, in hallways, behind bushes, under cars—and he was small enough to do a good job of trailing when he saw somebody who looked as though they were carrying food in their pockets or in the bags almost everyone carried. And he knew where to strike with the knife.

His home was the rubble of an apartment building just north of Columbus Circle, on Broadway. No one else lived there; only he knew the way through the broken corridors and fallen walls and piles of stone to his room on the seventh floor. Every day or so he went out into the park—to get food or anything at all he could get that he wanted. He was still looking for a gun. Food was the main thing, though; he had lots of cans up in his room, but he'd heard enough of the men's talk to know that it was wise to use them only when you didn't have anything else, and get what you could day by day.

And, of course, there was water—when it didn't rain or snow for a while, he had to get water from the lakes in the park.

That was hard sometimes. You could go two or three days without water, even if you went to one of the lakes and stayed hidden there all day, because it might be that long before a moment came when no one was near enough to kill you when you made your dash from the bushes and filled your pail and dashed back. There were more skeletons around the lakes than anyplace.

THE DOGS were coming up Central Park West. Their racket bounced off the broken buildings lining the street, and came down into the park, and even the squirrels and birds were quieter, as if not wanting to attract attention.

Steven froze by the bole of a tree, ready to climb if the dogs came over the wall at him. He'd done that once before. You climbed up and waited while the dogs danced red-eyed beneath you, until they heard or smelled someone else, and then they were off, bounding hungrily after the new quarry. They'd learned that men in trees just didn't come down.

The dogs passed the point in the park where Steven waited. He knew from the sound that they weren't after anybody—just prowling. The howls and snarls and scratchy sounds of nails on concrete faded slowly.

Steven didn't move until they were almost inaudible in the distance.

Then, when he did move, he

took only one step—and froze again.

Someone was coming toward him.

Just a shadow of a motion, a whisper of sound, a breath—someone was coming along the path on the other side of the bushes.

Steven's lips curled back to reveal decayed teeth. He brought out his knife from his belt and stood utterly still, waiting for the steps to go on so he could trail along behind his quarry, off to one side, judging the other's stature from glimpses through the bushes, and ascertaining whether he was carrying anything worth killing him for.

But the footsteps didn't pass. They stopped on the other side of the bushes. Then leaves rustled as whoever it was bent to come through the bushes. Steven hugged his tree trunk, and saw a short thin figure coming toward him through the green leaves, a bent-over figure. He raised the knife, started to bring its point down in the short arc that would end in the back of the other's neck . . .

He dropped the knife.

Wide-eyed, not breathing, he stared at her.

Knife in hand, its point aimed at his belly, she stared back.

She was dressed in a man's trousers, torn off at the ankles, and a yellow blouse that might have belonged to her mother, and new-looking shoes she must have found, or killed for, only a week or so ago. Her face was as sunburned and dirty as his.

A squirrel chittered over their heads as they stared at each other.

Steven noted expertly that she seemed to be carrying no food and had no gun. No one with a gun would carry a drawn knife.

She still held the knife ready, though the point had drooped. She moistened her lips.

He wondered if she would attack. He obviously didn't have any food either, so maybe she wouldn't. But if she did—well, she was only a little larger than he was; he could probably kill her with her own knife, though he might even get his own knife from the ground before she got to him.

But it was a *woman,* he knew . . . without knowing exactly what a woman was, or how he knew. The hair was long—but then, some of the men's hair was long too. It was something different—something about the face and body. He hadn't seen many women, and certainly never one as little as this, but he knew that's what it was. A *woman.*

Once he'd seen some men kill another man who'd killed a woman for her food. By their angry shouts he knew that killing a woman was different somehow.

And he remembered a woman. And a word: mother. A face and a word, a voice and a warmth and a not-sour body smell . . . she was dead. He didn't remember who had killed her. Somehow he thought she had been killed *before* everything changed, *before* the "bomb" fell; but he couldn't remember very well, and didn't know how she'd been killed or even why people had killed each other in those days . . . Not for food, he thought; he could remember having plenty to eat. Another word: cancer. His father had said it about his mother. Maybe somebody had killed her to get that, instead of food. Anyway,

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somebody had killed her, because she was dead, and people didn't just *die.*

Seeing a *woman,* and such a little one . . . it had startled him so much he had dropped his knife.

But he could still kill her if he had to.

She stirred, her eyes wide on his. She moved just an inch or so.

Steven crouched, almost too fast to see, and his knife was in his hand, ready from this position to get in under her stab and cut her belly open.

She made a strangled sound and shook her head.

Steven pulled his swing, without quite knowing why. He struck her knife out of her hand with his blade, and it went spinning into the leaves.

He took a step toward her, lips curled back.

She retreated two steps, and her back was against a tree trunk.

He came up to her and stood with his knife point pressing into her belly just above where the blouse entered the man's pants.

She whimpered and shook her head and whimpered again.

He scowled at her. Looked her up and down. She was wearing a tarnished ring on her right hand, with a stone that sparkled. He liked it. He decided to kill her. He pressed the knifepoint harder, and twisted.

She said, "Little boy—" and started to cry.

Memories assailed Steven:

Jump for God's sake, little boy . . .

Distrust. Kill her.

My little boy . . . my son. . . .

His knifepoint wavered. He scowled.

Don't run away, little boy—we won't hurt you. . . .

Kill.

Tears were rolling down her cheeks.

My son, my baby . . . I'm crying because I have to go away for a long time . . .

Steven stepped back. She was weaponless, and a *woman*—whatever that was.

Leaves rustled. Steven and the girl froze motionless.

It was only a squirrel in the bushes.

He bent silently, looked around under the leafy green bushes that surrounded them, almost at ground-level. If there had been men nearby, he could have seen their legs. He saw nothing. He kept one eye on the girl as he bent. She wasn't crying, now that he'd taken the knife away. She was watching him and rubbing her belly where he'd pressed it.

When he straightened, she took a step away from the tree, moving as silently as he ever had. Suddenly she stooped to pick up her knife, made a slashing motion at the ground with it, looked up at him.

He was in mid-air. On her. She flattened beneath him with a squeal. She was stronger than he was, and experienced. She brought her knife back over her shoulder, and if he hadn't ducked his head it would have laid his face open. When she brought it down for another try, he clubbed the back of her hand with the hilt of his knife, and she gasped and dropped it.

Astride her, he raised his knife

to kill her. She was pointing with her left hand, frantically, at something that lay on the ground beside them, and saying, "No, no, little boy, no, no—" Then she just whimpered, knowing that his knife was poised, and kept stabbing her finger at the ground. Because she was helpless, he paused, looked, and saw a squirrel lying there, head bleeding.

He understood. She hadn't been trying to kill him. She had seen the squirrel, and gotten it.

He decided to kill her anyway. For the squirrel.

"No, little boy—"

He hesitated.

"Friends, little boy . . ."

After a moment he rolled off her.

She sat up, cheeks tear-streaked. She pointed at the squirrel, then at Steven, and shook her head violently.

Knife threatening her, he reached out to pick up the squirrel.

Mine, the knife said.

At that point the squirrel, which had been only momentarily stunned by her blow, shook itself and scrambled for the bushes. His hand missed it by inches. He lunged for it, flat on his belly, and caught its tail with one hand.

As another squirrel's tail had done long ago, this one broke off.

He lay there for a moment, snarling, the tail in his hand; and when he turned over, the girl had her knife in her hand and her teeth were bared at him.

Blue eyes blazing, he got to his feet, expecting her to attack any second. He dropped the tail. He crouched to fight.

She didn't attack.

Nor, for some reason, did he.

The way her chapped lips were stretched back over her teeth disturbed him . . . or rather it unsettled him, because it *didn't* disturb him. At least not the way a snarl did. It didn't put him on guard, every muscle tense; it didn't make him feel that he had to fight. She didn't look angry or eager to have anything he had or ready to kill . . . he didn't know the word for how she looked.

She weighed her knife in her hand. Then she struck it in her belt, and said again, *"Friends,* little boy."

He stared. At her strange snarl that wasn't a snarl. At the knife she had put away. He had never seen anyone do that before.

Slowly he felt his own lips curl back into an expression he could hardly remember. He felt the way he felt sometimes late at night when, safe and alone in his room, he would play a little with his toys. He didn't feel like killing her any more. He left like . . . like *friends.*

He looked at the squirrel tail lying on the ground. He worried it with a foot, then kicked it away. It wasn't good to eat—and he thought of how the squirrel had looked scrambling off, and felt his lips stretch tighter.

He tried to think of the word. Finally it came.

"Funny squirrel," he said, through his tight lips.

He stuck his knife in his belt.

They stared at each other, feeling each other's pleasure at the peacemaking.

She bent, picked up a small stone and flipped it at him. He made no attempt to catch it, and it struck him on the hip. He half-

crouched, instantly wary, hand on knife. A thrown stone had only one meaning.

But she was still smiling, and she shook her head. "No, little boy," she said. *"Play."* She tossed another stone, high in the air.

He reached out and caught it as it descended.

He started to toss it back to her, and remembered only at the last moment not to hurl it at her head.

He tossed it, and she missed it.

He grinned at her.

She tossed another one back at him, and he missed, and they both grinned.

Then he grunted, remembering something from the dim past. He picked up a small fallen branch from the ground.

When he looked up, she was poised to run.

This time he shook his head, waving the stick gently. "Play," he said.

She threw another stone, eyes warily on the stick. He swung, missed.

He hit the next one, and the sharp crack, and the noise the stone made rattling off into the bushes, flattened him to the ground, eyes searching for sign of men.

She was beside him. He smelled her body and her breath.

They saw no one.

He looked at her lying beside him. She was grinning again.

Then she laughed; and, without knowing what he was doing or why—he could hardly remember ever doing it before—he laughed too.

It felt good. Like the snarl that wasn't a snarl, only better. It seemed to come from way inside. He laughed again, sitting up. He laughed a third time, tight hesitant sounds that came out of his throat and stretched his lips until they wouldn't stretch any more.

Tears were on his cheeks, and he was laughing very tightly, very steadily, and she was laughing the same way, and they lay that way for a few minutes until they were trembling and their stomachs ached, and the laughter was almost crying.

He saw her face, so close by, and felt an impulse. He rolled over and started to scuffle with her. When she realized that he wasn't trying to kill her, that he was playing, she scuffled back, rubbing his face in the dirt harder than he had hers, because she was stronger.

He spat dirt and grass and grinned at her, and they fell apart.

Footsteps.

HIS KNIFE was out and ready, and so was hers.

Legs moved on the other side of the bushes, stopped.

Silently, almost stepping between the leaves on the ground, Steven and the girl crawled out the other side of the bushes and took up positions against treetrunks, just enough of their heads protruding to see around.

A man came probing into the head-high bushes from the path side . . . stood there a moment looking around, only a vague brown shape through the leaves.

He grunted, went out to the path again, walked on.

Steven and the girl followed him by his sounds, trailing about twenty

feet behind, until Steven got a good look at him when he passed an open space between the bushes.

He was a big man in brownish-green clothes—new-looking clothes, not full of holes. He walked almost carelessly, as if he didn't care who heard him.

And Steven saw the reason for that.

Men with guns always walked louder. This man wore a holstered gun at his belt, and carried another one—a long gun something like a rifle, only bulkier.

Steven's lips curled. He darted a look at the girl. Across his mind flashed the vague idea of sharing whatever the man had with her, but he didn't know how to let her know.

She was looking at the guns, eyes wide. Afraid. She shook her head.

Steven snarled silently at her, put a hand on her chest, shoved gently.

She stayed there as he moved on.

Silently he drifted from tree to tree, bush to bush, getting ahead of his quarry. The big man's shoes clumped noisily along. Steven had no trouble telling where he was.

At last Steven spotted a good tree a thick-foliaged one about forty feet up the path, where the sun would be in the man's eyes.

If the man kept following the path—

He did.

And when he passed below the tree, Steven was waiting on the low branch that overhung the path—waiting with his face taut and his eyes staring and his knife ready. One stab at the base of the skull, and the guns would be his.

He jumped.

They brought them into the camp. By this time Steven and the girl had found that their captors were far too strong and too many to escape from, and quite adept at protecting themselves from the foulest of blows. But still the two of them struggled now and then, panting like animals.

Everything at the camp, which was over on Long Island, near Flushing Bay, was neat and trim and olive-drab, and it was almost evening now, and as the jeep rolled up the avenue between the rows of tents Steven and the girl stopped struggling to blink at the first artificial lights they'd seen in a very long time.

In the lieutenant's tent, the big man Steven had tried to kill said to the man behind the desk, "Like a jaguar, sir. Right out of the tree he came. I had him spotted, of course, but he did a peach of a job of trailing me. If I *hadn't* been ready for him, I'd be a dogtag."

The lieutenant looked at Steven and the girl, standing before him, and the four soldiers who stood behind them, one to each strong dirty young arm.

"The others got the girl, eh?" he said.

"Yessir. When we first heard 'em, I started making enough noise to cover the rest of the boys." The sergeant grinned. "I swear, he came at me as neat as any commando ever did."

"God," said the lieutenant, and closed his eyes for a moment. "What a thing. Let this war be the last one, Sipich. So *this* is what

happened to New York in six years. Maniacs. Murderers. Worst of all, wolf-children. And the rest of the country . . ."

"Well, we're back now, sir. We can start putting it all back together—"

"God," said the lieutenant again. "Do you think the pieces will fit?" He looked at Steven. "What is your name, son?"

Steven snarled.

"Take them away," said the lieutenant wearily. "Feed them. Delouse them. Send them to the Georgia camp."

"They'll be okay, sir. In a year or so they'll be smiling all over the place, taking an interest in things. Kids are kids, sir."

"*Are* they? *These* kids, Sipich? . . . I don't know. I just don't know."

The sergeant gave an order, and the four soldiers urged Steven and the girl out of the tent. There was a bleat of pain as one of the children placed a kick.

The sergeant started to follow his men out. At the tent flaps he paused. "Sir . . . maybe you'd like to know: we found these two because they were playing and laughing. We were scouting the park, and heard them laughing."

"They were?" said the lieutenant, looking up from the forms he was filling out. *"Playing?"*

"It's still there, sir. Deep down. It has to be."

"I see," said the lieutenant slowly. "Yes, I suppose it is. And now we've got to dig it up."

"Well . . . we buried it, sir." • • •

MIRACLE BY PRICE

They said old Doctor Price was an inventive genius but no miracle worker. Yet—if he didn't work miracles in behalf of an over-worked little guy named Cupid, what *was he doing?*

BY IRVING E. COX, JR.

MEMO TO: Clayton, Croyden and Hammerstead, Attorneys,
ATTENTION: William Clayton
FROM: Walter Gordon

Dear Bill:

Enclosed is the itemized inventory of the furnishings of the late Dr. Edward Price's estate. As you requested, I personally examined the laboratory. Candidly, Bill, you needed a psychiatrist for the job, not a graduate physicist. Dr. Price was undoubtedly an inventive genius a decade ago when he was still active in General Electronics, but his lab was an embarrassing example of senile clutter.

You had an idea, Bill, that before he died Price might have been playing around with a new invention which the estate could develop and patent. I found a score of gadgets in the lab, none of them finished and none of them built for any functional purpose that I could discover.

Only two seemed to be completed. One resembled a small, portable radio. It was a plastic case with two knobs and a two-inch speaker grid. There was no cord outlet. The machine may have been powered by batteries, for I

heard a faint humming when I turned the knobs. Nothing else. Dr. Price had left a handwritten card on the box. He intended to call it a Semantic-Translator, but he had noted that the word combination was awkward for commercial exploitation, and I suppose he held up a patent application until he could think of a catchier name. One sentence on that card would have amused you, Bill. Price wrote, "Should wholesale for about three-fifty per unit." Even in his dotage, he had an eye for profit.

The Semantic-Translator—whatever that may mean—might have had possibilities. I fully intended to take it back with me to General Electronics and examine it thoroughly.

The second device, which Price had labeled a Transpositor, was large and rather fragile. It was a hollow cylinder of very small wires, perhaps a foot in diameter, fastened to an open-faced console crowded with a weird conglomeration of vacuum tubes, telescopic lenses and mirrors. The cylinder of wires was so delicate that the motion of my body in the laboratory caused it to quiver. Standing in front of the wire coil were two brass rods. A kind of shovel-like chute was fixed to one rod (Price called it the shipping board). Attached to the second rod was a long-handled pair of tongs which he called the grapple.

The Transpositor was, I think, an outgrowth of Price's investigation of the relationship between light and matter. You may recall, Bill, the brilliant technical papers he wrote on that subject when he was still working in the laboratories of General Electronics. At the time Price was considered something of a pioneer. He believed that light and matter were different forms of the same basic element; he said that eventually science would learn how to change one into the other.

I seriously believe that the Transpositor was meant to do precisely that. In other words, Price had expected to transpose the atomic structure of solid matter into light, and later to reconstruct the original matter again. Now don't assume, Bill, that Price was wandering around in a senile delusion of fourth dimensional nonsense. The theory may be sound. Our present knowledge of the physical world makes the basic structure of matter more of a mystery than it has ever been.

Not that I think Price achieved the miracle. Even in his most brilliant and productive period he could not have done it. As yet our accumulation of data is too incomplete for such an experiment. I believe that Price created no more than a very realistic illusion with his arrangement of lenses and mirrors.

I saw the illusion, too; I used the machine.

There were two dials on the front of the console. One was lettered "time", and the other "distance". The "time" dial could be set for eons, centuries or hours, depending upon the position of a three-way switch beneath it; the "distance" dial could be adjusted to light years, thousand-mile units, or kilometers by a similar device. Since there was no indication which position would produce what results, I left the dials untouched.

I plugged the machine into an electric outlet and pushed the starter button. The coil of wire blazed with light and the chute slid rapidly in and out of the cylinder.

That was all, at first. The starter button was labeled "the shipper", and I gathered that Price had visualized the practical application of the Transpositor as a device for transporting goods from one point to another.

I looked around the lab for something I could put into the chute. There was a card, written in red, warning me not to load beyond the dimensional limits of the chute. The only thing I saw that was small enough was the little radio-like gadget Price had called a Semantic-Translator. Loaded horizontally, it just barely fit the chute.

I pushed the shipper button a second time. Again there was a blaze of light, brighter than before, which temporarily blinded me. For a moment I saw the Semantic-Translator in the heart of the fragile, wire cylinder. It had the glow of molten steel, pouring from a blast furnace.

Then it was gone. The chute shot back to the front of the machine. The tray was empty.

Was it an illusion? I believe that, Bill, because later on, when I thought of using the grapple. . .

MISS Bertha Kent walked back the gravel trail from the dressing room. The early morning sun was bright and warm, but she held her woolen robe tight across her throat. She tried to avoid looking at the other camps—at the sleepy-eyed women coming out of tents, and the men starting morning fires in the stone rings.

Bitterness was etched in acid in her soul. She made herself believe it was because she hated Yosemite. The vacation had been such a disappointment. She had expected so much and—as usual—it had all gone wrong.

Her hope had been so high when school closed; this year was going to be different!

"Are you going anywhere this summer?" Miss Emmy asked after the last faculty meeting in June.

"To Yosemite for a couple of weeks, I think."

"The Park's always crowded. You ought to meet a nice man up there, Bertha."

"I'm not interested in men," Miss Kent had replied frostily. "I'm a botany teacher and it helps me professionally if I spend part of the summer observing the phenomenon of nature."

"Don't kid me, Bertha. You can drop the fancy lingo, too; school's out. You want a man as much as I do."

That was true, Miss Kent admitted—in the quiet of her own mind. Never aloud; never to anyone else. Six years ago, when Bertha Kent had first started to teach, she had been optimistic about it. She wanted to marry; she wanted a family of her own—instead of wasting her lifetime in a high school classroom playing baby sitter for other people's kids. She had saved her money for all sorts of exotic summer vacations—tours, cruises, luxury hotels—but somehow something always went wrong.

To be sure, she had met men. She was pretty; she danced well;

she was never prudish; she liked the out-of-doors. All positive qualities: she knew that. The fault lay always with the men. When she first met a stranger, everything was fine. Then, slowly, Miss Kent began to see his faults. Men were simply adult versions of the muscle-bound knot-heads the administration loaded into her botany classes.

Bertha Kent wanted something better, an ideal she had held in her mind since her childhood. The dream-man was real, too. She had met him once and actually talked to him when she was a child. She couldn't remember where; she couldn't recall his face. But the qualities of his personality she knew as she did her own heart. If they had existed once in one man, she would find them again, somewhere. That was the miracle she prayed for every summer.

She thought the miracle had happened again when she first came to Yosemite.

She found an open campsite by the river. While she was putting up her tent, the man from the camp beside hers came to help. At first he seemed the prototype of everything she hated—a good-looking, beautifully co-ordinated physical specimen, as sharp-witted as a jelly-fish. The front of his woolen shirt hung carelessly unbuttoned. She saw the mat of dark hair on his chest, the sculpted curves of sun-tanned muscle. No doubt he considered himself quite attractive.

Then, that evening after the fire-fall, the young man asked her to go with him to the ranger's lecture at Camp Curry. Bertha discovered that he was a graduate physicist, employed by a large, commercial laboratory. They had at least the specialized area of science in common. By the time they returned from the lecture, they were calling each other by first names. The next day Walt asked her to hike up the mist trail with him to Nevada Falls.

The familiar miracle began to take shape. She lay awake a long time that night, looking at the dancing pattern of stars visible through the open flap of her tent. This was it; Walt was the reality of her dream. She made herself forget that every summer for six years the same thing had happened. She always believed she had found her miracle; and always something happened to destroy it.

For two days the idyll lasted. The inevitable awakening began the afternoon they drove along the Wawona highway to see the Mariposa Grove of giant sequoias. They left their car in the parking area and walked through the magnificent stand of cathedral trees. The trail was steep and sometimes treacherous. Twice Walt took her arm to help her. For some reason that annoyed her; finally she told him,

"I'm quite able to look after myself, Walt."

"So you've told me before."

"After all, I've been hiking most of my life. I know exactly what to do—"

"There isn't much you can't take care of for yourself, is there, Bertha?" His voice was suddenly very cold.

"I'm not one of these rattle-brained clinging vines, if that's what you mean. I detest a woman who is always yelping to a man for help."

"Independence is one thing, Bertha; I like that in a woman. But somehow you make a man feel totally inadequate. You set yourself up as his superior in everything."

"That's nonsense, Walt. I'm quite ready to grant that you know a good deal more about physics than I do."

"Say it right, Bertha. You respect the fact that I hold a PhD." He smiled. "That isn't the same thing as respecting me for a person. I knew you didn't need my help on the trail, but it was a normal courtesy to offer it. It seems to me it would be just as normal for you to accept it. Little things like that are important in relations between people."

"Forget it, Walt." She slipped her hand through his. "There, see? I'll do it just the way you want."

She was determined not to quarrel over anything so trivial, though what he said seemed childish and it tarnished the dream a little. But the rest was still good; the miracle could still happen.

Yet, in spite of all her effort, they disagreed twice more before they left the Mariposa Grove. Bertha began to see Walt as he was: brilliant, no doubt, in the single area of physical science, but basically no different from any other man. She desperately wished that she could love him; she earnestly wished that the ideal, fixed so long in her mind, might be destroyed.

But slowly she saw the miracle slip away from her. That night, after the fire-fall, Walt did not ask her to go with him to the lecture. Miserable and angry, Bertha Kent went into her tent, but not to sleep.

She lay staring at the night sky, and thinking how ugly the pinpoint lights of distant suns were on the velvet void. As the hours passed, she heard the clatter of pans and voices as people at the other campsites retired. She heard Walt when he returned, whistling tunelessly. He banged around for nearly an hour in the camp next to hers. He dropped a stack of pans; he overturned a box of food; he tripped over a tent line. She wondered if he were drunk. Had their quarreling driven him to that? Walt must have loved her, then.

After a time all the Coleman lanterns in the camp were out. Still Bertha Kent did not sleep. The acid grief and bitterness tormented her with the ghost of another failure, another shattered dream. She listened to the soft music of the flowing stream, the gentle whisper of summer wind in the pines, but it gave her no peace.

Suddenly she heard quiet footsteps and the crackling of twigs behind her tent. She was terrified. It must be Walt. If he had come home drunk, he could have planned almost any kind of violence by way of revenge.

The footsteps moved closer. Bertha shook off the paralysis of fear and reached for her electric lantern. She flashed the beam into the darkness. She saw the black bulk of a bear who was pawing through her food box.

She was so relieved she forgot that a bear might also be a legitimate cause of fear. She ran from the tent, swinging the light and shooing the animal away as she would have chased a puppy. The bear swung toward her, roaring and clawing at the air. She backed

away. The bear swung its paws again, and her food box shattered on the ground, in a crescendo of sound.

Bertha heard rapid footsteps under the pines. In the pale moonlight she saw Walt. He was wearing only a pair of red-striped boxer shorts. He was swinging his arms and shouting, but the noise of the falling box had already frightened the bear away.

Walt stood in the moonlight, smiling foolishly.

"I guess I came too late," he said.

"I'm quite sure the bear would have left of its own accord, Walt. They're always quite tame in the national parks, you know." As soon as she said it, she knew it was a mistake. Even though he had done nothing, it would have cost her little to thank him. The words had come instinctively; she hadn't thought how her answer would affect him. Walt turned on his heel stiffly and walked back to his tent.

With a little forethought—a little kindness—Bertha might even then have rescued her miracle. She knew that. She knew she had lost him now, for good. For the first time in her life she saw the dream as a barrier to her happiness, not an ideal. It held her imprisoned; it gave her nothing in exchange.

She slept fitfully for the rest of the night. As soon as the sun was up, she pulled on her woolen robe and went to the dressing room to wash. She walked back along the gravel path, averting her eyes from the other camps and the men hunched over the smoking breakfast fires. She hated Yosemite. She hated all the people crowded around her. She had made up her mind to pack her tent and head for home. This was just another vacation lost, another year wasted.

She went into her tent and put on slacks and a bright, cotton blouse. Then she sat disconsolate at her camp table surveying the mess the bear had made of her food box. There was nothing that she could rescue. She could drive to the village for breakfast, but the shops wouldn't open for another hour.

Behind her she heard Walt starting his Coleman stove. Yesterday he would have offered her breakfast; now he'd ignored her. All along the stream camp fires were blazing in the stone rings. Bertha wondered if she could ask the couple on the other side of her campsite for help. They had attempted to be friendly once before, and Bertha hadn't responded with a great deal of cordiality. They weren't the type she liked—a frizzy-headed, coarse-voiced blonde, and a paunchy old man who hadn't enough sense to know what a fool he looked parading around camp in the faded bathing trunks he wore all day.

Suddenly a light flashed in Bertha's face. A metal shovel slid out of nothingness and deposited a tiny, rectangular box on the table. For a long minute she stared at the box stupidly, vaguely afraid. Her mind must be playing her tricks. Such things didn't happen.

She reached out timidly and touched the box. It seemed real enough. A miniature radio of some sort, with a two-inch speaker. She turned the dials. She heard a faint humming.

The coarse-voiced blonde came

toward the table.

"We just heard what happened last night, Miss Kent," she said. "Me and George. About the bear, I mean."

Bertha forced a smile. "It made rather a shambles, didn't it?"

"Gee, you can't make breakfast out of a mess like this. Why don't you come and eat with us?"

The blonde went on talking, apologizing for what she was serving and at the same time listing it with a certain pride. Strangely, Miss Kent heard not one voice, but two. The second came tinnily from the little box on the table,

"You poor, dried-up old maid. That guy who's been hanging around would have been over long before this, if you knew the first thing about being nice to a man."

Bertha gasped. "Really, if that's the way you feel—"

"Why, honey, I just asked you over for breakfast," the blonde answered; at the same time the voice from the machine said,

"I suppose George and me ain't good enough for you. O.K. by me, sister. I didn't really want you to come anyway."

Trembling, Miss Kent stood up. "I've never been so insulted!"

"What's eating you, Miss Kent?" The blonde seemed genuinely puzzled, but again the voice came from the plastic box,

"The old maid's off her rocker. You'd think she was reading my mind."

Switching her trim little hips, the blonde walked back to her own camp. Bertha Kent dropped numbly on the bench, staring at the ugly box. "Reading my mind," the woman had said. Somehow the machine had done precisely that, translating the blonde's spoken words into the real, emotional meaning behind them. It was a terrifying gadget. Bertha was hypnotized by its potential horror—like the brutal, devasting truth spoken by a child.

A camper walked past on the road, waving at Miss Kent and calling out a cheerful good morning. But again the machine read the real meaning behind the pleasant words.

"So you've finally lost your man, Miss Kent. The way you dished out the orders, it's a wonder he stayed around as long as he did. And a pity: you're an attractive woman. You should make some man a good wife."

They all thought that. The whole camp had been watching her, laughing at her. Bertha felt helpless and alone. She needed—wanted—someone else; it surprised her when she faced that fact.

Then it dawned on her: the camper was right; the blonde was right. She had lost Walt through her own ridiculous bull-headedness. In order to assert herself. To be an individualist, she had always thought. And what did that matter, if it imposed this crushing loneliness?

For a moment a kind of madness seized her. It was the diabolical machine that was tormenting her, not the truth it told. She snatched a piece of her broken food box and struck at the plastic case blindly. There was a splash of fire; the gadget broke.

She saw Walt look up from his stove. She saw him move toward her. But she stood paralyzed by a

shattering trauma of pain. The voice still came from the speaker, and this time it was her own. Her mind was stripped naked; she saw herself whole, unsheltered by the protective veneer of rationalization.

And she knew the pattern of the dream-man she had loved since her childhood; she knew why the dream had been self-defeating.

For the idealization was her own father. That impossible paragon created by the worship of a child.

The shock was its own cure. She was too well-balanced to accept the tempting escape of total disorientation. Grimly she fought back the tide of madness, and in that moment she found maturity. She ran toward Walt, tears of gratitude in her eyes. She felt his arms around her, and she clung to him desperately.

"I was terrified; I needed you, Walt; I never want to be alone again."

"Needed me?" he repeated doubtfully.

"I love you." After a split-second's hesitation, she felt his lips warm on hers.

From the corner of her eye she saw a chute dart out of nowhere and scoop up the broken plastic box from the camp table. They both vanished again. That was a miracle, too, she supposed; but not nearly as important as hers.

Then the reason of a logical mind asserted its own form of realism: of course, none of it had happened. The mind-reading gadget had been a device created in her own subconscious, a psychological trick to by-pass the dream that had held her imprisoned. She knew enough psychology to understand that.

She ran her fingers through Walt's dark hair and repeated softly,

"I love you, Walt Gordon."

WAS IT an illusion? I believe that, Bill, because later on, when I thought of using the grapple, I brought the Semantic-Translator back from nowhere. Apparently the smaller gadget had been in the console or behind it. I hadn't seen it when I searched, because my eyes had been hurt by the glare of light.

In the process the Translator somehow got twisted around, for the chute dragged it back vertically through the coil of wire. It touched the wall of the cylinder, and the whole machine exploded.

It was impossible to save anything from the wreckage. But as a physicist I assure you, Bill, the transposition of matter into light is, in terms of our present science, a physical impossibility. It is certainly not the sort of invention that could have been produced by a senile old man, pottering around in a home laboratory. The only thing I regret is that I had no opportunity to examine the Semantic-Translator, but I'm sure it would have proved just as much nonsense.

I'm going up to Yosemite tomorrow for a couple of weeks. If you want any further details on the Price inventory, look me up at the office when I come home.

Yours,
Walt Gordon • • •

Illustrated by Ed Emsh

SPATIAL DELIVERY

Women on space station assignments shouldn't get pregnant. But there's a first time for everything. Here's the story of such a time——and an historic situation.

BY RANDALL GARRETT

ONE thousand seventy-five miles above the wrinkled surface of Earth, a woman was in pain.

There, high in the emptiness of space, Space Station One swung in its orbit. Once every two hours, the artificial satellite looped completely around the planet, watching what went on below. Outside its bright steel hull was the silence of the interplanetary vacuum; inside, in the hospital ward, Lieutenant Alice Britton clutched at the sheets of her bed in pain, then relaxed as it faded away.

Major Banes looked at her and smiled a little. "How do you feel, Lieutenant?"

She smiled back; she knew the pain wouldn't return for a few minutes yet. "Fine, doctor. It's no worse than I was expecting. How long will it before we can contact White Sands?"

The major looked nervously at his wristwatch. "Nearly an hour. You'll be all right."

"Certainly," she agreed, running a hand through her brown hair, "I'll be okay. Just you be on tap when I call."

The major's grin broadened. "You don't think I'd miss a historical event like this, do you? You take it easy. We're over Eastern Europe now, but as soon as we get within radio range of New Mexico, I'll beam a call in." He paused, then repeated, "You just take it easy. Call the nurse if anything happens." Then he turned and walked out of the room.

Alice Britton closed her eyes. Major Banes was all smiles and cheer now, but he hadn't been that way five months ago. She chuckled softly to herself as she thought of his blistering speech.

"Lieutenant Britton, you're either careless or brainless; I don't know which! Your husband may be the finest rocket jockey in the Space Service, but that doesn't give him the right to come blasting up here on a supply rocket just to get you pregnant!"

Alice had said: "I'm sure the thought never entered his mind, doctor. I know it never entered mine."

"But that was two and a half months ago! Why didn't you come to me before this? Of all the tomfool—" His voice had died off in supressed anger.

"I didn't know," she had said stolidly. "You know my medical record."

"I know. I know." A puzzled frown had come over his face then, a frown which almost hid the green eyes that contrasted so startlingly with the flaming red of his hair. "The question is: what do we do next? We're not equipped for obstetrics up here."

"Send me back down to Earth, of course."

And he had looked up at her scathingly. "Lieutenant Britton, it is my personal opinion that you need your head examined, and not by a general practitioner, either! Why, I wouldn't let you get into an airplane, much less land on Earth in a rocket! If you think I'd permit you to subject yourself to eight gravities of acceleration in a rocket landing, you're daffy!"

She hadn't thought of it before, but the major was right. The terrible pressure of a rocket landing would increase her effective body weight to nearly half a ton; an

adult human being couldn't take that sort of punishment for long, much less the tiny life that was growing within her.

So she had stayed on in the Space Station, doing her job as always. As Chief Radar Technician, she was important in the operation of the station. Her pregnancy had never made her uncomfortable; the slow rotation of the wheel-shaped station about its axis gave an effective gravity at the rim only half that of Earth's surface, and the closer to the hub she went, the less her weight became.

According to the major, the baby was due sometime around the first of September. "Two hundred and eighty days," he had said. "Luckily, we can pinpoint it almost exactly. And at a maximum of half of Earth gravity, you shouldn't weigh more than seventy pounds then. You're to report to me at least once a week, Lieutenant."

As the words went through her mind, another spasm of pain hit her, and she clenched her fists tightly on the sheets again. It went away, and she took a deep breath.

Everything had been fine until today. And then, only half an hour ago, a meteor had hit the radar room. It had been only a tiny bit of rock, no bigger than a twenty-two bullet, and it hadn't been traveling more than ten miles per second, but it had managed to punch its way through the shielding of the station.

The self-sealing walls had closed the tiny hole quickly, but even in that short time, a lot of air had gone whistling out into the vacuum of space.

The depressurization hadn't hurt her too much, but the shock had been enough to start labor. The baby was going to come two months early.

She relaxed a little more, waiting for the next pain. There was nothing to worry about; she had absolute faith in the red-haired major.

The major himself was not so sure. He sat in his office, massaging his fingertips and looking worriedly at the clock on the wall.

The Chief Nurse at a nearby desk took off her glasses and looked at him speculatively. "Something wrong, doctor?"

"Incubator," he said, without taking his eyes off the clock.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Incubator. We can't deliver a seven-month preemie without an incubator."

The nurse's eyes widened. "Good Lord! I never thought of that! What are you going to do?"

"Right now, I can't do anything. I can't beam a radio message through the Earth. But as soon as we get within radio range of White Sands, I'll ask them to send up an emergency rocket with an incubator. But—"

"But what?"

"Will we have time? The pains are coming pretty fast now. It will be at least three hours before they can get a ship up here. If they miss us on the next time around, it'll be five hours. She can't hold out that long."

The Chief Nurse turned her eyes to the slowly moving second hand of the wall clock. She could feel a lump in her throat.

Major Banes was in the Communications Center a full five min-

utes before the coastline of California appeared on the curved horizon of the globe beneath them. He had spent the hour typing out a complete report of what had happened to Alice Britton and a list of what he needed. He handed it to the teletype operator and paced the floor impatiently as he waited for the answer.

When the receiver teletype began clacking softly, he leaned over the page, waiting anxiously for every word.

WHITE SANDS ROCKET BASE 4 JULY 1984 0913 HRS URGENT TO: MAJ PETER BANES (MC) 0-266118 SS-1 MEDICAL OFFICER FROM: GEN DAVID BARRETT 0-199515 COMMANDING WSRB ROCKET ORBIT NOW BEING COMPUTED FOR RENDEZVOUS WITH SS-1 AS OF NEXT PASSAGE ABOVE USA. CAPT. JAMES BRITTON PILOTING. MEDICS LOADING SHIP TWELVE WITH INCUBATOR AND OTHER SUPPLIES. BASE OBSTETRICIAN LT COL GATES ALSO COMING TO ASSIST IN DELIVERY. HANG ON. OVER.

Banes nodded and turned to the operator. "I want a direct open telephone line to my office in case I have to get another message to the base before we get out of range again."

He turned and left through the heavy door. Each room of the space station was protected by airtight doors and individual heating units; if some accident, such as a really large meteor hit, should release the air from one room, nearby rooms would be safe.

Banes' next stop was the hospital ward.

Alice Britton was resting quietly, but there were lines of strain around her eyes which hadn't been there an hour before.

"How's it coming, Lieutenant?"

She smiled, but another spasm hit her before she could answer. After a time, she said: "I'm doing fine, but you look as if you'd been through the mill. What's eating you?"

He forced a nervous smile. "Nothing but the responsibility. You're going to be a very famous woman, you know. You'll be the mother of the first child born in space. And it's my job to see to it that you're both all right."

She grinned. "Another Dr. Dafoe?"

"Something on that order, I suppose. But it won't be all my glory. Colonel Gates, the O.B. man, was supposed to come up for the delivery in September, so when White Sands contacted us, they said he was coming immediately." He paused, and a genuine smile crossed his face. "Your husband is bringing him up."

"Jim! Coming up here? Wonderful! But I'm afraid the colonel will be too late. This isn't going to last that long."

Banes had to fight hard to keep his face smiling when she said that, but he managed an easy nod. "We'll see. Don't hurry it, though. Let nature take its course. I'm not such a glory hog that I'd not let Gates have part of it—or all of it, for that matter. Relax and take it easy."

He went on talking, trying to keep the conversation light, but his eyes kept wandering to his wristwatch, timing Alice's pain intervals. They were coming too close to-

gether to suit him.

There was a faint rap, and the heavy airtight door swung open to admit the Chief Nurse. "There's a message for you in your office, doctor. I'll send a nurse in to be with her."

He nodded, then turned back to Alice. "Stiff uppah lip, and all that sort of rot," he said in a phony British accent.

"Oh, raw*ther,* old chap," she grinned.

Back in his office, Banes picked up the teletype flimsy.

WHITE SANDS ROCKET BASE 4 JULY 1984 0928 HRS URGENT TO: MAJ PETER BANES (MC) 0-266118 SS-1 MEDICAL OFFICER FROM: GEN DAVID BARRETT 0-199515 COMMANDING WSRB ROCKET ORBIT COMPUTED FOR RENDEZVOUS AT 1134 HRS MST. CAPT BRITTON SENDS PERSONAL TO LT BRITTON AS FOLLOWS: HOLD THE FORT, BABY, THE WHOLE WORLD IS PRAYING FOR YOU. OUT.

BANES sat on the edge of his desk, pounding a fist into the palm of his left hand. "Two hours. It isn't soon enough. She'll never hold out that long. And we don't have an incubator." His voice was a clipped monotone, timed with the rhythmic slamming of his fist.

The Chief Nurse said: "Can't we build something that will do until the rocket gets here?"

Banes looked at her, his face expressionless. "What would we build it out of? There's not a spare piece of equipment in the station. It costs money to ship material up here, you know. Anything not essential is left on the ground."

The phone rang. Banes picked it up and identified himself.

The voice at the other end said: "This is Communications, Major. I tape recorded all the monitor pickups from the Earth radio stations, and it looks as though the Space Service has released the information to the public. Lieutenant Britton's husband was right when he said the whole world's praying for her. Do you want to hear the tapes?"

"Not now, but thanks for the information." He hung up and looked into the Chief Nurse's eyes. "They've released the news to the public."

She frowned. "That really puts you on the spot. If the baby dies, they'll blame you."

Banes slammed his fist to the desk. "Do you think I give a tinker's dam about that? I'm interested in saving a life, not in worrying about what people may think!"

"Yes, sir. I just thought—"

"Well, think about something useful! Think about how we're going to save that baby!" He paused as he saw her eyes. "I'm sorry, Lieutenant. My nerves are all raw, I guess. But, dammit, my field is space medicine. I can handle depressurization, space sickness, and things like that, but I don't know anything about babies! I know what I read in medical school, and I watched a delivery once, but that's all I know. I don't even have any references up here; people aren't supposed to go around having babies on a space station!"

"It's all right, doctor. Shall I prepare the delivery room?"

His laugh was hard and short. "Delivery room! I wish to Heaven

we had one! Prepare the ward room next to the one she's in now, I guess. It's the best we have.

"So help me Hannah, I'm going to see some changes made in regulations! A situation like this won't happen again!"

The nurse left quietly. She knew Banes wasn't really angry at the Brittons; it was simply his way of letting off steam to ease the tension within him.

The slow, monotonous rotation of the second hand on the wall clock seemed to drag time grudgingly along with it. Banes wished he could smoke to calm his raw nerves, but it was strictly against regulations. Air was too precious to be used up by smoking. Every bit of air on board had had to be carried up in rockets when the station was built in space. The air purifiers in the hydroponics section could keep the air fresh enough for breathing, but fire of any kind would overtax the system, leaving too little oxygen in the atmosphere.

It was a few minutes of ten when he decided he'd better get back to Alice Britton. She was trying to read a book between spasms, but she wasn't getting much read. She dropped it to the floor when he came in.

"Am I glad to see you! It won't be long now." She looked at him analytically. "Say! Just what *is* eating you? You look more haggard than I do!"

Again he tried to force a smile, but it didn't come off too well. "Nothing serious. I just want to make sure everything comes out all right."

She smiled. "It will. You're all set. You ordered the instruments months ago. Or did you forget something?"

That hit home, but he just grinned feebly. "I forgot to get somebody to boil water."

"Whatever for?"

"Coffee, of course. Didn't you know that? Papa always heats up the water; that keeps him out of the way, and the doctor has coffee afterwards."

Alice's hands grasped the sheet again, and Banes glanced at his watch. Ninety seconds! It was long and hard.

When the pain had ebbed away, he said: "We've got the delivery room all ready. It won't be much longer now."

"I'll say it won't! How about the incubator?"

There was a long pause. Finally, he said softly: "There isn't any incubator. I didn't take the possibility of a premature delivery into account. It's my fault. I've done what I could, though; the ship is bringing one up. I—I think we'll be able to keep the child alive until—"

He stopped. Alice was bubbling up with laughter.

"Lieutenant! Lieutenant Britton! Alice! This is no time to get hysterical! Stop it!"

Her laughter slowed to a chuckle. "*Me* get hysterical! That's a good one! What about you? You're so nervous you couldn't sip water out of a bathtub without spilling it!"

He blinked. "What do you mean?"

Another pain came, and he had to wait until it was over before he got her answer. "Doctor," she said, "I thought you would have

figured it out. Ask yourself just one question. Ask yourself, 'Why is a space station like an incubator?' "

Space Ship Twelve docked at Space Station One at exactly eleven thirty-four, and two men in spacesuits pushed a large, bulky package through the airlock.

Major Peter Banes, haggard but smiling, met Captain Britton in the corridor as he and the colonel entered the hospital ward.

Banes nodded to Colonel Gates, then turned to Britton. "I don't know whether to congratulate you or take a poke at you, Captain, but I suppose congratulations come first. Your son, James Edward Britton II, is doing fine, thank you."

"You mean—*already?*"

The colonel said nothing, but he raised an eyebrow.

"Over an hour ago," said Banes.

"But—but—the incubator—"

Banes' grin widened. "We'll put the baby in it, now that we've got it, but it really isn't necessary. Your wife figured that one out. A space station is a kind of incubator itself, you see. It protects us poor, weak humans from the terrible conditions of space. So all we had to do was close up one of the airtight rooms, sterilize it, warm it up, and put in extra oxygen from the emergency tanks. Young James is perfectly comfortable."

"Excellent, Major!" said the colonel.

"Don't thank me. It was Captain Britton's wife who—"

But Captain Britton wasn't listening any more. He was headed toward his wife's room at top speed.

• • •

Xhanph was the fully accredited ambassador from Gfun, and Earth's first visitor from outer space. History and the amenities called for a tremendous reception. But earth people are funny people . . .

UNWELCOMED VISITOR

BY WILLIAM MORRISON

ALL THE way over, all through the loneliness of the long trip, he had consoled himself with the thought of the reception he would get. How they would crowd around him, how they would gape and cheer! All the most prominent and most important Earthlings would rush to see him, to touch their own appendages to his tentacles, to receive his report of interplanetary good will. His arrival would certainly be the most celebrated occasion in all the history of Earth . . .

He was coming in for a landing, and it was no time for day-dreaming. He brought the ship down slowly, in the middle of a large square, as carefully as if he were settling down among his own people. He gave them a chance to get out from under him before making contact with the ground. When the ship finally rested firmly on the strange planet, he gave a sigh of relief, and for a few long seconds sat there motionless. And then he began to move toward the door.

The increased gravity did not affect him as badly as he had thought it would. For the dense atmosphere, with its high oxygen content, he had of course been prepared. He injected another dose of respiratory enzyme into his bloodstream just to make sure, and then swung open the door. The inrush of air caused only a momentary dizziness.

Then he climbed over the side and stared about in surprise.

No one was paying any attention to him.

Their indifference was so enormous that it struck him like a blow. Individuals of both sexes—he could easily distinguish them by the difference in their clothing—were going about their own business as if he simply were not there. A small animal running about on all fours had its forepart to the ground. It trotted from one place to another, making a slight noise with an organ that he felt sure was used for the intake of oxygen. When it came to him, it sniffed slightly, without any especial interest, and then ran off to more important business. No other creature paid him even that much attention.

Can it be, he asked himself incredulously, that they don't see me? Perhaps their organs of vision make use of different wave lengths. Perhaps to them I and the ship are not pink and gray respectively, but a perfect black which fails to register. I must speak to them, I must make myself known. They may be startled, but I must take the chance.

He rolled over to an individual who towered over him a full *spard,* and said gravely, "Greetings! I, Xhanph, bring you greetings from the inhabitants of the planet, Gfun. I come with a message of friendship—"

There could be no doubt that the other heard him. And saw him too. He looked straight at Xhanph, muttered something, probably about a pink monster, which Xhanph could guess at but not really interpret, and moved on impatiently. Xhanph stared after him with an incredulity that grew by the moment.

They didn't understand his language, that he realized. But surely they didn't have to understand in order to be interested. The very sight of his ship, a mere glimpse of *him,* the first visitor from interplanetary space, should have been enough to bring them flocking around. How could they possibly greet him with such disinterest, with such faces which even to a stranger seemed cold and chilling?

When you have traveled as far as he had traveled, you don't give up easily. Another, a shorter individual, was coming toward him, and he began again, "Greetings! I, Xhanph—"

This time the individual didn't even stop, but muttered something which must surely have been of the nature of an oath. And hurried on.

Xhanph tried five more times before he gave up. If there had been the slightest indication of interest, he would have kept on. But there wasn't. The only feeling he could detect was one of impatience at being annoyed. And he saw that there was nothing else to do but go back to his ship.

For a while he sat there, brooding. One possible solution struck him, although it didn't seem at all probable. These people were not representative of their kind. Perhaps this entire area he had taken for a city was nothing more than a retreat for the mentally disabled, for those who had found the strain of living too much and had sunk back into a kind of stupor. Perhaps elsewhere the people were more normal.

At the thought, he brightened

for a moment. Yes, that must be it. Convincing himself against his own better judgment, he lifted the ship into the air again and set it down a few dozen *grolls* away.

But there was no difference. Here, too, the faces looked at him blankly, and people hurried away impatiently when he tried to stop them.

He knew now that it was useless to pick up the ship still another time and set it down elsewhere. If there was some rational explanation for such irrational behavior, it could be found here just as well as anywhere else. And explanation there must be. But he would have to look for it. It would not come to him if he simply sat there in the ship and waited for it.

He got out and locked the ship so that in case some one finally did show curiosity, no harm would come to it. Then he began to roll around the city.

EVERYWHERE he met the same indifference as at first. Even the children stared at him without curiosity, and went on with their games. He stopped to watch—and to listen.

They bounced balls, and as they bounced, they recited words. When something interrupted the even tenor of the game and they had to begin again, they went back to the start of the recitation. Surely, they were counting. Listening carefully, he learned the fundamentals of their system of numerals. At the same time, for the sake of permanence, he made pictorial and auditory records.

Every now and then the game would be interrupted by a quarrel. And a childish quarrel, of course, was sure to be full of recriminations. You did this, I did that. He learned the names of the objects with which they played, he learned the words for first and second persons in their different forms. He learned the word for the maternal parent, who seemed to stand in the closest relation to the young ones.

By evening he had acquired a fairly good child's grasp of the language. He rolled back in the direction of the ship. When he came to the place where it should be, he had a sudden feeling of panic. The ship was gone.

They must have dragged it away. Their whole pretense of indifference must have been a trick, he thought excitedly. They had waited until they could tamper with it without his interference, in order to learn its secrets. What had they done with it? Perhaps they had harmed it, possibly they had ruined the drive. How could he ever get off this accursed planet, how would he ever get back to Gfun?

He rolled hastily over to the nearest man and tried to put his newfound vocabulary to use. "'Where—where—" He realized suddenly that he didn't know the word for ship. "Where galenfain?"

The man looked at him as if he were crazy, and walked on.

Xhanph did some swearing on his own account. He began to roll madly around the square, becoming more desperate from moment to moment. Finally, just when he thought he would explode from rage and frustration, he found the ship again. It had been dragged to

a neighboring street and left on a vacant lot, surrounded by rusty cans, broken bottles, and various other forms of garbage and rubbish indigenous to this section of the planet.

Relief mingled with a feeling of outrage. Xhanph swore again. The indignity of it was enough to start an interplanetary war. If they ever heard of it back on Gfun, they would want to blast this stupid and insulting planet out of existence.

He hastened into the ship, and found to his joy that there had been no damage. There was nothing to prevent him from taking off again and getting back to Gfun. But the mystery of his reception still intrigued him. He could not leave without solving it.

He rolled out of the ship again and stood there watching it. Evidently they had regarded this miracle of engineering as nothing more than so much rubbish. They would probably leave it alone now. He could let it remain here, and in the meantime carry on his investigating as before.

Things would go more rapidly now that he understood some of the elements of human speech. All he had to do was keep his hearing appendages open and interpret the key words as he heard them. It shouldn't take him long. One of the reasons he had been selected to make the trip was that he had a gift for languages, and a day or two more should suffice to establish communications.

He left the ship again, and began to roll around the city. He listened to traffic policemen directing the flow of helicopters, he stood by unobtrusively while boy talked with girl—these conversations turned out to be very limited in scope, as well as uninstructive in syntax—and he even managed to get into a place of amusement where three dimensional images created in him a sense of nostalgia. From his slight knowledge of the language, he could perceive that the dialogue was so stale that he himself could have supplied it from stories written long ago on his native planet. After a lapse of many hours, the majority of the people disappeared from the streets, and he decided it was time to return to his ship and suspend animation.

In the morning he set out again. By the end of that day he felt he could understand the spoken language well enough. What next?

To learn the language in written form might take too long, and besides, to solve his mystery he would have to waste time in digging up the recorded forms that contained the necessary information. No, he would have to find some one to talk to, some one who would have the necessary information at his tentacle-tips, or as they called the appendages here, finger-tips.

He began to approach various people again, undiscouraged by their cold and impolite replies. Finally he found the informant he had been seeking, an old, white-haired individual who was walking slowly, with the aid of a cane, along one of the wider and quieter streets.

The man looked at him with calm lack of interest as he approached. Xhanph came to a stop, and said, "Greetings! I, Xhanph, bring you greetings from the inhabitants of the planet, Gfun. I

come with a message of friendship."

"Very glad to make your acquaintance, sir," said the old man politely, but still without genuine interest.

At last some one who had answered! Xhanph started his portable recording machine going.

"I wish for information. Perhaps you can give it to me."

"Ah, my young fellow, I have seen a great deal and know a great deal. But it isn't very often that you young ones want to find out what we old folks know."

"Perhaps I have not made myself clear. I am an inhabitant of the planet, Gfun."

"Yes, indeed. Do you intend to stay here long?"

"I have come with a message of friendship. But I have found no one to receive it."

"Mmm. That's unfortunate," the old man said. "People are very impatient nowadays. Time is money, they say. Can't spare the money to stop and talk. Couldn't spare it myself, not so long ago. I'm retired now, though. Used to run a stereo store, up around Mudlark Street. Biggest store in the city. Everybody used to buy from me. Jefferson J. Gardner's my name. You may have heard of me on—where did you say you come from?"

"Gfun. However, I wish to make clear—"

"Never sold any stereos to any one on Gfun. Probably don't get good reception up there. Sold 'em to everybody else, though. I'm well known here, Mr.—"

"Xhanph. But before you go further—"

"Got into the stereo game when they first came out. Went like hotcakes in those days. Although I don't suppose you know what a hotcake is. Quality didn't count. Only thing that counted was size of screen and strength of the three-dimensional effect. Mr. Gloopher—he was Mayor then—Robert F. Gloopher—had a daughter who went in for acting . . ."

Not for the first time, Xhanph cursed this damnable planet. The only man he had found willing to talk was senile and his conversation rambled wildly like a feather in a strong and particularly erratic whirlwind. Still, he told himself with a touch of philosophy, I have wasted so much time, I can afford to waste a little more. Sooner or later this individual will tell me what I want to know.

Half an hour later, however, when Jefferson J. Gardner began to repeat himself, Xpanph realized that he couldn't just wait for the old man to talk himself out. Different tactics were needed.

He interrupted rudely. "Why don't people pay any attention to me?"

"Eh? What's that you say?"

"I come from the planet, Gfun. I thought that as an interplanetary visitor I would be received with tremendous enthusiasm. Instead I find myself disregarded."

"I recollect that back in the old days—"

"Never mind that. Why don't people pay any attention to me?"

"Why should they?"

"That is no answer!"

"But it is, sir," said the old gentleman with dignity. "They don't find you out of the ordinary. Why

pay attention to you?"

"You mean that you are accustomed to visitors from space?"

"No, sir, I mean nothing of the kind. What I do mean is that we are by now thoroughly accustomed to the idea of you. I remember—"

"Never mind what you remember!"

"When I was a child, stories about visitors from Mars or Venus were already trite and stereotyped. What could a visitor do? What might a visitor look like? All the possible answers had already been given, and we were familiar with every one of them. We imagined visitors with tentacles and without, with a thousand legs and no legs, with five heads and seven feet, and eighteen stomachs. We imagined visitors who were plants, or electrical impulses, or viruses, or energy-creatures. They had the power to read minds, to move objects telekinetically and to travel through impossible dimensions. Their space ships were of all kinds, and they could race along with many times the speed of light or crawl with the speed of molasses. I do not know, sir, in which category you fall—whether you are animal, vegetable, mineral, or electrical—but I know that there is nothing new about you."

"But you are familiar merely with the ideas. I am a *real* visitor!"

"Young man, I am a hundred and ten years old, and the idea of you was already ancient when I was eight. I remember reading about you in a comic book. You are not the first visitor who has pretended to be real. There were hundreds before you. I have seen press agent stunts by the dozen, and advertising pictures by the hundreds about Mars, about Venus, about the Moon, about visitors from interstellar space. Your pretended colleagues have walked the streets of innumerable cities, until now we are weary of the entire tribe of you. And you yourself, sir, if you will pardon the expression, you are an anticlimax."

"Your race must be insane," protested Xhanph. "For all you know I may come with great gifts which I wish to confer upon you."

"We have been fooled before. And in view of the fact, as I have reminded you, that time is money, we do not wish to bankrupt ourselves by investigating."

"But suppose I'm here to harm you!"

"If your race is capable of it, we can hardly stop you, so it is no use trying. If incapable, you are wasting your efforts."

"This is insanity, genuine racial insanity!"

"You repeat yourself. The fact is, we have become blasé," said the old man. "Thanks to the efforts of our science fiction writers, we have experienced in imagination all there is to experience in interplanetary contact, and the genuine article can be only a disappointment. I am reminded of an incident that occurred when Gerald Crombie, who was City Councilman at the time, ordered a twenty-five inch stereo set . . ."

XHANPH rolled away. He had his answer now, and he couldn't stand listening any longer to the old man's babbling. He rolled aimlessly, up one street and

down another. And he thought of how they would receive his answer when he went back to Gfun.

Was it him or the planet that they would consider mad? Almost certainly, they wouldn't believe him. He could imagine the exchange of wondering glances, the first delicate hints that the long trip had deranged him, the not so delicate hints later on when he persisted in sticking to his story. He remembered the high hopes with which he had departed, the messages with which he had been entrusted by the Chief of Planetary Affairs, the Head of the Scientific Bureau, the Director of Economic Affairs, and countless others. And he could imagine the reception he would find when he reported that he had been unable to deliver a single message.

How long he rolled in this aimless fashion he did not know. After a time he seemed to come to his senses. It was no use trying to run away from reality, as he was doing. He had to go back to the ship and return to Gfun. Let them believe him or not, his report would tell the truth. And the pictorial and auditory records would confirm his story.

What a planet, he thought again. Of all its hundreds of millions, its billions of inhabitants, not one had the curiosity, the ordinary intellectual decency, to be interested in him. Not one had the imagination, the awareness—

"Pardon me," said a shrill voice. "Excuse me for reading thoughts, but I could not help overhearing—I am a visitor here myself."

He swung around. The figure before him was strange, but an aura of friendliness came from it and he knew there was nothing to fear. Nothing to fear—and much to be thankful for.

With a heartfelt double sigh, while disinterested passersby spared them not even a glance, pink tentacles and green streamers clasped in a gesture of friendship that spanned the millions of miles of interplanetary space. • • •

LOOKING AHEAD

IN THE NOVEMBER ISSUE you will find some of the most varied and thought provoking stories it has been IF's pleasure to present: *Carry Me Home,* by Gordon R. Dickson, is an unusual study in the revelation of a character; *Progeny,* by Philip K. Dick, is an emotion filled story about a father and son in the distant future; *For Every Man a Reason,* by Patrick Wilkins, tests the love of a man for his wife, versus his love for his State; plus other short stories, each with a different theme, by Mari Wolf, William E. Bently, John Christopher, Basil Wells and Vernon L. McCain. *Also,* meet the winners in IF's $2000 nation-wide College Science Fiction Contest. Ask your newsdealer to reserve you a copy.

PEACE

We bid you welcome, Earthmen! Take your rightful place beside us, share our peaceful existence. By your endless struggles you have earned it.

BY NORMAN ARKAWY AND STANLEY HENIG

Peace Communique No 1.—Abilene—April 1, 2049

The war is over. Iverson is safely exiled on asteroid 14, and the other leaders of the aggressor forces—Cartwright, Briande, Remberg, Kiang and Risofsky—are all in confinement on their respective space islands. Peace has been restored to the system: on Rios and on Nwad.

(signed) SER GULLA
Sup. AC
Rios Adm.

AC Pamphlet
PIE Rios No. 1-1-1
10 APR 49 RT

REPORT TO

THE PEOPLE OF RIOS

On March 29, 2049 (Rios Time), the Rios-Nwadian war ended.

This report on the recent conflict has been prepared by the Bureau of Public Information and Education, Rios Branch, for the purpose of enlightening the inhabitants of Rios about the War, its causes, and the proposed policy of the Nwadian government concerning the administration of your planet.

In order to provide for full understanding by the people of Rios, Riosic terminology shall be used wherever possible in this report. Thus, Rios shall be called 'Earth', Nwad shall be designated 'Venus', and all dates, measurements and other data which are different on the two planets shall be indicated according to the Riosic calculation.

The War ended on March 29, 2049 when the last Earthian troops surrendered to the Venusian peace forces.

When did the War begin? The first battle was fought on December 18, 2048, but the first 'incident' that led directly to the conflict occurred in November, 2042. And even before that date, many years before, officials on Venus knew that war between the two worlds was inevitable.

Space scientists of Venus have been observing Earth for hundreds of years. The first space ship to reach your planet and return to

Venus made its voyage in the Earth year, 1891. From that time on, explorations were made sporadically until the 1950's, when revolutionary improvements in the design of our ships made possible more economical and faster trips.

It is an interesting coincidence, incidentally, that atomic power was discovered on Earth just as we on Venus had made atomic driven spacecraft obsolete by the introduction of the magnetico-gravitational drive. This fact is mentioned because it was the evidence of atomic explosions on Earth that increased our interest in your planet a century ago.

In all our observations of Earth, the most obvious fact we learned was that its dominant race was aggressive and war-like in nature. Having no desire to introduce this war-mindedness to our peaceful world, we avoided all contact with Earth.

We realized, however, that in time the Earth race would accomplish space travel and thus force a contact with us. Therefore, we devised highly potent weapons for our defense in the event that the people of Earth ever stopped quarreling among themselves and attempted an attack on our world.

High officials in our government were appalled at the thought of war with its chaotic and indiscriminate killing. There were those who deemed it an actual act of aggression on our part to arm ourselves in preparation for a war. The opposition to our defense program was strong. Yet, it was our preparedness which saved our civilization from destruction when your forces launched their invasion of our planet last year.

To understand the events which led to The War, it is best that we briefly review the history of space travel by Earthians. In the year 2002, the six remaining nations of the Earth formed the Federation to abolish war and to enable the people of your planet to put forth a united effort to discover the secret of interplanetary travel. This endeavour, in itself, was considered by our leaders to be most creditable. But the entire pattern of your development, observed for many centuries, instilled seeds of doubt in our minds. You were conditioned to war and the mere establishment of a Federation to monitor the future was not adequate insurance, we felt, against further conflict. In your concentration on conquering space, however, you did stop warring among yourselves.

Space travel from Earth began thirty-eight years ago. The first successful trip to Luna and back was made in 2011, and by 2020 the Lunar space port was opened. It was in 2020, also, that the space ship, Pioneer, left for Mars. It was never heard from again.

Unsuccessful attempts to travel to the other planets were made during the years 2021-2027. The Pioneer II, bound for Mars, the Adventurer, bound for Mars, and the Enterprise, bound for Venus, all disappeared without a trace.

In September, 2028, the Space King returned to Earth after completing a voyage to Mars. The ship landed safely, but the excited celebration that greeted it was short-lived when it was discovered that

the entire crew was afflicted with a neurological disease that your Earth scientists labeled 'space sickness'. This disease posed a new obstacle to interplanetary travel. It attacked indiscriminately and it proved fatal in almost every case.

Research and experimentation on the cause and cure of 'space sickness' was carried on continuously from the time the Space King returned with its dying crew until the disease was conquered in 2041. During these years, the experimental ships Enterprise II, Razorback, and Space King II were utilized as laboratories in orbital flights.

In April, 2041, the space liner Morning Star was completed, incorporating technological improvements designed to prevent the occurrence of 'space sickness'. The Morning Star left the Lunar station on July 17, 2042. Its destination was Venus.

In government circles on Venus, it was felt that no further delay could be permitted in establishing contact with the people of Earth. They were already too close to space flight maturity to forego any opportunity for formulating an understanding. Therefore, The Morning Star, whose flight had been observed contsantly, was allowed to pass through our ionic barrier and land unharmed on our planet. Emissaries of our *Lora Dannun* (nearest translation: Supreme Council) were on hand to greet the Earthmen when they left their ship.

As a precautionary measure, two atomic scorchers were trained on the ship, but our officials approached the debarking Earthmen without side arms and in a friendly manner. The Earthmen, understandably apprehensive, came forward with their hand weapons drawn.

Although we on Venus were already familiar with your International English language, our welcoming committee did not think it wise to further startle the men from Earth by greeting them in their own tongue. Therefore, our friendly intentions were made known by elaborate and unmistakable gestures.

The aliens from Earth, nevertheless, were startled enough by our appearance. They stared wide-eyed at what appeared to be four child-like specimens of human beings. This resemblance which Venusians bear to humans, and which should have impressed the crew of the Morning Star with the possibilities of intelligent negotiations, did not deter them from jumping to irrational conclusions.

Our chief emissary, Ser Madi, heard their leader and his lieutenant in the following conversation (which is reproduced from the auto-tape recording made on the spot):

Leader: What do you make of them, Jensen? They look almost like human children, don't they?
Lieutenant: There doesn't seem to be anything to worry about here, sir. They seem friendly enough. But why children? You'd think they'd send some bigwigs out to welcome us. Why did they send children?
Leader: I don't know . . . Maybe it's a trap!
Lieutenant: You're right, sir. We

can't afford to take any chances. Leader: Take them back to the ship for the psych boys to work on. I don't like the looks of this.

At this point Ser Madi revealed his knowledge of the Earth language. "I assure you, gentlemen," he said to the strangers, "that this is not a trap. Please follow us peacefully."

The invaders were stunned into silence, but it took the leader only a moment to recover. "I'll be damned!" he exclaimed. "The sly little devils understand English! Jensen! Have these creatures escorted onto the Star. This is something we'll have to talk over on the ship."

At a signal from the man called Jensen, eight of your people advanced toward the four members of our welcoming committee. Ser Madi spoke again: "I warn you, sir, not to try to abduct us. Order your men back."

The leader of the Earthmen laughed. "Look at them!" he said to his lieutenant. "These things are threatening us!" The soldiers had paused at Ser Madi's words. "Go on," the leader ordered them. "Take them aboard the ship!"

"You were warned," Ser Madi said sadly. He motioned to his companions and, in an instant of brilliant light, the space ship was reduced to smoldering ashes.

The stunned Earthians were easily taken into custody. They were completely awed by the destruction of their ship, which had been accomplished with "invisible" weapons. Ser Madi did not think it necessary to explain the compactness and efficiency of the atomic scorchers to them. They would not have been able to comprehend the principles behind the finger ring weapons.

Captain Daniels, the leader of the Earth expedition, was interrogated at great length, but he remined hostile and uncooperative. The only information that he offered was his name, rank and serial number, which he repeated over and over again. Jensen and the remaining crew members refused to answer our questions also, insisting that their captain was the spokesman for all of them. This action increased our fears that the intellectual and emotional make-up of Earth was incompatible with that of Venus.

We accomplished nothing in four days of questioning. It seemed impossible to determine the means whereby we could arrive at some workable line of reasoning. It was equally impossible for us to ascertain whether the hostile actions of the Morning Star represented the attitude of the Earth government or if they were merely the impulsive results of the emotional strain endured by Captain Daniels and his crew on their voyage.

The Supreme Council decided it was necessary to visit Earth now, make our presence known, and see if friendly relations could be established with that planet. We had hopes that this might be done, for there had been no war on Earth for almost fifty years. It was hoped that the people had finally achieved a civilization capable of friendly interplanetary exchange.

The Council ordered a delegation to leave immediately on the

first diplomatic mission from Venus to Earth. Ser Madi had justifiable doubts about the possibility of success, but the Council overruled his objections.

The delegation, led by the elder statesman, Ser Alaga, left for Earth aboard the light cruiser, Tunn. The date was December 9, 2042. Returning to Earth aboard the Tunn, were the eleven survivors of the Morning Star, treated not as prisoners, but as survivors of a space wreck.

The Tunn landed on Earth two miles out of Abilene, on December 15, 2042. A few hours after touching down, the Venusian delegation arrived in the Earth capital and presented themselves at the Ministry of State.

The office worker who stood between them and the Secretary of the Minister of Foreign Affairs was amused by the delegates' story. "Why don't you kids go home and stop annoying us?" he said. "And stop watching those TD shows!"

Ser Buldi indignantly repeated his request to see the Foreign Minister.

"Get out of here!" the office worker said in a tone that indicated he was through talking to us.

Ser Buldi began to reply but he was silenced by Ser Alaga, who wished to avoid any unnecessary incidents which could have proved embarrassing to the Earthmen. Instead, the elder statesman approached a young lady seated behind a desk.

"What can I do for you, little boy?" the girl asked with a smile.

Ser Alaga, with the aid of his hypno-tube, quickly convinced her to admit the delegates to the office of the Sub-Secretary for Foreign Affairs.

Then began a three day procession through the offices of many sub-secretaries, four under-secretaries and two deputy ministers. In each office our diplomats were received skeptically and passed on to the next.

Finally, in desperation, the delegation released the survivors of the Morning Star. Although Ser Alaga realized that their account of the incident probably would be distorted, he knew that it would serve to verify the delegation's identity.

The Abilene News of December 19, 2042, shouted at the top of its headline voice:

SPACE INVADERS HERE

The Bugle:

EARTH ATTACKED

The Times:

"MORNING STAR" DESTROYED

11 Survivors Of Space Liner Tell Story Of Attack

An immediate meeting was held between our delegation and the leaders of your government. After the formalities of greeting were over, the spokesman for the Earth government reviewed the facts of the Morning Star incident as they had been related by Captain Daniels and his crew. Venusian forces, they claimed, had been guilty of an unprovoked attack against the ship. We had barbarously murdered all of the ship's complement, save for the eleven "hostages" whom we had brought to Earth aboard the Tunn.

You Can Master the Power of Your "Sixth Sense"

These Uncanny Experiences PROVE YOU Have a "Sixth Sense"!

Buried deep among the atoms of your inner mind there is a mysterious sixth sense which is capable of producing seeming miracles.

How often have you had the feeling someone was staring at you — then turned around and found that someone WAS staring at you? You hadn't seen that person. How did you know?

How many times have you been talking or thinking about a person — then suddenly he or she appears? You had no reason to expect him (or her). But your inner mind knew!

Do you ever have the premonition that something is going to happen — then, bingo! — that very thing DOES happen?

Have you ever started to say something at exactly the same instant that someone else started to utter the SAME words?

Have you ever had a dream — and then seen your dream become a reality, just as your inner mind had pictured it?

We've all had uncanny experiences like these. You can't possibly explain them unless you admit that you DO have a sixth sense but this mysterious power is developed to a higher degree in some people than in others.

Some years ago the noted "father of modern psychology," Will James of Harvard, made the astonishing statement that most people use only 10% of their mental powers! The other 90% lies idle. Now, at last, science is making it easy for us to USE that vast reserve of brain power!

A few people seem to know instinctively the secret of harnessing this power. Others must learn. But once you learn the secret, NOTHING is beyond your power — NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE!

This doesn't mean we can all be Einsteins, Edisons or Fords. It does mean that we can have the happiness, peace of mind and feeling of security — plus the success in our chosen life's work — which we have every right to want and expect!

Man Is Just Now Beginning to Learn the True Power of the Human Mind!

For almost a hundred years, scientists have known about and talked about atomic energy. It is only recently that something has been done about it.

Likewise, the most amazing and mysterious powers of the inner mind were known to ancient sages, wise men, alchemists and philosophers. Their knowledge of these miraculous forces never died. It has been passed down through the centuries by a chosen few of each decade. Now these secrets are being brought to light for the first time. Now you and I can benefit by the precious knowledge of the inner mind — and learn how to put those forces to work!

As You Think — So You ARE!

That phrase comes from the Bible. It is just as true today as it was 2,000 years ago! But NOW we have the means to think along the right lines! Now we know how much better we can make our lives by simply releasing and putting to work the tremendous forces which have been lying dormant in our minds!

Of course you'd like to have a better home. A happier, fuller life. More understanding, respect and affection from your family, friends and associates. Greater success in your life work. More genuine security and peace of mind in this troubled world?

You can have all these things in abundance — soon! Nothing is impossible — nothing is beyond your reach — when you know how to use The Secret of The Power Within You.

Ben Sweetland, known to millions throughout the United States as Radio's Consulting Psychologist and who has contributed many works in the field of applied psychology — quite accidentally discovered the direct contact between the two minds of man — and how one can — at will — call upon his great mental powers.

The personal pronoun "I" refers to the mental self. Sweetland has taught for years. When this word is added to another, it becomes an instruction to self. "The only difference between the go-getter and the no'er-do-well," this psychologist published in 1935, is that one thinks in terms of "I Can" and the other —"I Can't!" He taught his followers to hold to the thought "I Can" and in a large number of cases, they proved they could — they did things.

One great truth was definitely established. The words "I CAN!" provided the direct path from the conscious mind to the subconscious mind; the use of them invoked the power to swing the door to the open sesame.

Mary Jones was a lonely spinster — not beautiful — and resigned to a life of single boredom. "I Can" helped the sunshine of happiness to smile on her. A large circle of friends — and a devoted husband came into being almost as though a magic wand had been used.

Jenny Smith had a good singing voice but lacked the courage to use it in public. "I Can!" gave her direct contact with her source of power and she has since appeared on concert stages throughout the United States.

Joe Winters was a machinist earning just enough to get by. Within days after gaining his "I Can" consciousness he started to expand. Today he operates a business employing 30 machinists.

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The government of Earth demanded an explanation. Ser Alaga spoke the truth. The Earthians were not satisfied.

(THE FOLLOWING CONVERSATION IS REPRODUCED FROM THE AUTO-TAPE RECORDING OF THE MEETING)

Earth Spokesman: *We will grant that your act of aggression was not premeditated, but resulted from a misinterpretation, on your part, of the friendly intentions of our forces. Nevertheless, our vessel was destroyed. Twenty-three of our men were killed. The government of the World Federation demands that your government make suitable reparations.*

Ser Alaga: *Mr. Cartwright, we respectfully deny the allegation that our forces were guilty of any act of aggression.*

Cartwright: *The Morning Star was destroyed by your men, was it not?*

Ser Alaga: *In self-defense, yes. As we have explained, the captain of your ship threatened our welcoming committee with . . .*

Cartwright: *None of your men were harmed!*

Ser Alaga: *They prevented their own imminent destruction by their action in self-defense. It was this action which resulted in the unfortunate . . .*

Cartwright: *Our ship and our men were attacked before they had fired a shot. Therefore, your action cannot be deemed to have taken place in self-defense.*

Ser Alaga: *Your reasoning confounds me, sir. If the prevention of aggressive action is termed aggression, then we are guilty of it. I bow to your logic.*

Naturally our government wishes to express its regrets over the impulsive act of its representatives. We want to meet with you in peace and friendship. We want to prevent any future incidents such as the one which has brought us here today.

Cartwright: *On behalf of the World Federation, I accept your apology. We, too, would like to prevent further strife between our worlds. There is much to be gained by a useful and cooperative alliance between Earth and Venus. But, to insure this, we feel that your government should make certain . . . payments in reparation for our losses.*

Ser Alaga: *Although I am in sympathy with your views, our delegation has not been empowered to offer any reparations. However, if you will indicate what your government would consider a suitable payment for your losses, we shall convey your request to our Council.*

(END OF AUTO-TAPE RECORDING)

Yttrium was the reparation asked by Earth—five thousand pounds of isolated and purified Yttrium. This metal was essential for the construction of Earth's space ships, the "alumiryten" alloy being used in the manufacture of the tough outer shell of these ships.

The supply of Yttrium ores on Venus is almost unlimited, and the Council had no trouble delivering the requested amount of the refined metal. The last shipment of ingots reached Earth within three months.

This conciliatory payment was intended to preserve the peace and build good will within the system. It was our intention that, if possible, the Earth would assume a more responsible attitude toward the greater scope of friendly interplanetary relations. It was our hope that harmony would form a permanent bond between our two worlds.

Our efforts were wasted.

YTTRIUM SHIPMENTS IMPURE

screamed the tabloid headlines. President Iverson of the World Federation sent a stiff note to the Council on Venus. He demanded apologies and immediate restitutions, claiming that sixty percent of the metal delivered was actually zirconium. We had cheated them, said Iverson.

In a terse reply to his note, our government branded the Iverson accusation a lie. It was all too apparent what was intended. We refused to discuss the matter. We broke off all diplomatic relations with Earth and simply ignored the numerous threats and accusations that were continuously being made.

Our vigilance increased, however, and we prepared for the attack that Iverson promised when he said: "Venus has not yet felt the force of Earth . . . They will!"

Several years passed, during which time the Federation built a huge space armada, using to good advantage the five thousand pounds of pure yttrium they had received from Venus. It was also during these years of preparation that Venus and its people were forced to accept the hardships of a regimented economy. Our citizens, however, long accustomed to personal sacrifice for the welfare of Society, did not complain.

On September 14, 2048, a fleet of four hundred Federation warships took off for Venus.

The battle in defense of our planet was carried out exactly according to the strategy of the Supreme Council. The first wave of one hundred attacking ships was completely demolished in our ionic barrier. Fifty percent of the second wave was accounted for in the same manner. Those ships which did manage to pierce the discharging barrier were badly damaged and were easily destroyed by our cruising disintegrator teams. The third wave of invaders was met by our ascending task force of sixty scout ships, each equipped with twin cosmic blasters. In this engagement, three of our ships were lost . . . all the invaders were destroyed. While this battle was being fought, our space patrol descended upon the fourth wave from outer space.

The Earth fleet was completely obliterated.

On March 14, 2049, our invasion fleet attacked the Earth. After two weeks of sporadic fighting, the occupation was completed.

Iverson, Cartwright, Briande, and the rest of the leaders of Earth's war-like government are in exile on their various asteroids. We shall not kill them, nor shall we allow them to die. They are supplied with their needs by a ship that calls once a month. Otherwise, they are left completely alone on their space islands, each a master of his own little world. We believe this to be a fitting punishment for men who try to conquer a world.

Peace has been restored to the system: on Venus, and on Earth.

Peace Communique No. 2—Abilene—May 1, 2049

One month ago, the provisional Venusian government on Earth was established to administer the military occupation of your planet. During the past month, that government, assisted by the Venusian Administration Corps, has instituted reforms whereby peace and security have been attained for all the Earth.

What of the future?

Citizens of Earth, here is your future: You are welcomed as equals in a union with Venus. For a time, until you have learned how to govern yourselves peacefully, your planet will be directed by Venusian administrators. But even now—immediately—you shall be accorded the same rights and privileges that the citizens of Venus enjoy.

And you shall have peace! Perhaps you should be thankful for the last terrible war which your leaders brought upon you, for as a result of it, you shall no longer know the meaning of war.

Of course, citizens have duties as well as rights. Failure to comply with regulations is severely punished. Therefore, it is advisable that you acquaint yourselves with the obligations of a peaceful citizen.

The duties of a citizen vary, depending upon the individual's classification and the location in which he lives. In addition to his special duties, however, every citizen is required to know and observe the five GENERAL DUTIES of a citizen, listed below.

GENERAL DUTIES OF A CITIZEN

1. Every citizen will work at his appointed task one-third of each day.

2. Every citizen will perform those duties necessary to maintain his sleeping area in such a manner as to comply with the directives posted in his barracks.

3. Every citizen (male) will father/ (female) will bear a child once every alternate cycle.

4. Every citizen will report promptly when notified of special duty (e.g. waste disposal detail, sewer maintenance crew, restorative squad).

5. Every citizen will report to his extermination center immediately upon notification. (See Note)

(Note: Certain measures are necessary to prevent the over-population of a peaceful world. In addition to the obvious elimination of the incurably sick, the insane, the feeble-minded, the disabled, the dishonest, and the aged, periodic exterminations must be held among the general citizenry.

Citizens who have been selected will report promptly to the appointed center for speedy, painless extermination. Failure to do so will result in a delayed and painful process.)

Now we bid you welcome, Earthmen. Take your rightful place beside us and share our peaceful existence. By your endless struggles through a long heritage of war, you have earned it.

(signed) SER GULLA
Sup. AC
Rios Adm • • •

 (Continued from page 53)

"Friend against friend, and the old hunting guns polished up for more deadly and constant shooting —is that a story that belongs in galactic history? Is it for this that great galactic corporations work—to turn peaceable planets into charnel houses for a stinking profit?

"That's the charge that you, and the rest of your workers, will have to answer to—not in courts, but to the people of the Galaxy.

"And, most important—to yourselves!"

"With that, he strode out.

KIM ROGERS was again in the presence of Roald Gibbons, and he was angry again.

"And don't look so smug. I know what you did. I worked with your father long enough to know about his special agents—but don't think the operation was all your doing.

"What do you think happened here when you sent that spacegram tipping us off that it was Galactic Aid behind the mess, and that we were to declare it a Class AA. It was a madhouse!

"It accomplished the desired result," Roald said. "When the Governor and the Secretary read that Class AA bulletin—and it took careful planning and timing to get into their office just when it was delivered—with me there to pound it home, they sort of faded about the gills.

"They came running to me in a few minutes. Now they are Honor Witnesses at Galactic Court, with more than enough testimony to sew up Galactic Aid."

Roald had a hard time keeping his mind on the present conversation. He was due to blast to Lyrane in a few hours. His company was proceeding with rehabilitation ahead of schedule, with the natural zealousness of the Lyranians for their old system helping them along.

Roald had not forgotten the piquant beauty of Erol Garbin's daughter. He had a hard time keeping his mind on the conversation.

"If anyone else had read that Class AA bulletin," Kim said, "we would have been sewed up. You know perfectly well we don't have the powers you had us state in that bulletin. It was a galactic offense to even print such a thing. What if the Governor had known that?"

"I counted on him not knowing it. Even though he was an executive of Galactic Aid, Class AA emergencies are so rare that very few people are familiar with their actual provisions.

"Certainly, it was a risky bluff. But when you're dealing with that sort of power, you have to bluff fast and hard. We didn't have enough evidence to actually stop Galactic. We needed inside testimony. When you rescinded the Class AA order, two hours later, the confession was already signed."

Exasperation was now Kim's mood. "One of these times your bluff won't work, and all your secret agents won't do you a bit of good. Empire law is nothing to tamper with."

Roald smiled. "I think that Galactic Aid found that out." • • •

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—Continued from Back Cover

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