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TO BETTY BALLANTINE,
my long-time editor, with my deepest affection.
Contents

The Magnificent

THE UNQUESTIONED KING of-the nighttime air in New York radio is a skinny and sardonic fellow named Long John Nebel. Long John's marathon talk show runs from midnight till dawn every night of the week, and what it covers is everything. I don't just mean "everything." I mean everything. Politics. Religion. Sex. Hying saucers. Bermuda triangles. War. Science fiction. Science. Art. Music. You name it, it has been the subject of a Long John talkfest. And over the years, among his chosen nuclear guest family who join him after midnight to chew over the topic of the day, one voice has stood out. Whatever the subject, he has an opinion, and insights and facts to back it up. He has done the show 400 times at least, not counting reruns on tape, and he is so well known to the insomniacs of New York (and most other states) that he is usually introduced only as The Magnificent. He doesn't need to be given a name, because the listeners know him so well. But he has one. It is Lester del Rey.

Of course, there are countless thousands of people who have known Lester del Rey very well for a long time who have never heard him on Long John's show. They are people like you and me: science-fiction readers. We've known Lester for forty years, or even longer

All

if we remember those polemical letters in Astounding's "Brass Tacks" department in the '30s.

Like most sf writers, Lester came to the field as a reader. He liked what he read. After some thought, he concluded that he would like writing it, too. He had never written a science-fiction story at the time. That didn't seem to matter. He reasoned that if he thought of an idea no one else had thought of before, and told it concisely and literately, with some attention to interesting characters and colorful backgrounds, John Campbell would buy it. So he did. And so John did; it was called "The Faithful." That was the first story Lester sold John Campbell. It certainly wasn't the last. The Golden Age of Astounding was all the more lustrous for "Nerves," "Helen O'Loy," and all those others from his hard-driven typewriter.

Once he had formed the habit, Lester did not stop with Astounding. He wrote for all the other magazines, too, and when a few years later a couple of publishers took all their courage in their hands and began to experiment with science-fiction books, Lester was one of the first to get his sf nicely packaged in hard covers. He wrote a couple, then a flood, of novels especially for the book publishers. There are grown men (and grown women, too) all over the country who cut their literary wisdom teeth on sf juveniles by Philip St. John, Erik Van Lhin, and Kenneth Wright-all of whom were, in fact, Lester del Rey. Scott Meredith, then a young (but obviously canny) literary agent, grabbed Lester as a client, and shortly thereafter as an employee, and as Meredith's Number One assistant, Lester guided the careers of scores of other writers. When the science-fiction magazine market mushroomed in the early 1950s Lester became the editor of one of the most interesting-strike that; of four of the most interesting- magazines around. He did most of that pseudony-mously, too. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, he was Philip St. John, editor of Science Fiction Adventures. On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays he

was Wade Kaempf ert, editing Rocket Stories; and then he had the whole week-end to himself, under his own name, to edit Space Science Fiction and Fantasy Fiction Magazine.

I first met Lester del Rey when both of us were impossibly apple-cheeked youngsters. I was editing two cut-rate science-fiction magazines for Popular Publications, and Lester, on one of his rare visits to New York, brought to my office a couple of stories that John Campbell had had the unwisdom to turn down. In my youthful foolishness, I did the same. Well, you can excuse Campbell, because he had everybody in the field clamoring to get into his magazines. Maybe you can forgive me, too, because I was inexperienced. But how can you excuse Lester for what he did then? Since two editors had declined the stories, he figured there was something wrong with them. He put them aside-and now, four decades later, they're still aside, in fact lost irretrievably.

A war came along, scattering us all for a while. And then, in 1947, there was a world science-fiction convention in Philadelphia. We all saw each other again, met new friends, had a fine time. All in all it was a fine weekend; and Lester and I liked it so well that we conceived the idea of making it permanent.

Lester was living in New York City by then, and so was I, and we got ourselves and a coterie of friends together and created The Hydra Club, New York's longest-lived sf writers' chowder-and-marching society. Long after both Lester and I had left the city and stopped attending, the club carried on of its own momentum. One of the leading lights of Hydra was the late Fletcher Pratt, a marvelous, lovable, feisty man who had once been a bantamweight prize fighter and converted himself into the writer who produced the best one-volume history of the Civil War ever in print (among very much else that is noteworthy). Fletcher and Inga Pratt owned a great old monster of a house on the New Jersey shore. Lester and I (and our wives) were frequent weekend guests, and grew fond of the Monmouth County area. In 1951 I moved to Red
Bank. In 1954 the del Reys came out to visit the Pohls for a weekend. They stayed seventeen years.

Oh, it wasn't roses, roses all the way! Science-fiction writers are thorny people, given to obstinacy and adrenalin, and Lester is an archetypal science-fiction writer. He has sometimes been described as fulminate of mercury with a beard. I am not at all like that, of course, but nevertheless we had some rousers. We fought like wombats over astrophysics, horticulture, and whether the Bruch violin concerto deserves to be mentioned in the same breath with the Mendelssohn. (Lester was wrong about that, though I must admit the Bruch is still very good.) In the days before baseball teams treacherously deserted their God-given home turfs to dally in California, Lester was misguidedly a partisan of the New York Giants, while I, of course, loyally supported the best team in the history of baseball, the Brooklyn Dodgers. That caused a lot of trouble. Perhaps you remember hearing about Bobby Thomson's home run that cost Brooklyn a pennant? That was the closest I ever came to punching Lester out. He chortled.

But when the chips were down, when there was trouble-and there was grave trouble now and then for both of us-what Lester was was a friend. In 1970 Evelyn del Rey was killed hi a car crash. After that, Lester did not want to live in their house any more. He moved to New York, and so in a short time Carol and I had lost not only Ewie, but Lester as well. It was a somber time.

But time passed; and then, when we now and then saw Lester on a visit, it was clear that somehow he was finding joy again. By and by it became clear that the joy had a name, and her name was Judy-Lynn Benjamin. I wholly approved. For one thing, I would not have dared not to; I had introduced them, when Lester was editing one of the magazines at the Galaxy complex and Judy-Lynn was the brand-new, fresh-out-of-college junior editor who saw that everything

got done for us. They were married a few months later; and that, my children, is the story of how Del Rey Books got its name.

So I am not very objective about Lester del Rey, either as a writer or as a friend. As a writer, his awards speak for his standing in his field, but they don't have to. The stories speak for themselves, and what I can tell you in this short note cannot say as much for his writing as any of the works that follow. So let me talk about him in other ways. As the person who dyed his beard green in silent protest when his wife changed the color of her hair. As the tinkerer who redesigned the keyboard of his typewriter to economize on finger movements. As the man who taught me so wickedly addictive a form of solitaire that I have never since been able to play any other. As the coach, mentor, and advocate of a hundred newer writers, some of them now in the top rank of science fiction.

Lester has spent a great deal of his time in passing on the writers' tribal lore to newcomers. One of them was a brash young Ohio fan named Harlan Ellison. When Harlan heard I was writing these notes, he demanded equal time. This is what he said:

I arrived in New York in late 1955; I was notable for two qualities: a relentless determination to be a professional writer, and squeaky-clean poverty. I had no place to live. Lester and his wonderful wife, the late Evelyn del Rey, took me in for a couple of weeks till I could find digs in the city. Sitting at the del Keys' dining room table, using the bartered Royal portable that had been virtually the only thing I'd salvaged when I'd been kicked out of Ohio State University a few months previous, I wrote my first story. Lester was unfailingly helpful. He would walk up behind me, read what I'd typed, see it was syntactically crippled, and bat me across the back of the head. "Not who, dummy! Whoml" He provided auctorial tips, he showed me how to cobble up the extrapolative science that would make my specious concepts work, he edited the manuscript. Ewie fed me.

After Algis Budrys and Andre Norton, who were the first writers to take an interest in me, Lester was the one who got me started thinking and writing as a professional. He wasn't kind, he was murderous; and that is a brutal treasure more valuable than all the strokes given by well-intentioned and inept amateurs who do not perceive one one-millionth as clearly as Lester did that writing is a killing craft, and only the tough survive and prevail.

For that savaging, I will always love and honor Lester.

A decade or so ago, Lester and I were comparing notes in the ril-show-you-mine-if-you-show-me-yours way writers have when they suspect they may be up for the same prize.

Each year the World Science Fiction Convention selects some figure from the field to be its official Guest of Honor. Neither Lester nor I had ever been. The convention that would vote on it was coming up. The committee for the city that gets the convention picks its GoH, and they keep it secret until, and unless, they win the bid.

And it turned out that, in fact, we were competing for the honor that year. What I told Lester at the tune was true: I surely would enjoy being it. But if I had to lose, there wasn't anybody in the field I'd rather lose to.

Of course, I confess, I felt pretty easy at being generous about it. The odds were on my side. Several cities were bidding for the convention. Two of them had asked me to be their Guest of Honor, and only one had asked Lester.

The trouble with betting with the odds is that the odds don't always pay off. Lester's people won. He got the honor, and I had to skulk in darkness for several more years before emerging into glory in Los Angeles. But that's Lester for you. He makes a liar of the odds-layers every time.

He beat the odds for his own life some years back, against all the wisdom of medical science. The name of what happened to him is thromboeytopenia purpura. It

is a disease, and an uncommon one. When it happens at all, it happens to tiny babies. When babies do develop it, the victims are usually female. I will attempt to describe this for you, if you will pardon the use of technical medical terms: For some reason or other, all the platelets in the blood say, "Ah, screw it," at once. They stop clotting. The victim bleeds to death.
When grown male Lester del Rey's platelets did this he was in his forties, and the local doctors competed vigorously for the chance to attend this medical marvel-right away, because they didn't think a lot of his chances of surviving. They said, "Don't cut yourself, don't bump yourself, and, above all, for God's sake, don't sneeze." Lester humored them to that extent. He didn't sneeze. But he didn't die, either. He was one of the vanishingly small number of male adults who contract the disease in the first place, and the even tinier number who survive it to make a full recovery. Doctors don't know how he managed this, but I do. It was his stubbornness. He just didn't feel like dying then.
Let me give you an example of what a person like Lester can do against the odds when he sets his mind to it. I swear every word of this is true.
You know that the Apollo Project, which put the first man on the Moon, began shortly after the inauguration of President John Kennedy in 1961.
Well, there is a novel by Lester del Rey (under his penname Philip St. John) called Rocket Jockey. It was published in 1951.
The space program had hardly begun when he was writing it, and Commander Neil Armstrong, who was to take that first great step for mankind a few years later, was still just another Navy pilot with the hope of someday sailing space. More than that. Sputnik and Vostok had made the American space program look pretty silly, and as far as anyone could tell, when that first man did walk on the Moon it was likely that the first message he would radio home might be in Russian.
Nevertheless-
Nevertheless the first sentence of that novel is fascinating. Many science-fiction stories have predicted fu-
ture events. Few have been as uncannily exact,* even to names, as this opening sentence:
"The first spaceship landed on the Moon, and Commander Armstrong stepped out."
Now do you understand why they call him The Magnificent?
FrederikPohl Red Bank, NJ. Christmas, 1977
*See Author's Afterword.
Helen O'Loy
I AM AN old man now, but I can still see Helen as Dave unpacked her, and still hear him gasp as he looked her over.
"Man, isn't she a beauty?"
She was beautiful, a dream in spun plastics and metals, something Keats might have seen dimly when he wrote his sonnet. If Helen of Troy had looked like that the Greeks must have been pikers when they launched only a thousand ships; at least, that's what I told Dave.
"Helen of Troy, eh?" He looked at her tag. "At least it beats this thing-K2W88. Helen . . . Mmmm . . . Helen of Alloy."
"Not much swing to that, Dave. Too many unstressed syllables in the middle. How about Helen O'Loy?"
"Helen O'Loy she is, Phil." And that's how it began-one part beauty, one part dream, one part science; add a stereo broacast, stir mechanically, and the result is chaos.
Dave and I hadn't gone to college together, but when I came to Messina to practice medicine, I found him downstairs in a little robot repair shop. After that, we began to pal around, and when I started going with one twin, he found the other equally attractive, so we made it a foursome.
When our business grew better, we rented a house out near the rocket field-

noisy but cheap, and the
rockets discouraged apartment building. We liked room enough to stretch ourselves. I suppose, if we hadn't quarreled with them, we'd have married the twins in time. But Dave wanted to look over the latest Venus-rocket attempt when his twin wanted to see a display stereo starring Larry Ainslee, and they were both stubborn. From then on, we forgot the girls and spent our evenings at home.

But it wasn't until "Lena" put vanilla on our steak instead of salt that we got off on the subject of emotions and robots: While Dave was dissecting Lena to find the trouble, we naturally mulled over the future of the mechs. He was sure that the robots would beat men some day, and I couldn't see it.

"Look here, Dave," I argued. "You know Lena doesn't think-not really. When those wires crossed, she could have corrected herself. But she didn't bother; she followed the mechanical impulse. A man might have reached for the vanilla, but when he saw it in his hand, he'd have stopped. Lena has sense enough, but she has no emotions, no consciousness of self."

"All right, that's the big trouble with the mechs now. But we'll get around it, put in some mechanical emotions, or something." He screwed Lena's head back on, turned on her juice. "Go back to work, Lena, it's nineteen o'clock."

Now I specialized in endocrinology and related subjects. I wasn't exactly a psychologist, but I did understand the glands, secretions, hormones, and miscellanies that are the physical causes of emotions. It took medical science three hundred years to find out how and why they worked, and I couldn't see men duplicating them mechanically in much less time.

I brought home books and papers to prove it, and Dave quoted the invention of memory coils and veritoid eyes. During that year we swapped knowledge until Dave knew the whole theory of endocrinology, and I could have made Lena from memory. The more we talked, the less sure I grew about the impossibility of Homo mechanensis as the perfect type.

Poor Lena. Her cuproberyl body spent half its time
in scattered pieces. Our first attempts were successful only in getting her to serve fried brushes for breakfast and wash the dishes in oleo oil. Then one day she cooked a perfect dinner with six wires crossed, and Dave was in ecstasy.

He worked all night on her wiring, put in a new coil, and taught her a fresh set of words. And the next day she flew into a tantrum and swore vigorously at-us when we told her she wasn't doing her work right.

"It's a lie," she yelled, shaking a suction brush. "You're all liars. If you so-and-so's would leave me whole long enough, I might get something done around the place."

When we calmed her temper and got her back to work, Dave ushered me into the study. "Not taking any chances with Lena," he explained. "We'll have to cut out that adrenal pack and restore her to normality. But we've got to get a better robot. A housemaid mech isn't complex enough."

"How about Dillard's new utility models? They seem to combine everything in one."

"Exactly. Even so, we'll need a special one built to order, with a full range of memory coils. And out of respect to old Lena, let's get a female case for its works."

The result, of course, was Helen. The Dillard people had performed a miracle and put all the works in a girl-modeled case. Even the plastic and rubberite face was designed for flexibility to express emotions, and she was complete with tear glands and taste buds, ready to simulate every human action, from breathing to pulling hair. The bill they sent with her was another miracle, but Dave and I scraped it together; we had to turn Lena over to an exchange to complete it, though, and thereafter we ate out.

I'd performed plenty of delicate operations on living tissues, and some of

them had been tricky, but I still felt Kke a premed student as we opened the front plate of her torso and began to sever the leads of her "nerves." Dave's mechanical glands were all prepared, complex little bundles of pansistors and wires that heterodyned
on the electrical thought impulses and distorted them as adrenalin distorts the reaction of human minds.
Instead of sleeping that night, we pored over the schematic diagrams of her structures, tracing the complex thought mazes of her wiring, severing the leaders, implanting the heterones, as Dave called them. And while we worked, a mechanical tape fed carefully prepared thoughts of consciousness and awareness of life and feeling into an auxiliary memory coil. Dave believed in leaving nothing to chance.
It was growing light as we finished, exhausted and exultant. All that remained was the starting of her electrical power; like all the Dillard mechs, she was equipped with a tiny atomotor instead of batteries, and once started would need no further attention.
Dave refused to turn her on. "Wait until we've slept and rested," he advised. "I'm as eager to try her as you are, but we can't do much studying with our minds half-dead. Turn in, and we'll leave Helen until later."
Even though we were both reluctant to follow it, we knew the idea was sound. We turned in, and sleep hit us before the air conditioner could cut down to sleeping temperature. And then Dave was pounding on my shoulder.
"Phil! Hey, snap out of it!"
I groaned, turned over, and faced him. "Well? ... Uh! What is it? Did Helen-"
"No, it's old Mrs. van Styler. She 'visored to say her son has an infatuation for a servant girl, and she wants you to come out and give counterhormones. They're at the summer camp in Maine."
Rich Mrs. van Styler! I couldn't afford to let that account down, now that Helen had used up the last of my funds. But it wasn't a job I cared for.
"Counterhormones! That'll take two weeks' full time. Anyway, I'm no society doctor, messing with glands to keep fools happy. My job's taking care of serious trouble."
"And you want to watch Helen." Dave was grinning, but he was serious, too. "I told her it'd cost her fifty thousand!"
"Huh?"
"And she said okay, if you hurried."
Of course, there was only one thing to do, though I could have wrung fat Mrs. van Styler's neck cheerfully. It wouldn't have happened if she'd used robots like everyone else-but she had to be different.
Consequently, while Dave was back home puttering with Helen, I was racking my brain to trick Archy van Styler into getting the counterhormones, and giving the servant girl the same. Oh, I wasn't supposed to, but the poor kid was crazy about Archy. Dave might have written, I thought, but never a word did I get.
It was three weeks later instead of two when I reported that Archy was "cured," and collected on the line. With that money in my pocket, I hired a personal rocket and was back in Messina in half an hour. I didn't waste time in reaching the house.
As I stepped into the alcove, I heard a light patter of feet, and an eager voice called out, "Dave, dear?" For a minute I couldn't answer, and the voice came again, pleading, "Dave?"
I don't know what I expected, but I didn't expect Helen to meet me that way, stopping and staring at me, obvious disappointment on her face, little hands fluttering up against her breast.
"Oh," she cried. "I thought it was Dave. He hardly conies home to eat now, but I've had supper waiting hours." She dropped her hands and managed a smile. "You're Phil, aren't you? Dave told me about you when ... at first. I'm so

glad to see you home, Phil."
"Glad to see you doing so well, Helen." Now what does one say for light conversation with a robot? "You said something about supper?"
"Oh, yes. I guess Dave ate downtown again, so we might as well go in. It'll be nice having someone to talk to around the house, Phil. You don't mind if I call you Phil, do you? You know, you're sort of a godfather to me."
We ate. I hadn't counted on such behavior, but apparently she considered eating as normal as walking.
She didn't do much eating, at that; most of the time she spent staring at the front, door.
Dave came in as we were finishing, a frown a yard wide on his face. Helen started to rise, but he ducked toward the stairs, throwing words over his shoulder.
"Hi, Phil. See you up here later."
There was something radically wrong with him. For a moment, I'd thought his eyes were haunted, and as I turned to Helen, hers were filling with tears. She gulped, choked them back, and fell to viciously on her food.
"What's the matter with him ... and you?" I asked.
"He's sick of me." She pushed her plate away and got up hastily. "You'd better see him while I clean up. And there's nothing wrong with me. And it's not my fault anyway," She grabbed the dishes and ducked into the kitchen; I could have sworn she was crying.
Maybe all thought is a series of conditioned reflexes- but she certainly had picked up a lot of conditioning while I was gone. Lena in her heyday had been nothing like this. I went up to see if Dave could make any sense out of the hodge-podge.
He was squirting soda into a large glass of apple brandy, and I saw that the bottle was nearly empty. "Join me?" he asked.
It seemed like a good idea. The roaring blast of an ion rocket overhead was the only familiar thing left in the house. From the look around Dave's eyes, it wasn't the first bottle he'd emptied while I was gone, and there were more left. He dug out a new bottle for his own drink.
"Of course, it's none of my business, Dave, but that stuff won't steady your nerves any. What's gotten into you and Helen? Been seeing ghosts?"
Helen was wrong; he hadn't been eating downtown- nor anywhere else. His muscles collapsed into a chair in a way that spoke of fatigue and nerves, but mostly of hunger. "You noticed it, eh?"
"Noticed it? The two of you jammed it down my throat."
"Uhmmm." He swatted at a nonexistent fly, and slumped further down in the pneumatic. "Guess maybe I should have waited with Helen until you got back. But if that stereo cast hadn't changed . . . anyway, it did. And those mushy books of yours finished the job."
"Thanks. That makes it all clear."
"You know, Phil, I've got a place up in the country . . . fruit ranch. My dad left it to me. Think I'll look it over."
And that's the way it went. But finally, by much liquor and more perspiration, I got some of the story out of him before I gave him an Amytal and put him to bed. Then I hunted up Helen and dug the rest of the story from her, until it made sense.
Apparently as soon as I was gone, Dave had turned her on and made preliminary tests, which were entirely satisfactory. She had reacted beautifully-so well that he decided to leave her and go down to work as usual.
Naturally, with all her untried emotions, she was filled with curiosity, and wanted him to stay. Then he had an inspiration. After showing her what her duties about the house would be, he set her down in front of the stereovisor, tuned in a travelogue, and left her to occupy her time with that.
The travelogue held her attention until it was finished, and the station

switched over to a current serial with Larry Ainslee, the same cute emoter who'd given us all the trouble with the twins. Incidentally, he looked something like Dave.
Helen took to the serial like a seal to water. This play-acting was a perfect outlet for her newly excited emotions. When that particular episode finished, she found a love story on another station, and added still more to her education. The afternoon programs were mostly news and music, but by then she'd found my books; and I do have rather adolescent taste in literature.
Dave came home in the best of spirits. The front alcove was neatly swept, and there was the odor of food
in the air that he'd missed around the house for weeks. He had visions of Helen as the super-efficient housekeeper.
So it was a shock to him to feel two strong arms around his neck from behind and hear a voice all aquiver coo into his ears, "Oh, Dave, darling. I've missed you so, and I'm so thrilled that you're back." Helen's technique may have lacked polish, but it had enthusiasm, as he found when he tried to stop her from kissing him. She had learned fast and furiously-also, Helen was powered by an atomotor.
Dave wasn't a prude, but he remembered that she was only a robot, after all. The fact that she felt, acted, and looked like a young goddess in his arms didn't mean much. With some effort, he untangled her and dragged her off to supper, where he made her eat with him to divert her attention.
After her evening work, he called her into the study and gave her a thorough lecture on the folly of her ways. It must have been good, for it lasted three solid hours, and covered her station in life, the idiocy of stereos, and various other miscellanies. When he finished, Helen looked up with dewy eyes and said wistfully, "I know, Dave, but I still love you."
That's when Dave started drinking.
It grew worse each day. If he stayed downtown, she was crying when he came home. If he returned on time, she fussed over him and threw herself at him. In his room, with the door locked, he could hear her downstairs pacing up and down and muttering; and when he went down, she stared at him reproachfully until he had to go back up.
I sent Helen out on a fake errand in the morning and got Dave up. With her gone, I made him eat a decent breakfast and gave him a tonic for his nerves. He was still listless and moody.
"Look here, Dave," I broke in on his brooding. "Helen isn't human, after all. Why not cut off her power and change a few memory coils? Then we can convince her that she never was in love and couldn't get that way."
"You try it. I had that idea, but she put up a wail that would wake Homer. She says it would be murder- and the hell of it is that I can't help feeling the same about it. Maybe she isn't human, but you wouldn't guess it when she puts on that martyred look and tells you to go ahead and kill her."
"We never put in substitutes for some of the secretions present in man during the love period."
"I don't know what we put in. Maybe the heterones backfired or something. Anyway, she's made this idea so much a part of her thoughts that we'd have to put in a whole new set of coils."
"Well, why not?"
"Go ahead. You're the surgeon of this family. I'm not used to fussing with emotions. Matter of fact, since she's been acting this way, I'm beginning to hate work on any robot. My business is going to blazes."
He saw Helen coming up the walk and ducked out the back door for the monorail express. I'd intended to put him back in bed, but let him go. Maybe he'd be better off at his shop than at home.
"Dave's gone?" Helen did have that martyred look now.
"Yeah. I got him to eat, and he's gone to work."

"I'm glad he ate." She slumped down in a chair as if she were worn out, though how a mech could be tired beat me. "Phil?"
"Well, what is it?"
"Do you think I'm bad for him? I mean, do you think he'd be happier if I weren't here?"
"He'll go crazy if you keep acting this way around him."
She winced. Those little hands were twisting about pleadingly, and I felt like an inhuman brute. But I'd started, and I went ahead. "Even if I cut out your power and changed your coils, he'd probably still be fcaunted by you."
"I know. But I can't help it. And I'd make him a good wife, really I would, Phil."
I gulped; this was getting a little too far. "And give Mm strapping sons to boot, I suppose. A man wants flesh and blood, not rubber and metal."
"Don't, please! I can't think of myself that way; to me, I'm a woman. And you know how perfectly-I'm made to imitate a real woman ... in all ways. I couldn't give him sons, but in every other way ... I'd try so hard, I know I'd make him a good wife."
I gave up.
Dave didn't come home that night, nor the next day. Helen was fussing and fuming, wanting me to call the hospitals and the police, but I knew nothing had happened to him. He always carried identification. Still, when he didn't come on the third day, I began to worry. And when Helen started out for his shop, I agreed to go with her.
Dave was there, with another man I didn't know. I parked Helen where he couldn't see her, but where she could hear, and went in as soon as the other fellow left.
Dave looked a little better and seemed glad to see me. "Hi, Phil-just closing up. Let's go eat."
Helen couldn't hold back any longer, but came trooping in. "Come on home, Dave. I've got roast duck with spice stuffing, and you know you love that."
"Scat!" said Dave. She shrank back, turned to go. "Oh, all right, stay. You might as well hear it, too. I've sold the shop. The fellow you saw just bought it, and I'm going up to the old fruit ranch I told you about, Phil. I can't stand the mechs any more."
"You'll starve to death at that," I told him.
"No, there's a growing demand for old-fashioned fruit, raised out of doors. People are tked of this water-culture stuff. Dad always made a living out of it. I'm leaving as soon as I can get home and pack."
Helen clung to her idea. "I'll pack, Dave, while you eat. I've got apple cobbler for dessert." The world was toppling under her feet, but she still remembered how crazy he was for apple cobbler.
Helen was a good cook; in fact she was a genius, with all the good points of a woman and a mech combined. Dave ate well enough, after he got started. By the time
supper was over, he'd thawed out enough to admit he liked the duck and cobbler, and to thank her for packing. In fact, he even let her kiss' him good-bye, though he firmly refused to let her go to the rocket field with him.
Helen was trying to be brave when I got back, and we carried on a stumbling conversation about Mrs. van Styler's servants for a while. But the talk began to lull, and she sat staring out of the window at nothing most of the time. Even the stereo comedy lacked interest for her, and I was glad enough to have her go off to her room. She could cut her power down to simulate sleep when she chose.
As the days slipped by, I began to realize why she couldn't believe herself a robot. I got to thinking of her as a girl and companion myself. Except for odd intervals when she went off by herself to brood, or when she kept going to the telescript for a letter that never came, she was as good a companion as a man

could ask. There was something homey about the place that Lena had never put there.
I took Helen on a shopping trip to Hudson and she giggled and purred over the wisps of silk and glassheen that were the fashion, tried on endless hats, and conducted herself as any normal girl might. We went trout fishing for a day, where she proved to be as good a sport and as sensibly silent as a man. I thoroughly enjoyed myself and thought she was forgetting Dave. That was before I came home unexpectedly and found her doubled up on the couch, threshing her legs up and down and crying to the high heavens.
It was then I called Dave. They seemed to have trouble in reaching him, and Helen came over beside me while I waited. She was tense and fidgety as an old maid trying to propose. But finally they located Dave.
"What's up, Phil?" he asked as his face came on the vkwplate. "I was just getting my things together to-"
I broke him off. "Things can't go on the way they are, Dave. I've made up my mind. I'm yanking Helen's coils tonight. It won't be worse than what she's going through now."
Helen reached up and touched my shoulder. "Maybe that's best, Phil. I don't blame you."
Dave's voice cut in. "Phil, you don't know what you're doing!"
"Of course, I do. It'll all be over by the time you can get here. As you heard, she's agreeing."
There was a black cloud sweeping over Dave's face. "I won't have it, Phil. She's half mine and I forbid it!"
"Of all the-"
"Go ahead, call me anything you want. I've changed my mind. I was packing to come home when you called."
Helen jerked around me, her eyes glued to the panel. "Dave, do you . . . are you-"
"I'm just waking up to what a fool I've been, Helen. Phil, I'll be home in a couple of hours, so if there's anything-"
He didn't have to chase me out. But I heard Helen cooing something about loving to be a rancher's wife before I could shut the door.
Well, I wasn't as surprised as they thought. I think I knew when I called Dave what would happen. No man acts the way Dave had been acting because he hates a girl; only because he thinks he does-and thinks wrong.
No woman ever made a lovelier bride or a sweeter wife. Helen never lost her flair for cooking and making a home. With her gone, the old house seemed empty, and I began to drop out to the ranch once or twice a week. I suppose they had trouble at times, but I never saw it, and I know the neighbors never suspected they were anything but normal man and wife.
Dave grew older, and Helen didn't, of course. But between us, we put lines in her face and grayed her hair without letting Dave know that she wasn't growing old with him; he'd forgotten that she wasn't human, I guess.
I practically forgot, myself. It wasn't until a letter came from Helen this morning that I woke up to reality. There, in her beautiful script, just a trifle shaky in places, was tlie inevitable that neither Dave nor I had seen.
Dear Phil,
As you know, Dave has had heart trouble for several years now. We expected him to live on just the same, but it seems that wasn't to be. He died in my arms just before sunrise. He sent you his greetings and farewell.
I've one last favor to ask of you, Phil. There is only one thing for me to do when this is finished. Acid will burn out metal as well as flesh, and I'll be dead with Dave. Please see that we are buried together, and that the morticians do not find my secret. Dave wanted it th at way, too.
Poor, dear Phil. I know you loved Dave -as a brother, and how you felt about me. Please don't grieve too much for us, for we have had a happy life

together, and both feel that we should cross this last bridge side by side.
With love and thanks from
Helen
It had to come sooner or later, I suppose, and the first shock has worn off now. I'll be leaving in a few minutes to carry out Helen's last instructions. Dave was a lucky man, and the best friend I ever had. And Helen-well, as I said, I'm an old man now, and can view things more sanely; I should have married and raised a family, I suppose. But . . . there was only one Helen O'Loy.

The Day Is Done

HWOOGH SCRATCHED THE hair on his stomach and watched the sun climb up over the hill. He beat listlessly on his chest and yelled at it timidly, then grumbled and stopped. In his youth, he had roared and stumped around to help the god up, but now it wasn't worth the effort. Nothing was. He found a fine flake of sweaty salt under his hair, licked it off his fingers, and twisted over to sleep again.

But sleep wouldn't come. On the other side of the hill there was a hue and cry, and somebody was beating a drum in a throbbing chant. The old Neanderthaler grunted and held his hands over his ears, but the Sun-Warmer's chant couldn't be silenced. More ideas of the Talkers.

In his day, it had been a lovely world, full of hairy grumbling people; people a man could understand. There had been game on all sides, and the caves about had been filled with the smoke of cooking fires. He had played with the few young that were born-though each year fewer children had come into the tribe-and had grown to young manhood with the pride of achievement. But that was before the Talkers had made this valley one of their hunting grounds.

Old traditions, half-told, half-understood, spoke of the land in the days of old, when only his people roamed over the broad tundra. They had filled the caves and gone out in packs too large for any animals to withstand. And the animals swarmed into the land, driven south by the Fourth Glaciation. Then the great cold had come again, and tunes had been hard. Many of his people had died.

But many had lived, and with the coming of the warmer, drier climate, again, they had begun to expand before the Talkers arrived. After that-Hwoogh stirred, uneasily-for no good reason he could see, the Talkers took more and more of the land, and his people retreated and diminished before them.

Hwoogh's father had made it understood that their little band in the valley was all that was left, and that this was the only place on the great flat earth where Talkers seldom came.

Hwoogh had been twenty when he first saw them, great long-legged men, swift of foot and eye, stalking along as if they owned the earth, with their incessant mouth noises. In the summer that year, they pitched their skin-and-wattle tents at the back of the hill, away from the caves, and made magic to their gods. There was magic on their weapons, and the beasts fell their prey.

Hwoogh's people had settled back, watching fearfully, hating numbly, finally resorting to begging and stealing. Once a young buck had killed the child of a Talker, and been flayed and sent out to die for it. Thereafter, there had been a truce between Cro-Magnon and Neanderthaler.

Now the last of Hwoogh's people were gone, save only himself, leaving no children. Seven years it had been since Hwoogh's brother had curled up in the cave and sent his breath forth on the long journey to his ancestors. He had always been dispirited and weak of will, but he had been the only friend left to Hwoogh.

The old man tossed about and wished that Keyoda would return. Maybe she would bring food from the Talkers. There was no use hunting now, when the Talkers had already been up and killed all the easy game. Better that a man should sleep all the tune, for sleep was the only satisfying thing left in the topsy-

turvy world; even the drink the tall Cro-Magnons made from mashed roots left a headache the next day.

He twisted and turned in his bed of leaves at the edge of the cave, grunting surlily. A fly buzzed over his head provocatively, and he lunged at it. Surprise lighted his features as his fingers closed on the insect, and he swallowed it with a momentary flash of pleasure. It wasn't as good as the grubs hi the forest, but it made a tasty appetizer.

The sleep god had left, and no amount of lying still and snoring would lure him back. Hwoogh gave up and squatted down on his haunches. He had been meaning to make a new head for his crude spear for weeks, and he rummaged around in the cave for materials. But the idea grew further away the closer he approached the work, and he let his eyes roam idly over the little creek below him and the fleecy clouds in the sky. It was a warm spring, and the sun made idleness pleasant.

The sun god was growing stronger again, chasing the cold fog and mist away. For years, he had worshiped the sun god as his, and now it seemed to grow strong again only for the Talkers. While the god was weak, Hwoogh's people had been mighty; now that its long sickness was over, the Cro-Magnons spread out over the country like the fleas on his belly.

Hwoogh could not understand it. Perhaps the god was mad at him, since gods are utterly unpredictable. He grunted, wishing again for his brother who had understood such things better.

Keyoda crept around the boulder in front of the cave, interrupting his brooding. She brought scraps of food from the tent village and the half-chewed leg of a horse, which Hwoogh seized on and ripped at with his strong teeth. Evidently the Talkers had made a big kill the day before, for they were lavish with their gifts. He grunted at Keyoda, who sat under the cave entrance in the sun, rubbing her back.

Keyoda was as hideous as most of the Talkers were to Hwoogh, with her long dangling legs and short arms, and the ungainly straightness of her carriage. Hwoogh remembered the young girls of his own day with a sigh; they had been beautiful, short and squat, with forward-jutting necks and nice low foreheads. How the flat-
faced Cro-Magnon women could get mates had been a puzzle to Hwoogh, but they seemed to succeed.

Keyoda had failed, however, and in her he felt justified in his judgment. There were times when he' felt almost in sympathy with her, and in his own way he was fond of her. As a child, she had been injured, her back made useless for the work of a mate. Kicked around by the others of her tribe, she had gradually drifted away from them, and when she stumbled on Hwoogh, his hospitality had been welcome to her. The Talkers were nomads who followed the herds north in the summer, south in the winter, coming and going with the seasons, but Keyoda stayed with Hwoogh in his cave and did the few desultory tasks that were necessary. Even such a half-man as the Neanderthaler was preferable to the scornful pity of her own people, and Hwoogh was not unkind.

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"Hwunkh?" asked Hwoogh. With his stomach partly filled, he felt more kindly toward the world.

"Oh, they come out and let me pick up their scraps- me, who was once a chiefs daughter!-same as they always do." Her voice had been shrewish, but the weariness of failure and age had taken the edge from it. " 'Poor, poor Keyoda,' thinks they, 'let her have what she wants, just so it don't mean nothin' we like.' Here." She handed him a roughly made spear, flaked on both sides of the point, but with only a rudimentary barb, unevenly made. "One of 'em give me this-it ain't the like of what they'd use, I guess, but it's good as you could make. One of the kids is practicing."

Hwoogh examined it; good, he admitted, very good, and the point was fixed

nicely in the shaft. Even the boys, with their long limber thumbs that could twist any which way, made better weapons than he; yet once, he had been famous among his small tribe for the nicety of his flint work.
Making the sign of horses, he got slowly to his feet. The shape of his jaw and the attachment of his tongue, together with the poorly developed left frontal lobe of his brain, made speech rudimentary, and he supplemented hjs glottals and labials with motions that Key-
oda understood well enough. She shrugged and waved him out, gnawing on oneof the bones.
Hwoogh wandered about without much spirit, conscious that he was growing old. And vaguely, he knew that age should not have fallen upon him for many snows; it was not the number of seasons, but something else, something that he could feel but not understand. He struck out for the hunting fields, hoping that he might find some game for himself that would require little effort to kill. The scornful gifts of the Talkers had become bitter in his mouth.
But the sun god climbed up to the top of the blue cave without Hwoogh's stumbling on anything. He swung about to return, and ran into a party of Cro-Magnons returning with the carcass of a reindeer strapped to a pole on their shoulders. They stopped to yell at him.
"No use, Hairy One!" they boasted, their voices light and gay. "We caught all the game this way. Turn back to your cave and sleep."
Hwoogh dropped his shoulders and veered away, his spear dragging limply on the ground. One of the party trotted over to him lightly. Sometimes Legoda, the tribal magic man and artist, seemed almost friendly, and this was one of the times.
"It was my kill, Hairy One," he said tolerantly. "Last night I drew strong reindeer magic, and the beast fell with my first throw. Come to my tent and I'll save a leg for you. Keyoda taught me a new song that she got from her father, and I would repay her."
Legs, ribs, bones! Hwoogh was tired of the outer meat. His body demanded the finer food of the entrails and liver. Already his skin was itching with a rash, and he felt that he must have the succulent inner parts to make him well; always before, that had cured him. He grunted, between appreciation and annoyance, and turned off. Legoda pulled him back.
"Nay, stay, Hairy One. Sometimes you bring good fortune to me, as when I found the bright ocher for my drawing. There is enough in the camp for all. Why hunt today?" As Hwoogh still hesitated, he grew more insistent, not from kindness, but more from a wish to have his own way. "The wolves are running near today, and one is not enough against them. We carve the reindeer at the camp as soon as it comes from the pole. I'll give you first choice of the meat!"
Hwoogh grunted a surly acquiescence and waddled after the party. The dole of the Talkers had become gall to him, but liver was liver-if Legoda kept his bargain.' They were chanting a rough marching song, trotting easily under the load of the reindeer, and he lumbered along behind, breathing hard at the pace they set.
As they neared the village of the nomads, its rough skin tents and burning fires threw out a pungent odor that irritated Hwoogh's nostrils. The smell of the long-limbed Cro-Magnons was bad enough without the dirty smell of a camp and the stink of their dung-fed fires. He preferred the accustomed moldy stench of his own musty cave.
Youths came swarming out at them, yelling with disgust at being left behind on this easy hunt. Catching sight of the Neanderthaler, they set up a howl of glee and charged at him, throwing sticks and rocks and jumping at him with play fury. Hwoogh shivered and crouched over, menacing them with his spear, and giving voice to throaty growls. Legoda laughed.
"In truth, O Hairy Chokanga, your voice should drive them from you. But see, they fear it not. Kuch, you two-legged pests! Out and away! Kuch, I say!" They

leaped back at his voice and dropped behind, still yelling. Hwoogh eyed them warily, but so long. as it suited the pleasure of Legoda, he was safe from their pranks.
Legoda was in a good mood, laughing and joking, tossing his quips at the women until his young wife came out and silenced it. She sprang at the reindeer with her flint knife, and the other women joined her.
"Heya," called Legoda. "First choice goes to Chokanga, the Hairy One. By my word, it is his."
"O fool!" There was scorn in her voice and in the look she gave Hwoogh. "Since when do we feed the
beasts of the caves and the fish of the river? Art mad, Legoda. Let him hunt for, himself."
Legoda tweaked her back with the point of his spear, grinning. "Aye, I knew thou'dst cry at that. But then, we owe his kind some pay-this was his hunting ground when we were but pups, straggling into this far land. What harm to give to an old man?" He swung to Hwoogh and gestured. "See, Chokanga, my word is good. Take what you want, but see that it is not more than your belly and that of Keyoda can hold this night."
Hwoogh darted in and came out with the liver and the fine sweet fat from the entrails. With a shrill cry of rage, Legoda's mate sprang for him, but the magic man pushed her back.
"Nay, he did right! Only a fool would choose the haunch when the heart of the meat was at hand. By the gods of my father, and I expected to eat of that myself! O Hairy One, you steal the meat from my mouth, and I like you for it. Go, before Hey a gets free."
Tomorrow, Hwoogh knew, Legoda might set the brats on him for this day's act, but tomorrow was in another cave of the sun. He drew his legs under him and scuttled off to the left and around the hill, while the shrill yells of Heya and the lazy good humor of Legoda followed. A piece of liver dangled loose, and Hwoogh sucked on it as he went. Keyoda would be pleased, since she usually had to do the begging for both of them.
And a little of Hwoogh's self-respect returned. Hadn't he outsmarted Legoda and escaped with the choicest meat? And had Keyoda ever done as well when she went to the village of the Talkers? Ayeee, they had a thing yet to learn from the cunning brain of old Hwoogh!
Of course the Talkers were crazy; only fools would act as Legoda had done. But that was none of his business. He patted the liver and fat fondly and grinned with a slight return ,of good humor. Hwoogh was not one to look a gift horse in the mouth.
The fire had shrunk to a red bed of coals when he reached the cave, and Keyoda was curled up on his bed, snoring loudly, her face flushed. Hwoogh smelled her breath, and his suspicions were confirmed. Somehow, she had drunk of the devil brew of the Talkers, and her sleep was dulled with its stupor. He prodded her with his toe, and she sat up bleary-eyed.
"Oh, so you're back. Ayeee, and with liver and fat! . But that never came from your spear throw; you been to the village and stole it. Oh, but you'll catch it!" She grabbed at the meat greedily and stirred up the fire, spitting the liver over it.
Hwoogh explained as best he could, and she got the drift of it. "So? Eh, that Legoda, what a prankster he is, and my own nephew, too." She tore the liver away, half-raw, and they fell to eagerly, while she chuckled and cursed by turns. Hwoogh touched her nose and wrinkled his face up.
"Well, so what if I did?" Liquor had sharpened her tongue. "That no-good son of the chief come here, after me to be telling him stories. And to make my old tongue free, he brings me the root brew. Ah, what stories I'm telling-and some of them true, too!" She gestured toward a crude pot. "I reckon he steals it, but what's that to us? Help yourself, Hairy One. It ain't ever' day we're

getting the brew."
Hwoogh remembered the headaches of former experiments, but he smelled it curiously, and the lure of the magic water caught at him. It was the very essence of youth, the fire that brought life to his legs and memories to his mind. He held it up to his mouth, gasping as the beery liquid ran down his throat. Keyoda caught it before he could finish and drained the last quart.
"Ah, it strengthens my back and puts the blood arun-ning hot through me again." She swayed on her feet and sputtered out the fragments of an old skin-scraping song. "Now, there you go-can't you never learn not to drink it all to once? That way, it don't last so long, and you're out before you get to feeling good."
Hwoogh staggered as the brew took hold of him, and his knees bent ever farther under him. The bed came up
in his face, his head was full of bees buzzing merrily, and the cave spun around him. He roared at the cave, while Keyoda laughed.
"Heh! To hear you ayelling, a body might think you was the only Chokanga left on earth. But you ain't-no, you ain't!"
"Hwunkh?" That struck home. To the best of Hwoogh's knowledge, there were no others of his kind left on earth. He grabbed at her and missed, but she fell and rolled against him, her breath against his face.
"So? Well, it's the truth. The kid up and told me. Legoda found three of 'em, just like you, he says, up the land to the east, three springs ago. You'll have to ask him-I dunno nothing about it." She rolled over against him, grunting half-formed words, and he tried to think of this new information. But the brew was too strong for his head, and he was soon snoring beside her.
Keyoda was gone to the village when he awoke, and the sun was a spear length high on the horizon. He rummaged around for a piece of the liver, but the flavor was not as good as it had been and his stomach protested lustily at going to work again. He leaned back until his head got control of itself, then swung down to the creek to quench a thirst devil that had seized on him in the night.
But there was something he should do, something he half remembered from last night. Hadn't Keyoda said something about others of his people? Yes, three of them, and Legoda knew. Hwoogh hesitated, remembering that he had bested Legoda the day before; the young man might resent it today. But he was filled with an overwhelming curiosity, and there was a strange yearning in his heart. Legoda must tell him.
Reluctantly, he went back to the cave and fished around in a hole that was a secret even from Keyoda. He drew out his treasures, fingering them reverently, and selecting the best. There were bright shells and colored pebbles, a roughly drilled necklace that had belonged to his father, a sign of completed manhood, bits of this and that with which he had intended to make himself ornaments. But the quest for knowledge was
stronger than the pride of possession; he dumped them out into his fists and struck out for the village.
Keyoda was talking with the women, whining the stock formula that she had developed, and Hwoogh skirted around the camp, looking for the young artist. Finally he spotted the Talker out behind the camp, making odd motions with two sticks. He drew near cautiously, and Legoda heard him coming.
"Come near, Chokanga, and see my new magic." The young man's voice was filled with pride, and there was no threat to it. Hwoogh sighed with relief, but sidled up slowly. "Come nearer, don't fear me. Do you think I'm sorry of the gift I made? Nay, that was my own stupidity. See."
He held out the sticks and Hwoogh fingered them cautiously. One was long and springy, tied end to end with a leather thong, and the other was a little spear with a tuft of feather on the blunt end. He grunted a question.
"A magic spear, Hairy One, that flies from the hand with wings, and kills

beyond the reach of other spears."
Hwoogh snorted. The spear was too tiny to kill more than rodents, and the big stick had not even a point. But he watched as the young man placed the sharp stick to the tied one, and drew back on it. There was a sharp twang, and the little spear sailed out and away, burying its pouit in the soft bark of a tree more than two spear throws away. Hwoogh was impressed.
"Aye, Chokanga, a new magic that I learned in the south last year. There are many there who use it, and with it they can throw the point farther and better than a full-sized spear. One man may kill as much as three!"
Hwoogh grumbled; already they killed all the good game, and yet they must find new magic to increase their power. He held out his hand curiously, and Legoda gave him the long stick and another spear, showing him how it was held. Again there was a twang, and the leather thong struck at his wrist, but the weapon sailed off erratically, missing the tree by yards. Hwoogh handed it back glumly-such magic was not for his
kind. His thumbs made the handling of it even more difficult.
Now, while the magic man was pleased with his superiority, was a good time to show the treasure. Hwoogh spread it out on the bare earth and gestured at Legoda, who looked down thoughtfully.
"Yes," the Talker conceded. "Some of it is good, and some would make nice trinkets for the women. What is it you want-more meat, or one of the new weapons? Your belly was filled yesterday; and with my beer, that was stolen, I think, though for that I blame you not. The boy has been punished already. And this weapon is not for you."
Hwoogh snorted, wriggled and fought for expression, while the young man stared. Little by little, his wants were made known, partly by signs, partly by the questions of the Cro-Magnon. Legoda laughed.
"So, there is a call of the kind in you, Old Man?" He pushed the treasure back to Hwoogh, except one gleaming bauble. "I would not cheat you, Chokanga, but this I take for the love I bear you, as a sign of our friendship." His grin was mocking as he stuck the valuable in a flap of his clout.
Hwoogh squatted down on his heels, and Legoda sat on a rock as he began.
"There is but little to tell you, Hairy One. Three years ago I did run onto a family of your kind-a male and his mate, with one child. They ran from us, but we were near their cave, and they had to return. We harmed them not, and sometimes gave them food, letting them accompany us on the chase. But they were thin and scrawny, too lazy to hunt. When we returned next year, they were dead, and so far as I know, you are the last of your kind."
He scratched his head thoughtfully. "Your people die too easily, Chokanga; no sooner do we find them and try to help them than they cease hunting and become beggars. And then they lose interest in life, sicken and die. I think your gods must be killed off by our stronger ones."
Hwoogh grunted a half-assent, and Legoda gathered up his bow and arrows, turning back toward camp. But
there was a strange look on the Neanderthaler's face that did not escape the young man's eyes. Recognizing the misery in Hwoogh's expression, he laid a hand on the old man's shoulder and spoke more kindly.
"That is why I would see to your well-being, Hairy One. When you are gone, there will be no more, and my children will laugh at me and say I lie when I spin the tale of your race at the feast fire. Each time that I kill, you shall not lack for food."
He swung down the single street toward the tent of his family, and Hwoogh turned slowly back toward his cave. The assurance of food should have cheered him, but it only added to his gloom. Dully he realized that Legoda treated him as a small child, or as one whom the sun god had touched with madness.
Hwoogh heard the cries and laughter of children as he rounded the hill, and for a minute he hesitated before going on. But the sense of property was well

developed in him, and he leaped forward grimly. They had no business near his cave.
They were of all ages and sizes, shouting and chasing each other about in a crazy disorder. Having been forbidden to come on Hwoogh's side of the hill, and having broken the rule in a bunch, they were making the most of their revolt. Hwoogh's fire was scattered down the side of the hill into the creek, and they were busily sorting through the small store of his skins and weapons.
Hwoogh let out a savage yell and ran forward, his spear held out in jabbing position. Hearing him, they turned and jumped back from the cave entrance, clustering up into a tight group. "Go on away, Ugly Face," one yelled. "Go scare the wolves! Ugly Face, Ugly Face, waaaah!"
He dashed in among them, brandishing his spear, but they darted back on their nimble legs, slipping easily from in front of him. One of the older boys thrust out a leg and caught him, tripping him down on the rocky ground. Another dashed in madly and caught his spear away, hitting him roughly with it. From the tune of the
first primate, the innate cruelty of thoughtlessness had changed little hi children. ,
Hwoogh let out a whooping bellow, scrambled up clumsily and was in among them. But they slipped nimbly out of his clutching hands. The little girls were dancing around gleefully, chanting: "Ugly Face ain't got no mother, Ugly Face, ain't got no wife, waaaah on Ugly Face!" Frantically he caught one of the boys, swung him about savagely, and tossed him on the ground, where the youth lay white and silent. Hwoogh felt a momentary glow of elation at his strength. Then somebody threw a rock.
The old Neanderthaler was tied down crudely when he swam back to consciousness, and three of the boys sat on his chest, beating the ground with then" heels hi time to a victory chant. There was a dull ache in his head, and bruises were swelling on his arms and chest where they had handled him roughly. He growled savagely, heaving up, and tumbled them off, but the cords were too strong for him. As surely as if grown men had done it, he was captured.
For years they had been his enemies, ever since they had found that Hwoogh-baiting was one of the pleasant occupations that might relieve the tedium of camp life. Now that the old feud was about finished, they went at the business of subduing him with method and ingenuity.
While the girls rubbed his face with soft mud from the creek, the boys ransacked the cave and tore at his clothes. The rough bag in which he had put his valuables came away in their hands, and they paused to distribute this new wealth. Hwoogh howled madly.
But a measure of sanity was returning to them, now that the first fury of the fight was over, and Kechaka, the chief's eldest son, stared at Hwoogh doubtfully. "If the elders hear of this," he muttered unhappily, "there will be trouble. They'd not like our bothering Ugly Face."
Another grinned. "Why tell them? He isn't a man, anyway, but an animal; see the hair on his body! Toss
old Ugly Face in the river, clean up his cave, and hide these treasures. Who's to know?"
There were half-hearted protests, but the thought of the beating waiting for them added weight to the idea. Kechaka nodded finally, and set them to straightening up the mess they had made. With broken branches, they eliminated the marks of their feet, leaving only the trail to the creek.
Hwoogh tossed and pitched in their arms as four of them picked him up; the bindings loosened somewhat, but not enough to free him. With some satisfaction, he noted that the boy he had caught was still retching and moaning but that was no help to his present position. They waded relentlessly into the water, laid him on it belly down, and gave him a strong push that

sent him gliding out through the rushing stream. Foaming and gasping, he fought the current, straggling against his bonds. His lungs ached for air, and the current buffeted him about; blackness was creeping up on his mind.
With a last desperate effort he tore loose the bonds and pushed up madly for the surface, gulping in air greedily. Water was unpleasant to him, but he could swim, and struck out for the bank. The children were disappearing down the trail, and were out of sight as he climbed from the water, bemoaning his lost fire that would have warmed him. He lumbered back to his cave and sank soddenly on the bed.
He, who had been a mighty warrior, bested by a snarling pack of Cro-Magnon brats! He clenched his fcts savagely and growled, but there was nothing he could do. Nothing! The futility of his own effort struck down on him like a burning knife. Hwoogh was an old man, and the tears that ran from his eyes were the bit-tar, aching tears that only age can shed.
Keyoda returned late, cursing when she found the fire gone, but her voice softened as she spied him huddled in his bed, staring dully at the wall of the cave. Her old eyes spotted the few footprints the boys had missed, and she swore with a vigor that was almost youthful be-Inre she turned back to Hwoogh.
"Come, Hairy One, get out of that cold, wet fur!" Her hands were gentle orf the straps, but Hwoogh shook her aside. "You'll be sick, lying there on them few leaves, all wet like that. Get off that fur, and I'll go back to the village for fire. Them kids! Wait'11 I tell Legoda!"
Seeing there was nothing he would let her do for him, she turned away down the trail. Hwoogh sat up to change his furs, then lay back. What was the use? He grumbled a little, when Keyoda returned with the fire, but refused the delicacies she had wheedled at the village, and tumbled over into a fitful sleep.
The sun was long up when he awoke to find Legoda and Keyoda fussing over him. There was an unhappy feeling in his head, and he coughed. Legoda patted his back. "Rest, Hairy One. You have the sickness devil that burns the throat and runs at the nose, but that a man can throw off. Ayeee, how the boys were whipped! I, personally, attended to that, and this morning not one is less sore than you are. Before they bother you again, the moon will eat up the sun."
Keyoda pushed a stew of boiled liver and kidneys at him, but he shoved it away. Though the ache in his head had gone down, a dull weight seemed to rest on his stomach, and he could not eat. It felt as though all the boys he had fought were sitting on his chest and choking him.
Legoda drew out a small painted drum and made heavy magic for his recovery, dancing before the old man and shaking the magic gourd that drove out all sickness. But this was a stronger devil. Finally the young man stopped and left for the village, while Keyoda perched on a stone to watch over the sick man. Hwoogh's mind was heavy and numb, and his heart was leaden in his breast. She fanned the flies away, covering his eyes with a bit of skin, singing him some song that the mothers lulled their children with.
He slept again, stirring about in a nightmare of Talker mockery, with a fever flushing his face. But when Legoda came back at night, the magic man swore he should be well in three days. "Let him sleep and feed
him. The devil will leave him soon. See, there is scarce a mark where the stone hit him."
Keyoda fed him, as best she could, forcing the food that she begged at the village down his throat. She lugged water from the creek as often as he cried for it, and bathed his head and chest when he slept. But the three days came and went, and still he was not well. The fever was little higher, and the cold little worse than he had gone through many times before. But he did not throw it off as he should have done.
Legoda came again, bringing his magic and food, but they were of little help.

As the day drew to a close, he shook his head and spoke low words to Keyoda. Hwoogh came out of a half-stupor and listened dully.
"He tires of life, Keyoda, my father's sister." The young man shrugged. "See, he lies there not fighting. When a man will not try to live, he cannot."
"Ayyeah!" Her voice shrilled dolefully. "What man will not live if he can? Thou are foolish, Legoda."
"Nay. His people tire easily of life, O Keyoda. Why, I know not. But it takes little to make them die." Seeing that Hwoogh had heard, he drew closer to the Neander-thaler. "O Chokanga, put away your troubles, and take another bite out of life. It can still be good, if you choose. I have taken your gift as a sign of friendship, and I would keep my word. Come to my fire, and hunt no more; I will tend you as I would my father."
Hwoogh grunted. Follow the camps, eat from Lego-da's hunting, be paraded as a freak and a half-man! Legoda was kind, sudden and warm in his sympathy, but the others were scornful. And if Hwoogh should die, who was to mourn him? Keyoda would forget him, and not one Chokanga would be there to show them the ritual for burial.
Hwoogh's old friends had come back to him in his dreams, visiting him and showing the hunting grounds of his youth. He had heard the grunts and grumblings of the girls of his race, and they were awaiting him. That world was still empty of the Talkers, where a man could do great things and make his own kills, without hearing the laughter of the Cro-Magnons. Hwoogh sighed softly. He was tired, too tired to care what happened.
The sun sank low, and the clouds were painted a harsh red. Keyoda was wailing somewhere, far off, and Legoda beat on his drum and muttered his magic. But life was empty, barren of pride.
The sun dropped from sight, and Hwoogh sighed again, sending his last breath out to join the ghosts of his people.

The Coppersmith

IN THE SLANTING rays of the morning sun, the figure trudging along the path seemed out of place so near the foothills of the Adirondacks. His scant three feet of stocky height was covered by a tattered jerkin of brown leather that fell to his knees, and above was a russet cap with turned-back brim and high, pointed crown. Below, the dusty sandals were tipped up at the toes and tied back to the ankles, and on each a little copper bell tinkled lightly as he walked.
Ellowan Coppersmith moved slowly under the weight of the bag he bore on his shoulders, combing out his beard with a stubby brown hand and humming in time with the jingling bells. It was early still and a whole day lay before him in which to work. After the long sleep, back in the hills where his people lay dormant, work would be good again.
The path came to an end where it joined a well-kept highway, and the elf eased the bag from his shoulder while he studied the signpost. There was little meaning for him in the cryptic marker that bore the cabalistic 30, but the arrow below indicated that Wells lay half a mile beyond. That must be the village he had spied from the path; a very nice little village, Ellowan judged, and not unprosperous. Work should be found in plenty there.
But first, the berries he had picked in the fields
would refresh him after the long walk. His kindly brown eyes lighted with pleasure as he pulled them from his bag and sat back against the signpost. Surely even these few so late in the season were an omen of good fortune to come. The elf munched them slowly, savoring their wild sweetness gratefully. When they were finished, he reached into his bag again and brought forth a handful of thin sticks, which he tossed on the ground and studied carefully.
"Six score years in sleep," he muttered. "Eh, well, though the runes forecast the future but poorly, they seldom lie of the past. Six score years it must be."

He tossed the runes back into the bag and turned toward a growing noise that had been creeping up on him from behind. The source of the sound seemed to be a long, low vehicle that came sweeping up the road and flashed by him so rapidly that there was only time to catch a glimpse of the men inside.
"These men!" Ellowan picked up his bag and headed toward the village, shaking his head doubtfully. "Now they have engines inside their carriages, and strange engines at that, from the odor. Even the air of the highway must be polluted with the foul smell of machines. Next it's flying they'll be. Methinks 'twere best to go through the fields to the village."
He pulled out his clay pipe and sucked on it, but the flavor had dried out while he had lain sleeping, and the xtobacco in his pouch had molded away. Well, there'd be tobacco in the village, and coppers to buy it with. He was humming again as he neared the town and studied its group of houses, among which the people were just beginning to stir. It would be best to go from house to house rather than disturb them by crying his services from the street. With an expectant smile on his weathered old face, Ellowan rapped lightly and waited for a response.
"Whatta you want?" The woman brushed back her stringy hair with one hand while holding the door firmly with the other, and her eyes were hard as she caught sight of the elf's bag. "We don't want no magazines. You're just wastin' your time!"
From the kitchen came the nauseating odor of scorching eggs, and the door was slammed shut before Ellowan could state his wants. Eh, well, a town without a shrew was a town without a house. A bad start and a good ending, perchance. But no one answered his second knock, and he drew no further response than faces pressed to the window at the third.
A young woman came to the next door, eyeing him' curiously, but answering his smile. "Good morning," she said doubtfully, and the elf's hopes rose.
"A good morning to you, mistress. And have you pots to mend, pans or odds that you wish repaired?" It was good to speak the words again. "I'm a wonderful tinker, none better, mistress. Like new they'll be, and the better for the knack that I have and that which I bring in my bag."
"I'm sorry, but I haven't anything; I've just been married a few weeks." She smiled again, hesitantly. "If you're hungry, though . . . well, we don't usually feed men who come to the door, but I guess it'd be all right this time."
"No, mistress, but thank'ee. It's only honest labor I want." Ellowan heaved the bag up again and moved down the steps. The girl turned to go in, glancing back at him with a feeling of guilt that there was no work for the strange little fellow. On impulse, she called after him.
"Wait!" At her cry, he faced her again. "I just thought; Mother might have something for you. She lives down the street-the fifth house on the right. Her name's Mrs. Franklin."
Ellowan's face creased in a twinkling smile. "My thanks again, mistress, and good fortune attend you."
Eh, so, his luck had changed again. Once his skill was known, there'd be no lack of work for him. "A few coppers here and a farthing there, from many a kettle to mend; with solder and flux and skill to combine, there's many a copper to spend."
He was still humming as he rounded the house and found Mrs. Franklin hanging out dish towels on the
back porch to dry. She was a somewhat stout woman, with the expression of''fatigue that grows habitual in some cases, but her smile was as kindly as her daughter's when she spied the elf.
"Are you the little man my daughter said mended things?" she asked. "Susan phoned me that you'd be here-she took quite a fancy to you. Well, come up here on the porch and I'll bring out what I want fixed. I hope your rates aren't

too high?"
"It's very reasonable you'll find them, mistress." He sank down on a three-legged stool he pulled from his bag and brought out a little table, while she went inside for the articles that needed repairs. There were knick-knacks, a skillet, various pans, a copper wash boiler, and odds and ends of all sorts; enough to keep him busy till midday.
She set them down beside him. "Well, that's the lot of them. I've been meaning to throw most of them away, since nobody around here can fix them, but it seems a shame to see things wasted for some little hole. You just call me when you're through."
Ellowan nodded briskly and dug down into his seemingly bottomless bag. Out came his wonderful fluxes that could clean the thickest tarnish away in a twinkling, the polish that even the hardest grease and oldest soot couldn't defy, the bars of solder that became one with the metal, so that the sharpest eye would fail to note the difference; and out came the clever little tools that worked and smoothed the repair into unity with the original. Last of all, he drew forth a tiny anvil and a little charcoal brazier whose coals began to burn as he set it down. There was no fan or bellows, yet the coals in the center glowed fiercely at white heat.
The little elf reached out for the copper boiler, so badly dented that the seam had sprung open all the way down. A few light taps on his anvil straightened it back into smoothness. He spread on his polish, blew on it vigorously, and watched the dirt and dullness disappear, then applied his flux, and drew some of the solder onto it with a hot iron, chuckling as the seams became waterproof again. Surely now, even the long sleep had cost him none of his skill. As he laid it down, there was no sign to show that the boiler had not come freshly from some shop, or new out of the maker's hands.
The skillet was bright and shiny, except for a brown circle on the bottom, and gleamed with a silvery luster. Some magic craftsman must have made it, the elf thought, and it should receive special pains to make sure that the spell holding it so bright was/not broken. He rubbed a few drops of polish over it carefully, inspected the loose handle, and applied his purple flux, swabbing off the small excess. Tenderly he ran the hot iron over the solder and began working the metal against the handle.
But something was very wrong. Instead of drawing firmly to the skillet, the solder ran down the side in little drops. Such as remained was loose and refused to stick. With a puzzled frown, Ellowan smelled his materials and tried again; there was nothing wrong with the solder or flux, but they still refused to work. He muttered softly and reached out for a pan with a phi hole in it
Mrs. Franklin found him sitting there later, his tools neatly before him, the pots and pans stacked at his side, and the brazier glowing brightly. "All finished?" she asked cheerfully. "I brought you some coffee and a cinnamon bun I just baked; I thought you might like them." She set them down before the elf and glanced at the pile of utensils again. Only the boiler was fixed. "What-" she began sharply, but softened her question somewhat as she saw the bewildered frustration on bis face. "I thought you said you could fix them?"
Ellowan nodded glumly. "That I did, mistress, and that I tried to do. But my solder and flux refused all but the honest copper, yonder, and there's never a thing I can make of them. Either these must be wondrous metals indeed, or my art has been bewitched."
"There's nothing very wonderful about aluminum and enamelware-nor stainless, steel, either, except the prices they charge." She picked up the wash boiler and inspected his work. "Well, you did do this nicely, and you're not the only one who can't solder aluminum, I
guess, so cheer up. And eat your roll before it's cold!"
"Thank'ee, mistress." The savory aroma of the bun had been tantalizing his

stomach, but he had been waiting to make certain that he was welcome to it. "It's sorry I am to have troubled you, but it's a long time ago that I tinkered for my living, and this is new to me."
Mrs. Franklin nodded sympathetically; the poor little man must have been living with a son, or maybe working in a side show-he was short enough, and his costume was certainly theatrical. Well, hard times were hard times. "You didn't trouble me much, I guess. Besides, I needed the boiler tomorrow for wash day, so that's a big help, anyway. What do I owe you for it?"
"Tu'pence ha'penny," Ellowan said, taking out for the bun. Her look was uncertain, and he changed it quickly. "Five pence American, that is, mistress."
"Five cents! But it's worth ten .times that!"
"It's but an honest price for the labor, mistress." Ellowan was putting the tools and materials back in his bag. "That's all I can take for the small bit I could do."
"Well-" She shrugged. "All right, if that's all you'll take, here it is." The coin she handed him seemed strange, but that was to be expected. He pocketed it with a quick smile and another "thank'ee," and went in search of a store he had noticed before.
The shop was confusing in the wide variety of articles it carried, but Ellowan spied tobacco and cigars on display and walked in. Now that he had eaten the bun, the tobacco was a more pressing need than food.
"Two pennies of tobacco, if it please you," he told the clerk, holding out the little leather pouch he carried.
"You crazy?" The clerk was a boy, much more interested in his oiled hair than in the customers who might come in. "Cheapest thing I can give you is Duke's Mixture, and it'll cost you five cents, cash."
Regretfully Ellowan watched the nickel vanish over the counter; tobacco was indeed a luxury at the price. He picked up the small cloth bag, and the pasteboard folder the boy thrust at him. "What might this be?" he asked, holding up the folder.
"Matches." The boy grinned in fine superiority.
"Where you been all your life? Okay, you do this . . . see? Course, if you don't want 'em-"
"Thank'ee." The elf pocketed the book of matches quickly and hurried toward the street, vastly pleased with his purchase. Such a great marvel as the matches alone surely was worth the price. He filled his clay pipe and struck one of them curiously, chuckling in delight as it flamed up. When he dropped the flame regretfully,-he noticed that the tobacco, too, was imbued with magic, else surely it could never have been cured to such a mild and satisfying flavor. It scarcely bit his tongue.
But there was no time to be loitering around admiring his new treasures. Without work there could be no food, and supper was still to be taken care of. Those aluminum and enamelware pans were still in his mind, reminding him that coppers might be hard to get. But then, Mrs. Franklin had mentioned stainless steel, and only a mighty wizard could prevent iron from rusting; perhaps her husband was a worker in enchantments, and the rest of the village might be served in honest copper and hammered pewter. He shook his shoulders in forced optimism and marched down the street toward the other houses, noting the prices marked in a store window as he passed. Eh, the woman was right; he'd have to charge more for his services to eat at those rates.
The road was filled with the strange carriages driven by engines, and Ellowan stayed cautiously off the paving. But the stench from their exhausts and the dust they stirred up were still thick in his nostrils. The elf switched the bag from his left shoulder to his right and plodded on grimly, but there was no longer a tune on his lips, and the little bells refused to tinkle as he walked.

The sun had set, and it was already growing darker, bringing the long slow day to a close. His last call would be at the house ahead, already showing lights burning, and it was still some distance off. Ellowan pulled his belt tighter and marched toward it, muttering in slow time to his steps. "Al-u-mi-num and en-am-el-ware and stain-less STEEL!" A row of green pans, red pots and ivory bowls ran before his eyes, and everywhere there was a glint of silvery skillets and dull white kettles. Even the handles used were no longer honest wood, but smelled faintly resinous.

Not one proper kettle in the whole village had he found. The housewives came out and looked at him, answered his smile, and brought forth their work for him in an oddly hesitant manner, as if they were unused to giving out such jobs at the door. It spoke more of pity than of any desire to have their wares mended.

"No, mistress, only copper. These new metals refuse my solder, and them I cannot mend." Over and again he'd repeated the words until they were as wooden as his knocks had grown; and always, there was no copper. It was almost a kindness when they refused to answer his knock.

He had been glad to quit the village and turn out on the road to the country, even though the houses were farther apart. Surely among the farming people, the older methods would still be in use. But the results were no different. They greeted him kindly and brought out their wares to him with less hesitancy than in the village-but the utensils were enamelware and aluminum and stainless steel!

Ellowan groped for his pipe and sank down on the ground to rest, noting that eight miles still lay between him and Northville. He measured out the tobacco carefully, and hesitated before using one of the new matches. Then, as he lit it, he watched the flame dully and tossed it listlessly aside. Even the tobacco tasted flat now, and the emptiness of his stomach refused to be fooled by the smoke, though it helped to take his mind away from his troubles. Eh, well, there was always that one last house to be seen, where fortune might smile on him long enough to furnish a supper. He shouldered the bag with a grunt and moved on.

A large German shepherd came bounding out at the elf as he turned in the gate to the farmhouse. The dog's bark was gruff and threatening, but Ellowan clucked softly and the animal quieted, walking beside him toward the house, its tail wagging slowly. The farmer watched the performance and grinned.

"Prinz seems to like you," he called out. "Tain't everyone he takes to like that. What can I do for you, lad?" Then, as Ellowan drew nearer, he looked more sharply. "Sorry-my mistake. For a minute there, I thought you was a boy."

"I'm a tinker, sir. A coppersmith, that is." The elf stroked the dog's head and looked up at the farmer wistfully. "Have you copper pots or pans, or odds of any kind, to be mended? I do very good work on copper, sir, and I'll be glad to work for only my supper."

The farmer opened the door and motioned him in. "Come on inside, and we'll see. I don't reckon we have, but the wife knows better." He raised his voice. "Hey, Louisa, where are you? In the kitchen?"

"In here, Henry." The voice came from the kitchen, and Ellowan followed the man back, the dog nuzzling his hand companionably. The woman was washing the last few dishes and putting the supper away as they entered, and the sight of food awoke the hunger that the elf had temporarily suppressed.

"This fellow says he's good at fixin' copper dishes, Louisa," Henry told his wife. "You got anything like that for him?" He bent over her ear and spoke in an undertone, but Ellowan caught the words. "If you got anything copper, he looks like he needs it, Lou. Nice little midget, seems to be, and Prinz took quite a shine to him."

Louisa shook her head slowly. "I had a couple of old copper kettles, only I

threw them away when we got the aluminum cooking set. But if you're hungry, there's plenty of food still left. Won't you sit down while I fix it for you?"
Ellowan looked eagerly at the remains of the supper, and his mouth watered hotly, but he managed a smile, and his voice was determined. "Thank'ee kindly, mistress, but I can't. It's one of the rules I must live by not to beg or take what I cannot earn. But I'll be thanking you both for the thought, and wishing you a very good night."
They followed him to the door, and the dog trotted behind him until its master's whistle called it back. Then the elf was alone on the road again, hunting a place to sleep. There was a haystack back off the road that would make a good bed, and he headed for that. Well, hay was hardly nourishing, but chewing on it was better than nothing:
Ellowan was up with the sun again, brushing the dirt off his jerkin. As an experiment, he shook the runes out on the ground and studied them for a few minutes. "Eh, well," he muttered, tossing them back in the bag, "they speak well, but it's little faith I'd have in them for what is to come. It's too easy to shake them the way I'd want them to be. But perchance there'll be a berry or so in the woods yonder."
There were no berries, and the acorns were still green. Ellowan struck the highway again, drawing faint pleasure from the fact that few cars were on the road at that hour. He wondered again why their fumes, though unpleasant, bothered him as little as they did. His brothers, up in the grotto hidden in the Adirondacks, found even the smoke from the factories a deadening poison. The smell of a good wood fire, or the fumes from alcohol in the glass-blower's lamp were pleasant to them. But with the coming of coal, a slow lethargy had crept over them, driving them back one by one into the hills to sleep. It had been bad enough when coal was burned in the hearths, but that Scotchman, Watts, had found that power could be drawn from steam, and the factories began spewing forth the murky fumes of acrid coal smoke. And the Little Folk had fled hopelessly from the poison, until Ellowan Coppersmith alone was left. In time, even he had joined his brothers up in the hills.
Now he had awakened again, without rhyme or reason, when the stench of the liquid called gasoline was added to that of coal. All along the highway were pumps that supplied it to the endless cars, and the taint of it in the air was omnipresent.
"Eh, well," he thought. "My brothers were ever filled with foolish pranks instead of honest work, while I found my pleasure in labor. Methinks the pranks weakened them against the poison, and the work gives strength; it was only after I hexed the factory owner that the sleep crept into my head, and six score years must surely pay the price of one such trick. Yet, when I first awakened, it's thinking I was that there was some good purpose that drew, me forth."
The sight of an orchard near the road caught his attention, and the elf searched carefully along the strip of grass outside the fence in the hope that an apple might have been blown outside. But only inside was there fruit, and to cross the fence would be stealing. He left the orchard reluctantly and started to turn in at the road leading to the farmhouse. Then he paused. After all, the farms were equipped exactly as the city now, and such faint luck as he'd had yesterday had been in the village. There was little sense in wasting his effort among the scattered houses of the country, in the unlikely chance that he might find copper. In the city, at least, there was little time wasted, and it was only by covering as many places as he could that he might hope to find work. Ellowan shrugged, and turned back on the highway; he'd save his time and energy until he reached Northville.
It was nearly an hour later when he came on the boy, sitting beside the road and fussing over some machine. Ellowan stopped as he saw the scattered parts and the worried frown on the lad's face. Little troubles seemed great to

twelve-year-olds.
"Eh, now, lad," he asked, "is it trouble you've having there? And what might be that contrivance of bars and wheels?"
"It's a bicycle; ever'body knows that." From the sound of the boy's voice, tragedy had reared a large and ugly head. "And I've only had it since last Christmas. Now it's broke and I can't fix it."
He held up a piece that had come from the hub of the rear wheel. "See? That's the part that swells up when I brake it. It's all broken, and a new coaster brake costs five dollars."
Ellowan took the pieces and smelled them; his eyes had not been deceived. It was brass. "So?" he asked. "Now that's a shame, indeed. And a very pretty machine it was. But perchance I can fix it."
The boy looked up hopefully as he watched the elf draw out the brazier and tools. Then his face fell. "Naw, mister. I ain't got the money. All I got's a quarter, and I can't get it, 'cause it's in my bank, and mom won't let me open it."
The elf's reviving hopes of breakfast faded away, but he smiled casually. "Eh, so? Well, lad, there are other things than money. Let's see what we'll be making of this."
His eyes picked out the relation of the various parts, and his admiration for the creator of the machine rose. That hub was meant to drive the machine, to roll free, or to brake as the user desired. The broken piece was a split cylinder of brass that was arranged to expand against the inside of the hub when braking. How it could have been damaged was a mystery, but the ability of boys to destroy was no novelty to Ellowan.
Under his hands, the rough edges were smoothed down in a twinkling, and he ran his strongest solder into the break, filling and drawing it together, then scraping and abrading the metal smooth again. The boy's eyes widened.
"Say, mister, you're good! Them fellers in the city can't do it like that, and they've got all kinds of tools, too." He took the repaired piece and began threading the parts back on the spindle. "Gosh, you're little. D'you come out of a circus?"
Ellowan shook his head, smiling faintly. The questions of children had always been candid, and honest replies could be given them. "That I did not, lad, and I'm not a midget, if that's what you'd be thinking. Now didn't your grandmother tell you the old tales of the elves?"
"An elf!" The boy stopped twisting the nuts back on. "Go on! There ain't such things-I don't guess." His voice grew doubtful, though, as he studied the little brown figure. "Say, you do look like the pi'tures I seen, at that, and it sure looked like magic the way you fixed my brake. Can you really do magic?"
"It's never much use I had for magic, lad. I had no time for learning it, when business was better. The h6n-est tricks of my trade were enough for me, with a certain skill that was ever mine. And I wouldn't be mentioning this to your parents, if I were you."
"Don't worry, I won't; they'd say I was nuts." The boy climbed on the saddle, and tested the brake with obvious satisfaction. "You goin' to town? Hop on and put your bag in the basket here. I'm goin' down within a mile of there-if you can ride on the rack."
"It would be a heavy load for you, lad, I'm thinking." Ellowan was none too sure of the security of such a vehicle, but the ride would be most welcome.
"Naw. Hop on. I've carried my brother, and he's heavier'n you. Anyway, that's a Mussimer two-speed brake. Dad got it special for Christmas." He reached over for Ellowan's bag, and was surprised by its lightness. Those who help an elf usually found things easier than they expected. "Anyway, I owe you sumpin' for fixin'it."
Ellowan climbed on the luggage rack at the rear and clutched the boy tightly

at first. The rack was hard, but the paving smoothed out the ride, and it was far easier than walking. He relaxed and watched the road go by in a quarter of the time he could have traveled it on foot. If fortune smiled on him, breakfast might be earned sooner than he had hoped.
"Well, here's where I stop," the boy finally told him. "The town's down there about a mile. Thanks for fixin' my bike."
Ellowan dismounted cautiously, and lifted out his bag. "Thank'ee for helping me so far, lad. And I'm thinking the brake will be giving you little trouble hereafter." He watched the boy ride off on a side road, and started toward the town, the serious business of breakfast uppermost in his minds
Breakfast was still in his mind when midday had passed, but there was no sign that it was nearer his stomach. He came out of an alley and stopped for a few draws on his pipe and a chance to rest his shoulders. He'd have to stop smoking soon; on an empty stomach, too much tobacco is nauseating. Over the smell of the smoke, another odor struck Ms nose, and he turned around slowly. It was the clean odor of hot metal in a charcoal fire, and came from a sprawling old building a few yards away. The sign above was faded, but he made out the words: MICHAEL DONAHUE-HORSESHOEING AND AUTO REPAIRS. The sight of a blacksmith shop aroused memories of pleasanter days, and Ellowan drew nearer. The man inside was in his fifties, but his body spoke of strength and clean living, and the face under the mop of red hair was open and friendly. At the moment, he was sitting on a stool, finishing a sandwich. The odor of the food reached out and stirred the elf's stomach again, and he scuffed his sandals against the ground uneasily. The man looked up.
"Saints presarve us!" Donahue's generous mouth opened to its widest. "Sure, and it's one o' the Little Folk, the loike as my feyther tolt me. Now fwhat-Ochs now, but it's hungry ye'd be from the look that ye have, and me eatin' before ye! Here now, me hearty, it's yer-self as shud have this bread."
"Thank'ee." Ellowan shook his head with an effort, but it came harder this tune. "I'm an honest worker, sir, and it's one of the rules that I can't be taking what I cannot earn. But there's never a piece of copper to be found in all the city for me to mend." He laid his hands on a blackened bench to ease the ache in his legs.
"Now that's a shame." The brogue dropped from Donahue's speech, now that the surprise of seeing the elf was leaving him. "It's a good worker you are, too, if what my father told me was true. He came over from the old country when I was a bit of a baby, and his father told him before that. Wonderful workers, he said you were."
"I am that." It was a simple statement as Ellowan made it; boasting requires a certain energy, even had he felt like it. "Anything of brass or copper I can fix, and it'll be like new when I finish."
"Can you that?" Donahue looked at him with interest. "Eh, maybe you can. I've a notion to try you out. You wait here." He disappeared through the door that divided his smithy from the auto servicing department and came back with a large piece of blackened metal hi his hand. The elf smelled it questioningly and found it was brass.
Donahue tapped it lightly. "That's a radiator, m'boy. Water runs through these tubes here and these little fins cool it off. Old Pete Yaegger brought it in and wanted it fixed, but it's too far ruined for my hands. And he can't afford a new one. You fix that now, and I'll be giving you a nice bit of money for the work."
"Fix it I can." Ellowan's hands were trembling as he inspected the corroded metal core, and began drawing out his tools. "I'll be finished within the hour."
Donahue looked doubtfully at the elf, but nodded slowly. "Now maybe you will. But first, you'll eat, and we'll not be arguing about that. A hungry man never

did good work, and I'm of the opinion the same applies to yourself. There's still a sandwich and a bit of pie left, if you don't mind washing it down with water."
The elf needed no water to wash down the food. When Donahue looked at him next, the crumbs had been licked from the paper, and Ellowan's deft hands were working his clever little tools through the fins of the radiator, and his face was crinkling up into its usual merry smile. The metal seemed to run and flow through his hands with a will of its own, and he was whistling lightly as he worked.
Ellowan waited intently as Donahue inspected the finished work. Where the blackened metal had been bent and twisted, and filled with holes, it was now shining and new. The smith could find no sign to indicate
that it was not all one single piece, now, for the seams were joined invisibly.
"Now that's craftsmanship," Donahue admitted. "I'm thinking we'll do a deal of business from now on, the two of us, and there's money in it, too. Ellowan, m'boy, with work like that we can buy up old radiators, remake them, and at a nice little profit for ourselves we can sell them again. You'll be searching no further for labor."
The elf's eyes twinkled at the prospect of long lines of radiators needing to be fixed, and a steady supply of work without the need of searching for it. For the first tune, he realized that industrialization might have its advantages for the worker.
Donahue dug into a box and came out with a little metal figure of a greyhound, molded on a threaded cap. "Now, while I get something else for you, you might be fixing this," he said. " Tis a godsend that you've come to me. . . . Eh, now that I think of it, what brings you here, when I thought it'd be in the old country you worked?"
"That was my home," the elf agreed, twisting the radiator cap in his hands and straightening out the broken threads. "But the people became too poor hi the country, and the cities were filled with coal smoke. And then there was word of a new land across the sea, so we left, such of us as remained, and it was here we stayed until the smoke came again, and sent us sleeping into the hills. Eh, it's glad I am now to be awake again."
Donahue nodded. "And it's not sorry I am. I'm a good blacksmith, but there's never enough of that for a man to live now, and mostly I work on the autos. And there, m'boy, you'll be a wonderful help to be sure. The parts I like least are the ignition system and generator, and there's copper in them where your skill will be greater than mine. And the radiators, of course."
Ellowan's hands fumbled on the metal, and he set it down suddenly. "Those radiators, now-they come from a car?"
"That they do." Donahue's back was turned as he drew a horseshoe out of the forge and began hammering it on the anvil. He could not see the twinkle fade from
the elf's eyes and the slowness with which the small fingers picked up the radiator cap.
Ellowan was thinking of his people, asleep in the hills, doomed to lie there until the air should be cleared of the poisonous fumes. And here he was, working on parts of the machines that helped to make those fumes. Yet, since there was little enough else to do, he had no choice but to keep on; cars or no cars, food was still the . prime necessity.
Donahue bent the end of a shoe over to a calk and hammered it into shape, even with the other one. "You'll be wanting a place to sleep?" he asked casually. "Well, now, I've a room at the house that used to be my boy's, and it'll just suit you. The boy's at college and won't be needing it."
"Thank'ee kindly." Ellowan finished the cap and put it aside distastefully. "The boy'll be a great engineer some day," the smith went on with a glow of

pride. "And not have to follow his father in the trade. And it's a good thing, I'm thinking. Because some day, when they've used up all their coal and oil, there'll be no money in the business at all, even with the help of these newfangled things. My father was a smith, and I'm by way of being smith and mechanic-but not the boy."
"They'll use up all the coal and oil-entirely?"
"They will that, now. Nobody knows when, but the day's acoming. And then they'll be using electricity or maybe alcohol for fuel. It's a changing world, lad, and we old ones can't change to keep with it."
Ellowan picked up the radiator cap and polished it again. Eh, so. One day they'd use up all the sources of evil, and the air would be pure again. The more cars that ran, the sooner that day would come, and the more he repaired, the more would run.
"Eh, now," he said gayly. "I'll be glad for more of those radiators to mend. But until then, perchance I could work a bit of yonder scrap brass into more such ornaments as this one."
Somehow, he was sure, when his people came forth again, there'd be work for all.
Hereafter, Inc.
PHINEAS THEOPHILUS POTTS, who would have been the last to admit and the first to believe he was a godly man, creaked over in bed and stuck out one scrawny arm wrathfully. The raucous jangling of the alarm was an unusually painful cancer in his soul that morning. Then his waking mind took over and he checked his hand, bringing it down on the alarm button with precise, but gentle, firmness. Would he never learn to control these little angers? In this world one should bear all troubles with uncomplaining meekness, not rebel against them; otherwise- But it was too early in the morning to think of that.
He wriggled out of bed and gave his thoughts over to the ritual of remembering yesterday's sins, checking to make sure all had been covered and wiped out the night before. That's when he got his first shock; he couldn't remember anything about the day before-bad, very bad. Well, no doubt it was another trap of the forces conspiring to secure Potts' soul. Teh, tch. Terrible, but he could circumvent even that snare.
There was no mere mumbling by habit to his confession; word after word rolled off his tongue carefully with full knowledge and unctuous shame until he reached the concluding lines. "For the manifold sins which I have committed and for this greater sin which
now afflicts me, forgive and guide me to sin no more, but preserve me in righteousness all the days of my life. Amen." Thus having avoided the pitfall and saved himself again from eternal combustion, he scrubbed hands with himself and began climbing into his scratchy underclothes and cheap black suit. Then he indulged in a breakfast of dry toast and buttermilk flavored with self-denial and was ready to fare forth into the world of ' temptation around him.
The telephone jangled against his nerves and he jumped, grabbing for it impatiently before he remembered; he addressed the mouthpiece contritely.
"Phineas Potts speaking."
It was Mr. Sloane, his lusty animal voice barking out from the receiver. "
'Lo, Phin, they told me you're ready to come down to work today. Business is booming and we can use you. How about it?"
"Certainly, Mr. Sloane. I'm not one to shirk my duty." There was no reason for the call that Potts could see; he hadn't missed a day in twelve years. "You know-"
"Sure, okay. That's fine. Just wanted to warn you that we've moved. You'll see the name plate right across the street when you come out-swell place, too. Sure you can make it all right?"
"I shall be there in ten minutes, Mr. Sloane," Phineas assured him, and

remembered in time to hang up without displaying distaste. Tch, poor Sloane, wallowing in sin and ignorant of the doom that awaited him. Why, the last time Phineas had chided his employer-mildly, too-Sloane had actually laughed at him! Dear. Well, no doubt he incurred grace by trying to save the poor lost soul, even though his efforts seemed futile. Of course, there was danger in consorting with such people, but no doubt his sacrifices would be duly recorded.

There was a new elevator boy, apparently, when he came out of his room. He sniffed pointedly at the smoke from the boy's cigarette; the boy twitched his lips, but did not throw it away.

"Okay, bub," he grunted as the doors clanked shut,
grating across Phineas' nerves, "I don't like it no bet-ter'n you will, but here We are."

Bub! Phineas glared at the shoulders turned to him and shuddered. He'd see Mrs. Biddle about this later.

Suppressing his feelings with some effort, he headed across the lobby, scarcely noting it, and stepped out onto the street. Then he stopped. That was the second jolt. He swallowed twice, opened his eyes and lifted them for the first time in weeks, and looked again. It hadn't changed. Where there should have been a little twisted side street near the tenements, he saw instead a broad gleaming thoroughfare, busy with people and bright in warm golden sunshine. Opposite, the ugly stores were replaced with bright, new office buildings, and the elevated tracks were completely missing. He swung slowly about, clutching his umbrella for support as he faced the hotel; it was still a hotel-but not his- definitely not his. Nor was the lobby the same. He fumbled back into it, shaken and bewildered.

The girl at the desk smiled up at him out of dancing eyes, and she certainly wasn't the manager. Nor would prim Mrs. Biddle, who went to his church, have hired this brazen little thing; both her lips and fingernails were bright crimson, to begin with, and beyond that he preferred not to go.

The brazen little thing smiled again, as if glorying in her obvious idolatry. "Forget something, Mr. Potts?"

"I . . . uh . . ; no. That is ... you know who I am?"

She nodded brightly. "Yes indeed, Mr. Potts. You moved in yesterday. Room 408. Is everything satisfactory?"

Phineas half nodded, gulped, and stumbled out again. Moved in? He couldn't recall it. Why should he leave Mrs. Biddle's? And 408 was his old room number; the room was identical with the one he had lived in, even to the gray streak on the wallpaper that had bothered his eyes for years. Something was horribly wrong-first the lack of memory, then Sloane's peculiar call, now this. He was too upset even to realize that this was probably another temptation set before him.

Mechanically, Phineas spied Sloane's name plate on one of the new buildings and crossed over into it. "Morning, Mr. Potts," said the elevator boy, and Phineas jumped. He'd never seen this person before, either. "Fourth floor, Mr. Potts. Mr. Sloane's office is just two doors down."

Phineas followed the directions automatically, found the door marked G. R. SLOANE-ARCHITECT, and pushed1 into a huge room filled with the almost unbearable clatter of typewriters and Comptometers, the buzz of voices, and the jarring thump of an addressing machine. But this morning the familiarity of the sound seemed like a haven out of the wilderness until he looked around. Not only had Sloane moved, but he'd apparently also expanded and changed most of his office force. Only old Callahan was left, and Callahan- Strange, he felt sure Callahan had retired or something the year before. Oh, well, that was the least of his puzzles.

Callahan seemed to sense his stare, for he jumped up and brought a hamlike fist down on Phineas' back, almost knocking out the ill-fitting false teeth.

"Phin Potts, you old doom-monger! Welcome back!" He thumped again and Potts coughed, trying to reach the spot and rub out the sting. Not only did Callahan have to be an atheist-an argumentative one-but he had to indulge in this gross horseplay. Why hadn't the man stayed properly retired?
"Mr. Sloane?" he managed to gurgle.
Sloane himself answered, his rugged face split in a grin. "Hi, Phin. Let him alone, Callahan. Another thump like that and I'll have to hire a new draftsman. Come on, Phin, there's the devil's own amount of work piled up for you now that you're back from your little illness." He led him around a bunch of tables where bright-painted hussies were busily typing, down a hall, and into the drafting room, exchanging words with others that made Phineas wince. Really, his language seemed to grow worse each day.
"Mr. Sloane, would you please-"
"Mind not using such language," Sloane finished, and grinned. "Phin, I can't help it. I feel too good. Business is terrific and I've got the world by the tail. How do you feel?"
"Very well, thank you." Phineas fumbled and caught the thread of former conversation that had been bothering him. "You said something about-illness?"
"Think nothing of it. After working for me twelve years, I'm not going to dock your pay for a mere month's absence. Kind of a shame you had to be off just when I needed you, but such things will happen, so we'll just forget it, eh?" He brushed aside the other's muttered attempt at questioning and dug into the plans. "Here, better start on this-you'll notice some changes, but it's a lot like what we used to do; something like the Oswego we built in '37. Only thing that'll give you trouble is the new steel they put out now, but you can follow specifications on that."
Phineas picked up the specifications, ran them over, and blinked. This would never do; much as he loathed the work, he was an excellent draftsman, and he knew enough of general structural design to know this would never do. "But, two-inch I-beams here-"
" 'Sail right, Phin, structural strength is about twelve times what you're used to. Makes some really nice designing possible, too. Just follow the things like I said, and I'll go over it all later. Things changed a little while you were delirious. But I'm in a devil of a rush right flow. See you." He stuck his body through the door, thrust his head back inside and cocked an eyebrow. "Lunch? Need somebody to show you around, I guess."
"As you wish, Mr. Sloane," agreed Phineas. "But would you please mind-"
"Not swearing. Sure, okay. And no religious arguments this time; if I'm damned, I like it." Then he was gone, leaving Phineas alone-he couldn't work with the distraction of others, and always had a room to himself.
So he'd been sick had he, even delirious? Well, that might explain things. Phineas had heard that such things sometimes produced a hiatus in the memory, and
it was a better explanation than nothing. With some relief, he put it out of his mind, remembering only to confess how sinfully he'd lost his trust in divine guidance this morning, shook his head mournfully, and began work with dutiful resignation. Since it had obviously been ordained that he should make his simple living at drafting, draft he would, with no complaints, and there would be no fault to be found with him there.
Then the pen began to scratch. He cleaned and adjusted it, finding nothing wrong, but still it made little grating sounds on the paper, lifting up the raw edges of his nerves. Had Phineas believed in evolution, he'd have said the hair his ancestors had once grown was trying to stand on end, but he had no use for such heretical ideas. Well, he was not one to complain. He unclenched his teeth and sought forbearance and peace within.
Then, outside, the addressograph began to thump again, and he had to force himself not to ruin the lines as his body tried to flinch. Be patient, all

these trials would be rewarded. Finally, he turned to the only anodyne he knew, contemplation of the fate of heretics and sinners. Of course, he was sorry for them roasting eternally and crying for water which they would never get-very sorry for the poor deluded creatures, as any righteous man should be. Yet still they had been given their chance and not made proper use of it, so it was only just. Picturing morbidly the hell of his most dour Puritan ancestors-something very real to him-he almost failed to notice the ache of his bunion where the cheap shoes pinched. But not quite.

Callahan was humming out in the office, and Phineas could just recognize the tune. Once the atheist had come in roaring drunk, and before they'd sent him home, he'd cornered Phineas and sung it through, unex-purgated. Now, hi tune with the humming^ the words insisted in trickling through the suffering little man's mind, and try as he would, they refused to leave. Prayer did no good. Then he added Callahan to the tortured sinners, and that worked better.

"Pencils, shoestrings, razor blades?" The words behind him startled him, and he regained his balance on
the stool with difficulty. Standing just inside the door was a one-legged hunch-back with a handful of cheap articles. "Pencils?" he repeated. "Only a nickel. Help a poor cripple?" But the grin on his face belied the words.

"Indeed no, no pencils." Phineas shuddered as the fellow hobbled over to a window and rid himself of a chew of tobacco. "Why don't you try the charities? Furthermore, we don't allow beggars here."

"Ain't none," the fellow answered with ambiguous cheerfulness, stuffing in a new bite.

"Then have faith in the Lord and He will provide." Naturally, man had been destined to toil through the days of his life in this mortal sphere, and toil he must to achieve salvation. He had no intention of ruining this uncouth person's small chance to be saved by keeping him in idleness.

The beggar nodded and touched his cap. "One of them, eh? Too bad. Well, keep your chin up, maybe it'll be better later." Then he went off down the hall, whistling, leaving Phineas to puzzle over his words and -give it up as a bad job.

Potts rubbed his bunion tenderly, then desisted, realizing that pain was only a test, and should be borne meekly. The pen still scratched, the addressing machine thumped, and a bee had buzzed in somehow and went zipping about. It was a large and active bee.

Phineas cowered down and made himself work, sweating a little as the bee lighted on his drafting board. Then, mercifully, it flew away and for a few minutes he couldn't hear it. When it began again, it was behind him. He started to turn his head, then decided against it; the bee might take the motion as an act of aggression, and declare war. His hands on the pen were moist and clammy, and his fingers ached from gripping it too tightly, but somehow, he forced himself to go on working.

The bee was evidently in no hurry to leave. It flashed by his nose, buzzing, making him jerk back and spatter a blob of ink into the plans, then went zooming around his head and settled on his bald spot. Phineas held his breath and the bee stood pat. Ten, twenty, thirty seconds. His breath went out suddenly with a rush. The insect gave a brief buzz, evidently deciding the noise was harmless, and began strolling down over his forehead and out onto his nose. It tickled; the inside of his nose tickled, sympathetically.

"No, no," Phineas whispered desperately. "N- AcheeOOl EEOW!" He grabbed for his nose and' jerked violently, bumping his shins against the desk and splashing more ink on the plans. "Damn, oh, da-"

It was unbelievable; it couldn't be true! His own mouth had betrayed him! With shocked and leaden fingers he released the pen and bowed his head, but no sense of saving grace would come. Too well he could remember that even the smallest sin deserves just damnation. Now he was really sweating, and the

visions of eternal torment came trooping back; but this time he was in Callahan's place, and try as he would, he couldn't switch. He was doomed!
Callahan found him in that position a minute later, and his rough, mocking laugh cut into Phineas' wounded soul. "Sure, an angel as I live and breathe." He dumped some papers onto the desk and gave another backbreaking thump. "Got the first sheets done, Phin?"
Miserably, Phineas shook his head, glancing at the clock. They should have been ready an hour ago. Another sin was piled upon his burden, beyond all hope of redemption, and of all people, Callahan had caught him not working when he was already behind. But the old Irishman didn't seem to be gloating.
"There now, don't take it so hard, Phin. Nobody expects you to work like a horse when you've been sick. Mr. Sloane wants you to come out to lunch with him now."
"I-uh-" Words wouldn't come.
Callahan thumped him on the back again, this time lightly enough to rattle only two ribs. "Go along with you. What's left is beginner's stuff and I'll finish it while you're eating. I'm ahead and got nothing to do, anyhow. Go on." He practically picked the smaller man off the
stool and shoved him through the door. "Sloane's waiting. Heck, I'll be glad to do it. Feel so good I can't find enough to keep me busy."
Sloane was flirting with one of the typists as Phineas plodded up, but he wound up that business with a wink and grabbed for his hat. " 'Smatter, Phin? You look all in. Bad bruise on your nose, too. Well, a good lunch'll fix up the first part, at least. Best damned food you ever ate, and right around the corner."
"Yes, Mr. Sloane, but would you . . . uh!" He couldn't ask that now. He himself was a sinner, given to violent language. Glumly he followed the other out and into the corner restaurant. Then, as he settled into the seat, he realized he couldn't eat; first among his penances should be giving up lunches.
"I ... uh ... don't feel very hungry, Mr. Sloane. I'll just have a cup of tea, I think." The odors of the food in the clean little restaurant that brought twinges to his stomach would only make his penance that much greater.
But Sloane was ordering for two. "Same as usual, honey, and you might as well bring a second for my friend here." He turned to Phineas. "Trouble with you, Phin, is that you don't eat enough. Wait'11 you get a whiff of the ham they serve here-and the pie! Starting, now, you're eating right if I have to stuff it down you. Ah!"
Service was prompt, and the plates began to appear before the little man's eyes. He could feel his mouth watering, and had to swallow to protest. Then the look in Sloane's eye made him decide not to. Well, at least he could fast morning and night instead. He nodded to himself glumly, wishing his craven appetite wouldn't insist on deriving so much pleasure from the food.
"And so," Sloane's voice broke in on his consciousness again, "after this, you're either going to promise me you'll eat three good meals a day or I'll come around and stuff it down you. Hear?"
"Yes, Mr. Sloane, but-"
"Good. I'm taking that as a promise." Phineas cringed. He hadn't meant it that way; it couldn't go through as a promise. "But-"
"No buts about it. Down there I figured you had as good a chance of being right as I did, so I didn't open my mouth on the subject. But up here, that's done with. No reason why you can't enjoy life now."
That was too much. "Life," said Phineas, laying' down his knife and preparing for siege, "was meant to give us a chance to prepare for the life to come, not to be squandered in wanton pleasure. Surely it's better to suffer through a few brief years, resisting temptations, than to be forever damned to perdition. And would you sacrifice heaven for mere mundane cravings, transient

and worthless?"
"Stow it, Phin. Doesn't seem to me I sacrificed much to get here." Then, at Phineas' bewildered look. "Don't tell me you don't realize where you are? They told me they were sending a boy with the message; well, I guess he just missed you. You're dead, Phin! This is heaven! We don't talk much about it, but that's the way it is!" "No!" The world was rolling in circles under Phineas' seat. He stared uncomprehendingly at Sloane, finding no slightest sign of mockery on the man's face. And there was the hole in the memory of sins, and the changes, and-Callahan! Why, Callahan had died and been buried the year before; and here he was, looking ten years younger, and hearty as ever. But it was all illusion; of course, it was all illusion. Callahan wouldn't be in heaven. "No, it can't be."
"But it is, Phin. Remember? I was down your way to get you for overtime work, and yelled at you just as you came out of your house. Then you started to cross, I yelled again-Come back now?"
There'd been a screeching of tires, Sloane running toward him suddenly waving frantically, and-blackout! "Then it hit? And this . . . is-"
"Uh-huh. Seems they picked me up with a shovel, but it took a month to finish you off." Sloane dug into the pie, rolling it on his tongue and grinning. "And this
is Hereafter. A darned good one, too, even if nobody meets you at the gate to say 'Welcome to Heaven.' " •
Phineas clutched'at the straw. "They didn't tell you it was heaven, then? Oh." That explained everything. Of course, he should have known. This wasn't heaven after all; it couldn't be. And though it differed from his conceptions, it most certainly could be the other place; there'd been that bee! Teh, it was just like Callahan and Sloane to enjoy perdition, misguided sinners, glorying in their unholiness.
Slowly the world righted itself, and Phineas Potts regained his normal state. To be sure, he'd used an ugly word, but what could be expected of him in this vile place? They'd never hold it against him under the circumstances. He lowered his eyes thankfully, paying no attention to Sloane's idle remarks about unfortunates. Now if he could just find the authorities of this place and get the mistake straightened out, all might yet be well. He had always done his best to be righteous. Perhaps a slight delay, but not long; and then-no Callahan, no Sloane, no drafting, or bees, or grating noises!
He drew himself up and looked across at Sloane, sadly, but justly doomed to this strange Gehenna. "Mr. Sloane," he asked firmly, "is there some place here where I can find ... uh ... authorities to ... umm-"
"You mean you want to register a complaint? Why sure, a big white building about six blocks down; Adjustment and Appointment office." Sloane studied him thoroughly. "Darned if you don't look like you had a raw deal about something, at that. Look, Phin, they made mistakes sometimes, of course, but if they've handed you the little end, we'll go right down there and get it put right."
Phineas shook his head quickly. The proper attitude, no doubt was to leave Sloane in ignorance of the truth as long as possible, and that meant he'd have to go alone. "Thank you, Mr. Sloane, but I'll go by myself, if you don't mind. And ... uh ... if I don't come back . . . uh-"
"Sure, take the whole afternoon off. Hey, wait, aren't you gonna finish lunch?"
But Ph'ineas Potts was gone, his creaking legs carrying him out into the mellow noon sunlight and toward the towering white building that must be his destination. The fate of a man's soul is nothing to dally over, and he wasn't dallying. He tucked his umbrella close under his arm to avoid contact with the host of the damned, shuddering at the thought of mingling with them. Still, undoubtedly this torture would be added to the list of others, and his reward be made that much greater. Then he was at the Office of Administration,

Appointments, and Adjustments.
There was another painted Jezebel at .the desk marked INFORMATION, and he headed there, barely collecting his thoughts in time to avoid disgraceful excitement. She grinned at him and actually winked! "Mr. Potts, isn't it? Oh, I'm so sorry you left before our messenger arrived. But if there's something we can do now-"
"There is," he told her firmly, though not too unkindly; after all, her punishment was ample without his anger. "I wish to see an authority here. I have a complaint; a most grievous complaint."
"Oh, that's too bad, Mr. Potts. But if you'll see Mr. Alexander, down the hall, third door left, I'm sure he can adjust it."
He waited no longer, but hurried where she pointed. As he approached, the third door opened and a dignified-looking man in a gray business suit stepped to it. The man held out a hand instantly. "I'm Mr. Alexander. Come in, won't you? Katy said you had a complaint. Sit right over there, Mr. Potts. Ah, so. Now^if you'll tell me about it, I think we can straighten it all out."
Phineas told him-in detail. "And so," he concluded firmly-quite firmly, "I feel I've been done a grave injustice, Mr. Alexander. I'm positive my destination should have been the other place."
"The other place?" Alexander seemed surprised.
"Exactly so. Heaven, to be more precise."
Alexander nodded thoughtfully. "Quite so, Mr. Potts.
Only I'm afraid there's been a little misunderstanding. You see ... ah ... this is heaven. Still, I can see you don't believe me yet, so we've failed to place you properly. We really want to make people happy here, you know. So, if you'll just tell me what you find wrong, we'll do what we can to rectify it."
"Oh." Phineas considered. This might be a trick, of course, but still, if they could make him happy here, give him his due reward for the years filled with temptation resisted and noble suffering in meekness and humility, there seemed nothing wrong with it. Possibly, it came to him, there were varying degrees of blessedness, and even such creatures as Callahan and his ilk were granted the lower ones-though it didn't seem quite just. But certainly his level wasn't Callahan's.
"Very well," he decided. "First, I find myself living in that room with the gray streak on the wallpaper, sir, and for years I've loathed it; and the alarm and telephone; and-"
Alexander smiled. "One at a time please. Now, about the room. I really felt we'd done a masterly job on that, you know. Isn't it exactly like your room on the former level of life? Ah, I see it is. And didn't you choose and furnish that room yourself?"
"Yes, but-"
"Ah, then we were right. Naturally, Mr. Potts, we assumed that since it was of your own former creation, it was best suited to you. And besides, you need the alarm and telephone to keep you on time and in contact with your work, you know."
"But I loathe drafting!" Phineas glanced at this demon who was trying to trap him, expecting it to wilt to its true form. It didn't. Instead, the thing that was Mr. Alexander shook its head slowly and sighed.
"Now that is a pity; and we were so pleased to find we could even give you the same employer as before. Really, we felt you'd be happier under him than a stranger. However, if you don't like it, I suppose we could change. What other kind of work would you like?"
Now that was more like it, and perhaps he had even misjudged Alexander. Work was something Phineas hadn't expected, but-yes, that would be nice, if it could be arranged here. "I felt once I was called," he suggested.
"Minister, you mean? Now that's fine. Never get too many of them, Mr. Potts. Wonderful men, do wonderful work here. They really add enormously to the

happiness' of our Hereafter, you know. Let me see, what experience have you had?" He beamed at Potts, who thawed under it; then he turned to a bookshelf, selected a heavy volume and consulted it. Slowly the beam vanished, and worry took its place.

"Ah, yes, Phineas Theophilus Potts. Yes, entered training 1903. Hmmm. Dismissed after two years of study, due to. a feeling he might . . . might not be quite temperamentally suited to the work and that he was somewhat too fana ... ahem! . . . overly zealous in his criticism of others. Then transferred to his uncle's shop and took up drafting, which was thereafter his life's work. Umm. Really, that's too bad." Alexander turned back to Phineas. "Then, Mr. Potts, I take it you never had any actual experience at this sort of work?"

Phineas squirmed. "No, but-"

"Too bad." Alexander sighed. "Really, I'd like to make things more to your satisfaction, but after all, no experience-afraid it wouldn't do. Tell you what, we don't like to be hasty hi our judgments; if you'll just picture exactly the life you want-no need to describe ft, I'll get it if you merely think it-maybe we can adjust things. Try hard now."

With faint hope, Phineas tried. Alexander's voice droned out at him. "A little harder. No, that's only a negative picture of what you'd like not to do. Ah . . , van, no. I thought for a minute you had something, but it's gone. I think you're trying to picture abstractions, Mr. Potts, and you know one can't do that; I get something very vague, but it makes no sense. There! That's better."

He seemed to listen for a few seconds longer, and

Phineas was convinced now it was all sham; he'd given up trying. What was the use? Vague jumbled thoughts were all he had left, and now Alexander's voice broke in on them.

"Really, Mr. Potts, I'm afraid there's nothing we can do for you. I get a very clear picture now, but it's exactly the life we'd arranged for you, you see. Same room, same work. Apparently that's the only life you know. Of course, if you want to improve we have a great many very fine schools located throughout the city."

Phineas jerked upright, the control over his temper barely on. "You mean-you mean, I've got to go on like that?"

"Afraid so."

"But you distinctly said this was heaven."

"It is."

"And I tell you," Phineas cried, forgetting all about controlling his temper, "that this is hell!"

"Quite so, I never denied it. Now, Mr. Potts, I'd like to discuss this further, but others are waiting, so I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to leave."

Alexander looked up from his papers, and as he' looked, Phineas found himself outside the door, shaken-and sick. The door remained open as the girl called Katy came up, looked at him in surprise, and went in. Then it closed, but still he stood there, unable to move, leaning against the wooden frame for support.

There was a mutter of voices within, and his whirling thoughts seized on them for anchor. Katy's voice first. "-seems to take it terribly hard, Mr. Alexander. Isn't there something we can do?"

Then the low voice of Alexander. "Nothing, Katy. It's up to him now. I suggested the schools, but I'm afraid he's another unfortunate. Probably even now he's out there convincing himself that all this is merely illusion, made to try his soul and test his ability to remain unchanged. If that's the case, well, poor devil, there isn't much we can do, you know."

But Phineas wasn't listening then. He clutched the words he'd heard savagely to his bosom and went stiffly

out and back toward the office of G. R. Sloane across from the little room,

No. 408. Of course he should have known. All this was merely illusion, made to try his soul. Illusion and test, no more.
Let them try him, they would find him humble in his sufferings as always, not complaining, resisting firmly their temptations. Even though Sloane denied him the right to fast, still he would find some other way to do proper penance for his sins; though Callahan broke his back, though a thousand bees attacked him at once, still he would prevail.
"Forgive and guide me to sin no more, but preserve me in righteousness all the days of my life," he repeated, and turned into the building where there was more work and misery waiting for him. Sometime he'd be rewarded. Sometime. Back in his head a small shred of doubt sniggered gleefully.
The Wings of Night
"DAMN ALL MARTIANS!" Fats Welch's thin mouth bit out the words with all the malice of an offended member of a superior race. "Here we are, loaded down with as sweet a high-rate cargo of iridium as ever came out of the asteroids, just barely over the moon, and that injector starts mismetering again. If I ever see that bulbous Marshy-"
"Yeah." Slim Lane groped back with his right hand for the flexible-shaft wrench, found it, and began wriggling and grunting forward into the mess of machinery again. "Yeah. I know. You'll make mince meat out of him. Did you ever figure that maybe you were making your own trouble? That maybe Martians are people after all? Lyro Bmachis told you it would take two days to make the overhaul of the injector control hookup, so you knocked him across the field, called his ancestors dirty dogs, and gave him just eight hours to finish repairs. Now you expect his rush job to be a labor of love for you- Oh, skip it, Fats, and give me the screwdriver."
What was the use? He'd been over it all with Fats a dozen times before, and it never got him anywhere. Fats was a good rocket man, but he couldn't stretch his imagination far enough to forget the hogwash the Reconstruction Empire was dishing out about the Destiny of Man and the Divine Plan whereby humans were created

to exploit all other races. Not that it would do Fats much good if he did. Slim knew the value of idealism- none better.
He'd come out of college with a bad dose of it and an inherited fortune big enough for three men, filled with the old crusading spirit. He'd written and published books, made speeches, interviewed administrators, lobbied, joined and organized societies, and been called things that weren't complimentary. Now he was pushing freight from Mars to Earth for a living, quarter owner of a space-worn freighter. And Fats, who'd come up from a tube cleaner without the help of ideals, owned the other three quarters.
Fats watched him climb out of the hold. "Well?"
"Nothing. I can't fix it-don't know enough about electronics. There's something wrong with the relays that control the time interval, but the indicators don't show where, and I'd hate to experiment out here."
"Make it to Earth-maybe?"
Slim shook his head. "I doubt it, Fats. Better set us down on Luna somewhere, if you can handle her that far. Then maybe we can find out what's wrong before we run out of air."
Fats had figured as much and was already braking (he ship down, working against the spasmodic flutter of die blasts, and swearing at the effects of even the moon's weak gravity. But the screens showed that he was making progress toward the spot he'd chosen-a •mall flat plain with an area in the center that seemed unusually clear of debris and pockmarks.
"Wish they'd at least put up an emergency station out here," he muttered.
"They had one once," Slim said. "But nobody ever goes to Luna, and there's no reason for passenger ships to land there; takes less fuel for them to coast

down on their fins through Earth's atmosphere than to jet down fcere. Freighters like us don't count, anyway. Funny fcow regular and flat that place is; we can't be over a mile up, and I don't see even a meteor scar."
"Luck's with us, then. I'd hate to hit a baby crater
and rip off a tube or poke a hole in the shell." Fats glanced at the radio altimeter and fall indicator. "We're gonna hit plenty hard. If- Hey, what the deuce!"
Slim's eyes flicked to the screen just in time to see the flat plain split into two halves and slide smoothly out from under them as they seemed about to touch it; then they were dropping slowly into a crater of some sort, seemingly bottomless and widening out rapidly; the roar of the tubes picked up suddenly. Above them, the over-screens showed a pair of translucent slides closing together again. His eyes stared at the height indicator, neither believing nor doubting.
"Hundred and sixty miles down and trapped in! Tube sounds show air in some amount, at least, even up here. This crazy trap can't be here. There's no reason for it."
"Right now, who cares? We can't go through that slide up there again, so we go down and find out, T guess. Damn, no telling what kind of landing field we'll find when we reach bottom." Fats' lack of excess imagination came in handy in cases like this. He went about the business of jockeying down the enormous crater as if he were docking at York port, too busy with the uncertain blast to worry about what he might find at the bottom. Slim gazed at him in wonder, then fell back to staring at the screen for some indication of the reason behind this obviously artificial trap.
Lhin scratched idly through the pile of dirt and rotten shale, pried a thin scrap of reddened stone out from where his eyes had missed it the first time, and rose slowly to his feet. The Great Ones had been good to him, sending a rockslide just when the old beds were wearing thin and poor from repeated digging. His sensitive nostrils told him there was magnesium, ferrous matter, and sulphur in abundance, all more than welcome. Of course, he'd hoped there might be copper, even as little as the end of his finger, but of that there seemed to be no sign. And without copper-
He shrugged the thought aside as he had done a thousand times before, and picked up his crude basket,
now filled half with broken rock and half with the li-chenlike growth that filled this end of the crater. One of his hands ground a bit of rottenstone together with shreds of lichen and he popped the mixture into his mouth. Grace to the Great Ones who had sent the slide; the pleasant flavor of magnesium tickled his tongue, and the lichens were full-flavored from the new richness of the soil around them. Now, with a trace of copper,' there would have been nothing left to wish for.
With a rueful twitch of his supple tail, Lhin grunted and turned back toward his cave, casting a cursory glance up at the roof of the cavern. Up there, long miles away, a bright glare lanced down, diffusing out as it pierced through the layers of air, showing that the long lunar day was nearing noon, when the sun would lance down directly through the small guarding gate. It was too high to see, but he knew of the covered opening where the sloping walls of the huge valley ended and the roof began. Through all the millennia of his race's slow defeat, that great roof had stood, unsupported except for the walls that stretched out around in a circle of perhaps fifty miles in diameter, strong and more lasting than even the crater itself; the one abiding monument to the greatness that had been his people's.
He knew without having to think of it that the roof was artificial, built when the last thin air was deserting the moon, and the race had sought a final refuge here in the deepest crater, where oxygen could be trapped and kept from leaking away. In a vague way, he could sense the ages that had passed since

then and wonder at the permanence of the domed roof, proof against all time. Once, as the whole space about him testified, his had been a mighty race. But time had worked on them, aging the race as it had individuals, removing the vigor of their youth and sending in the slow creepers of hopelessness. What good was existence here, cooped up in one small colony, away from their world? Their numbers had diminished and some of their skill had gone from them. Their machines had crumbled and vanished, unreplaced, and they had fallen back to the primitive, digging out the rocks of the crater walls and the lichens they had cultured to draw energy from the heat and radioactive phosphorescence of the valley instead of sunlight. Fewer young were planted each year, and of the few, a smaller percentage proved fertile, so that their original million fell to thousands, then to hundreds, and finally to a few grubbing individuals.

Only then had they awakened to the danger of extinction, to find it too late. There had been three elders when Lhin was grown, his seed being the only fertile one. Now the elders were gone long years since, and Lhin had the-entire length and breadth of the crater to . himself. And life was a long series of sleeps and food forages, relieved only by the same thoughts that had been , in his mind while his dead world turned to the light and away more than a thousand times. Monotony had slowly killed off his race, but now that its work was nearly done, it" had ended. Lhin was content with his type of life; he was habituated, and immune to boredom.

His feet had been moving slowly along with the turning of his thoughts, and he was out of the valley proper, near the door of the shelter carved into the rocky walls which he had chosen from the many as his home. He munched another mouthful of rock and lichen and let the diffused sunlight shine on him for a few minutes more, then turned into the cave. He needed no light, since the rock walls about had all been rendered radioactive in the dim youth of his race, and his eyes were adapted to wide ranges of light conditions. He passed quickly through the outer room, containing his woven lichen bed and few simple furnishings, and back into the combination nursery and workshop, an illogical but ever-present hope drawing him back to the far corner.

But as always, it was reasonless. The box of rich earth, pulped to a fine loam and watered carefully, was barren of life. There was not even the beginning of a small red shoot to awaken him to hope for the future. His seed was infertile, and the time when all life would be extinct was growing near. Bitterly he turned his back on the nursery bed.

So little lacking, yet so much! A few hundred molecules of copper salt to eat, and the seeds he grew would
be fertile; or those same copper molecules added to the water would render the present seeds capable of growing into vigorous manhood-or womanhood; Lhin's people carried both male and female elements within each member, and could grow the seeds that became their children either alone or with another. So long as one member of the race lived, as many as a hundred young a year could be reared in the carefully tended incubating soil-if the vital hormone containing copper could be made.

But that, it seemed, was not to be. Lhin went over his laboriously constructed apparatus of hand-cut rock bowls and slender rods bound together into tubes, and his hearts were heavy within him. The slow fire of dried lichen and gummy tar burned still, and slowly, drop by drop, liquid oozed from the last tube into a bowl. But even in that there was no slightest odor of copper salts. Well, he had tried that and failed. The accumulation of years of refining had gone into the water that kept the nursery soil damp, and in it there had been too little of the needed mineral for life. Almost dispassionately he threw the permanent metal rolls of his race's science back into their cylinders and began disassembling the chemical part of his workshop.

That meant the other solution, harder, and filled with risks, but necessary

now. Somewhere up near the roof, the records indicated, there was copper in small amounts, but well past the breathable concentration of air. That meant a helmet and tanks for compressed air, along with hooks and grapples to bridge the eroded sections of the old trail and steps leading up, instruments to detect the copper, and a pump to fill the tanks. Then he must carry tanks forward, cache them, and go up to make another cache, step by step, until his supply line would reach the top and-perhaps-he could find copper for a new beginning.

He deliberately avoided thinking of the tune required and the chances of failure. His foot came down on the little bellows and blue flames licked up from his crude forge as he drew out the hunks of refined metal and began heating them to malleability. Even the shaping of it by hand to the patterns of the ancient records was almost impossible, and yet, somehow, he must accomplish it correctly. His race must not die!

He was still working doggedly hours later when a high-pitched note shot through the cave. A meteor, coming into the fields around the sealing slides of the roof, and a large one! In all Lhin's life there had been none big enough to activate the warning screens, and he had doubted that the mechanism, though meant to be ageless and draw sun power until the sun died, was still functioning. As he stood staring at the door senselessly, the whistling note came again.

Now, unless he pressed his hand over the inductance grid, the automatic forces would come into play, twisting the meteor aside and beyond the roof. But he gave no thought to that as he dashed forward and slapped his fingers against the grille panel. It was for that he had chosen his rock house, once the quarters of the Watchers who let the few scouting rockets of the dim past ages in and out. A small glow from the grid indicated the meteor was through, and he dropped his hand, letting the slides close again.

Then he waited impatiently for it to strike, moving out to the entrance. Perhaps the Great Ones were kind and were answering his prayers at last. Since he could find no copper here, they were sending a token from outer space to him, and who knew what fabulous amounts it might contain-perhaps even as much as he could hold in one hand! But why hadn't it struck? He scanned the roof anxiously, numb with a fear that he had been too late and the forces had thrown it aside.

No, there was a flare above-but surely not such as a meteor that size should make as it sliced down through the resisting air! A sharp stinging whine hit his ears finally, flickering off and on; and that was not the sound a meteor would logically make. He stared harder, wondering, and saw that it was settling downward slowly, not in a sudden rush, and that the flare struck down instead of fading out behind. That meant-could only mean-intelligent control. A rocket!

Lhin's mind spun under the shock, and crazy ideas of his ancestors' return, of another unknown refuge, of the Great Ones' personal visit slid into his thoughts. Basically, though, he was severely logical, and one by one he rejected them. This machine could not come from the barren moon, and that left only the fabled planet lying under the bottom of his world, or those that wandered around the sun in other orbits. Intelligence there?

His mind slid over the records he had read, made when his ancestors had crossed space to those worlds, long before the refuge was built. They had been unable to colonize, due to the oppressive pull of gravity, but they had observed in detail. On the second planet were only squamous things that slid through the water and curious fronds on the little dry land; on his own primary, gigantic beasts covered the globe, along with growth rooted to the ground. No intelligence on those worlds. The fourth, though, was peopled by more familiar life, and like his own evolutionary forerunners, there was no division into animal and vegetable, but both were present in all. Ball-shaped

blobs of life had already formed into packs, guided by instinct, with no means of communication. Yet, of the other worlds known, that seemed the most probable as a source of intelligence. If, by some miracle, they came from the third, he abandoned hope; the blood lust of that world was too plainly written in the records, where living mountainh'ke beasts tore at others through all the rolls of etched pictures. Half filled with dread, half with anticipation, he heard the ship land somewhere near, and started toward it, his tail curved tightly behind him.

He knew, as he caught sight of the two creatures outside the opened lock of the vessel that his guess had been wrong. The creatures were bifurcate, like himself, though massive and much larger, and that meant the third world. He hesitated, watching carefully as they stared about, apparently keenly enjoying the air around them. Then one spoke to the other, and his mind shook under a new shock.

The articulation and intonation were intelligent, but
the sounds were a meaningless babble. Speech-that! It must be, though the words held no meaning. Wait-in the old records-Slha the Freethinker had touched on some such thought; he had written of remote days when the Lunarites had .had no speech and postulated that they had invented the sounds and given them arbitrary meaning, and that only by slow ages of use had they become instinctive in the new-grown infants-had even dared to question that the Great Ones had ordered speech and sound meanings as the inevitable complement of intelligence. And now, it seemed, he was right. Lhin groped up through the fog of his discovery and tightened his thoughts into a beam.

Again, shock struck at him. Their minds were hard to reach, and once he did find the key and grope forward into their thoughts, it was apparent that they could not read his! Yet they were intelligent. But the one on whom his thoughts centered noticed him finally, and grabbed at the other. The words were still harsh and senseless, but the general meaning reached the moon man.

"Fats, what's that?"

The other turned and stared at Lhin's approach. "Search me. Looks like a scrawny three-foot monkey. Reckon it's harmless?"

"Probably, maybe even intelligent. It's a cinch no band of political refugees built this place-nonhuman construction. Hi there!" The one who thought of himself as Slim-massive though he appeared-turned to the approaching Lunarite. "What and who are you?"

"Lhin," he answered, noting surprised pleasure in Slim's mind. "Lhin-me are Lhin."

Fats grunted. "Guess you're right, Slim. Seems to savvy you. Wonder who came here and taught him English."

Lhin fumbled clumsily, trying to pin down the individual sounds to then' meanings and remember them. "No sahffy Enlhis. No who came here. You-" He ran out of words and drew nearer, making motions toward Slim's head, then his own. Surprisingly, Slim got it.

"He means he knows what we're thinking, I guess. Telepathy."

"Yeah? Marshies claim they can do it among themselves, but I never saw one read a human mind. They claim we don't open up right. Maybe this Ream monkey's lying to you."

"I doubt it. Take another look at the radioactivity meter in the viability tester-men wouldn't come here and go home without spreading the good word. Anyway, his name isn't Ream. Lean comes closer to the sound he made, though we'll never get it right." He half sent a thought to Lhin, who dutifully pronounced his name again. "See? His liquid isn't . . . it's a glottal stop. And he makqb the final consonant a labial, though it sounds something like our dental. We can't make sounds like that. Wonder how intelligent he is."

He turned back into the ship before Lhin could puzzle out some kind of answer, and was out a moment later with a small bundle under his arm. "Space English

code book," he explained to Fats. "Same as they used to teach the Martians English a century ago."
Then to Lhin: "Here are the six hundred most useful words of our language, organized, so it'll beat waiting for you to pick them up bit by bit. You look at the diagrammed pictures while I say and think the word. Now. One-w-uh-nn; two-tuh-ooo. Getting it?"
Fats watched them for a while, half-amused, then grew tired of it. "Okay, Slim, you mollycoddle the native a while and see what you learn. I'm going over to the walls and investigate that radioactive stuff until you're ready to start repairs. Wish radios weren't so darned limited in these freighters and we could get a call through."
He wandered off, but Lhin and Slim were hardly aware of it. They were going through the difficult task of organizing a means of communication, with almost no common background, which should have been worse than impossible in terms of hours. Yet, strange as the word associations and sounds were, and odd as their organization into meaningful groups, they were still only speech, after all. And Lhin had grown into life with a highly complex speech as natural to nun as breathing.
I
He twisted his lips over the sounds and nailed the meanings down in his mind, one by one, indelibly.
Fats finally found them in Lhin's cave, tracing them by the sound of their voices, and sat down to watch, as an adult might watch a child playing with a dog. He bore Lhin no ill will, but neither could he regard the Moon man as anything but some clever animal, like the Martians or the primitives of Venus; if Slim enjoyed treating them as equals, let him have his way for the time.
Lhin was vaguely conscious of those thoughts and others more disturbing, but he was too wrapped up in the new experience of having some living mind to communicate with, after nearly a century of being alone with himself. And there were more important things. He wriggled his tail, spread his arms, and fought over the Earth sounds, while Slim followed as best he could.
Finally the Earth man nodded. "I think I get it. All of them died off except you, and you don't like the idea of coming to a dead end. Umm. I wouldn't either. So now you hope these Great Ones of yours-we call 'em God-have sent us down here to fix things up. How?"
Lhin beamed, his face contorting into a furrowed grimace of pleasure before he realized Slim misinterpreted the gesture. Slim meant well. Once he knew what was needed, perhaps he Would even give the copper gladly, since the old records showed that the third world was richest of all in minerals.
"Nra is needed. Life comes from making many simple things one not-simple thing-air, drink stuff, eat stuff, all that I have, so I live. But to begin the new life, Nra is needed. It makes things begin. The seed has no life-with Nra it lives. But I have no word."
He waited impatiently while Slim digested that. "Sort of a vitamin or hormone, something like Vitamin E6, eh? Maybe we could make it, but-"
Lhin nodded. Surely the Great Ones were kind. His hearty were warm as he thought of the many seeds carefully wrapped and stored that could be made to grow
with the needed copper. And now the Earth man was willing to help. A little longer and all would be well.
"No need to make/' he piped happily. "Simple stuff. The seed or I can make it, in us. But we, need Nra to make it. See." He pulped a handful of rock from the basket lying near, chewed it carefully, and indicated that it was being changed inside him.
Fats awoke to greater attention. "Do that again, monkey!"
Lhin obliged, curious to note that they apparently ate nothing other life had not prepared for them. "Darn. Rocks-just plain rocks-and he eats them. Has he

got a craw like a bird, Slim?"
"He digests them. If you've read of those half-plant, half-animal things the Martians came from, you'll know what his metabolism's like. Look, Lhin, I take it you mean an element. Sodium, calcium, chlorine? No, I guess you'd have all those. Iodine, maybe? Hmmm." He went over a couple of dozen he could imagine having anything to do with life, but copper was not among them, by accident, and a slow fear crept up into the Lunarite's thoughts. This strange barrier to communication-would it ruin all?
He groped for the answer-and relaxed. Of course, though no common word existed, the element itself was common in structure. Hurriedly, he flipped the pages of the code book to a blank one and reached for the Earth man's pencil. Then, as Slim and Fats stared curiously, he began sketching in the atomic structure of copper, particle by particle, from the center out, as the master physicists of his race had discovered it to be.
It meant nothing to them. Slim handed the paper back, shaking his head. "Fella, if I'm right in thinking that's a picture of some atom, we've got a lot to learn back on earth. Wheeoof
Fats twistecf his lips. "If that's an atom, I'm a fried egg. Come on, Slim, it's sleepy time and you've fooled away half a day. Anyhow, I want to talk that radioactive business over with you. It's so strong it'd cook us in half an hour if we weren't wearing these portable nulli-
fiers-yet the monkey seems to thrive on it.-I got an idea."
Slim came back from his brown study and stared at his watch. "Darn it! Look, Lhin, don't give up yet, we'll talk all this over tomorrow again. But Fats is right; it's time for us to sleep. So long, fella."
Lhin nodded a temporary farewell in his own tongue and slumped back on his rough bed. Outside, he heard Fats extolling a scheme of some kind for getting out the radioactives with Lhin's help, somehow, and Slim's protesting voice. But he paid no attention. The atomic structure had been right, he knew, but they were only groping toward it in their science, and their minds knew too little of the subject to enable them to grasp his pictures.
Chemical formulae? Reactions that would eliminate others, one by one? If they were chemists, perhaps, but even Slim knew too little for that. Yet, obviously,, unless there was no copper on Earth, there was an answer somewhere. Surely the Great Ones whom they called God would never answer generations of faithful prayer with a mockery! There was an answer, and while they slept, he would find it, though he had to search through every record roll for clues.
Hours later he was trudging across the plain toward the ship, hope high again. The answer, once found, was simple. All elements formed themselves into families and classes. Slim had mentioned sodium, and copper was related in the more primitive tables, such as Earth might use. More important, its atomic number was twenty-nine by theory elementary enough for any race that could build rockets.
The locks were open, and he slipped through both, the wavering half-formed thoughts of the men leading him to them unerringly. Once hi their presence, he stopped, wondering about their habits. Already he had learned that what held true for his people was not necessarily the rule with them, and they might not approve of his arousing a sleeper. Finally, torn between politeness and impatience, he squatted on the metal floor,
clutching the record roll, his nostrils sampling the metals around him. Copper was not there; but he hadn't expected so rare an element, though there were others here that he failed completely to recognize and guessed were among the heavy ones almost lacking on the moon.
Fats gurgled and scrimmaged around with his arms, yawned, sat up, still half asleep. His thoughts were full of some Earth person of the female element which Lhin had noted was missing in these two, and what he'd do "when he got

rich." Lhin was highly interested in the thought pictures until he realized that it would be best not to intrude on these obviously secret things. He withdrew his mind just as the man noted him.
Fats was never at his best while waking up. He came to his feet with a bellow and grabbed for something. "Why, you sneaking little monkey! Trying to slip up and cut our-"
Lhin squealed and avoided the blow that would have left him a shapeless blob, uncertain of how he had offended, but warned by caution to leave. Physical fear was impossible to him-too many generations had grown and died with no need of it. But it came as a numbing shock that these beings would actually kill another intelligent person. Was life so cheap on Earth?
"Hey! Hey, Fats, stop it!" Slim had awakened at the sound of the commotion, and a hasty glance showed Lhin that he was holding the other's arms. "Lay off, will you? What's going on?"
But now Fats was fully awake and calming down. He dropped the metal bar and grinned wryly. "I dunno. I gsess he meant all right, but he was sitting there with that metal thing in his hands, staring at me, and I figured he meant to cut my throat or something. I'm all right now. Come on back, monkey; it's all right."
Slim let his partner go and nodded at Lhin. "Sure, come back, fella. Fats has some funny ideas about non-humans, but he's a good-hearted egg, on the whole. Be a good doggie and he won't kick you-he might even scratch your ears."
"Nuts." Fats was grinning, good nature restored. He
knew Slim meant it as a crack, but it didn't bother him; what was wrong with treating Marshies and monkeys like what they were? "Whatcha got there, monkey? More pictures that mean nothing?"
Lhirt nodded in imitation of their assent gesture and held out the roll to Slim; Fats' attitude was no longer unfriendly, but he was an unknown quantity, and Slim seemed the more interested. "Pictures that mean much, I hope. Here is Nra, twenty-nine, under sodium."
"Eight column periodic table," Slim told Fats. "At least, it looks like one. Get me the handbook, will you? Ummm. Under sodium, No. 29. Sodium, potassium, copper. And it's No. 29, all right. That it, Lhin?"
Lhin's eyes were blazing with triumph. Grace to the Great Ones. "Yes, it is copper. Perhaps you have some? Even a gram, perhaps?"
"Ten thousand grams, if you like. According to your notions, we're lousy with the stuff. Help yourself."
Fats cut in. "Sure, monkey, we got copper, if that's the stuff you've been yelling about. What'll you pay for it?"
"Pay?"
"Sure, give in return. We help you; you help us. That's fair, isn't it?"
It hadn't occurred to Lhin, but it did seem fair. But what had he to give? And then he realized what was in the man's mind. For the copper, he was to work, digging out and purifying the radioactives that gave warmth and light and life to the crater, so painfully brought into being when the place was first constructed, transmuted to meet the special needs of the people who were to live there. And after him, his sons and their sons, mining and sweating for Earth, and being paid in barely enough copper to keep Earth supplied with laborers. Fats' mind filled again with dreams of the other Earth creature. For that, he would doom a race to life without pride or hope or accomplishment. Lhin found no understanding in it. There were so many of those creatures on Earth-why should his enslavement be necessary? Nor was enslavement all. Eventually, doom was as
certain that way as the other, once Earth was glutted with the radioactives, or when the supply here dropped below the vital point, great as the reserve was. He shuddered under the decision forced upon him.
Slim's hand fell on his shoulder. "Fats has things slightly wrong, Lhin.

Haven't you, Fats?"
There was something in Slim's hand, something Lhin knew dimly was a weapon. The other man squirmed, but his grin remained.
"You're touched, Slim, soft. Maybe you believe all this junk about other races' equality, but you won't kill me for it. I'm standing pat-I'm not giving away my copper."
And suddenly Slim was grinning, too, and putting the weapon back. "Okay, don't. Lhin can have my copper. There's plenty on the ship in forms we can spare, and don't forget I own a quarter of it."
Fats' thoughts contained no answer to that. He mulled it over slowly, then shrugged. Slim was right enough about it, and could do as he wanted with his share. Anyhow- "Okay, have it your way. I'll help you pry it off wherever it is, or dig it out. How about that wire down hi the engine locker?"
Lhin stood silently watching them as they opened a small locker and rummaged through it, studying the engines and controls with half his mind, the other half quivering with ecstasy at the thought of copper-not just a handful, but all he could carry, in pure form, eas-fly turned into digestible sulphate with acids he had already prepared for his former attempt at collecting it. In a year, the crater would be populated again, teeming with life. Perhaps three or four hundred sons left, and as they multiplied, more and yet more.
A detail of the hookup he was studying brought that
t part of his mind uppermost, and he tugged at Slim's
ftrouser leg. "The . . . that ... is not good, is it?"
"Huh? No, it isn't, fella. That's what brought us here.
Why?"
"Then, without radioactives, I can pay. I will fix it."
A momentary doubt struck him. "That is to pay, is it not?"
Fats heaved a coil of wonderful-smelling wire out of the locker, wiped off sweat, and nodded. "That's to pay, all right, but you let those things alone. They're bad enough, already, and maybe even Slim can't fix it."
"I can fix."
"Yeah. What school did you get your degree in electronics from? Two hundred feet in this coil, makes fifty for him. You gonna give it all to him, Slim?"
"Guess so." Slim was looking at Lhin doubtfully, only half-watching as the other measured and cut the wire. "Ever touched anything like that before, Lhin? Controls for the ion feed and injectors are pretty complicated in these ships. What makes you think you can do it-unless your people had things like this and you studied the records."
Lhin fought for words as he tried to explain. His people had nothing like that-their atomics had worked from a different angle, since uranium was almost nonexistent on the moon, and they had used a direct application of it. But the principles were plain to him, even from what he could see outside; he could feel the way it worked in his head.
"I feel. When I first grew, I could fix that. It is the way I think, not the way I learn, though I have read all the records. For three hundred million of your years, my people have learned it-now I feel-it."
"Three hundred million years! I knew your race was old when you told me you were born talking and reading, but-galloping dinosaurs!"
"My people saw those things on your world, yes," Lhin assured him solemnly.
"Then I shall fix?"
Slim shook his head in confusion and handed over a tool kit without another word. "Three hundred million years, Fats, and during almost all that time they were further ahead than we are now. Figure that one out. When we were little crawling things living off dinosaur eggs, they were flitting from planet to planet-only I don't suppose they could stay very long; six tunes normal gravity for them. And now, just because they had
to stay on a light world and their air losses made them gather here where

things weren't normal, Lhin's all that's left."
"Yeah, and how does that make him a mechanic?" "Instinct. In the same amount of time, look at the instincts the animals picked up-what to eat, enemy smells, caring for their young ... He has an instinct for machinery; he doesn't know all about it, probably, but he can instinctively feel how a thing should work.1 Add to that the collection of science records he was showing me and the amount of reading he's probably done, and there should be almost nothing he couldn't do to a machine."
There wasn't much use hi arguing, Fats decided, as he watched what was happening. The monkey either fixed things or they never would leave now. Lhin had taken snips and disconnected the control box completely; now he was taking that to pieces, one thing at a time. With a curious deftness, he unhooked wires, lifted out tubes, and uncoupled transformers.
It seemed simple enough to him. They had converted energy from the atomic fuel, and they used certain forces to ionize matter, control the rate of ionization, feed the ions to the rocket tubes, and force them outward at high speed through helices. An elementary problem in applied electronics, to govern the rate and control the ionization forces.
With small quick hands he bent wires into coils, placed other coils hi relation, and coupled a tube to the combination. Around the whole, other coils and tubes took shape, then a long feeder connected to the pipe that carried the compound to be ionized, and bus bars to the energy intakes. The injectors that handled the feeding of ions were needlessly complicated, but he let them alone, since they were workable as they were. It had taken him less than fifteen minutes.
"It will work now. But use care when you first try it. Now it makes all work, not a little as it did before."
Slim inspected it. "That all? What about this pile of stuff you didn't use?"
"There was no need. It was very poor. Now it is
good." As best he could he explained to Slim what happened when it was used now; before, it would have taken a well-trained technician to describe, even with the complicated words at his command. But what was there now was the product of a science that had gone beyond the stumbling complications of first attempts. Something was to be done, and was done, as simply as possible.
Slim's only puzzle was that it hadn't been done that way in the first place-a normal reaction, once the final simplification is reached. He nodded. .
"Good. Fats, this is the business. You'll get about 99.99 percent efficiency now, instead of the 20 percent maximum before. You're all right, Lhin."
Fats knew nothing of electronics, but it had sounded right as Lhin explained, and he made no comment. Instead, he headed for the control room. "Okay, we'll leave here, then. So long, monkey."
Slim gathered up the wire and handed it to Lhin, accompanying him to the air lock. On the ground, as the locks closed, the Moon man looked up and managed an Earth smile. "I shall open the doors above for you to go through. And you are paid, and all is fan:, not so? Then-so long, Slim. The Great Ones love you, that you have given my people back to me."
"Adios," Slim answered, and waved, just before the doors came shut. "Maybe we'll be back sometime and see how you make out."
Back in the cave, Lhin fondled the copper and waited for the sounds the rockets would make, filled with mixed emotions and uncertainties. The copper was pure ecstasy to him, but there were thoughts in Fats' mind which were not all clear. Well, he had the copper for generations to come; what happened to his people now rested on the laps of the Great Ones.
He stood outside the entrance, watching the now-steady rocket blast upward and away, carrying with it the fate of his race. If they told of the radioactives, slavery and extinction. If they remained silent, perhaps a return to former greatness, and passage might be resumed to other planets, long deserted even

at the height
of their progress; but now planets bearing life and intelligence instead of mere jungles. Perhaps, in time, and with materials bought from other worlds with ancient knowledge, even a solution that would let them restore their world to its ancient glory, as they had dreamed before hopelessness and the dark wings of a race's night had settled over them.
As he watched, the rocket spiraled directly above him, cutting the light off and on with a shadow like the beat of wings from the mists of antiquity, when winged life had filled the air of the moon. An omen, perhaps, those sable wings that reached up and passed through the roof as he released the slides, then went skimming out, leaving all clear behind. But whether a good omen or ill, he had not decided.
He carried the copper wire back to the nursery.
And on the ship, Slim watched Fats wiggle and try to think, and there was amusement on his face. "Well, was he good? As good as any human, perhaps?"
"Yeah. All right, better. I'll admit anything you want. He's as good as I am- maybe he's better. That satisfy you?"
"No." Slim was beating the iron while it was hot. "What about those radioactives?"
Fats threw more power into the tubes, and gasped as the new force behind the rockets pushed him back into his seat. He eased up gently, staring straight ahead. Finally he shrugged and turned back to Slim.
"Okay, you win. The monkey keeps his freedom and I keep my lip buttoned. Satisfied now?"
"Yeah." Slim was more than satisfied. To him, also, things seemed an omen of the future, and proof that idealism was not altogether folly. Some day the wings of dark prejudice and contempt for others might lift from all Earth's Empire, as they were lifting from Fats' mind. Perhaps not in his time, but eventually; and intelligence, not race, would rule.
"Well satisfied, Fats," he said. "And you don't need to worry about losing too much. We'll make all the money we can ever spend from the new principles of Lhin's hookup; I've thought of a dozen applications al-
ready. What do you figure on doing with your share?" Fats grinned. "Be a damned fool. Help you start your propaganda again and; go around kissing Marshies and monkeys. Wonder what our little monkey's thinking?" Lhin wasn't thinking, then; he'd solved the riddle of the factors hi Fats' mind, and he knew what the decision would be. Now he was making copper sulphate, and seeing dawn come up where night had been too long. There's something beautiful about any dawn, and this was very lovely to him.

Into Thy Hands

SIMON AMES WAS old, and his face was bitter as only that of a confirmed idealist can be. Now a queer mixture of emotions crossed it momentarily, as he watched the workmen begin pouring cement to fill the small opening of the domelike structure, but his eyes returned again to the barely visible robot within.
"The last Ames' Model Ten," he said ruefully to his son. "And even then I couldn't put in full memory coils! Only the physical sciences here; biologicals hi the other male form, humanities in the female. I had to fall back on books and equipment to cover the rest. We're already totally converted to soldier robots, and no more humanoid experiments. . . . Dan, is there no conceivable way war can be avoided?"
The young Rocket Force captain shrugged, and his mouth twitched unhappily. "None, Dad. They've fed thek people on the glories of carnage and loot so long they have to find some pretext to use their hordes of warrior robots."
"Mmm . . . The stupid, blind idiots!" The old man shuddered. "Dan, it sounds like old wives' fears, but this time it's true; unless we somehow avoid or win this war quickly, there'll be no one left to wage another. I've spent my life

on robots; I know what they can do-and should never be made to do! Do you think I'd waste a fortune on these storehouses on a mere whim?"
"I'm not arguing, Dad. God knows, I feel the same!" Dan watched the workmen pour the last concrete, to leave no break in the twenty-foot thick walls. "Well, at least if anyone does survive, you've done all you can for them. Now it's in the hands of God!"
Simon Ames nodded, but there was no satisfaction on his face as he turned back with his son. "All we could- and never enough! And God? I wouldn't even know to pray for the survival of which of the three-science, life, or culture. . . ." The words sighed into silence, and his eyes went back to the filled-in tunnel.
Behind them, the ugly dome hugged the ground while the rains of God and of man's destruction washed over it. Snow covered it and melted, and other things built up that no summer sun could disperse, until the ground was level with its top. The forest crept forward, and the seasons flicked by in unchanging changes that pyramided decade upon century. Inside, the shining case of SA-10 waited immovably.
And at last the lightning struck, blasting through a tree, downward into the dome, to course through a cable, short-circuit a ruined timing switch, and spend itself on the ground below.
Above the robot, a cardinal burst into song, and he looked up, his stolid face somehow set in a look of wonder. For a moment, he listened, but the bird had flown away at the sight of his lumbering figure; With a tired little sigh, he went on, crashing through the brush of the forest until he came back near the entrance to his cave.
The sun was bright above, and he studied it thoughtfully; the word he knew, and even the complex carbon-chain atomic breakdown that went on within it. But he did not know how he knew, or why.
For a second longer he stood there silently, then opened his mouth for a long wailing cry. "Adam! Adam, come forth!" But there were doubts in the oft-repeated call now and the pose of his head as he waited. And again only the busy sounds of the forest came back to him.
"Or God? God, do You hear me?"
But the answer was the same. A field mouse slipped out from among the grass and a hawk soared over the woods. The wind rustled among the trees, but there was no sign from the Creator. With a lingering backward look, he turned slowly to the tunnel he had made and wriggled back down it into his cave.
Inside, light still came from a single unbroken bulb, and he let his eyes wander from the jagged breach in the thick wall across to where some ancient blast had tossed crumpled concrete against the opposite side. Between lay only ruin and dirt. Once, apparently, that half had been filled with books and films, but now there were only rotted fragments of bindings and scraps of useless plastic tape mixed with broken glass in the filth of the floor.
Only on the side where he had been was the ruin less than complete. There stood the instruments of a small laboratory, many still useful, and he named them one by one, from the purring atomic generator to the projector and screen set up on one table.
Here, in his mind, were order and logic, and the world above had conformed to an understandable pattern. He alone seemed to be without purpose. How had he come here, and why had he no memory of himself? If there was no purpose, why was he sentient at all? The questions held no discoverable answers.
There were only the cryptic words on the scrap of plastic tape preserved inside the projector. But what little of them was understandable was all he had; he snapped off the light and squatted down behind the projector, staring intently at the screen as he flicked the machine on.
There was a brief fragment of some dark swirling, and then dots and bright spheres, becoming suns and planets that spun out of nothing into a celestial

pattern. "In the beginning," said a voice quietly, "God created the heavens and the earth." And the screen filled with that, and the beginnings of life. "Symbolism?" the robot muttered. Geology and astronomy were part of his knowledge, at least; and yet, m a mystic beauty, this was true enough. Even the life
forms above had fitted with those being created on the screen.
Then a new voice, not unlike his own in resonant power, filled the speaker. "Let Us go down and create man in Our Image!" And a shifting mist of light that symbolized God appeared, shaping man from the dust of the ground and breathing life into him. Adam grew lonely, and Eve was made from his rib, to be shown Eden and tempted by the serpentine mist of darkness; and she tempted the weak Adam, until God discovered their sin and banished them. But the banishment ended in a blur of ruined film as the speaker went dead.
The robot shut it off, trying to read its meaning. It must concern him, since he alone was here to see it. And how could that be unless he were one of its characters? Not Eve or Satan, but perhaps Adam; but then God should have answered him. On the other hand, if he were God, then perhaps the record was unfulfilled and Adam not yet formed, so that no answer could be given.
He nodded slowly to himself. Why should he not have rested here with this film to remind him of his plan, while the world readied itself for Adam? And now, awake again, he must go forth and create man in his own image! But first, the danger of which the film had warned must be removed.
He straightened, determination coming into his steps as he squirmed purposefully upward. Outside the sun was still shining, and he headed toward it into the grossly unkempt Eden forest. Now stealth came to him as he moved silently through the undergrowth, like a great metal wraith, with eyes that darted about and hands ready to snap forward at lightning speed.
And at last he saw it, curled up near a large rock. It was smaller than he had expected, a mere six feet of black, scaly suppleness, but the shape and forked tongue were unmistakable. He was on it with a blurr of motion and a cry of elation; and when he moved away, the lifeless object on the rock was forever past corrupting the most naive Eve.
The morning sun found the robot bent over what had
once been a wild pig, a knife moving precisely in his hand. Delicately he opened the heart and manipulated it, studying the valve action. Life, he was deciding, was highly complex, and a momentary doubt struck him. It had seemed easy on the film! And at times he wondered why he should know the complex order of the heavens but nothing of this other creation of his.
But at last he buried the pig's remains, and settled down among the varicolored clays he had collected, his' fingers moving deftly as he rolled a white type into bones for the skeleton, followed by a red clay heart. The tiny nerves and blood vessels were beyond his means, but that could not be helped; and surely if he had created the gigantic sun from nothing, Adam could rise from the crudeness of his sculpturing.
The sun climbed nigher, and the details multiplied. Inside, the last organ was complete, including the grayish lump that was the brain, and he began the red sheathing of muscles. Here more thought was required to adapt what he had learned of the pig to the longer limbs and different structure of this new body; but his mind pushed grimly on with the mathematics involved, and at last it was finished.
Unconsciously he began a crooning imitation of the bird songs as his fingers molded the colored clays to hide the muscles and give smooth symmetry to the body. He had been forced to guess at the color, though the dark lips on the film had obviously been red from blood within them.
Twilight found him standing back, nodding approval of the work. It was a faithful copy of the film Adam, waiting only the breath of life; and that must come from him, be a part of the forces that flowed through his own metal

nerves and brain.
Gently he fastened wires to the head and feet of the day body; then he threw back his chest plate to fasten the other ends to his generator terminals, willing the current out into the figure lying before him. Weakness flooded through him instantly, threatening to black out his consciousness, but he did not begrudge the energy. Steam was spurting up and covering the figure as a mist
had covered Adam, but it slowly subsided, and he stopped the current, stealing a second for relief as the full current coursed back through him. Then softly he unhooked the wires and drew them back.
"Adam!" The command rang through the forest, vibrant with his urgency. "Adam, rise up! I, your creator, command it!"
But the figure lay still, and now he saw great cracks in it, while the noble smile had baked into a gaping leer. There was no sign of life! It was dead, as the ground from which it came.
He squatted over it, moaning, weaving from side to side, and his fingers tried to draw the ugly cracks together, only to cause greater ruin. At last he stood up, stamping his feet until all that was left was a varicolored smear on the rock. Still he stamped and moaned as he destroyed the symbol of his failure. The moon mocked down at him with a wise and cynical face, and he howled at it in rage and anguish, to be answered by a lonely owl, querying his identity.
A powerless God, or a Godless Adam! Things had gone so well in the film as Adam rose from the dust of the ground. . . .
But the film was symbolism, and he had taken it literally! Of course he had failed. The pigs were not dust, but colloidal jelly complexes. And they knew more than he, for there had been little ones that proved they could somehow pass the breath of life along.
Suddenly he squared his shoulders and headed into the forest again. Adam should yet rise to ease his loneliness. The pigs knew the secret, and he could learn it; what he needed now were more pigs, and they should not be too hard to obtain.
But two weeks later it was a worried robot who sat watching his pigs munch contentedly at their food. Life, instead of growing simpler, had become more complicated. The fluoroscope and repaired electron microscope had shown him much, but always something was lacking. Life seemed to begin only with life; for even the two basic cells were alive in some manner strangely
different from his own. Of course God-life might differ from animal-life, but ...
With a shrug he dismissed his metaphysics and turned back to the laboratory, avoiding the piglets that ambled trustingly under his feet. Slowly he drew out the last ovum from the nutrient fluid in which he kept it, placing it on a slide and under the optical microscope. Then, with a little platinum filament, he brought a few male spermatazoa toward the ovum, his fingers moving surely through the thousandths of an inch needed to place it.
His technique had grown from failures, and now the sperm cell found and pierced the ovum. As he watched, the round single cell began to lengthen and divide across the middle. This was going to be one of his successes! There were two, then four cells, and his hands made lightening, infinitesimal gestures, keeping it within the microscope field while he changed the slide for a thin membrane, lined with thinner tubes to carry oxygen, food and tiny amounts of the stimulating and controlling hormones with which he hoped to shape its formation.
Now there were eight cells, and he waited feverishly for them to put out a tube toward the membrane as they did toward the pig's womb. ... But they did not! As he watched, another division began, but stopped; the cells had died again. All his labor and thought had been futile, as always.
He stood there silently, relinquishing all pretensions to godhood. His mind

abdicated, letting the dream vanish into nothingness; and there was nothing to take its place and give him purpose and reason-only a vacuum instead of a design.
Dully he unbarred the rude cage and began chasing the grumbling, reluctant pigs out and up the tunnel, into die forest and away. It was a dull morning, with no sun apparent, and it matched his mood as the last one disappeared, leaving him doubly lonely. They had been poor companions, but they had occupied his time, and rite little ones had appealed to him. Now even they were
!•"*•
Wearily he dropped his six hundred pounds onto the turf, staring at the black clouds over him. An ant climbed up his body inquisitively, and he watched it without interest. Then it, too, was gone.
"Adam!" The cry came from the woods, ringing and compelling. "Adam, come forth!"
"God!" With metal limbs that were awkward and unsteady, he jerked upright. In the dark hour of his greatest need, God had finally come! "God, here I am!"
"Come, forth, Adam, Adam! Come forth, Adam!"
With a wild cry, the robot dashed forward toward the woods, an electric tingling suffusing him. He was no longer unwanted, no longer a lost chip in the storm. God had come for him. He stumbled, tripping over branches, crashing through bushes, heedless of his noise; let God know his eagerness. Again the call came, no longer from straight ahead, and he turned a bit, lumbering forward. "Here I am, I'm coming!"
God would ease his troubles and explain why he was so different from the pigs; God would know all that. And then there'd be Eve, and no more loneliness! He'd have trouble keeping her from the Tree of Knowledge, but he wouldn't mind that!
And from still a different direction the call reached him. . . . Perhaps God was not pleased with his noise. The robot quieted his steps and went forward reverently. Around him the birds sang, and now the call came again, ringing and close. He hastened on, striving to blend speed with quiet in spite of his weight.
The pause was longer this time, but when the call came it was almost overhead. He bowed lower and crept to the ancient oak from which it came, uncertain, half-afraid, but burning with anticipation.
"Come forth, Adam, Adam!" The sound was directly above, but God did not manifest Himself visibly. Slowly the robot looked up through the boughs of the tree. Only a bird was there-and from its open beak the call came forth again.
"Adam, Adam!"
A mockingbird he'd heard imitating the other birds now mimicking his own voice and words! And he'd fol-
lowed that through the forest, hoping to find God! He screeched suddenly at the bird, his rage so shrill that it leaped from the branch in hasty flight, to perch in another tree and cock its head at him. "God?" it asked in his voice, and changed to the raucous call of a jay.
The robot slumped back against the tree, refusing to let hope ebb completely from him. He knew so little of God; might not He have used the bird to call him here? At least the tree was not unlike the one under which God had put Adam to sleep before creating Eve.
First sleep, then the coming of God! He stretched out determinedly, trying to imitate the pigs' torpor, fighting back his mind's silly attempts to speculate as to where his rib might be. It was slow and hard, but he persisted grimly, hypnotizing himself into mental numbness; and bit by bit, the sounds of the forest faded to only a trickle in his head. Then that, too, was stilled.
He had no way of knowing how long it lasted, but suddenly he sat up groggily, to the rumble of thunder, while a torrent of lashing rain washed in blinding

sheets over his eyes. For a second, he glanced quickly at his side, but there was no scar.
Fire forked downward into a nearby tree, throwing splinters of it against him. This was definitely not the way the film had gone! He groped to his feet, flinging some of the rain from his face, to stumble forward toward his cave. Again lightning struck, nearer, and he increased his pace to a driving run. The wind lashed the trees, snapping some with wild ferocity, and it took the full power of his magnets to forge ahead at ten miles an hour instead of his normal fifty. Once the wind caught him unaware, and crashed him down over a rock with a wild clang of metal, but it could not harm him, and he stumbled on until he reached the banked-up entrance of his muddy tunnel.
Safe inside, he dried himself with the infra-red lamp, sitting beside the hole and studying the wild fury of the gale. Syrely its furor held no place for Eden, where dew dampened the leaves in the evening under caressing, musical breezes!
He nodded slowly, his clenched jaws relaxing. This
could not be Eden, and God expected him there. Whatever evil knowledge of Satan had lured him here and stolen his memory did •not matter; all that counted was to return, and that should be simple, since the Garden lay among rivers. Tonight out of the storm he'd prepare here, and tomorrow he'd follow the stream in the woods until it led him where God waited.
With the faith of a child, he turned back and began tearing the thin berylite panels from his laboratory tables and cabinets, picturing his homecoming and Eve. Outside the storm raged and tore, but he no longer heard it. Tomorrow he would start for home! The word was misty in his mind, as all the nicer words were, but it had a good sound, free of loneliness, and he liked it.
Six hundred long endless years had dragged their slow way into eternity, and even the tough concrete floor was pitted by those centuries of pacing and .waiting. Time had eroded all hopes and plans and wonder, and now there was only numb despair, too old to vent itself even in rage or madness.
The female robot slumped motionlessly on the atomic excavator, her eyes staring aimlessly across the dome, beyond the tiers of books and films and the hulking machines that squatted eternally on the floor. There a pickax lay, and her eyes rested on it listlessly; once, when the dictionary revealed its picture and purpose, she had thought it the key to escape, but now it was only another symbol of futility.
She wandered over aimlessly, picking it up by its two metal handles and striking the wooden blade against the wall; another splinter chipped from the wood, and century-old dust dropped to the floor, but that offered no escape. Nothing did. Mankind and her fellow robots must have perished long ago, leaving her neither hope for freedom nor use for it if freedom were achieved. Once she had planned and schemed with all her remarkable knowledge of psychology to restore man's heritage, but now the note-littered table was only a mockery; she thrust out a weary hand-
And froze into a metal statue! Faintly, through all
the metal mesh and concrete, a dim, weak signal trickled into the radio that was part of her!
With all her straining energy, she sent out an answering call; but there was no response. As she stood rigidly for long minutes, the signals grew stronger, but re-. mained utterly aloof and unaware of her. Now some sudden shock seemed to cut through them, raising their power until the thoughts of another robot mind were abruptly clear-thoughts without sense, clothed in madness! And even as the lunacy registered, they began to fade; second by second, they dimmed into the distance and left her alone again and hopeless!
With a wild, clanging yell, she threw the useless pickax at the wall, watching it rebound in echoing din. But she was no longer aimless; her eyes had noted chipped concrete breaking away with the sharp metal point, and she caught the

pick before it could touch the floor, seizing the nub of wood in small, strong hands. The full force of her magnets lifted and swung, while her feet kicked aside the rubble that came cascading down from the force of her blows. Beyond that rapidly crumbling concrete lay freedom and-madness! Surely there could be no human life hi a world that could drive a robot mad, but if there were . . . She thrust back the picture and went savagely on attacking the massive wall.

The sun shone on a drenched forest filled with havoc from the storm, to reveal the male robot pacing tirelessly along the banks of the shallow stream. In spite of the heavy burden he carried, his legs moved swiftly now, and when he came to sandy stretches, or clear land that bore only turf, his great strides lengthened still further; already he had dallied too long with delusions in this unfriendly land.

Now the stream joined a larger one, and he stopped, dropping his ungainly bundle and ripping it apart. Scant minujtes later, he was pushing an assembled berylite boat out and climbing in. The little generator from the electron microscope purred softly and a steam jet began hissing underneath; it was crude, but efficient, as the
boiling wake behind him testified, and while slower than his fastest pace, there would be no detours or impassable barriers to bother him.

The hours sped by and the shadows lengthened again, but now the stream was wider, and his hopes increased, though he watched the banks idly, not yet expecting Eden. Then he rounded a bend to jerk upright and head toward shore, observing something totally foreign to the landscape. As he beached the boat, and drew nearer, he saw a great gaping hole bored into the earth for a hundred feet in depth and a quarter-mile in diameter, surrounded by obviously artificial ruins. Tall bent shafts stuck up haphazardly amid jumbles of concrete and bits of artifacts damaged beyond recognition. Nearby a pole leaned at a silly angle, bearing a sign.

He scratched the corrosion off and made out dim words: WELCOME TO HOGANVILLE. POP. 1,876. It meant nothing to him, but the ruins fascinated him. This must be some old trick of Satan; such ugliness could be nothing else.

Shaking his head, he turned back to the boat, to speed on while the stars came out. Again he came to ruins, larger and harder to see, since the damage was more complete and the forest had claimed most of it. He was only sure because of the jagged pits in which not even a blade of grass would grow. And sometimes as the night passed there were smaller pits, as if some single object had been blasted out of existence. He gave up the riddle of such things, finally; it was no concern of his.

When morning came again, the worst rums were behind, and the river was wide and strong, suggesting that the trip must be near its end. Then the faint salty tang of the ocean reached him, and he whooped loudly, scanning the country for an observation point.

Ahead, a low hill broke the flat country, topped by a rounded bowl of green, and he made toward it. The boat crunched on gravel, and he was springing off over the turf to the hill, up it, and onto the bowl-shaped top that was covered with vines. Here the whole lower course of the river was visible, with no more large
branches in the twenty-five miles to the sea. The land was pleasant and gentle, and it was not hard to imagine Eden out there.

But now for the first time, as he started down, he noticed that the mound was not part of the hill as it had seemed. It was of the same gray-green concrete as the walls of the cave from which he had escaped, like a bird from an egg. And here was another such thing, like an egg un-hatched but already cracking, as the gouged-out pit on its surface near him testified. For a moment, the idea contained in the figure of speech staggered him, and then he was ripping away the concealing vines and dropping into the hole, reaching for a small

plate pinned to an unharmed section nearby. It was a poor tool, but if Eve were trapped inside, needing help to break the shell, it would do.
"To you who may survive the holocaust, I, Simon Ames-" The words caught his eyes, drawing his attention to the plate in spite of his will, their terse strangeness pulling his gaze across them. "-dedicate this. There is no easy entrance, but you will expect no easy heritage. Force your way, take what is within, use it! To you who need it and will work for it, I have left all knowledge that was. ..."
Knowledge, Knowledge, forbidden by God! Satan had put before his path the unquestioned thing meant by the Tree of Knowledge symbol, concealed as a false egg, and he had almost been caught! A few minutes more-! He shuddered, and backed out, but optimism was freshening inside him again. Let it be the Tree! That meant this was really part of Eden, and being forewarned by God's marker, he had no fear for the wiles of Satan, alive or dead.
With long, loping strides he headed down the hill toward the meadows and woods, leaving the now useless boat behind. He would enter Eden on his own feet, as God had made him!
Half an hour later he was humming happily to himself as he passed beside lush fields, rich with growing
things, along a little woodland path. Here was order and logic, as they should be. This was surely Eden!
And to confirm it catae Eve! She was coming down the trail ahead, her hair floating behind, and some loose stuff draped over her hips and breasts, but the form underneath was Woman, beautiful and unmistakable. He drew back out of sight, suddenly timid and uncertain, only vaguely wondering how she came here before him. Then she was beside him, and he moved impulsively, his voice a whisper of ecstasy!
"Eve!"
"Oh, God! Dan! Dan!" It was a wild shriek that cut the air, and she was rushing away in panic, into the deeper woods. He shook his head in bewilderment, while his own legs began a more forceful pumping after her. He was almost upon her when he saw the serpent, alive and stronger than before! But not for long! As a single gasp broke from her, one of his arms lifted her aside, while the other snapped out to pinch the fanged head completely off the body. His voice was gently reproving as he put her down. "You shouldn't have fled to the serpent, Eve!"
"To-ugh! But . . . you could have killed me before it struck!" The taut whiteness of fear was fading from her face, replaced by defiance and doubt.
"Killed you?"
"You're a robot! Dan!" Her words cut off as a brawny figure emerged from the underbrush, an ax in one hand and a magnificent dog at his heels. "Dan, he saved me ... but he's a robot!"
"I saw, Syl. Steady! Edge this way, if you can. Good! They sometimes get passive streaks, I've heard. Shep!"
"Yeah, Dan?" The dog's thick growl answered, but his eyes remained glued to the robot.
"Get the people; just yell 'robot' and hike back. Okay, scram! You-what do you want?"
SA-10 grunted harshly, hunching his shoulders. "Things that don't exist! Companionship and a chance to use my strength and the science I know. Maybe I'm
not supposed to have such things, but that's what I wanted!"
"Mmm. There are fairy stories about friendly robots hidden somewhere to help us, at that. . . . We could use help. What's your name, and where from?"
Bitterness crept into the robot's voice as he pointed up river. "From the sunward side. So far, I've only found who I'm not!"
"So? Meant to get up there myself when the colony got settled." Dan paused,

eying the metal figure specu-latively. "We lost our books in the hell-years mostly, and the survivors weren't exactly technicians. So while we do all right with animals, agriculture, medicine and such, we're pretty primitive otherwise. If you really do know the sciences, why not stick around?"
The robot had seen too many hopes shattered like his clay man to believe wholly in this promise of purpose and companionship, but his voice caught as he answered. "You-want me?"
"Why not? You're a storehouse of knowledge, Say-Ten, and we-"
"Satan?"
"Your name-there on your chest." Dan pointed with his left hand, his body suddenly tense. "See? Right there!"
And now, as SA-10 craned his neck, the foul letters were visible, high on his chest! Ess, aye-
His first warning was the ax that crashed against his chest, to rock him back on his heels, and come driving down again, powered by muscles that seemed almost equal to his own. It struck again, and something snapped inside him. All the strength vanished, and he collapsed to the ground with a jarring crash, knocking his eyelids closed. Then he lay there, unable even to open them.
He did not try, but lay waiting almost eagerly for the final blows that would finish him. Satan, the storehouse of knowledge, the tempter of men-the one person he had learned to hate! He'd come all this way to find a name and a purpose; now he had them! No wonder
God had locked him away in a cave to keep him from men.
"Dead! That little fairy story threw him off guard." There was a tense chuckle from the man. "Hope his generator's still okay. We could heat every house in the settlement with that. Mmm . . . wonder where his hideout was?"
"Like the one up north with all the weapons hidden? Oh, Dan!" A strange smacking sound accompanied that, and then her voice sobered. "We'd better get back for help in hauling him."
Their feet moved away, leaving the robot still motionless but no longer passive. The Tree of Knowledge, so easily seen without the vine covering over the hole, was barely twenty miles away, and no casual search could miss it! He had to destroy it first!
But the little battery barely could maintain his consciousness, and the generator ho longer served him. Delicate detectors were sending their messages through his nerves, assuring him it was functioning properly under automatic check, but beyond his control. Part of the senseless signaling device within him must have been defective, unless the baking of the clay man had somehow overloaded a part of it, and now it was completely wrecked, shorting aside all the generator control impulses, leaving him unable to move a finger.
Even when he blanked his mind almost completely out, the battery could not power his hands. His evil work was done; now he would heat their houses, while they sought the temptation he had offered them. And he could do nothing to stop it. God denied him the chance even to right the wrong he had done.
Bitterly he prayed on, while strange noises sounded near him and he felt himself lifted and carried bumpily at a rapid rate. God would not hear him!
And at last he stopped, while the bumping went on to whatever end he was destined. Finally, even that stopped, and there were a few moments of absolute quiet.
"Listen! I know you still live!" It was a gentle, soothing voice, hypnotically compelling, that broke in on the dark swirls of his thoughts. Brief thoughts of God
crossed his mind, but it was a female voice, which must mean that one of the settlement women believed him and was trying to save him in secret. It came again. "Listen and believe me! You can move-a very very little, but enough for me to see. Try to repair yourself, and let me be the strength in your hands.

Try! . . . Ah, your arm!"
It was inconceivable that she could follow his imperceptible movements, and yet he felt his arm lifted and placed on his chest as the thought crossed his mind. But it was none of his business to question how or why. All his energy must be devoted to mustering his strength before the men could find the Tree!
"So-I turn this-this nut. And the other . . . There, the plate is off. What do I do now?"
That stopped him. His life force had been fatal to a pig, and probably would kill a woman. Yet she trusted him. He dared not move-but the idea must have been father to the act, for his fingers were brushed aside and her arms scraped over his chest, to be followed by an instant flood of strength pouring through him.
Her fingers had slipped over his eyes, but he did not need them as he ripped the damaged receiver from its welds and tossed it aside. Now there was worry in her voice, over the crooning cadence she tried to maintain. "Don't be too surprised at what you may see. Everything's all right!"
"Everything's all right!" he repeated dutifully, lingering over the words as his voice sounded again in his ears. For a moment more, while he reaffixed his plate, he let her hold his eyes closed. "Woman, who are you?"
"Eve. Or at least, Adam, those names will do for us." And the fingers withdrew, though she remained out of sight behind him.
But there was enough for him to see. In spite of the tiers of bookcases and film magazines, the machines, and the size of the laboratory, this was plainly the double of his own cave, circled with the same concrete walls! That could only mean the Tree!
With a savage lurch, he was facing his rescuer, seeing another robot, smaller, more graceful, and female in
form, calling to all the hunger and loneliness he had known! But those emotions had betrayed him before, and he forced them back bitterly. There could be no doubt while the damning letters spelled out her name. Satan was male and female, and Evil had gone forth to rescue its kind!
Some of the warring hell of emotions must have shown in his movements, for she was retreating before him, her hands fumbling to cover the marks at which he stared. "Adam, no! The man read it wrong-dreadfully wrong. It's not a name. We're machines, and all machines have model numbers, like these. Satan wouldn't advertise his name. And I never had evil intentions!"
"Neither did I!" He bit the words out, stumbling over the objects on the floor as he edged her back slowly into a blind alley, while striving to master his own rebellious emotions at what he must do. "Evil must be destroyed! Knowledge is forbidden to men!"
"Not all knowledge! Wait, let me finish! Any condemned person has a right to a few last words. ... It was the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. God called it that! And He had to forbid them to eat, because they couldn't know which was the good. Don't you see, He was only protecting them until they were older and able to choose for themselves! Only Satan gave them evil fruit-hate and murder-to ruin them. Would you call healing the sick, good government, or improving other animals evil? That's knowledge, Adam, glorious knowledge God wants man to have. . . . Oh, damn it, can't you see?"
For a second as she read his answer, she turned to flee; then, with a little sobbing cry, she was facing him again, unresisting. "All right, murder me! Do you think death frightens me after being imprisoned here for six hundred years with no way to break free? Only get it over with!"
Surprise and the sheer audacity of the lie held his hands as his eyes darted from the atomic excavator to a huge drill, and a drum marked as explosives. And yet- even that cursory glance could not overlook the worn floor and thousand marks of age-long occupation,
though the surface of the dome had been unbroken a few hours before.

Reluctantly, his eyes swung back to the excavator, and hers followed.
"Useless! The directions printed on it say to move the thing marked 'Orifice Control' to zero before starting. It can't be moved!"
She stopped, abruptly speechless, as his fingers lifted the handle from the ratchet and spun it easily back to zero! Then she was shaking her head in defeat and lifting listless hands to help him with the unfastening of her chest plate. There was no color left in her voice.
"Six hundred years because I didn't lift a handle! Just because I have absolutely no conception of mechanics, while all men have some instinct for it, which they take for granted. They'd have mastered these machines hi time and learned to read meaning into the books I memorized without even understanding the titles. But I'm like a dog tearing at a door, with a simple latch over his nose. . . . Well, that's that. Good-by, Adam!"
But perversely, now that the terminals lay before him, he hesitated. After all, the instructions had not mentioned the ratchet; it was too obvious to need mention, but ... He tried to picture such ignorance, staring at one of the elementary radio books above him, "Application of a Cavity Resonator." Mentally, he could realize that a nonscience translation was meaningless : Use of a sound producer or strengthener in a hole! And then the overlooked factor struck him.
"But you did get out!"
"Because I lost my temper and threw the pickax. That's how I found the blade, not the handle, was metal. The only machines I could use were the projector and typer I was meant to use-and the typer broke!"
"Umm." He picked up the little machine, noting the yellowed incomplete page still hi it, even as he slipped the carriage tension cord back on its hook. But his real attention was devoted to the cement dust ground into the splintered handle of the pick.
No man or robot could be such a complete and hope-
less dope, and yet he no longer doubted. She was a robot moron! And if knowledge were evil, then surely she belonged to God! All the horror of his contemplated murder vanished, leaving his mind clean and weak before the relief that flooded him as he motioned her out.
"All right, you're not evil. You can go."
"And you?"
And himself? Before, as Satan, her arguments would have been plausible, and he had discounted them. But now-it had been the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil! And yet ...
"Dogs!" She caught at him, dragging him to the entrance where the baying sound was louder. "They're hunting you, Adam-^dozens of them!"
He nodded, studying the distant forms of men on horseback, while his fingers busied themselves with a pencil and scrap of paper. "And they'll be here hi twenty minutes. Good or evil, they must not find what's here. Eve, there's a boat by the river; pull the red handle the way you want to go, hard for fast, a light pull for slow. Here's a map to my cave, and you'll be safe there."
Almost instantly, he was back at the excavator and in its saddle, his fingers flashing across its panel; its heavy generator bellowed gustily, and the squat, heavy machine began twisting through the narrow aisles and ramming obstructions aside. Once outside, where he could use its full force without danger of backwash, ten minutes would leave only a barren hill; and the generator could be overdriven by adjustment to melt itself and the machine into useless slag.
"Adam!" She was spraddling into the saddle behind him, shouting over the roar of the thin blade of energy that was enlarging the tunnel.
"Go on, get away, Eve! You can't stop me!"
"I don't want to-they're not ready for such machines as this, yet! And between us, we can rebuild everything here, anyhow. Adam?"

He grunted uneasily, unable to turn away from the needle beam. It was hard enough trying to think without her distraction, knowing that he dared not take chances
and must destroy himself, while her words and the instincts within him fought against his resolution. "You talk too much!"
"And I'll talk a lot more, until you behave sensibly! You'll make your mind sick, trying to decide now; come up the river for six months with me. You can't do any harm there, even if you are Satan! Then, when you've thought it over, Adam, you can do what you like. But not now!" '
"For the last time, will you go?" He dared not think now, while he was testing his way through the flawed, cracked cement, and yet he could not quiet his mind to her words that went on and on. "Go!"
"Not without you! Adam, my receiver isn't defective; I knew you'd try to kill me when I rescued you! Do you think I'll give up so easily now?"
He snapped the power to silence with a rude hand, flinging around to face her. "You knew-and still saved me? Why?"
"Because I needed you, and the world needs you. You had to live, even if you killed me!"
Then the generator roared again, knifing its way through the last few inches, and he swung out of the dome and began turning it about. As the savage bellow of full power poured out of the main orifice, he turned his head to her and nodded.
She might be the dumbest robot in creation, but she was also the sweetest. It was wonderful to be needed and wanted!
And behind him, Eve nodded to herself, blessing Simon Ames for listing psychology as a humanity. In six months, she could complete his reeducation and still have time to recite the whole of the Book he knew as a snatch of film. But not yet! Most certainly not Leviticus yet; Genesis would give her trouble enough.
It was wonderful to be needed and wanted!
Spring had come again, and Adam sat under one of the budding trees, idly feeding one of the new crop of piglets as Eve's hands moved swiftly, finishing what
were to be his clothes, carefully copied from those of Dan.
They were almost ready to go south and mingle with men in the task of leading the race back to its heritage. Already the yielding plastic he had synthesized and she had molded over them was a normal part of them, and the tiny magnetic muscles he had installed no longer needed thought to reveal their emotions in human expressions. He might have been only an uncommonly handsome man as he stood up and went over to her.
"Still hunting God?" she asked lightly, but there was no worry on her face. The metaphysical binge was long since cured.
A thoughtful smile grew on his face as he began donning the clothes. "He is still where I found Him- Something inside us that needs no hunting. No, Eve, I was wishing the other robot had survived. Even though we found no trace of his dome where your records indicated, I still feel he should be with us."
"Perhaps he is, in spirit, since you insist robots have souls. Where's your faith, Adam?"
But there was no mockery inside her. Souls or not, Adam's God had been very good to them.
And far to the south, an aged figure limped over rubble to the face of a cliff. Under his hands, a cleverly concealed door swung open, and he pushed inward, closing and barring it behind him, and heading down the narrow tunnel to a rounded cavern at its end. It had been years since he had been there, but the place was still home to him as he creaked down onto a bench and began removing tattered, travel-stained clothes. Last of all, he pulled a mask and gray wig from his head, to* reveal the dented and worn body of the third

robot.
He sighed wearily as he glanced at the few tattered books and papers he had salvaged from the ruinous growth of stalagmites and stalactites within the chamber, and at the corroded switch the unplanned dampness had shorted seven hundred years before. And finally, his gaze rested on his greatest treasure. It was faded, even under
the plastic cover, but the bitter face of Simon Ames still gazed out in recognizable form.
The third robot nodded toward it with a strange mixture of old familiarity and ever-new awe. "Over two thousand miles in my condition, Simon Ames, to check on a story I heard in one of the colonies, and months of searching for them. But I had to know. Well, they're good for the world. They'll bring all the things .1 couldn't, and their thoughts are young and strong, as the race is young and strong."
For a moment, he stared about the chamber and to the tunnel his adapted bacteria had eaten toward the outside world, resting again on the picture. Then he cut off the main generator and settled down in the darkness.
"Seven hundred years since I came out to find man extinct on the earth," he told the picture. "Four hundred since I learned enough to dare attempt his recreation, and over three hundred since the last of my su-perfrozen human ova grew to success. Now I've done my part. Man has an unbroken tradition back to your race, with no knowledge of the break. He's strong and young and fruitful, and he has new leaders, better than I could ever be alone. I can do no more for him!"
For a moment there was only the sound of his hands sliding against metal, and then a faint sigh. "Into my hands, Simon Ames, you gave your race. Now, into Thy Hands, God of that race, if You exist as my brother believes, I commend him-and my spirit."
Then there was a click as his hands found the switch to his generator, and final silence.
And It Comes Out Here
No, YOU'RE WRONG. I'm not your father's ghost, even if I do look a bit like him. But it's a longish story, and you might as well let me in. You will, you know, so why quibble about it? At least, you always have ... or do ... or will. I don't know, words get all mixed up. We don't have the right attitude toward tense for a situation like this.
Anyhow, you'll let me in. I did.
Thanks. You think you're crazy, of course, but you'll find out you aren't. It's just that things are a bit confused. And don't look at the machine out there too long-until you get used to it, you'll find it's hard on the eyes, trying to follow where the vanes go. You'll get used to it, of course, but it will take about thirty years.
You're wondering whether to give me a drink, as I remember it. Why not? And naturally, since we have the same tastes, you can make the same for me as you're having. Of course we have the same tastes- we're the same person. I'm you thirty years from now- or you're me. I remember just how you feel-I felt the same way when he came back to tell me about it, thirty years ago.
Here, have one of these cigarettes. You'll get to like them in a couple more years. And you can look at the revenue stamp date, if you still doubt my story. You'll believe it eventually, though, so it doesn't matter. .-
Right now, you're shocked-it's a bit rugged when a man meets himself for the first time. Some kind of telepathy seems to work between two of the same people-you sense things. So I'll simply go ahead talking for half an hour or so, until you get over it. After that, you'll come along with me. You know, I could try to change things around by telling what happened to me; but he told me what I was going to do, so I might as well do the same. I probably couldn't help telling you the same thing in the same words, even if I tried-and I don't

intend to try. I've gotten past that stage in worrying about things.
So let's begin when you get up in half an hour and come out with me. You'll take a closer look at the machine, then. Yeah, it'll be pretty obvious it must be a time machine-you'll sense that, too. You've seen it- just a small little cage with two seats, a luggage compartment, and a few buttons on a dash.
You'll be puzzling over what I'll fell you, and you'll be getting used to the idea that you are the guy who makes atomic power practical. Jerome Boell, just plain engineer, the man who put atomic power in every home. You won't exactly believe it, but you'll want to go along.
I'll be tired of talking by then, and in a hurry to get going. So I cut off your questions, and get you inside. I snap on a green button, and everything seems to cut off around us-you can see a sort of foggy nothing surrounding the cockpit; it is probably the field that prevents passage through time from affecting us. The luggage section isn't protected, though.
You start to say something, but by then I'm pressing a black button, and everything outside will disappear. You look for your house, but it isn't there. There is exactly nothing there-in fact, there is no there. You are completely outside of time and space, as best you can guess how things are.
You can't feel any motion, of course. You try to reach a hand out through the field into the nothing around you-and your hand goes out, all right, but nothing happens. Where the screen ends, your hand just turns over and pokes back at you. Doesn't hurt, and
when you pull your arm back, you're still sound and uninjured. But it looks odd, and you don't try it again.
Then it comes to you slowly that you're actually traveling in time. You turn to me, getting used to the idea. "So this is the fourth dimension?"
Then you feel silly, because you'll remember that I said you'd ask that. Well, I asked it after I was told, then I came back and told it to you, and I still can't help answering when you speak.
"Not exactly," I try to explain. "Maybe it's no dimension-or it might be the fifth; if you're going to skip over the so-called fourth without traveling along it, you'd need a fifth. Don't ask me. I didn't invent the machine, and I don't understand it."
"But . . ."
I let it go, apd so do you. That's a good way of going crazy. You'll see why I couldn't have invented the machine later. Of course, there may have been a start for all this once. There may have been a time when you did invent the machine-the atomic motor first, then the time machine. And when you closed the loop by going back and saving yourself the trouble, it got all tangled up. I figured out once that such a universe would need some seven or eight time and space dimensions. It's simpler just to figure that this is the way time got kinked on itself. Maybe there is no machine, and it's just easier for us to imagine it. When you spend thirty years thinking about it, as I did-and you will-you get further and further from an answer.
Anyhow, you sit there, watching nothing all around you-and no time, apparently, though there is a time effect back in the luggage space. You look at your watch, and it's still running. That means you either carry a small time field with you, or you are catching a small increment of time from the main field. I don't know, and you won't think about that then, either.
I'm smoking, and so are you, and the air in the machine is getting a bit stale. You suddenly realize that everything in the machine was wide open, yet you haven't seen any effects of air loss.
"Where are we getting our air?" you ask. "Or why don't we lose it?"
"No place for it to go," I explain. There isn't-out there is neither time nor space, apparently. How could the air leak out? You still feel gravity, but I can't explain that, either. Maybe the machine has a gravity field built in-or maybe the time that makes your watch run is responsible for gravity. In spite

of Einstein, you have always had the idea that time is an effect of gravity, and I sort of agree, still.
Then the machine stops-at least, the field around us cuts off. You feel a dankish sort of air replace the stale air, and you breathe easier, though we're in complete darkness, except for the weak light in the machine, which always burns, and a few feet of rough dirty cement floor around. You take another cigarette from me and you get out of the machine, just as I do.
I've got a bundle of clothes, and I start changing. It's a sort of simple, short-limbed, one-piece affair I put on, but it looks comfortable.
"I'm staying here," I tell you. "This is like the things they wear in this century, as near as I can remember it, and I should be able to pass fairly well. I've had all my fortune-the one you make on that atomic generator-invested in such a way I can get it on using some identification I've got with me, so I'll do all right. I know they still use some kind of money-you'll see evidence of that. And it's a pretty easy-going civilization, from what I could see. We'll go up, and I'll leave you. I like the looks of things here, and I won't be coming back with you."
You nod, remembering I've told you about it. "What century is this, anyway?"
I'd told you that, too, but you've forgotten. "As near as I can guess, it's about 2150. He told me, just as I'm telling you, that it's an interstellar civilization."
You take another cigarette from me, and follow me. Fve ^ot a small flashlight, and we grope through a pile of rubbish, and out into a corridor. This is a sub-sub-subbasement. We have to walk up a flight of stairs, and
there is an elevator waiting, fortunately with the door open. c
"What about the time machine?" you ask.
"Since nobody ever stole it, it's safe."
We get in the elevator, and I say "first" to it. It gives out a coughing noise, and the basement openings begin to click by us. There's no feeling of acceleration-some kind of false gravity they use in the future. Then the door opens, and the elevator says "first" back at us.
It's obviously a service elevator, and we're in a dim corridor, with nobody around. I grab your hand and shake it. "You go that way. Don't worry about getting lost; you never did, so you can't. Find the museum, grab the motor, and get out. And good luck to you."
You act as if you're dreaming, though you can't believe it's a dream. You nod at me, and I move out into the main corridor. A second later, you see me going by, mixed into a crowd that is loafing along toward a restaurant, or something like it, that is just opening. I'm asking questions of a man, who points, and I turn and move off.
You come out of the side corridor, and go down a hall, away from the restaurant. There are quiet little signs along the hall. You look at them, realizing that things have changed.
STEIJ:NERI, FAUNTEN, Z:RGOT DISPENSERI. The signs
are very quiet and dignified. Some of them can be decoded to stationery shops, fountains, and the like. What a zergot is, you don't know. You stop at a sign that announces: TRAV:L BIWROU-F:RST-CLAS TWRZ-
MARZ AND X: TROUDJ:N PLANETS. SPEJ:L REITS TU AOL
S:NZ WTXIN 60 LYT IIRZ! But there is only a single picture of a dull-looking metal sphere, with passengers moving up a ramp, and the office is closed. You begin to get the hang of the spelling they use, though.
Now there are people around you, but nobody pays much attention to you. Why should they? You wouldn't care if you saw a man in a leopard-skin suit-you'd figure it was some part in a play, and let it go. Well, people don't change much.
You get up your courage and go up to a boy selling

something that might be papers on tapes. "Where can I find the Museum of Science?"
Downayer rien turn lefa the sign. Stoo bloss," he tells you. Around you, you hear some pretty normal English, but there are others using stuff as garbled as his. You go right until you find a big sign built into the rubbery surface of the walk: MIUZI:M :v SYENS. There's an arrow pointing, and you turn left. Ahead of you, two blocks 'on, you can see a pink building, with faint aqua trimming, bigger than most of the others. They are building lower than they used to, apparently. Twenty floors up seems about the maximum. You head for it, and find the sidewalk is marked with the information that it is the museum.
You go up the steps, but you see that it seems to be closed. You hesitate for a moment, then. You're beginning to think the whole affair is a bunch of nonsense, and you should get back to the tune machine and go home. But then a guard comes to the gate-except for the short legs in his suit, and the grin on his face, he looks like any other guard.
What's more, he speaks pretty clearly. Everyone says things in a sort of drawl, with softer vowels, and slurred consonants, but it's rather pleasant.
"Help you, sir? Oh, of course. You must be playing in 'Atoms and Axioms.' The museum's closed, but I'll be glad to let you study whatever you need for color in your role. Nice show. I saw it twice."
"Thanks," you mutter, wondering what kind of a civilization can produce guards as polite as that. "I-I'm told I should investigate your display of atomic generators."
He beams at that. "Of course." The gate is swung to behind you, but obviously he isn't locking it-in fact, there doesn't seem to be a lock. "Must be a new part. You go down that corridor, up one flight of stairs, and left. Finest display in the worlds. We've got the original of the first thirteen models. Profesor Jonas was using them to check his latest theory of how they work. Too bad he couldn't explain the principle, either. Someone will, some day, though. Lord, the genius of that twen-
tieth century inventor! It's quite a hobby with me, sir. I've read everything I could get on the period. Oh- congratulations on your pronunciation. Sounds just like some of our oldest tapes."
You get away from him, finally, after some polite thanks. The building seems deserted, and you wander up the stairs. There's a room on your right filled with something that proclaims itself the first truly plastic diamond former, and you go up to it. As you come near, it goes through a crazy wiggle inside, stops turning out a continual row of what seem to be bearings, and slips a hunk of something about the size of a penny toward you. "Souvenir," it announces in a well-modulated voice. "This is a typical gemstone of the twentieth century, properly cut to fifty-eight facets, known technically as a Jaegger diamond, and approximately twenty carats in size. You can have it made into a ring on the third floor during morning hours for one-tenth credit. If you have more than one child, press the red button for the number of stones you desire."
You put it in your pocket, gulping a little, and get back to the corridor. You turn left, and go past a big room in which models of space ships-from the original thing that looks like a V-2, and is labeled first lunar rocket, to a ten-foot globe, complete with miniature manikins-are sailing about in some kind of orbits. Then there is one labeled WEP:NZ, filled with everything from a crossbow to a tiny little rod four niches long and half the size of a pencil, marked FYN:L HAND-ARM. Beyond is the end of the corridor, and a big place that bears a sign, MOD:LZ :v ATOMIC PAU:R SORSEZ.
By that tune, you're almost convinced. And you've been doing a lot of thinking about what you can do. The story I'm telling has been sinking in, but you aren't completely willing to accept it.

You notice that the models are all mounted on tables, and that they're a lot smaller than you thought. They seem to be in chronological order, and the latest one, marked 2147-RINGS DYN:POT, is about the size of a desk telephone. The earlier ones are larger, of course, but with variations, probably depending on the power
output. A big sign on the ceiling gives a lot of dope on atomic generators, explaining that this is the first invention which sprang full blown into basically final form.
You study it, but it mentions casually the inventor, without giving his name-either they don't know it, or they take it for granted that everyone does, which seems more probable. They call attention to the fact that they have the original model of the first atomic generator built, complete with design drawings, original manuscript on operation, and full patent application. They state that it has all major refinements, operating on any fuel, producing electricity at any desired voltage up to five million, any chosen cyclic rate from direct current to one thousand megacycles, and any amperage up to one thousand, its maximum power output being fifty kilowatts, limited by the current-carrying capacity of the outputs. They also mention that the operating principle is still being investigated, and that only such refinements as better alloys and the addition of magnetric and nucleatric current outlets have been added since the original.
So you go to the end and look over the thing. It's simply a square box with a huge plug on each side, and a set of vernier controls on top, plus a little hole marked in old-style spelling, DROP BB'S OR WIRE HERE. Apparently that's the way it's fueled. It's about one foot on a side.
"Nice," the guard says over your shoulder. "It finally wore out one of the cathogrids, and we had to replace that, but otherwise it's exactly as the great inventor made it. And it still operates as well as ever. Like to have me tell you about it?"
"Not particularly," you begin, and then realize bad manners seem to be out up here. While you're searching for an answer, the guard pulls something out of his pocket and stares at it.
"Fine, fine. The mayor of Altasecarba-Centaurian, you know-is arriving, but I'll be back in about ten minutes. He wants to examine some of the weapons for a monograph on Centaurian primitives compared to nineteenth-century man. You'll pardpn me?"
You pardon him all over the place, and he wanders off happily. You go up,, to the head of the line, to that Rinks Dynapot, or whatever it transliterates to. That's small, and you can carry it. But the darned thing is absolutely fixed. You can't see any bolts, but you can't budge it, either.
You work down the line-it'd be foolish to take the early model if you can get one with built-in magnetic current terminals-Ehrenhaft or some other principle?-and nuclear binding-force energy terminals. But they're all held down by the same whatchamaycallem effect.
And finally, you're right back beside the original first model. It's probably bolted down, too-but you try it tentatively, and you find it moves. There's a little sign under it, indicating you shouldn't touch it, since the gravostatic plate is being renewed.
Well, you won't be able to change the time cycle by doing anything I haven't told you, but a working model such as that is a handy thing. You lift it-and it weighs about fifty pounds! But it can be carried.
You expect a warning bell, but nothing happens. As a matter of fact, if you'd stop drinking so much of that Scotch and staring at the tune machine out there now, you'd hear what I'm saying, and know what will happen to you. But of course, just as I did, you're going to miss a lot of what I say from now on, and have to find out for yourself. But maybe some of it helps-I've tried to remember how much I remembered, after he told me, but I can't be sure. So I'll

keep on talking. I probably can't help it, anyhow.
Well, you stagger down the corridor, looking for the guard, but all seems clear. Then you hear his voice from the weapons room. You bend down and try to scurry past, but you know you're in full view. Nothing happens, though.
You stumble down the stairs, feeling all the futuristic rays in the world on your back, and still nothing happens. Ahead of you, the gate is closed. You reach it, and it opens obligingly by itself. You breathe a quick sigh of relief, and start out onto the street.
Then there's a yell behind you. You don't wait. You put one leg in front of the other, and you begin moving down the walk, ducking past people, who stare at you with expressions you haven't time to see. There's another yell behind you.
Something goes over your head and drops on the sidewalk just in front of your feet, with a sudden ringing sound. You don't wait to find out about that, either. Somebody reaches out a hand to catch you, and you dart past.
The street is pretty clear now, and you jolt along, with your arms seeming to come out of the sockets, and that atomic generator getting heavier at every step.
Out of nowhere, something in a blue uniform about six feet tall and on the beefy side appears-and the star hasn't changed any. The cop catches your arm, and you know you're not going to get away. So you stop.
"You can't exert yourself that hard in this heat, fellow," the cop says. "There are laws against that, without a yellow sticker. Here, let me grab you a taxi."
Reaction sets in a bit, and your knees begin to buckle, but you shake your head, and come up for air.
"I-I left my money home," you begin.
The cop nods. "Oh, that explains it. Fine, I won't have to give you an appearance schedule. But you should have come to me." He reaches out and taps a pedestrian lightly on the shoulder. "Sir, emergency request. Would you help this gentleman?"
The pedestrian grins, looks at his watch, and nods. "How far?"
You did notice the name of the building from which you came, and you mutter it. The stranger nods again, reaches out, and picks up the other side of the generator, blowing a little whistle the cop hands him. Pedestrians begin to move aside, and you and the stranger jog down the street at a trot, with a nice clear path, while the cop stands beaming at you both.
That way, it isn't so bad. And you begin to see why I decided I might like to stay up here in the future. But all the same, the organized cooperation here doesn't
look too good. The guard .can get the same, and be there before you.
And he is. He stands just inside the door of the building as you reach it. The stranger lifts an eyebrow, and goes off at once when you nod at him, not waiting for thanks. And the guard comes up, holding some dinkus in his hand, about the size of a big folding camera, and not too dissimilar in other ways. He snaps it open, and you get set to duck.
"You forget the prints, monograph, and patent applications," he says. "They go with the generator-we don't like to have them separated. A good thing I knew the production offices of 'Atoms and Axioms' were in this building. Just let us know when you're finished with the model, and we'll pick it up. What's it for-repro for a new skit hi a hurry?"
You swallow several sets of tonsils you had removed years before, and take the bundle of papers he hands you out of the little case. He pumps you for some more information, which you give him at random. But it seems to satisfy your amiable guard friend. He finally smiles in satisfaction, and heads back to the museum.
You still don't believe it, but you pick up the atomic generator and the

information sheets, and you head down toward the service elevator. There is no button on it. In fact, there's no door there.
You start looking for other doors or corridors, but you know this is right-the signs along the halls are the same as they were.
Then there's a sort of cough, and something dilates in the wall. It forms a perfect door, and the elevator stands there waiting. You get in, gulping out something about going all the way down, and then wondering how a machine geared for voice operation can make anything of that.- What the deuce would that lowest basement be called? But the elevator has closed, and is moving downward in a hurry. It coughs again, and you're at the original level. You get out-and realize you don't have a light.
You'll never know what you stumbled over, but somehow, you move back in the direction of the time
machine, bumping against boxes, staggering here and there, and trying to find the right place by sheer feel. Then a shred of dim light appears-it's the weak light in the time machine, and you've located it.
You put the atomic generator in the luggage space, throw the papers down beside it, and climb into the cockpit, sweating and mumbling. You reach forward toward the green button, and hesitate-but there's a' red one beside it, and you finally decide on that.
Suddenly, there's a confused yell from the direction of the elevator, and a beam of light strikes against your eyes, with a shout punctuating it. Your finger touches the red button.
You'll never know what the shouting was about- whether they finally doped out the fact they'd been robbed, or whether they were trying to help you. You don't care then. The field springs up around you, and the next button you touch-the one on the board that hasn't been used so far-sends you off into the nothingness. There is no beam of light, you can't hear a thing, and you're safe.
It isn't much of a trip back. You sit there smoking and letting your nerves settle back to normal. You notice a third set of buttons, with some pencil marks over
them-PRESS-THESE TO RETURN TO YOURSELF THIRTY
YEARS-and you begin waiting for the air to get stale. It doesn't because there is only one of you this time.
Instead, everything flashes off, and you're sitting in the machine in your own back yard.
You'll figure out the cycle in more details later. You get into the machine hi front of your house, go to the future in the subbasement, land in your backyard, and then hop back thirty years to pick up yourself, landing hi front of your house. Just that. But right then, you don't care. You jump out and start pulling out that atomic generator and taking it inside.
It isn't hard to disassemble-but you don't learn a thing; just some plates of metal, some spiral coils, and a few odds and ends-all things that can be made easily enough, all obviously of common metals. But when you put it together again, about an hour later, you notice
something-everything in it is brand new, and there's one set of copper wires "missing! It won't work. You put some #12 house wire in, exactly like the set on the other side, drop in some iron filings, and try it again.
And with the controls set at 120 volts, 60 cycles, and 15 amperes, you get just that. You don't need the power company any more. And you feel a little happier when you realize that the luggage space wasn't insulated from time effects by a field, so the motor has moved backward in time, somehow, and is back to its original youth-minus the replaced wires the guard mentioned-which probably wore out because of the makeshift job you've just done.
But you begin getting more of a jolt when you find that the papers are all in your own writing, that your name is down as the inventor, and that the date of

the patent application is 1991.
Yeah. It will begin to soak in, then. You pick up an atomic generator in the future and bring it back to the past-your present-so that it can be put in the museum with you as the inventor so you can steal it to be the inventor. And you do it in a time machine which you bring back to~ yourself to take yourself into the future to return to take back to yourself.
Who invented anything? And who built them? While your riches from the generator are piling in, and little kids from school are coming around to stare at the man who changed history and made atomic power so common that no nation could hope to be anything but a democracy and a peaceful one-after some of the worst times in history for a few years-while your name becomes as common as Ampere, or Faraday, or any other spelled without a capital letter, you're thinking of that.
And one day, you come across an old poem- something about some folks calling it evolution and others calling it God. You go out, make a few provisions for the future, and come back to climb into the time machine that's waiting in the building you had put around it. Then you'll be knocking on your own door, thirty years back-or right now, from your view-and telling yourself all these things I'm telling you.
But now ...
Well, the drinks are finished, you're woozy enough to go along with me without protest, and I want to find out just why those people up there came looking for you and shouting, before the time machine left.
Come on, let's go.
The Monster
His FEET WERE moving with an automatic monotony along the souncWeadening material of the flooring. He looked at them, seeing them in motion, and listened for the little taps they made. Then his eyes moved up along the rough tweed of his trousers to the shorter motion of his thighs. There was something good about the movement, almost a purpose.
He tried making his arms move, and found that they accepted the rhythm, the right arm moving forward with the left leg, giving a feeling of balance. It was nice to feel the movement, and nice to know that he could walk so smoothly.
His eyes tired of the motion quickly, however, and he glanced along the hall where he was moving. There were innumerable doors along it; it was a long hall, with a bend at the end. He reached the bend, and began to wonder how he could make the turn. But his feet seemed to know better than he, since one of them shortened its stride automatically, and his body swung right, before picking up the smooth motion again.
The new hallway was like the old one, painted white, with the long row of doors. He began to wonder idly what might lie behind all the doors. A universe of hallways and doors that branched off into more hallways? It seemed purposeless to him. He slowed his steps, just as a series of sounds reached him from one of the doors.
It was speech-and that meant there was someone else in this universe in which he had found himself. He stopped outside the door, turning his head to listen. The sounds were muffled, but he could make out most of the words.
Politics, his mind told him. The word had some meaning to him, but not much. Someone inside was talking to someone else about the best way to avoid the battle on the moon, now that both powers had bases there. There was a queer tone of fear to the comments on the new iron-chain reaction bombs and what they could do from the moon.
It meant nothing to him, except that he was not alone, and that it stirred up knowledge in his head of a world like a ball in space with a moon that circled it. He tried to catch more conversation, but it had stopped, and the other doors seemed silent. Then he found one where a speaker was cursing at the idea

of introducing robots into a world already a mess, calling someone else by name.
That hit the listener, sending shocks of awareness down his consciousness. He had no name! Who was he? Where was he? And what had come before he found himself here?
He found no answers, savagely though he groped through his reluctant mind. A single word emerged- amnesia, loss of memory. Did that mean he had once had memories? Then he tried to reason out whether an amnesiac would have a feeling of personality, but could not guess. He could not even be sure he had none.
He stared at the knob of the door, wondering if the men inside would know the answers. His hand moved to the knob slowly. Then, before he could act, there was the sudden, violent sound of running footsteps down the hall.
He swung about to see two men come plunging around the corner and toward him. It hadn't occurred to hfm that legs could move so quickly. One man was thicker than he was, dressed in a dirty smock of some kind, and the other was neat and trim, in figure and
dress, in a khaki outfit he wore like a badge. The one in khaki opened his mouth."
"There he is! Stop him! You-Expeto! Haiti George . . ."
Expeto . . . George Expeto! So he did have a name-unless the first name belonged to the other man. No matter, it was a name. George accepted it and gratitude ran through him sharply. Then he realized the senselessness of the order. How could he halt when he was already standing still? Besides, there were those rapid motions. ...
The two men let out a yell as George charged into motion, finding his legs could easily hold the speed of a running motion. He stared doubtfully at another corner, but somehow his responses were equal to it. He started "to slow to a halt-just as something whined by his head and spattered against a white wall. His mind catalogued it as a bullet from a silent zep-gun, and bullets were used in animosity. The two men were his enemies.
He considered it, and found he had no desire to kill them; besides, he had no gun. He doubled his speed, shot down another hall, ran into stairs and took them at a single leap. It was a mistake. They led to a narrower hallway, obviously recently blocked off, with a single door. And the man with the zep-gun was charging after him as he hesitated.
He hit the door with his shoulder and was inside, in a strange room of machinery and tables and benches. Most of it was strange to his eyes, though he could recognize a small, portable boron-reactor and generator unit. It was obviously one of the new hundred-kilowatt jobs.
But the place was a blind alley! Behind him, the man in khaki leaped through the busted door, his zep-gun ready. But the panting, older figure of the man in the smock was behind him, catching his arm.
"No! Man, you'd get a hundred years of Lunar Prison for shooting Expeto. He's worth his weight in general's stars! If he . . ."
"Yeah, if! George, we can't risk it. Security comes
first. And if he isn't, we can't have another paranoiac running around. Remember the other?"
Expeto dropped his shoulders, staring at them and the queer fear that was in them. "I'm not George?" he asked slowly. "But I've got to be George. I've got to have a name."
The older man nodded. "Sure, George, you're George-George Expeto. Take it easy, Colonel Kallik! Sure, you're George. And I'm George-George Enders Obanion. Take it easy, George, and you'll be all right. We're not going to hurt you. We want to help you."
It was a ruse, and Expeto knew it. They didn't want to help-he was somehow important, and they wanted him for something. His name wasn't George-just Expeto. The man was lying. But there was nothing else to do; he had no

weapons.
He shrugged. "Then tell me something about myself."
Obanion nodded, catching at the other man's hand. "Sure, George. See that chart on the wall, there behind you . . . Now!"
Expeto had barely time to turn and notice there was no chart on the wall before he felt a violent motion at his back, and a tiny catching reaction as the other's hand hit him. Then he blanked out.
He came back to consciousness abruptly, surprised to find that there was no pain in his head. A blow sufficient to knock him out should have left afterpains. He was alone with his thoughts.
They weren't good thoughts. His mind was seizing on the words the others had used, and trying to dig sense out of them. Amnesia was a rare thing-too rare. But paranoia was more common. A man might first feel others were persecuting him, then be sure of it, and finally lose all reality in his fantasies of persecution and his own importance. Then he was a paranoiac, making np fantastic lies to himself, but cunning enough, and seemingly rational at times.
But they had been persecuting him! There'd been the man with the gun . . . and they'd said he was impor-
tant! Or had he only imagined it? If someone important had paranoia, would they deliberately induce amnesia as a curative step?
And who was he and where? On the first, he didn't care-George Expeto would do. The second took more care, but he had begun to decide it was a hospital-or asylum. The room here was whitewashed, and the bed was the only furniture. He stared down at his body. They'd strapped him down, and his arms were encased in thin metal chains!
He tried to recall all he could of hospitals, but nothing came. If he had ever been sick, there was no memory of it. Nor could he remember pain, or what it was like, though he knew the word.
The door was opening then, cautiously, and a figure in white came in. Expeto stared at the figure, and a slow churning began in his head. The words were reluctant this time, but they came, mere surface whispers that he had to fight to retain. But the differences in the figure made them necessary. The longer hair, the softer face, the swelling at the breast, and something about the hips stirred his memories just enough.
"You're-woman!" He got the word out, not sure it would come.
She jumped at his voice, reaching for the door which she had closed slowly. Fear washed over her face, but she nodded, gulping. "I-of course. But I'm just a technician, and they'll be here, and ... They've fastened you down!"
That seemed to bring her back to normal, and she came over, her eyes sweeping over him curiously, while one eyebrow lifted, and she whistled. "Um, not bad. Hi, Romeo. Too bad you're a monster! You don't look mean."
"So you came to satisfy your curiosity," he guessed, and his mind puzzled it over, trying to identify the urge that drove men to stare at beasts in cages. He was just a beast to them, a monster-but somehow important. And in the greater puzzle of it all, he couldn't even resent her remark. Instead, something that had been puzzling him since he'd found the word came to the sur-
face. "Why are there men and women-and who am I?"
She glanced at her watch, her ear to the door. Then she glided over to him. "I guess you're the most important man in the world-if you're a man, and not pure monster. Here."
She found his hand had limited freedom in the chains and moved it over her body, while he stared at her. Her eyes were intent on him. "Well. Now do you know why there are men and women?" Her stare intensified as he shook his head, and her lips firmed. "My God, it's true-and you couldn't act that well! That's all I wanted to know! And now they'll take over the whole moon! Look, don't

tell them I was here-they'll kill you if you do. Or do you know what death is? Yeah, that's it, kaput! Don't talk, then. Not a word!"
She was at the door, Listening. Finally she opened it, and moved out. . . . There was no sound from the zep-gun, but the splaatt of the bullet reached Expeto's ears. He shuddered, writhing within himself as her exploding body jerked back out of sight. She'd been pleasant to look at. Maybe that was what women were for.
Obanion was over him then, while a crowd collected in the hall, all wearing khaki. "We're not going to kill you, Expeto. We knew she'd come-or hoped she would. Now, if I unfasten your chains, will you behave? We've only got four hours left. O.K., Colonel Kallik?"
The colonel nodded. Behind him, the others were gathering something up and leaving.
"She's the spy, all right. That must make the last of them. Clever. I'd have sworn she was O.K. But they tipped their hand in letting Expeto's door stay unbolted before. Well, the trap worked. Sorry about cutting down your time."
Obanion nodded, and now it was a group of men in white uniforms who came in, while the khaki-clad men left. They were wheeling in assorted machines, something that might have been an encephalograph, a unitary cerebrotrope, along with other instruments.
Expeto watched them, his mind freezing at the impli-
cations. But he wasn't insane. His thoughts were lucid. He opened his mouth to protest, just as Obanion swung around.
"Any feeling we're persecuting you, Expeto? Maybe you'd like to get in a few licks, to break my skull and run away where you'd be understood. You might get away with it; you're stronger than I am. Your reaction time is better, too. See, I'm giving you the idea. And you've only got four hours in which to do it."
Expeto shook his head. That way lay madness. Let his mind feel he was persecuted and he'd surely be the paranoiac he'd heard mentioned. There had to be another answer. This was a hospital-and men were healed in hospitals. Even of madness. It could only be a test.
"No," he denied slowly, and was surprised to find it was true. "No, I don't want to kill you, doctor. If I've been insane, it's gone. But I can't remember-I can't remember!"
He pulled his voice down from its shriek, shook his head again and tried to restrain himself. "I'll cooperate. Only tell me who I am. What have I done that makes people call me a monster? My God, give me an anchor to hold me steady, and then do what you want."
"You're better off not knowing, since you seem to be able to guess when I'm lying." Obanion motioned the other men up, and they waited while Expeto took the chair they pointed out. Then they began clamping devices on his head.
"You're what the girl said-the spy. You're the most important man in the world right now-if you can stay sane. You're the one man who carries the secret of how we can live on the moon, protect Earth from aggressive powers, even get to the stars some day."
"But I can't remember-anything!"
"It doesn't matter. The secret's in you and we know how to use it. All right, now I'm going to give you some tests, and I want you to tell me exactly what comes into your mind. The instruments will check on it, so lying won't do any good. Ready?"
It went on and on, while new shifts came in. The
clock on the wall indicated only an hour, but it might have been a century, when Obanion sighed and turned his work over to another.
Expeto's thoughts were reeling. He grabbed the breather gratefully, let his head thump back. There must be a way.
"What day is this?" he asked. At their silence, he frowned. "Cooperate means

both working together. I've been doing my part. Or is it too much to answer a sun-pie question?"
The new man nodded slowly. "You're right. You deserve some answers, if I can give them without breaking security. It's June eighth, nineteen ninety-one-eleven P.M."
It checked with figures that had appeared in the back of his mind, ruining the one theory he'd had. "The President is William Olsen?"
The doctor nodded, killing the last chance at a theory. For a time, he'd thought that perhaps the aggressive countries had won, and that this was their dictatorship. If he'd been injured in a war . . . but it was nonsense, since no change had occurred in his time sense or in the administration.
"How'd I get here?"
The doctor opened his mouth, then closed it firmly. "Forget that, Expeto. You're here. Get this nonsense of a past off your mind-you never had one, understand? And no more questions. We'll never finish in less than three hours, as it is."
Expeto stood up slowly, shaking himself. "You're quite right. You won't finish. I'm sick of this. Whatever I did, you've executed your justice in killing the me that was only a set of memories. And whatever I am, I'll find for myself. To hell with the lot of you!"
He expected zep-guns to appear, and he was right. The walls suddenly opened hi panels, and six men with guns were facing him, wearing the oppressive khaki. But something hi him seemed to take over. He had the doctor in one arm and a zep-gun from the hand of a major before anyone else could move. He faced them, waiting for the bullets that would come, but they drew
back, awaiting orders. Expeto's foot found the door, kicked at it; the lock snapped.
Obanion's voice cut through it all. "Don't! No shooting! Expeto, I'm the one you want. Let Smith go, and I'll accompany you, until you're ready to let me go. Fair enough?"
Smith was protesting, but the doctor cut him short. "My fault, since I'm responsible. And the Government be damned. I'm not going to have a bunch of good men killed. His reaction's too fast. We can learn things this way, maybe better. All right, Expeto-or do you want to kill them?"
Expeto dropped the gun a trifle and nodded, while the emotions in his head threatened to make him blank out. He knew now that he could never kill even one of them. But they apparently weren't as sure. "Take me outside, and you can go back," he told Obanion.
The doctor wiped sweat from his forehead, managed a pasty smile and nodded. Surprisingly, he stepped through a different door, and down a short hall, where men with rifles stood irresolutely. Then they were outside.
Obanion turned to go back, and then hesitated. Surprisingly, he dropped an arm onto Expeto's shoulder. "Come on back inside. We can understand you. Or ... All right, I guess you're going. Thanks for taking my offer."
The door closed, and Expeto was alone. Above him, most of the building was dark, but he saw a few lighted windows, and some with men and women working over benches and with equipment. There was no sign of beds. All right, so it was some Government laboratory.
The most important monster in the world, the useful paranoiac they'd saved by amnesia. The monster they intended to persecute back to paranoia, in hopes he'd recover his memory, and the secret they wanted. Let them have the secret-but let him have peace and quiet, where his brain could recover by itself. Then he'd gladly give it to them. Or would he? Would he really be a monster again? Or might he learn the strange reason for there being men and women, the puzzle which
seemed so simple that the woman had felt mere contact would solve it?
Funny that there were so many sciences, but no science of life--or was there?

Maybe he'd been such a scientist-psychology, zoology, biology, whatever they'd call it from the Greek. Maybe the secret lay there, and it had completely burned out that part of his mind.
Then he heard the sound of a motor and knew they weren't going to let him go. He wasn't to have a moment of freedom they could prevent. He swung about sharply, studying the horizon. There were lights and a town. There'd be people, and he could hide among them.
He whipped his legs into action, driving on at a full run. The light of the moon was barely enough for him to see the ground clearly, but he managed a good deal more speed than the hallways had permitted. He heard the car behind on the road he found, and doubled his speed, while the sound of the motor slowly weakened as the distance increased.
He breathed easier when he hit the outskirts of the town, and slowed to a casual walk, imitating the steps of a few people he saw about. This was better. In the myriad of streets and among the countless others, he would be lost. The only trouble was that he was on a main street, and the lights would give him away to anyone who knew him.
He picked up a paper from a waste receptacle, and moved off to the left, seeking a less brilliantly lighted street. Now and again he glanced at the print, looking for some trace. But aside from the news that his mind recognized as normal for the tunes, there was nothing on any mysterious, all-important person, nor on anyone who was either a monster or a savior.
Ahead of him, a lone girl was tapping along on the sidewalk. He quickened his step, and she looked back, making the identity complete as her tiny bolero drifted back in the breeze to expose all but the tip of her breasts. She hesitated as he caught up with her, looking up uncertainly. "Yes?"
She couldn't know the answers. Obviously she had
never seen him. How could she tell him what he wanted to know? *
"Sorry, I thought you were someone else. No, wait. You can tell me something. Where can I find a place to stay?"
"Oh. Well, the Alhambra, I guess." She smiled a little. "Back there-see where the sign is?"
She brushed against his arm as she turned, and a faint gasp sounded. Her hand suddenly contracted on his bare skin, then jerked back sharply, while she began stepping slowly away.
"No!" It was a small wail as he caught her shoulder. Then she slumped against him, wilting as he pulled her toward his face. He released her, to see her fall down in a sagging heap.
For a moment, the sickness in him rose in great waves, undulating and horrible as he dropped beside her. But when he felt the pulse in her hand still beating, it left. He hadn't killed her, only frightened her into unconsciousness.
He stood there, tasting that. Only frightened her that much!
And finally he turned about and headed for the Alhambra. There was nothing he could do for her; she'd recover, in time, and it would be better if she didn't see him there. Then maybe she'd decide it was all a fantasy.
He watched a streak mount the horizon bitterly, remembering that the men had been discussing the two bases on the moon in the room where he'd first heard voices. They could face war, such as the rocket he saw being prepared, raining down in hell bombs from a quarter of a million miles, and only fear it vaguely. But he could drive someone senseless by touching her!
He found the night clerk busy watching a television set with the screen badly adjusted to an overbalance of red, and signed the register with the full name he'd hoped once was his. George Expeto, from-make it from New York. It wouldn't matter.
"Twenty dollars," the clerk told him.
Dollars? He shook his head slowly, trying to think.

Something about dollars and cents. But it made no sense.
The clerk's eyes were hard. "No dough, eh? O.K., try to fool someone else. No baggage, no dough, no room. Scram."
Expeto stood irresolutely, trying to mak& sense out of it still. Dollars-something . . . The clerk had swung back to watching the set, and he reached out for the scrawny shoulder, drawing the man around.
"But look . . ." Then it was no use. The shoulder had crumpled in his hand like a rotten stick, and the man had lapsed into a faint with a single shriek.
Expeto stood outside, swaying while the sickness washed away slowly, and he told himself the doctors would fix the man up; that was what they were for. They'd fix him, and no real harm had been done. He hadn't meant to hurt the man. He'd only meant to ask him what dollars were and how to get them.
Then he moved on into a little park and dropped onto a seat. But the sickness was still there, a sickness he hadn't noticed, but which had been growing on him even before he'd hurt the clerk. It was as if something were slowly eroding his mind. Even the curious memory of ideas and words was going!
He was sitting there, his head in his hands, trying to catch himself, when the car drove up. Obanion and Kal-lik got out, but Obanion came over alone.
"Come on, Expeto. It won't work. You might as well come back. And there's only an hour left!"
Expeto got up slowly, nodding wearily. The doctor was right-there was no place for such a monster as he in the world.
"Left before what?" he asked dully, as he climbed into the rear of the car, and watched Obanion lock the door and the glass slide between him and the front seat.
For a second Obanion hesitated, then he shrugged. "All right. Maybe you should know. In another hour you'll be dead! And nothing can prevent it."
Expeto took it slowly, letting the thought sink into the muddying depths of his mind. But he was important ... they'd told him so. Or had they? They'd chased him about, bound him down, refused to tell him what he needed, refused him even civil decency and told him he was the hope of the world. Or had he only imagined it?
"I never wanted anything but myself. Only myself. And they wouldn't let me have that-not even for a few hours. They had to hound me . . ." He realized he was muttering aloud and stopped it.
But from the front seat, the voices came back, muffled by the glass, Kallik speaking first. "See, paranoia all right. Thinks he's being persecuted."
"He is." Obanion nodded slowly. "With the time limit the Government insisted on, the ruin of our plans by the spies that got through, and the need to get the facts, what else could we do? If they'd let us animate him for a week-but six hours' limit on the vital crystals! We've had to be brutal."
"You talk as if he were a human being. Remember the other-XP One? Crazy, killing people, or trying to. I tell you, the robots can't be made trustworthy yet, no matter what you cybernetics boys have found in the last ten years. This one only had six hours instead of ten for the other, and he's already threatened us and hurt two people."
"Maybe. We. don't know all the story yet." Obanion wiped his forehead. "And damn it, he is human. That's what makes it tough, knowing we've got to treat him like a machine. Maybe we grew his brain out of sili-cones and trick metal crystals, and built his body in a laboratory, but the mechanical education he got made him a lot more human than some people, or should have made him so. If I can prove he isn't crazy . . ."
Expeto-Experiment Two-stared at the hands he held before his face. He bent the fingers, looking at the veins and muscles. Then, slowly, with his other hand, he twisted at them, stretching them out and out, until there could be no doubt of the rubbery plastic they were.
A monster! A thing grown in a laboratory, made out of mechanical parts, and

fed bits of human education from tapes in cybernetics machines! A thing that would walk on the moon without air and take over enemy
bases, or do all men's work-but that could never be taken as a man by human beings, who grew from something or other, but were never built. A thing to be animated for a few hours, and deliberately set to die at the end of that time, as a precaution-because it had no real life, and it wasn't murder to kill a built thing!
' A thing that somehow couldn't kill men, it seemed, judging by the sickness he'd felt when he'd hurt or threatened them. But a thing of which they couldn't be sure-until they'd tested him and found he was complete and sane.
He rocked back and forth on the seat, moaning a little. He didn't want to die; but already, the eroded places in his brain were growing larger. It didn't matter; he had never been anyone; he never could be anyone. But he didn't want to die!
"Hah' an hour left," the cyberneticist, Obanion, said slowly. "And less than that, unless we make sure he doesn't exert himself. He's about over."
Then the car was coming into the garage, and Obanion got out with Kallik. Expeto went with them quietly, knowing that Obanion was right. Already, he was finding it hard to use his legs or control what passed for muscles. They went back to the room with the instruments and the waiting technicians.
For a moment, he looked at the humans there. Oban-ion's eyes were veiled, but the others were open to his gaze. And there was no pity there. Men don't pity a car that is too old and must go to the scrap heap. He was only a machine, no matter how valuable. And after him, other machines would see the faces of men turned away from them, generation after generation.
Slowly, he kicked at the chair, tipping it over without splintering it, and his voice came out as high and shrill as his faltering control could force'it.
"No! No more! You've persecuted me enough. You've tried to kill me-me, the hope of your puny race! You've laughed at me and tortured me. But I'm smarter than you- greater than you! I can kill you-all of you-the whole world, with my bare hands."
He saw shock on Obanion's face, and sadness, and
for that he was almost sorry. But the smug satisfaction of Kallik as the zep-gun came up and the horror on the faces of the others counteracted it. He yelled once, and charged at them.
For a moment, he was afraid that he would not be stopped before he had to injure at least one of them. But then the zep-gun in Kallik's hand spoke silently, and the bullet smashed against the mockery of Expeto's body.
He lay there, watching them slowly recover from their fright. It didn't matter when one of them came over and began kicking him senselessly. It didn't even matter when Obanion put a stop to it.
His senses were fading now, and he knew that the excitement had shortened his brief time, and that the crystals were about to break apart and put an end to his short existence. But in a curious way, while he still hated and feared death, he was resigned to it.
They'd be better off. Maybe the first experimental robot had known that. Expeto let the thought linger, finding it good. He couldn't believe the other had grown insane; it, too, must have found the bitter truth, and tried to do the only possible thing, even when that involved genuine injury to a few of the humans.
Now they'd have two such failures, and it would be perhaps years before they'd risk another, when their checks failed to show the reason for the nonexistent flaws. They'd have to solve their own problems of war or peace, without mechanical monsters to make them almost gods in power, while teaching them the disregard of devils for life other than their own.
And there'd be no more of his kind to be used and despised, and persecuted. Persecuted? The word stirred up thoughts . . . something about paranoia and

insanity.
But it faded. Everything faded. And he sank through vague content into growing blackness. His thoughts were almost happy as death claimed him.

The Years Draw Nigh

MARS WAS HARSH and old, worn with the footsteps of two races that had come and gone, leaving only scant traces behind. Even the wind was tired, and its thin wailing was a monotonous mutter of memories from its eroded past.
Zeke Lerner stared out from the dust-covered observation port of the hastily-reconditioned little rocket, across the scarred runways and sand-filled pits for the star ships, toward the ruins of what had once been the great Star Station. His face was gray and dull as he watched a figure coming across the pitted sand of the field toward his ship.
He sighed softly, a faint sound in the tiny cabin, and his breath stirred the dust that lay everywhere. In four centuries, a man can learn not to think, but feelings and emotions survive. He was tired beyond any power of the rejuvenation treatments to remedy. His shoulders sagged slightly, confirming the age that the gray in his hair implied. But his eyes were older still as he swung about to open the inner lock of the ship.
Stendal was a middle-aged man, but some of the same age and fatigue lay on his face when he dropped his aspirator helmet and slumped limply into a seat. His plain uniform as Assistant Coordinator of Terra was covered with dirt and grime. He grinned faintly at Zeke and pulled a thermos of coffee out of its niche.

"So the Thirty-four is coming back?" Zeke asked quietly. o
He had no need of the other's nod, though. When they'd finally located him at the Rejuvenation Center and rushed him to the rocket field, he'd suspected. Only a matter of extreme urgency could interrupt a man's return to youth. The messengers had been uninformative, but he had been sure, once they told him Stendal was waiting on Mars. They must have been keeping it restricted to the top administrators. Zeke's eyes went back to the dirt on the man's uniform.
"Top secret," Stendal confirmed. "So hush-hush that I came to do the janitor work here. Now it's all yours. The robots and I managed to get it into a reasonable facsimile of repaired condition. Oof! I could use a week's sleep, but I've got to get back earthside at once. . . . Sorry to interrupt the rejuvenation, Zeke."
Zeke shrugged. Once, when the rejuvenation was new and men stood in line for days to keep their appointment, it might have mattered. Now there'd be a cancellation he could replace. Over 15 percent of the population was refusing treatment-and some of the canceling men were those only reaching their first touch of age. Each year, less of the population seemed to find life worth renewing.
"How'd you find out she was coming?" he asked. "After all, she's fifty years overdue."
Stendal tossed the thermos into a disposal chute and reached for one of Zeke's cigarettes. "Centaurus automatic signal must still be working. Nigel, at the Bureau, got a series of pips showing something coming this way faster than light. That's the only ship we have out, so it must be her, or ..."
He let it hang unfinished, but Zeke knew what he was thinking. It was either the Thirty-Four or another race coming with a ship that could exceed light speed. Sudden adrenalin shot through him, and he straightened. After all, the ship was long overdue. He wished the ship and the men no ill, but-
"No use getting up false hopes," Stendal cut into his thoughts. "The captain was a pretty determined sort, as
I remember him. Maybe he had trouble. And I'll have trouble if I don't get back. I'll leave you a robot, in case anything needs more repairs. Think you can still run this setup, Zeke?"

Zeke snorted. He'd spent tune enough at Marsport, first as head of communications, and finally as director of the whole Star Ship project, while they built the great ships and sent them out as fast as they could come'off the ways. Forty ships during half a century, each costing over four billion dollars. And the Thirty-Four was the last one out. All the rest had come back to report failure in this final quest for new frontiers.

They buckled on their aspirator helmets and went out through the locks. Stendal waved curtly and headed toward his own rocket, calling three of the waiting robots with him and sending the fourth toward the broken ruin of the administration building. Zeke watched Sten-dal's rocket take off and disappear. Then he turned for a final look over the wrecked field.

Mars was already wiping out all traces of this second race that had come boiling out from Earth, bent for the stars. Marsport had been young and booming when Zeke had come there first, three and a half centuries ago. Two centuries later, when the star ships first began to come straggling back, and they shifted him to Earth to head General Traffic, the sand was just starting to creep over the outer buildings.

Those structures were gone now, vanished into the desert, with only this single building maintained after a fashion in faint hope the last ship would return. The frame shacks and hydroponic quonsets that had hidden the ancient Martian ruins were rotted long ago; there was only the hint of a foundation here and there to show they ever existed. In a century or so there would be no evidence that Mars had ever felt the marching feet of men, except for the scraps of the returned ships that might last a few millennia longer.

Zeke sighed again, and headed toward the building.

Then his eyes went to the horizon, where the piled stones and pitted pylon of beryl steel still stood, marking what had been the unknown and apparently un-knowable race of Mars, dead perhaps ten million years before. Once that race must have spread its structures across the whole planet, but now there were only such traces as this, useless to even the archeologists. All the elaborate designs on them might have had significance once, but no man would ever decode them. There was no hint as to their nature, or where the race had vanished-or why.

He entered the lock of the building, with the robot dutifully at his heels, and surveyed it glumly. Only the one room, housing the great space-destroying ultrawave communicators, had been put in order. But most of the sand and dust was gone, and it was livable enough for a while. He checked to see that the communicator was working before walking over to the single window and staring out at the Martian ruins again.

Beside him, the robot stirred uneasily. "Orders?" it questioned.

Zeke turned back reluctantly from the window. "No orders, Ozin. We're on Mars, where men have given up dominion. You're as free as I am. Do what you like."

Ozin stirred again, worn metal protesting at its lack of usefulness, its queer, almost intelligent mind trying to resolve the problem presented by Zeke's words. But even this final robot, the last model before men abandoned the idea of robots, could not handle that. "Orders?" it repeated.

Zeke gave up. "Take my ship up and house it behind the building, out of the way, then. After that, you can cut off until I call you."

The robot wasted no words in acknowledgement, but turned slowly and headed out, its metal body clumping along as woodenly as Zeke's mind was working. The lock hissed softly, and a trace of the stale, dessicated air of Mars came in. Then Ozin appeared around the arc of the wall, heading toward the rocket. Zeke watched it enter, saw the shiplock close, and shut his eyes at the deep blue flame of the exhaust from the unbaffled
tubes.

Sand kicked up, spurting out and grating against the walls of the station wing, swishing against the pylon of

the lost Martians. For a minute, dust hung in the air. But it settled back quickly now, to show an unchanged scene. Zeke heard the ship land again behind the building.

He reached automatically for a cigarette, wondering idly if the repaired building's aspirators would take even that much added load in their labor of making a decent atmosphere out of Mars' thin air. For a second, he fiddled with the ultrawave set. The signal was coming through from Earth, indicating that they were already quietly beaming it out to where the Thirty-Four could pick it up. It was the same dull, insipid news Zeke had heard for too many decades, though it might be interesting to men who had been gone from Earth for over two centuries. There was no other signal to indicate that they were within calling distance, however.

He went to the window again, to watch the slow sinking of the sun that was reddening a distant sandstorm, until it finally crept below the horizon. With an abruptness that was typical of the planet, darkness fell. The stars seemed to leap into the sky, with Earth standing out among them. He frowned at that, realizing that he was the only man who would be seeing it. All the others were home on the planet.

The skylight was filthy, but he found a battered bench that would stand his weight and began working the dust and grime from the glass. The stars were clearer through that. A few hundred years, hadn't changed them noticeably, and he picked them out-hot points that barely flickered in the thin air of Mars. Jupiter was in view, and he knew where all the other useless planets should be, though he could not see them.

He grimaced faintly at that, remembering his life as a boy when men had dreamed that each new world might contain some rare treasure--or even intelligence to meet and compete with man. None had panned out, though. Mercury was too hot, Venus was a roiling dust-bowl under foul, poisonous layers of atmosphere, Mars worn beyond usefulness, and the other planets too cold and forbidding, except as possible stepping stones to the stars that lay farther out.

Chenery had found the trick to beat light speed when Zeke was still a callow thirty, and Marsport had sprung into life; the planet had made an ideal take-off point for ships which Earth could not permit hi her own atmosphere because of the dangerous radiation of their exhausts.

There'd been Centaurus and Sirius, and the thousands of suns beyond, some with planets and some without. There had even been the high moment when a planet had been found and colonized, a mere thousand light-years away, before men had discovered that something in the star's radiation was eventually lethal to all Earth forms. But there had been no life beyond the Solar System-and nothing that even the most foolhardy could use as a reason for man's settlement.

It had proven to be a barren universe, except for Earth and the Mars of perhaps ten million years ago. Zeke looked at the ruins again, still faintly visible in the light that sliced out from his window. Whatever had built them had reached a civilization at least as high as man's. What had happened to them that had made a culture capable of such work come to a sudden and unmarked end?

A meaningless crackle came from the ultrawave set, and he moved to it, touching up its sensitivity. For a moment again, he hoped that it would respond with only gibberish that might mean another race coming down the long starlanes toward Earth, instead of the code he knew. But he choked off the wish, even before the speaker burped again. There was a sudden sound of code symbols a second later, followed by the thin, wavering words and voice at the limit of reception.

"Star Ship Thirty-Four coming in. Can you get us? Thirty-Four calling Marsport. Landing in two hours maximum. Clear field for full splash landing. Clear field for landing without tube shields. Thirty-Four calling Marsport-"

Zeke had the great bank of accumulators working through the transmitter, and the indicators showed that the big tubes were ready to throw then- pulsed megawatts into subspace. He glanced at the bandpass and
saw that it was at its maximum intelligibility level for the distance.
"Land Marsport, Thirty-Four, as you will. All clear. Repeat."
The voice came back, weaker. It wavered, broke into a squeal, and disappeared in a hash of static. Only blind luck had given them clear subspace long enough for a complete call. Zeke cut off the transmitter; there was no purpose hi telling them that the field had been clear for decades. They'd find that soon enough.
Mars had still been a colony when they took off. It had remained one while six more of the great ships were built and sent out with orders to proceed to the limit of range before returning-or to return on significant discovery. Zeke had watched them all leave, filled with bright young volunteers, sure that they would be the ones to find a new race of intelligent life or a world that would be a paradise for men. Now the last one out was returning, and it was appropriate that he should meet the space-weary men who were coming home.
He tried to remember them, but there had been too many years and too many ships. On impulse, he knocked dust from the walls, scanning the names that had been scrawled there against regulations-and left because he had countermanded those regulations. Surprisingly, he found the one he was seeking. Hugh Mif-fen, captain of the Thirty-Four. Zeke remembered him now, a towheaded boy with a ramrod back and the hell-driving urge of divine inspiration in his eyes. And there had been "Preacher" Hook, who swore he was going to memorize the whole Bible in subspace. Only the two stood out now, over the long years.
Surely, if any group could have found a home for man or a companion intelligence, that group should have done it. Something must have happened during the fifty years they had been overdue. Their fuel would never have lasted, otherwise.
The speaker gobbled at him, finally, until he cut the power down. The wash of static could only mean that they were beginning the struggle out of subspace, knocking a hole for themselves in normal space and
crawling painfully into it. It was taking the ship longer than it should, and Zeke began to worry. Then the blare of static decreased. He knew she was down under light speed.
The ship robot took his call this time, indicating that all the men aboard were fully occupied in the task of trimming her for normal flight. The signal was clear, however, and he could hear faint sounds of men's voices in the background. There was no undue worry in them, as best he could tell.
"Sealed beam," Zeke requested. It took more power to maintain a signal that could be handled on a beam with the ultrawave, but she was close enough now to risk it; it wouldn't do to have the message accidentally picked up by Earth until he knew what the results of the trip were. The robot acknowledged his order, and the queer, clipped effect of the sealing could be detected on the signal.
Zeke grunted with satisfaction as he made his own adjustment. "Okay, this is Zeke Lerner, code responsibility 21-zy-18-obt-4-a. You can report."
"Digest of report," the robot began tonelessly. "Visited suns 3248; examined planets 2751. Checked suns on automatic spotting, 9472; checked planets and found barren on automatic spotting, 23,911. Maximum distance attained by direct route, one hundred ten thousand light-years, forty-three ship-years; arc of coverage . . ."
"Cut it out. Did you find an inhabited world?"
The robot adjusted to the interruption slowly, humming into the microphone as evidence that it was still there. Zeke swore. Then a human voice suddenly took over, weary even through the distortion of the sealed beam.
"Lerner? You still on the spot?" It was a deep bass voice that could only

belong to Hugh Miffen, in spite of the years that had roughened it. The ship had naturally carried rejuvenation equipment, but even the best treatment never wiped out all traces of time. "Sorry we had the robot on-it's about half shot, now. Anyhow, we're under light, and I'm free for a minute. Leaving out the statistics, we ran out too far and got short of fuel. We'd spotted two planets that might barely be; habitable, so we backtracked and put down on one of them. It took us about thirty-five years to find and work fuel out of the ores. Then we went on a bit before we turned home."

Zeke's eyebrows had shot up, and he shook his head. He tried to picture what it would be like on some barely livable planet, scouting for ore, jury-rigging some kind of plant to refine it-with almost no equipment-and his old respect for Miffen went up another notch. That type of man seemed sadly lacking nowadays. But he made no comment on it; it could wait for more important things, and Miffen had begun to describe the two planets.

One was too far from its sun in an eccentric orbit, going from a brief summer into a bitter winter equal to three years of Earth time. It was suitable otherwise, but no more so than Antarctica. The other was a wasteland of little water and low air pressure, though barely habitable. It had been on that world that Miffen and his crew had stranded themselves. Zeke frowned as he discarded the planets. Both would mean tremendous difficulties in ferrying supplies out for at least a century until they could somehow be made self-supporting. Men would work for a dream, but there were limits. It would need more incentive than there seemed to be.

"Evidence of life anywhere?" he asked reluctantly, as the other finished. But the question had to be asked, although the answer could be predicted, almost certainly. Even over that distance, the possibility of other races to study might drive the scientists to set up an outpost, and with that as a basis, another world might be developed as a stepping stone to still further exploration.

Miffen's voice was hesitant as the answer came. "The world we were on-Outpost, we called it-had some ruins that could only come from intelligence. But there was nothing living there. Maybe it had been what we called it once . . . Damn!"

A yell had sounded thinly over the speaker. Miffen's steps clattered loudly, to fade out, and leave the ultra-wave dead. With the ship braking down for a landing, there was probably more than enough work for all the men. Zeke's hand lingered over the switch. Finally, he depressed it, cutting off power.

Ruins that showed intelligence, eighty thousand light-years across the galaxy! In forty thousand explored worlds the star ships had touched, this was the first sign of even that much chance. It wasn't enough, of course, but ...

Slowly Zeke's shoulders straightened and his figure came erect. They'd explored space to a distance of a hundred thousand light-years on a bare chance, without any reason to hope. Out of all the previous reports, there had been only three habitable worlds, and no sign of life beyond the Solar System. Now a ship was returning with reports of two barely possible worlds and evidence that there was such life! An outpost-and somewhere beyond, perhaps, the planet where that life still existed.

With proper propaganda, with enough build-up, and with evidence that somewhere in the infinity of stars life and livability must exist, could man refuse to go on with his questing?

For a moment, he clutched at the hope. It had to be. One world was not enough for a race that had set its heart on the stars, had always found frontiers, and had geared its soul to an eternal drive toward something beyond. It could not be cooped up and fenced in without sickening in its own futility, as it was sickening even now-as he was sick within himself after four centuries of following blind alleys.

With only a little spark to fan the flames, men might be driven on. And perhaps only a few light-years away from the end of their explorations-the arbitrary limits imposed by time and energy for the ships-there might be fellow races to stir the spark that was dying in mankind.

Then he grinned bitterly and looked out through the window, turning the single workable searchlight on the Martian ruins. Man had found evidence of other life hi his own backyard, and it had carried him for centuries.

But it was not enough to drive him onward forever. There was nothing on Outpost that couldn't be had here-and no colony had lasted on Mars.

Zeke squinted his eyes as he studied the pylon again, noting the queer, twisted decorations on it. He had seen the report of the scientists, and they had finally given up the riddle. It would take more than this to drive men farther outward. And Miffen's voice had sounded too doubtful.

But some of the hope remained faintly in him as he stood staring into the Martian night. It would have to wait until he heard more. Now it was only another mystery, like that of the lost race of Mars.

What had happened to them? They had known how to cast tungsten, and there was evidence that nuclear reactions had been used in tempering the pylons. That was high-level science. Where had it gone? There had apparently been no long period of high civilization, since the pylons all over the planet were about alike, with few advances in the later ones. There hadn't been time enough for the race to become decadent. Nor was there any evidence of war carried on by a race with advanced nuclear physics; there would have been enough signs of that. They couldn't have settled Earth, of course-it wouldn't have been suitable then. But they must have had starships. What had kept them from spreading outward-had even wasted them into nothingness in such a brief period of culture on their own planet?

His thoughts were interrupted by a beep from the speaker, and he switched on the automatic ultrawave because that would guide the ship down. Overhead, a thin whine thickened to a stuttering cough, the unhealthy sound of gasping, unshielded rockets that had been used too often and in too many futile landings. It was coming down well enough, though, half a mile away. Zeke watched it land while he was climbing into anti-radiation armor.

The ground was still smoking, but the counter showed the radiation low enough for a quick passage when he went out. He waited for the outer lock to open, then made a dash toward it, his breath reminding him that he was old and had not been rejuvenated. He crawled into the lock and stopped to catch himself before removing the armor, while the inner lock began to open.

Then he was facing four gaunt, weary men. His eyes darted back for the others of the thirty who had gone out, but Miffen was shaking his gray-bearded head.

"Four of us, General. We had a few casualties. But. . ."

His arm swept out toward the field, now illuminated by the beams of the great ship, and his eyes fixed on the scene of the sand-filled pits and bits of building foundations that showed through the quartz of the entrance port.

Zeke shrugged and reached for his cigarettes. The sudden hunger in their eyes hit him then, reminding him of stores now depleted in all those long years. He passed the package around, careful not to notice the hands that shook as they pulled out the cylinders.

"We've had some casualties, too, you might say," he told Miffen. He lighted his own cigarette finally, and his shoulders lifted and dropped at the other's expression. "And I'm not a general now-not since Marsport was abandoned. I came out only because we were expecting you back. . . . What about Outpost?"

"In my cabin I've got it on microfilm." Miffen swung about, waving the three crewmen off. For the first time, Zeke noticed that one of them had the flaming red hair that had always distinguished Preacher Hook.

He lifted an eyebrow and Hook nodded, pulling out a worn Bible and making a circle with his thumb and finger. "All memorized," he stated. But the grin on

his face was uncertain, and the achievement no longer seemed to be important to him.
Zeke had forgotten the size of these star shins as they went up the handrails. The elevators were obviously not working. Miffen swung up the last and turned into a little cabin, kicking the door farther open. He dug into a worn chest and came out with a small package and a little viewer.
"I figured some things from what little we picked up
of Earth's broadcast," he remarked emotionlessly as he threaded the film into the viewer. "But I 'didn't believe it. Not until I saw Marsport. I guess ... well, this will give you an idea of Outpost. I explored all the suns around I could reach, but I never learned where the race originated."
Zeke adjusted the lenses carefully, seeing the unfamiliar two-dimensional flatness of non-stereo for the first time in centuries. It was awkward at first, but his eyes soon relearned the trick of fooling themselves.
There were several scenes, showing a sky of dull green, with grayish sand and something that looked like jumbled blocks of granite. As he stared, a pattern began to show itself. Something had been built there once, and by intelligence. Closer viewing showed that the stones had been shaped geometrically, under all their weathering.
He came to a list of statistics and skimmed through it. Then he reached the final scene.
Miffen's voice suddenly sounded behind him, awkward and too tense. "What about the other ships?"
"They all got back-they're piled up beside the field, beyond the reach of your lights. No use to us now. Thirty-nine hulks, and yours makes the fortieth-all we ever built." He turned back to the film, but again Miffen's voice interrupted him.
"All? I'd expected . . . That bad, eh?"
"Worse. I suppose you're entitled to know what you've come back to. You'll see it soon enough, though-and better than I can tell you." Zeke clamped the viewer to his eye firmly, and turned to the light once more. "There was purpose when you left. Now that's all past tense."
"Yeah." Miffen let the word hang. He must have seen Zeke's sudden tenseness and realized there was no use putting off the inspection of the final scene on the film any longer. Zeke was staring at it, but he was unconscious of what his eyes saw, and the last of the hope in him was draining slowly away.
He stared up at Miffen, tapping the viewer. "You know what this is, of course. Or do you?"
Miffen shook his head. "I suspected. But I never paid much attention back here, and it's been a long time. I kept hoping I was crazy."
Zeke made no answer. He picked up the viewer and headed toward the control room, with Miffen following. Still silently, he pointed out through the viewports, across the leprous surface of Mars, toward the pitted beryl steel pylon that gleamed in the light from the Star Station. Then he put the viewer to his eyes again.
The sky was green instead of black, and the sand was gray where Mars was covered with red. But the scene was the same. A gleaming metal pylon rose from the rubble of ruined blocks, carrying the queer, twisted decorations that had been typical of all Martian structures. There was no question about what race had tried to colonize Outpost-and had failed.
Suddenly a work-gnarled hand took the viewer from him, and he turned to see Preacher Hook and the other men. They must have- followed Miffen and himself into the control room. But it didn't matter. They must have suspected. And there was no surprise on their faces as they passed the viewer from one to another, comparing the scene with that outside.
Almost without feeling, Zeke picked up the ultrawave microphone and called the administration building, ordering the robot to bring his rocket down beside

the big star ship. He adjusted the dials carefully and spoke terse, coded symbols into the instrument. A moment later, Stendal's voice answered him. "I'm bringing the four survivors down in my ship," he reported in a voice that seemed completely detached from him. "Give us a secrecy blanket until we can report in full. And see if you can nil a few bathtubs with whiskey. We'll need it."

Stendal seemed to catch his breath and then sigh, but his words were level when he spoke. "So Pandora's box was just a fairy story, after all. Well, I never had many hopes. Okay, I'll get the liquor, Zeke. And about your rejuvenation-I'm getting a private installation here for you. If the others need it, we'll take care of all of you."

Zeke looked up at the four men, and then out toward
the pylon again-all that was left of a race that had searched the stars in its need to find new frontiers. It must have been a hardy race, since it had dared to set up a colony across all those innumerable parsecs of space, without even the inspiration of other life. Then, when that colony had failed, the race had returned to the loneliness of its own little world, where the stars looked down grimly, no longer promising anything. Now Mars had been dead ten million years, and the pylon stood as the final tombstone on the world which had become a prison. The old puzzle of that race's end was solved.

The speaker was sputtering with Stendal's impatient questions, as Zeke and the men studied each other, but they gave no attention to it. Preacher Hook sighed, breaking the silence.

"Man goeth to his long home," he quoted softly. "And the mourners go about the streets; or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern; and the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit return unto God who gave it."

Zeke nodded and picked up the microphone.

"Just get the whiskey. We've decided to skip the rejuvenation."

He put the microphone back on its hook carefully and headed toward the handrails that led down, with the others behind him. Ozin had the rocket waiting, and they climbed in and strapped themselves down.

Then the rockets blasted, and the last five men beyond the Earth were heading home.

Instinct

SENTHREE WAVED ASIDE the slowing scooter and lengthened his stride down the sidewalk; he had walked all the way from the rocket port, and there was no point to a taxi now that he was only a few blocks from the bio-labs. Besides, it was too fine a morning to waste in riding. He sniffed at the crisp, clean fumes of gasoline appreciatively and listened to the music of his hard heels slapping against the concrete.

It was good to have a new body again. He hadn't appreciated what life was like for the last hundred years or so. He let his eyes rove across the street toward the blue flame of a welding torch and realized how long it had been since his eyes had really appreciated the delicate beauty of such a flame. The wise old brain in his chest even seemed to think better now.

It was worth every stinking minute he'd spent on Venus. At times like this, one could realize how good it was to be alive and to be a robot.

Then he sobered as he came to the old bio-labs. Once there had been plans for a fine new building instead of the old factory in which he had started it all four hundred years ago. But somehow, there'd never been time for that. It had taken almost a century before they could master the technique of building up genes and chromosomes into the zygote of a simple fish that would breed with the natural ones. Another century had
gone by before they produced Oscar, the first artificially made pig. And there they 'seemed to have stuck. Sometimes it seemed to Senthree that they were no

nearer recreating Man than they had been when they started.
He dilated the door and went down the long hall, studying his reflection in the polished walls absently. It was a good body. The black enamel was perfect and every joint of the metal case spelled new techniques and luxurious fitting. But the old worries were beginning to settle. He grunted at Oscar LXXII, the lab mascot, and received an answering grunt. The pig came over to root at his feet, but he had no time for that. He turned into the main lab room, already taking on the worries of his job.
It wasn't hard to worry as he saw the other robots. They were clustered about some object on a table, dejection on every gleaming back. Senthree shoved Ceofor and Beswun aside and moved up. One look was enough. The female of the eleventh couple lay there in the strange stiffness of protoplasm that had died, a horrible grimace on her face.
"How long-and what happened to the male?" Sen-three asked,
Ceofor swung to face him quickly. "Hi, boss. You're late. Hey, new body!"
Senthree nodded, as they came grouping around, but his words were automatic as he explained about falling in the alkali pool on Venus and ruining his worn body completely. "Had to wait for a new one. And then the ship got held up while we waited for the Arcturus su-perlight ship to land. They'd found half a dozen new planets to colonize, and had to spread the word before they'd set down. Now, what about the creatures?"
"We finished educating about three days ago," Ceofor told him. Ceofor was the first robot trained hi Sen-three's technique of gene-building and the senior assistant. "Expected you back then, boss. But . . . well, see for yourself. The man is still alive, but he won't be long."
Senthree followed them back to another room and
looked through the window. He looked away quickly. It had been another failure. The man was crawling about the floor on hands and knees, falling half the time to his stomach, and drooling. His garbled mouthing made no sense.
"Keep the news robots out," he ordered. It would never do to let the public see this. There was already too much of a cry against homovivifying, and the crowds were beginning to mutter something about it being unwise to mess with vanished life forms. They seemed actually afraid of the legendary figure of Man.
"What luck on Venus?" one of them asked, as they began the job of carefully dissecting the body of the female failure to look for the reason behind the lack of success.
"None. Just another rumor. I don't think Man ever established self-sufficient colonies. If he did, they didn't survive. But I found something else-something the museum would give a fortune for. Did my stuff arrive?"
"You mean that box of tar? Sure, it's over there hi the corner."
Senthree let the yielding plastic of his mouth smile at them as he strode toward it. They had already ripped off the packing, and now he reached up for a few fine wires in the tar. It came off as he pulled, loosely repacked over a thin layer of wax. At that, he'd been lucky to sneak it past customs. This was the oldest, crudest, and biggest robot discovered so far-perhaps one of the fabulous Original Models. It stood there rigidly, staring out of its pitted, expressionless face. But the plate on its chest had been scraped carefully clean, and Senthree pointed it out to them.
MAKEPEACE ROBOT, SER. 324MD2991. SURGEON.
"A mechanic for Man bodies," Beswun translated. "But that means . . ."
"Exactly." Senthree put it into words. "It must know how Man's body was built-if it has retained any memory. I found it in a tarpit by sheer accident, and it seems to be fairly well preserved. No telling whether there were any magnetic fields to erode memories, of
course, and it's all matted inside. But if we can get it to working ..."
Beswun took over. He had been trained as a physicist before the mysterious

lure of the bio-lab had drawn him here. Now he began wheeling the crude robot away. If he could get it into operation, the museum could wait. The re-creation of Man came first!

Senthree pulled x-ray lenses out of, a pouch and r6~ placed the normal ones in his eyes before going over to join the robots who were beginning dissection. Then he switched them for the neutrino detector lenses that had made this work possible. The neutrino was the only particle that could penetrate the delicate protoplasmic cells without ruining them and yet permit the necessary millions of tunes magnification. It was a fuzzy image, since the neutrino spin made such an insignificant field for the atomic nuclei to work on that few were deflected. But through them, he could see the vague outlines of the pattern within the cells. It was as they had designed the original cell-there had been no reshuffling of genes in handling. He switched to his micromike hands and began the delicate work of tracing down the neuron connections. There was only an occasional mutter as one of the robots beside him switched to some new investigation.

The female should have' lived! But somewhere, in spite of all their care, she had died. And now the male was dying. Eleven couples-eleven failures. Senthree was no nearer finding the creators of his race than he had been centuries before.

Then the radio hi his head buzzed its warning and he let it cut in, straightening from his work. "Senthree."

"The Director is in your office. Will you report at once?"

"Damn!" The word had no meaning, but it was strangely satisfying at times. What did old Emptinine want ... or wait again, there'd been a selection while he was on Venus investigating the rumors of Man. Some young administrator-Arpeten-had the job now.

Ceofor looked up guiltily, obviously having tuned in.

"I should have warned you. We got word three days ago he was coming, but forgot it in reviving the couple. Trouble?"

Senthree shrugged, screwing his normal lenses back in and trading to the regular hands. They couldn't have found out about the antique robot. They had been seen by nobody else. It was probably just sheer curiosity over some rumor that they were reviving the couple. If his appropriation hadn't been about exhausted, Senthree would have told him where to go; but now was hardly the time, with a failure on one hand and a low credit balance on the other. He polished his new head quickly with the aid of one of the walls for a mirror and headed toward his office.

But Arpeten was smiling. He got to his feet as the bio-lab chief entered, holding out a well-polished hand. "Dr. Senthree. Delighted. And you've got an interesting place here. I've already seen most of it. And that pig- they tell me it's a descendant of a boar out of your test tubes."

"Incubation wombs. But you're right-the seventy-second generation."

"Fascinating." Arpeten must have been reading too much of that book Proven Points to Popularity they'd dug up in the ruins of Hudson ten years before, but it had worked. He was the Director. "But tell me. Just what good are pigs?"

Senthree grinned, in spite of himself. "Nobody knows. Men apparently kept a lot of them, but so far as I can see they are completely useless. They're clever, in a way. But I don't think they were pets. Just another mystery."

"Umm. Like men. Maybe you can tell me what good Man will be. I've been curious about that since I saw your appropriations. But nobody can answer."

"It's in the records," Senthree told him sharply. Then he modified his voice carefully. "How well do you know your history? I mean about the beginning."

"Well ..."

He probably knew some of it, Senthree thought. They all got part of it as legends. He leaned back in his seat

now, though, as the biochemist began the old tale of the beginning as they knew it. They knew that there had been Man a million years before them. And somebody-Asimov or Asenion, the record wasn't quite clear-had apparently created the first robot. They had improved it up to about the present level. Then there had been some kind of a contest in which violent forces had ruined the factories, most of the robots, and nearly all of the Men. It was believed from the fragmentary records that a biological weapon had killed the rest of man, leaving only the robots.

Those first robots, as they were now known, had had to start on a ruined world from scratch-a world where mines were exhausted, and factories were gone. They'd learned to get metals from the seas, and had spent years and centuries slowly rebuilding the machines to build new robots. There had been only two of them when the task was finished, and they had barely time enough to run one new robot off and educate him sketchily. Then they had discharged finally, and he had taken up rebuilding the race. It was almost like beginning with no history and no science. Twenty millennia had passed before they began to rebuild a civilization of their own.

"But why did Man die?" Senthree asked. "That's part of the question. And are we going to do the same? We know we are similar to Man. Did he change himself in some way that ruined him? Can we change ourselves safely? You know that there are a thousand ways we could improve ourselves. We could add anti-gravity, and get rid of our cumbersome vehicles. We could add more arms. We could eliminate our useless mouths and talk by radio. We could add new circuits to our brains. But we don't dare. One school says that nobody can build a better race than itself, so Man must have been better than we are-and if he made us this way, there was a reason. Even if the psychologists can't understand some of the circuits in our brains, they don't dare touch them.

"We're expanding through the universe-but we can't even change ourselves to fit the new planets. And until we can find the reasons for Man's disappearance,

that makes good sense. We know he was planning to change himself. We have bits of evidence. And he's dead. To make it worse, we have whole reels of education tape that probably contain all the answers- but information is keyed to Man's brain, and we can't respond to it. Give us a viable Man, and he can interpret that. Or we can find out by comparison what we can and cannot do. I maintain we can do a lot."

Arpeten shook his head doubtfully. "I suppose you think you know why he died!"

"I think so, yes. Instinct! That's a built-in reaction, an unlearned thought. Man had it. If a man heard a rattlesnake, he left the place hi a hurry, even though he'd never heard it before. Response to that sound was built into him. No tape impressed it, and no experience was needed. We know the instincts of some of the animals, too-and one of them is to struggle and kill-like the ants who kill each other off. I think Man did just that. He couldn't get rid of his instincts when they were no longer needed, and they killed him. He should have changed-and we can change. But I can't tell that from animals. I need intelligent life, to see whether instinct or intelligence will dominate. And robots don't have instincts-I've looked for even one sign of something not learned individually, and can't find it. It's the one basic difference between us. Don't you see, Man is the whole key to our problem of whether we can change or not without risking extermination?"

"Umm." The director sounded noncommittal. "Interesting theory. But how are you going to know you have Man?"

Senthree stared at the robot with more respect. He tried to explain, but he had never been as sure of that himself as he might. Theoretically, they had bones and 'bits of preserved tissue. They had examined the gene pattern of these, having learned that the cells of the individual contain the same pattern as that of the zygote. And they had other guides-man's achievements,

bits of his literature. From these, some working theories could be made. But he couldn't be quite sure-they'd never really known whether man's pigment was dark
brown, pinkish orange, white, or what; the records they had seemed to disagree on this.
"We'll know when we get an intelligent animal with instinct," he said at last. "It won't matter exactly whether he is completely like Man or not. At least it will give us a check on things we must know. Until then, we'll have to go on trying. You might as well know that the last experiment failed, though it was closer. But in another hundred years . . ."
"So." Arpeten's face became bland, but he avoided the look of Senthree. "I'm afraid not. At least for a while. That's what I came about, you know. We've just had word of several new planets around Arcturus, and it will takfr the major allocation of our funds to colonize these. New robots must be built, new ships-oh, you know. And we're retrenching a bit on other things. Of course, if you'd succeeded . . . but perhaps it's better you failed. You know how the sentiment against reviving Man has grown."
Senthree growled bitterly. He'd seen how it was carefully nurtured-though he had to admit it seemed to be easy to create. Apparently most of the robots were afraid of Man-felt he would again take over, or something. Superstitious fools.
"How much longer?" he asked.
"Oh, we won't cut back what you have, Dr. Senthree. But I'm afraid we simply can't allocate more funds. When this is finished, I was hoping to make you biological investigator, incidentally, on one of the planets. There'll be work enough. . . . Well, it was a pleasure." He shook hands again, and walked out, his back a gleaming ramrod of efficiency and effectiveness.
Senthree turned back, his new body no longer moving easily. It could already feel the harsh sands and unknown chemical poisons of investigating a new planet- the futile, empty carding of new life that could have no real purpose to the robots. No more appropriations! And they had barely enough funds to meet the current bills.
Four hundred years-and a ship to Arcturus had ended it in three months. Instinct, he thought again-
given life with intelligence and instinct together for one year, and he could settle half the problems of his race, perhaps. But robots could not have instincts. Fifty years of study had proven that.
Beswun threw up a hand in greeting as he returned, and he saw that the dissection was nearly complete, while the antique robot was activated. A hinge on its ludicrous jaw was moving, and rough, grating words were coming out. Senthree turned to the dissecting bench, and then swung back as he heard them.
"Wrong . . . wrong," it was muttering. "Can not live. Is not good brain. No pineal. Medulla good, but not good cerebrum. Fissures wrong. Maybe pituitary disfunction? No. How can be?" It probed doubtfully and set the brain aside. "Mutation maybe. Very bad. Need Milliken mike. See nucleus of cells. Maybe just freak, maybe new disease."
Senthree's fingers were taut and stiff as he fished into his bag and came out with a set of lenses. Beswun shook his head and made a waiting sign. He went out at a run, to come back shortly with a few bits of metal and the shavings from machining still on his hands. "Won't fit-but these adapters should do it. There, 324MD2991. Now come over here where you can look at it over this table-that's where the-uh, rays are."
He turned back, and Senthree saw that a fine wire ran from one adapter. "He doesn't speak our bio-terminology, Senthree. We'll have to see the same things he does. There-we can watch it on the screen. Now, 324MD2991, you tell us what is wrong and point it out. Are your hands steady enough for that?"
"Hands one-billionth inch accurate," the robot creaked; it was a meaningless

noise, though they had found the unit of measure mentioned. But whatever it meant, the hands were steady enough. The microprobe began touching shadowy bunches of atoms, droning and grating. "Freak. Very bad freak. How he lived? Would stop tropoblast, not attach to uterus. Ketone-no ke-tone there. Not understand. How he live?"

Ceofor dashed for their chromosome blanks and began lettering in the complex symbols they used. For a

second, Senthree hesitated. Then he caught fire and began making notes along with his assistant. It seemed to take hours; it probably did. The old robot had his memory intact, but there were no quick ways for him to communicate. And at last, the antique grunted in disgust and turned his back on them. Beswun pulled a switch.

"He expects to be discharged when not in use. Crazy, isn't it?" the physicist explained. "Look, boss, am I wrong, or isn't that close to what we did on the eleventh couple?"

"Only a few genes different in three chromosomes. We were close. But-umm, that's ridiculous. Look at all the brain tissue he'd have-and a lot of it unconnected. And here-that would put an extra piece on where big and little intestines join-a perfect focal point for infection. It isn't efficient biological engineering. And yet-umm-most animals do have just that kind of engineering. I think the old robot was right-this would be Man!" He looked at their excited faces, and his shoulders sank. "But there isn't time. Not even time to make a zygote and see what it would look like. Our appropriations won't come through."

It should have been a bombshell, but he saw at once that they had already guessed it. Ceofor stood up slowly.

"We can take a look, boss. We've got the sperm from the male that failed-all we have to do is modify those three, instead of making up a whole cell. We might as well have some fun before we go out looking for sand fleas that secrete hydrofluoric acid and menace our colonies. Come on, even in your new body I'll beat you to a finished cell!"

Senthree grinned ruefully, but he moved toward the creation booth. His hands snapped on the little time field out of pure habit as he found a perfect cell. The little field would slow time almost to zero within its limits, and keep any damage from occurring while he worked. It made his own work difficult, since he had to force the probe against that, but it was insulated to some extent by other fields.

Then his hands took over. For a time he worked and thought, but the feeling of the protoplasm came into them, and his hands were almost one with the life stuff, sensing its tiny responses, inserting another link onto a chain, supplanting an atom of hydrogen with one of the hydroxyl radicals, wielding all the delicate chemical manipulation. He removed the defective genes and gently inserted the correct ones. Four hundred years of this work lay behind him-work he had loved, work which had meant the possible evolution of his race into all it might be.

It had become instinct to him-instinct in only a colloquial sense, however; this was learned response, and real instinct lay deeper than that, so deep that no reason could overcome it and that it was automatic even the first time. Only Man had had instinct and intelligence- stored somehow in this tiny cell that lay within the time field.

He stepped out, just as Ceofor was drawing back in a dead heat. But the younger robot inspected Senthree's cell, and nodded. "Less disturbance and a neater job on the nucleus-I can't see where you pierced the wall. Well, if we had thirty years-even twenty-we could have Man again-or a race. Yours is male and mine female. But there's no time. . . . Shall I leave the time field on?"

Senthree started to nod.

Then he swung to Beswun. "The time field. Can it be reversed?"

"You mean to speed time up within it? No, not with that model. Take a bigger one. I could build you one in half an hour. But who'd want to speed up tune with all the troubles you'd get? How much?"
"Ten thousand-or at least seven thousand times! The period is up tomorrow when disbursements have to be made. I want twenty years in a day."
Beswun shook his head. "No. That's what I was afraid of. Figure it this way: you speed things up ten thousand times and that means the molecules in there speed up just that much, literally. Now 273° times ten thousand-and you have more than two million degrees
of temperature. And those molecules have energy! They come busting out of there. No, can't be done."
"How much can you do?" Senthree demanded.
Beswun considered. "Ten times-maybe no more than nine. That gives you all the refractories would handle, if we set it up down in the old pit under the building-you know, where they had the annealing oven."
It wasn't enough; it would still take two years. Sen-' three dropped onto a seat, vagrantly wondering again how this queer brain of his that the psychologists studied futilely could make him feel tired when his body could have no fatigue. It was probably one of those odd circuits they didn't dare touch.
"Of course, you can use four fields," Beswun stated slowly. "Big one outside, smaller one, still smaller, and smallest inside that. Fourth power of nine is about sixty-six hundred. That's close-raise that nine a little and you'd have your twenty years in a day. By the time it leaked from field to field, it wouldn't matter. Take a couple of hours."
"Not if you get your materials together and build each shell inside the other-you'll be operating faster each step then," Ceofor shouted. "Somebody'11 have to go in and stay there a couple of our minutes toward the end to attach the educator tapes-and to revive the couple!"
"Take power," Beswun warned.
Senthree shrugged. Let it. If the funds they had wouldn't cover it, the Directorate would have to make it up, once it was used. Besides, once Man was created, they couldn't fold up the bio-labs. "I'll go in," he suggested.
"My job," Ceofor told him flatly. "You won the contest in putting the cells right."
Senthree gave in reluctantly, largely because the younger robot had more experience at reviving than he did. He watched Beswun assemble the complicated net of wires and become a blur as he seemed to toss the second net together almost instantly. The biochemist couldn't see the third go up-it was suddenly there, and Beswun was coming out as it flashed into existence. He
held up four fingers, indicating all nets were working.
Ceofor dashed in with the precious cells for the prepared incubators that would nurture the bodies until maturity, when they would be ready for the educators. His body seemed to blur, jerk, and disappear. And almost at once he was back.
Senthree stood watching for a moment more, but there was nothing to see. He hesitated again, then turned and moved out of the building. Across the street lay his little lodging place, where he could relax with his precious two books-almost complete-that had once been printed by Man. Tonight he would study that strange bit of Man's history entitled Gather, Darkness, with its odd indications of a science that Man had once had which had surpassed even that of the robots now. It was pleasanter than the incomprehensibility of the mysteriously titled Mein Kampf. He'd let his power idle, and mull over it, and consider again the odd behavior of male and female who made such a complicated business of mating. That was probably more instinct-Man, it seemed, was filled with instincts.
For a long time, though, he sat quietly with the book on his lap, wondering

what it would be like to have instincts. There must be many unpleasant things about it. But there were also suggestions that it could be pleasant. Well, he'd soon know by observation, even though he could never experience it. Man should have implanted one instinct in a robot's brain, at least, just to show what it was like.

He called the lab once, and Ceofor reported that all was doing nicely, and that both children were looking quite well. Outside the window, Senthree heard a group go by, discussing the latest bits of news on the Arcturus expedition. At least in that, Man had failed to equal the robots. He had somehow died before he could find the trick of using identity exchange to overcome the limitation imposed by the speed of light.

Finally he fell to making up a speech that he could deliver to the Director, Arpenten, when success was in his hands. It must be very short-something that would stick in the robot's mind for weeks, but carrying every-
thing a scientist could feel on proving that those who opposed him were wrong. Let's see. ...

The buzzer on the telescreen cut through his thoughts, and he flipped it on to see Ceofor's face looking out. Senthree's spirits dropped abruptly as he stared at the younger robot.

"Failure? No!"

The other shook his head. "No. At least, I don't know. I couldn't give them full education. Maybe the tape was uncomfortable. They took a lot of it, but the male tore his helmet off and took the girl's off. Now they just sit there, rubbing their heads and staring around."

He paused, and the little darkened ridges of plastic over his eyes tensed. "The time speed-up is off. But I didn't know what to do."

"Let them alone until I get there. If it hurts them, we can give them the rest of it later. How are they otherwise?"

"I don't know. They look all right, boss." Ceofor hesitated, and his voice dropped. "Boss, I don't like it. There's something wrong here. I can't quite figure out what it is, but it isn't the way I expected. Hey, the male just pushed the female off her seat. Do you think their destructive instinct . . . ? No, she's sitting down on the floor now, with her head against him, and holding one of his hands. Wasn't that part of the mating ritual in one of the books?"

Senthree started to agree, a bit of a smile coming onto his face. It looked as if instinct were already in operation.

But a strange voice cut him off. "Hey, you robots, when do we eat around here?"

They could talk! It must have been the male. And if it wasn't the polite thanks and gratitude Senthree had expected, that didn't matter. There had been all kinds of Men in the books, and some were polite while others were crude. Perhaps forced education from the tapes without fuller social experience was responsible for that. But it would all adjust in time.

He started to turn back to Ceofor, but the younger
robot was no longer there, and the screen looked out on a blank wall. Senthree could hear the loud voice crying out again, rough and harsh, and there was a shrill, whining sound that might be the female. The two voices blended with the vague mutter of robot voices until he could not make out the words.

He wasted no time in trying. He was already rushing down to the street and heading toward the labs. Instinct-the male had already shown instinct, and the female had responded. They would have to be slow with the couple at first, of course-but the whole answer to the robot problems lay at hand. It would only take a little time and patience now. Let Arpeten sneer, and let the world dote on the Arcturus explorers. Today, biochemistry had been, crowned king with the magic of intelligence combined with instinct as its power.

Ceofor came out of the lab at a run with another robot behind him. The young

robot looked dazed, and there was another emotion Senthree could not place. The older biochemist nodded, and the younger one waved quickly. "Can't stop now. They're hungry." He was gone at full speed.
Senthr.ee realized suddenly that no adequate supply of fruit and vegetables had been provided, and he hadn't even known how often Man had to eat. Or exactly what. Luckily, Ceofor was taking care of that.
He went down the hall, hearing a tumult of voices, with robots apparently spread about on various kinds of hasty business. The main lab where the couple was seemed quiet. Senthree hesitated at the door, wondering how to address them. There must be no questioning now. Today he would not force himself on them, nor expect them to understand his purposes. He must welcome them and make them feel at ease in this world, so strange to them with their prehistoric tape education. It would be hard at first to adjust to a world of only robots, with no other Man people. The matter of instinct that had taken so long could wait a few days more.
The door dilated in front of him and he stepped into the lab, his eyes turning to the low table where they sat. They looked healthy, and there was no sign of misery or
uncertainty that he could see, though he could not be sure of that until he knew them better. He could not even be sure it was a scowl on the male's face as the Man turned and looked at him.
"Another one, eh? Okay, come up here. What you want?"
Then Senthree no longer wondered how to address the Man. He bowed low as he approached them, and instinct made his voice soft and apologetic as he answered.
"Nothing, Master. Only to serve you."
Superstition
THE SEPELORA CRAWLED along at her maximum eighty light-years an hour, as she had done for the four months since she'd left the university planet of Terra. The space-denial generators hummed on monotonously, maintaining the field around the ship where space almost ceased to exist. The big viewing panel and ports were blanked out by the effect, forming perfect mirrors. There was a steady wash of slightly stale air through the control cabin, and the pseudo-gravity on the decks was unvarying. With less than a day of superspeed left, Captain Derek should have been content.
Instead, he sat slumped loosely over the control board, staring with unfocused eyes at his image in the panel, while his fingers doodled black aces, hangman's knots, and all the other symbols of doom for which his culture had no real referents. His deep-set eyes and the -hollows in his cheeks gave him an almost cadaverous look, borne out by the general angularity of his body. At forty-five he looked fifty, with gray speckles around his temples and lines of worry etched deeply into his face.
Abruptly a small speaker came to life with the voice of his aide, Ferad.
"Psych Siryl to see you, sir."
Derek sighed, letting his eyes focus slowly as his fin-
gers came up in the ancient sign against evil, pointing at his own image. The physicist, Kayel, must have sent her; the man had been eyeing Derek all during the orders for instrument alert. But now that she was here, there was nothing to be done about it. "Send her in," he acknowledged, and turned slowly to face the door that began opening.
Siryl's bearing was more military than his, in spite of her civilian blouse. Her feet tapped across the deck precisely, her hips swayed just enough in the split skirt, and her face bore the impersonal warmth of all psychologists on duty. Under her professional pride lay the curious overdeveloped consciousness of being female possible only to women who wanted to be men. She was ten years younger than Derek and only slightly shorter, but her features and body were good, as near beauty as grooming and care could make them. Only her hair was

wrong, and its black severity was deliberate.
She wasted no time. Before he could rise, she was beside him, rolling back his sleeve. There was the coldness of an antiseptic and then the faint bite of a needle. "You'll be all right in a minute," she said coolly. "I'd have come sooner, but all these rumors have kept me busy. I've been expecting this; your chart shows you're a depressive with an irregular cycle." Her precise smile was calculated to make it seem no more than mention of a bit of common gossip. "Come on now, Captain. Things aren't all black."
Now that the drug had ended his chance to wallow in the mood of his ill-fortune, he was almost glad. But her words touched it off again. The jinx was more than a mood. He was the only man of his age in the Service who rated less than sector commander. Everything he undertook went wrong, and seldom through his own failure. There had been the training ship that blew up, the girl who died from mutational weaknesses, the mislaid citation papers-and the whole affair leading to this foredoomed command.
"Optimism!" he said bitterly. "You should head an expedition that you know is bound to fail-because you head it!"
She snorted. "Superstition! Sure, you had a run of misfortune, Derek. But your real trouble came when you started to believe that jinx nonsense. You're so sure of bad luck now that it's sapped all your initiative. Look at you. You've been eyeing me for months, wanting me and being afraid to make a pass because something might go wrong!"
There was too much truth in it, and he could feel the blood rush to his face. She stood studying his reaction clinically, as if using it to gauge the progress of the anti-depressant. Then suddenly she laughed easily and dropped to the opposite chair. "Maybe you should try sometime, Derek-but not now. I'm having my hands full with the men's rumors. Look, why not tell me the truth about this expedition? After all, we're almost ready to cut speed."
The drug was beginning to work now, killing some of his gloom. He was still convinced of his jinx, but he could think of other things. Now he considered her question, surprised that she hadn't already been briefed. "How much of the background and history of the war do they teach on Terra?" he asked. Some of the distant worlds had queer legends that would make explanation difficult.
She frowned impatiently for a second. Then she apparently decided to humor him and began sketching her knowledge in. Aside from her provincial belief that men had originated on Terra, it was accurate enough. Wherever men had started, the race had seemingly discovered space travel two thousand years before and somehow had almost immediately stumbled onto some form of faster-than-light travel. They had spread over the cosmos at a fantastic rate, using up vast quantities of some power element known as uranium.
Thirteen hundred years ago, dwindling supplies of that had split them into two competing empires. An un-thinkably violent war had blasted systems of suns to novas, had used the last of the uranium, and had left their culture in ruins. Except for misleading hints that it had involved negation of time, the superdrive had been lost. It had taken centuries to find new power in the fusion
of boron. It had taken longer to discover how to eliminate space around the ship, leaving only a subfractional connection with the universe and using the "suction" resulting from imbalance to drive them. Then men began spreading again.
Fifty years ago, they had run into the other empire- an empire technically ahead of them and filled with hate that had been nursed for thirteen centuries. The enemy gave no quarter and began savagely wiping them out, planet by planet. For a time, the Federation had seemingly been doomed. But lately, under the drive of necessity, they had begun to match the enemy science. In a few more years ...
"In a few years-or months-there won't be a Federation, unless this mission

succeeds," he cut into her routine optimism. He fished around in a drawer to locate one of the mission briefing sheets he'd helped prepare. For a second, his lips twisted as he saw the dull, official words.

The Waraok, on its way to rendezvous with the Fifth Fleet, had cut its space-denial drive to make a fix in one of the old sun-blasted sectors at 9-17/2.47:23 Federation time. At 9-17/2.47:26 they were less than a quarter million miles from one of the planets of Sirius.

Something had thrown them more than two hundred thousand light-years instantaneously! And unless they could wipe out the enemy base or find the secret and its countersecret, that something could as easily throw boron bombs into every Federation sun! With that threat, even such harebrained schemes as this mission had to be tried.

The Sepelora and eleven other ships were hastily stocked with every possible instrument, staffed with technicians, and blasted off on a course that would bring them out of superspeed at points around the recorded original fix of the Waraok. Their instruments would be recording and their space-denial transmitters signaling as they emerged, while a fleet of battleships followed. If they ran into the mysterious weapon and were lucky, the instruments might determine its nature. Otherwise, the locations of their last signals might pin-
point the enemy base for bombing. Then they could only hope it was an experimental station and the only one the enemy had.

Siryl had glanced over the paper. Now she crumpled it in sudden disgust. "They gave us this guff back on Terra! Derek, you don't expect me or the men to believe such nonsense? Instantaneous teleportation! Could you believe it?"

He stared at her, his first thrust of anger giving place to bitterness that drove away the last physical effects of the drug. "I should be able to," he told her. "I was captain of the Waraok when it happened!"

_ It had been his first command of a battleship-and his last chance at promotion; the loss of plans he had been carrying had cost the Federation a major defeat, even though it had been no fault of his. Such miracles weren't beyond the power of his jinx.

She snorted incredulously. "Captain, even I know that a single photon would have infinite energy against a ship at infinite speed! You couldn't keep it out without a perfect space-denial-which means ceasing to exist. This story sounds like something from those papers of Aevan's we found. A fine mathematician from before the Collapse, but superstitious like you. He actually believed in mind reading, clairvoyance, and teleportation!"

Legends indicated that people had once had such abilities to some extent, but there was obviously no use in reminding her of that. He swore hotly. "I tell you, I was there!"

"Hypnotic implantation! Propaganda based on old superstition! You'd better look in your safe for sealed orders, Captain Der-"

Red lights erupted on the control board. The alarm system went wild, with every gong clamoring. A blare of light struck in through the viewing panel and the big radar let out a whine, with a picture and coordinates forming to show a body of planetary size less than ten thousand miles below. Needlessly, the green letters on the board blazed out the fact that the superdrive was off.

Derek silenced the gongs and began hitting his switches, trying to get information. Nobody answered. Crews were normally lax during superspeed cruising, but at least one man should have been on watch near the space-denial generators; the others should be reporting to their stations on the double. He cut into the intercom and began yelling for immediate reports.

The door of the cabin jerked open, but it was only the chubby figure of Ferad, scared white. Then another figure burst through the door, and Derek recognized the physicist, Kayel. The little man's weak chin seemed buried in his throat and his huge Adam's apple was bobbing horribly. He jerked one hand up,

clutched around a crooked pipe he affected, and motioned tautly backward. "Gone!" he screamed. "All gone!"
Derek cursed, shoved him aside, and headed through the door. He leaped across the precabin, yanked another door open-and stopped.
Five feet ahead, the deck ended. Where the cabins, storage hatches, rec rooms, galleys, and parts of the machine shops and engine rooms had been, there was nothing! Or rather, there was only an empty hull with a single keri-bird from Sirius, squawking and beating its wings wildly in air that held the warm, wet scent of growing Sirian flowers!
Beside him, Derek heard a sharp gasp from Siryl and felt her fingers bite into his arm. Ferad stood frozen and Kayel was gasping for breath, trying to light his pipe against chattering teeth. He met Derek's gaze, glanced at Siryl, and somehow steadied himself.
"It-it just went! I was back there-" His finger pointed toward the remains of the engine room and the beginning of the rocket chambers. "Gone! Without cutting the hull! Completely impossible!"
Derek could appreciate their shock, but after years of living with his jinx, he was practically immune. There were advantages to everything, even to regular bad luck. "What about the denial drive? Can we fix it?"
"No." Kayel had hesitated, but his negative was definite. "Most of it's all right, but we'd need tools we don't have now."
Derek nodded. "All right, see what our remaining instruments show; if we<-get back, the Federation will need those readings; Ferad, get back to the rockets. Somehow, we've got to make a landing on that planet under us. And Siryl, if you're done shouting superstition at me ..."
Then he grinned thinly. She was staring at the yawning emptiness with unbelieving eyes, slowly crossing herself.
Eighty men and tons of ship were gone, with only a Sirian bird and the perfume of flowers in their place. Among the missing were the pilot, navigator, and engineer. Derek hadn't handled a rocket landing for twenty years, and he didn't even have figures on the atmosphere and gravity of the world below. His grin vanished and he groaned to himself as he headed back to the control cabin.

2

The planet was closer when Kayel reported back with word that the instruments all showed exactly nothing. He was working with the spectroprobe, trying to get data for Derek, when Siryl came in with coffee as a peace offering. "Some of the supplies are all right," she reported. "Enough for-for four!"
"Thanks." Derek tasted the coffee and found it vile. But at least it was hot and wet. "Better take some back to Ferad if you can find the way. Tell him if he doesn't report at once, I'll skin his fat carcass."
Kayel gulped and accepted coffee from her as if he'd never seen a woman serve food before. He probably hadn't on Terra, judging by what she'd done to the coffee.
Derek interrupted the physicist's stumbling compliments. "Find anything yet, Kayel?"
Siryl threw him a dirty look and went out, again on parade drill. Kayel nodded, turning back reluctantly. "One of the blasted systems, all right, sir. Spectrum looks as if the sun got a light dose, though."
Probably one of the last suns the first war had ruined, Derek thought; men had been running low on high-numbered atoms by then. If the blast had been mild, it might even have missed the planet. In that case, they might find machinery in some of the ruined cities.
Kayel shook his head. "Planet was hit, all right. A lot of helium in the atmosphere shows that. Funny, though. A couple hundred miles of air with plenty of free oxygen-about like Terra." He sucked on his pipe, squinting through heavy lenses at the charts he had prepared. "Umm. Density against

height . . . must have about gravity one. Damn. Shouldn't be free oxygen in that quantity!"
Derek muttered unhappily. The Slpelora wasn't equipped with full-sized vanes, and an atmosphere and high gravity would make landing harder. Still, if they got down it would be handy. And while the ancient solar explosion would have ruined their hope for tools, it meant there was no danger from savages or beasts left over from the old days; some of the distant worlds had turned wild.
Ferad reported finally, complaining at the impossible job of readying the rockets by himself.
"Put Siryl to work with you," Derek ordered. "They'll be ready in five minutes or we'll miss perigee."
Their intrinsic momentum, left from their speed before cutting on the space-denial generators after takeoff, was carrying them down toward the planet hi an ellipse that would approach within some six hundred miles.
Surprisingly, Ferad reported the rockets ready and valves trimmed within the time limit. The ship groaned as the rockets went on and Derek watched his indicators grimly, expecting the worst. With so much of her interior bracing removed, she was badly weakened and completely unbalanced. With his luck, anything could happen. Usually, he managed to get out of one mess before getting into another, but there had been that time during inspection ...
The Sepelora hit the atmosphere badly. There had been no time for full correction with the side rockets, and the gyroscopes were gone with the missing section.
I
One of the weakened girders let go with a snap that jarred his teeth.and the ship wobbled before straightening out. Derek knocked the sweat out of his eyes and tried to remember all that he'd been taught back in rocketry school. But all that came back was the instructor's long lecture on why accident prones should be kicked out at once.
The ship righted, however, though it was close, and settled into a long, fast glide, with her hull pyrometers well into the red-hot zone but safe. A protective shield had slipped over the viewing panel, but the radar still gave them a view of the ground. They came down to twenty miles above the surface, then to fifteen.
Kayel let out a surprised whinny and pointed the stem of his pipe excitedly at the screen. Derek could see nothing, but the little man watched intently as something seemed to vanish. "A city! Straight lines- streets!"
"Ruins, probably," Derek commented. Maybe they were in luck and the solar explosion had only touched the planet, without burning it enough to destroy buildings and major tools. After thirteen hundred years, some would be ruined; but the ancients had built things to last on the outer planets.
There was a thin layer of clouds that the ship cut through. Now the going was rougher. Without full vanes, the Sepelora had all the lift of a stone, and the glide was growing steeper asymptotically, though her temperature was finally dropping. Derek got her tail down and began using controlled blasts.
Three miles above the surface, she was falling almost straight down, going too fast and swaying badly. Correcting for the unbalanced weight was harder than he had expected.
Then he was only a mile up. With a groan, he cut on more power, hoping no other girders snapped. It was going to be a close shave, with scant seconds left.
Kayel jerked up, screaming and pointing to the screen. Derek's eyes followed the motion before he could pull them back. Something that might have been rows of buildings showed there. But he couldn't worry about ruins; the blast would flatten them, anyhow.
"Derek! People! They're moving!" Kayel's voice was screeching in his ears.

He thrust the obvious hysteria of the other from his thoughts. The last glance had ruined his timing. Now the surface was zooming up. The Sepelora wobbled, pv-ershot, and then slowly came upright. Derek's eyes jerked to catch a quick glimpse of the screen. For a second, his hands froze. Along the regular rows that must be streets, things were scurrying madly out of his path!

There was no time to think. Conditioning against killing others, no matter what the risk, took over. His fingers bit into the side controls, and the Sepelora twisted under him, beginning to topple. For a second, the full side blasts tossed the ship backward. Then she dropped, just as he cut power in a final conditioned reflex.

Kayel had fainted. Derek stared at him and down at his own hands. The ship was still. There had been no shock. He tried to figure it out; in theory, the various forces could counterbalance to cause a dead halt at just the moment of touching surface. But the chances were so remote that no pilot could have estimated them. It was as if all the years of his incredibly consistent jinx had come to a balance in one impossible piece of blind good luck.

Kayel came to slowly, blinking. His fingers groped up to find his glasses still on his nose. "My pipe!" he squeaked, and ducked down for it. Then he straightened, staring at Derek. "We're alive!"

"No thanks to you," Derek said curtly. He flipped a switch and the shield over the viewing panel began sliding up, just as Siryl and Ferad came in. They looked exhausted, but less shaken than Kayel-probably because they hadn't known what was going on. "Don't start cheering yet. There are people here-and there shouldn't be on any sun-grazed planet we haven't recol-onized. With my luck, I've probably landed us right hi the middle of an enemy colony!"

"Luck!" Siryl snorted. Then she reddened faintly at his look, but went on stubbornly. "The enemy are com-
pulsive troglodytes-they don't build surface dwellings. And look at that,"

The shield had come up enough to show fields around them, apparently corn and potatoes. Beyond, the edge of the town could be seen, built in low structures of crude stone and thatching.

"An agricultural culture," Siryl guessed quickly. "Look-there's one! See, coming through the field. We're in luck. Primitive agricultural societies are usually peaceful."

Several people were filing toward the ship, showing no sign of fear. They were dressed in rough pants with serapes or blankets thrown over their shoulders. The men wore beards with hair to their shoulders, all of a uniform brown except for the graybeard in front. The women were distinguished only by thick plaits around their heads. They were a healthy looking bunch.

The graybeard moved to the viewing panel, waving at them with some bit of what seemed to be stone in his hand. His motions indicated that they were to come out. Derek shrugged faintly and nodded. He headed toward the door.

Siryl caught his arm. "Where are you going?" "Out. You said they were peaceful." "Usually peaceful," she qualified hastily. "But-" "Unless they're superstitious about sky devils, eh? I'm still going out." He headed down the nearest passage that would lead to a lock. There was nothing else to do. Their few weapons were gone, along with their tools and the big space-decoupled signaling transmitter. The Sepelora was only a converted freighter and her hull was too thin to withstand any concerted attack by even primitive agriculturists. If the worst had to happen, it was better to get it over with at once.

Siryl hesitated for a second. Then her heels tapped out a steady pace behind him, while the other two followed reluctantly. She caught up with Derek and marched beside him. If she was afraid, there was no sign of it. He opened the inner lock, then the outer, and
dropped to the field of stubble. As he landed, the gray-beard came around the curve of the ship.

The old man's lips parted in what might have been a smile, and words came out, slowly at first, then more rapidly in the classic greetings of Twenty-fifth-Century English.

When the words finally ceased, Derek stepped forward and began a careful reply. Classic English was the basic language from which that of his own planet had been derived, and he'd studied it during eight long years of schooling, without ever expecting to use it.

The graybeard turned back to his people and stood silently for a minute, glancing sideways at the four. Siryl was staring at Derek in surprise. "I did a paper on Ae-van's work," she said. "So I had to learn Classic. That's the pure language, unchanged after thirteen hundred years! And primitive cultures don't preserve dead languages-speech changes from century to century."

Derek shrugged. She knew a lot of things with the certainty of the teachers who had taught her. It wouldn't be the first time the authorities were wrong. He forgot it as the old man came forward.

"My name is Skora. I'm the-the priest of the village." He gestured to his people. "We've decided that you are welcome on the planet of god. And we're happy that you landed safely. I saw your space ship so late that there was hardly time to use the god power to land you without harm to us. If you'll walk back with us, there will be shelter and warmth. The nights are quite cold here."

Derek turned the offer over in his mind. He'd have preferred to stay with the ship, but wisdom dictated otherwise. "That's kind of you. We're much obliged." He was proud of remembering the phrase.

The old man nodded, while his eyes examined the others. A smile etched his face as he spotted Ferad's hungry looks at one of the younger women. "She's unmarried," he said. "Tell him she likes him! She shall be his!"

Siryl translated quickly. "Accept!" she urged, though Ferad's fat face indicated no need to such advice.

"You'll insult them otherwise. Derek, I was right. They're primitives-hospitable, provincial, superstitious. Did you notice how he called this the planet of god? And how he thinks he landed you with some incantation?"

Derek grunted something she took for assent. Let the old man have full credit; prayer or magic was as good an explanation as any other. He studied the quiet group as they moved toward the village.

"Maybe," he said. "But I'd like to know how your primitives knew about space ships and safe landings! And I'm curious about how he knew we had to translate the language for Ferad when both of us were pretty fluent in it. Another thing-he said the nights are cold here, as if he knew they aren't on all the planets."

For once, she was as silent as the natives. Derek had been hoping she'd have an answer, and her silence added to his doubts. Something was out of order on Skora's planet of god!

3

The house assigned to them had proved surprisingly comfortable after they learned to work the peat-burning fireplace. The food had been passable, if a man liked cereals and mutton. Derek had gone to sleep readily enough, to his surprise. But dawn had found him awake. No attempt was made to stop him as he walked out of the village, past the undisturbed Sepelora, and on to the low hills beyond the tilled land. Siryl was apparently right in assuming they were safe, once bread had been broken.

But his uncertainty returned as he studied the view from the top of the nearest hill. The solar explosion had hit hard at one time; the ground was ashy in places and actually melted to slag hi others. A few plants grew here and there, but thinned out in the distance, indicating they had spread from the village. There were no trees anywhere. By all indications, rainfall must be infrequent

and light. The village seemed like a bit of another world, transplanted into the wasteland.
From the top of another hill Derek spotted what must be a second village, perhaps four miles away, also green and thriving. He stared about for a road between the two towns. No path led out of either.
Men were already in the fields as he returned. Some stood quietly watching their sheep and goats; others were puttering about in ways he couldn't understand. There was none of the grimness he'd always associated with living off the ground on backward planets.
Beside the field where the Sepelora had landed, Derek saw a young man pushing a stick along the ground, leaving a furrow of turned earth behind. There was no sign of a plowshare, aside from a piece of bent wire, and the man was using only his own muscular power, but he was obviously plowing. From his effortless motion, he was either inhumanly strong or the ground was incredibly soft.
Derek reached over for a handful of dirt, but it seemed normal enough.
"Good morning, Derek. I'm Michla." The plowman had stopped and walked over, leaving the stick standing. He took some of the dirt and rubbed it between his palms. "Too dry. I'll have to bring some rain tonight."
Derek shook his hand, finding it no stronger than that of any normal man.
"Glad to know you, Michla. I've been wondering how your plow works."
"See for yourself." Michla led the way to it, pulling the implement up. It was only what Derek had seen--a stick with a bit of bent wire and a curiously shaped handle made of baked clay and covered with curlicues. "I hold the amulet and guide it. God turns over the dirt. It hasn't changed since god showed us how to farm."
Derek could see no sign of the burrowing machine that must be located below the ground, guided by a signal from the stick. He frowned, reluctantly deciding that it was safer to accept the explanation until he could learn more about their customs. "This god you worship seems like a highly helpful one," he commented.
"Worship?" Michla shook his head. "Nobody's that superstitious any more, Derek. We know he was only a
man like you or me--and sometimes I think he was always a little insane. By the way, I'm planning to plow the other field. Mind if I move your ship?"
The ship's controls were locked and there was nothing the man could do to hurt it, Derek decided. He'd have to see about moving it himself, if there was fuel enough to waste. Meantime, it might be a good idea to let Michla find that other people had secrets and that ships didn't fly by waving wands at them.
"Go ahead."
He headed back to the house they had been given with Lari, the new wife or concubine of Ferad. Here and there, one of the villagers looked up and uttered one of the old greetings, which he returned. It was the only conversation he heard. They saluted each other just as formally, but with no further talk.
Ferad was waiting hungrily for breakfast and Lari was busy setting a stone table when Derek returned. She smiled happily at him. "Good morning, Derek. Breakfast will be ready as soon as the fruit that god showed us arrives. If you want to shave first, Skora brought up one of god's personal razors."
He stared after Lari's figure as she went back to the kitchen. This lower-case god of theirs was getting to be a highly peculiar divinity. Derek went to the well-fitted bathroom in the rear, wondering where they got their water; each house had a tank on its roof, but there were no supply pipes. He found a razor that might have come from a pre-Collapse museum, lathered with a cake of their somewhat harsh soap, and tried it out. It worked well enough, once he got the hang of it.
Kayel was standing hi front of Siryl's door as Derek left the bathroom. He blushed, bit down on his pipe stem, and hurried toward the living quarters when he saw the captain.

Derek knocked lightly on Siryl's door and threw it open. "Come on to breakfast!"
She opened sleepy eyes. Then she screamed and began pulling frantically at the covers, trying to conceal her nude -body as if her life depended on it. Her face went white, and her voice was a thick gasp. "How dare you-?"
"Somebody had to wake you up," he pointed out logically. He'd heard of women who considered clothes more than a matter of convenience, but the slit skirts had made him think that Terran women were normal about such things. "Why didn't you tell me you had such religious taboos?"
She jerked upright, grabbing for the slipping cover again. Her face crimsoned, whitened again, and hardened slowly. She looked sick as she forced herself to stand up before him and her hands were shaking as she reached for her clothes. Her voice quavered. "I do not have taboos, Captain Derek! I-I simply resent your invasion of my privacy. I might have been doing- anything! How would you like it if I barged into your room like that?"
"Try it!" he suggested, grinning at her. "And don't count too much on my fear of failure." He watched in amusement as she finished her dressing in frenzied haste.
Then she brushed back her hair and was herself again. She smiled with forced amusement of her own. "Maybe I will, Captain. That overdose of antidepres-sant I gave you won't last forever."
He prowled and turned toward the living quarters. It was a fine crew he had left! He'd heard once that since the Collapse all men were neurotic in some way, while psychiatry had turned from a science to a farc'e. They bore out the theory. Kayel had an Oedipus complex, Ferad had turned to gluttony and hidden a good brain to avoid responsibility, and Siryl walled herself in with scorn for all men because she couldn't be one! Maybe their whole civilization was at fault. The people of the village had seemed as relaxed as if they'd just finished a course in electro-leucotomy that somehow left them with no loss of volition.
He found a seat at the table and watched Siryl slide in beside Kayel, who tried to hide his excitement at the favor behind a labored puffing at his pipe. Skora had joined them and was seated near Ferad. He had been explaining something about one of the students at the school having trouble with something god had revealed
to him. Now the old mail smiled and reached toward a bowl of fruit in the center of the table.
"I've never thought of eating fruit, but I decided to try it," he said. "I hope it's good. When I found from god that most of the worlds like more than simple cereals for breakfast, I tried to find the type of fruit that was best."
Derek began peeling one of the big fruits, wondering how much of that he was supposed to believe. The marel-fruit grew only on Feneris, where its export was the chief industry. He tasted the aromatic sweetness, surprised to find it fresh and fully ripe.
"It must be at least a hundred thousand light-years to Feneris," he suggested, trying to keep his voice casual.
Skora nibbled carefully. A smile of pleasure ap-. peared on his lips and he fell to busily. "Good. Excellent. We'll have to adopt this. Feneris? It's farther than that. But the fruit grew on many worlds before the sun blasting, and still grows on a few in this sector. We found from god where to get it and sent one of the boys who needed the exercise."
"Then you have space ships!" Derek's fruit fell to his lap as he came to his feet, his hands gripping the edge of the table. If it came from another planet of this system, it might not mean they had faster-than-light travel, but still ...
Skora shrugged apologetically. "I'm afraid not, Derek. Vanir is a simple

world. We have only our god and his power. The work of building space ships has always seemed too great for its reward. You'll find us quite primitive from your views, I'm sure."
"But-"
Siryl cut in, using Universal. "Stop it, Derek! Don't violate any verbal taboos here, if you want to get out alive!"
"But he knew the distance to Feneris and about other planets!"
"Folk songs and sagas!" She switched back to Classic, apologizing to Skora.
Derek let it drop, but he wasn't satisfied. The exotic fruit grew only in a saturated atmosphere, which this
planet didn't have. This might not be a colony of the enemy or have its own space ships, but that was no proof that ships couldn't stop here-enemy ships. With his luck, anything odd would almost certainly prove to be dangerous. He chewed on his thoughts bitterly, along with the pancakes Lari brought them. This god of theirs might even be one of the enemy, using some strange technology to create near miracles that the villagers could only believe were magic. In that case, word of their capture must be winging back to the enemy planets. It would be only a matter of time before one of the squat, black ships landed here!
Derek got up abruptly, making hasty excuses and signaling for Kayel to follow. This was no time to waste on speculation. The ship was their only means of escape, and it had to be put in some kind of operating condition. .
Siryl followed them as Derek voiced his suspicions to Kayel. The little man's eyes bulged and his face turned ashen as the captain poured out his doubts. The psychologist snorted in disgust.
"Stop exercising your persecution complex!" she snapped. She shook her head, putting on her superior smile of tolerance. "You men! A few things you can't understand and probably some changes in the language we haven't caught yet, and you picture bogy-men under every rock! There isn't a trace of inferiority feeling here, as there would be if they'd run into a superior culture!"
Ahead of them lay the ship, and Derek saw a figure standing beside it. He broke into a faster walk, until he recognized it as Michla. The man waved at them and went back to whatever he was doing. As they came nearer, Derek saw that he was running his fingers over a large, odd-shaped stone plate with more of the curlicues on it.
"Incantations on a charm. He's probably sure the ship is a form of life that can be commanded with the right spell," Siryl said with satisfaction.
Michla pulled the disk to him, holding it against his chest with one hand. The other hand went out to touch the side of the ship.
As he lifted his arm, the twenty thousand tons of the Sepelora lifted a foot off the ground and began moving steadily forward beside him. He carried it along easily, heading toward a section of wasteland half a mile away.

4

By the time they reached the Sepelora, Michla had picked up his strange plow and was busy at the far end of the field. Derek fumbled his way into the ship and began switching on the strain gauges while Kayel watched. There was no evidence of harm.
"Antigravity!" The physicist's voice was an awed whisper. "I always thought it was impossible with less than tons of equipment! And generated in the whole of the ship at once!"
Derek swung to face Siryl, but she was recovering and there was no humility in her. "Hypnotism, you mean! They must have worked on us while we slept and made us think the ship was in the other field, when it was here all along. We saw it there, and saw it being moved, by posthypnotic suggestion. Lots of primitives have some knowledge of hypnotism."
"Make it magic and I'll buy it," Derek told her. "That's a good explanation for what you can't understand, too."

She started to say something and then checked it. Finally she turned toward the airlock. "All right. Let them fool you. I'm going to go back to Lari. Primitive women are always easier to handle than their men. They're less organized."
She went out and through the fields, carefully avoiding the sight of the depression where the Sepelora had first lain. Derek and Kayel fell to work on the ruined space-denial generators and what stores were left to them.
By all standard methods, it was hopeless. Yet Kayel began sketching and checking among the small power tools. He seemed to gather momentum, now passing orders to Derek with a certainty that he showed only
when working in his own field. "It won't be good," he admitted. "I'm having to compromise. But I think we may be able to combine enough of some of the new theories with the first methods ever used. We won't make better than fifteen light-years an hour, but it should get us to one of the border planets."
It was meaningless to Derek. But if they could leave, he was willing to try it. They worked on, grinding and shaping by methods that had been lost from practice for over a century. Some of the work would be trial and error, with no chance to estimate the time it would take. But it helped to take their minds off the primitives who could handle forces that civilized science couldn't touch.
Ferad came out finally to call them in to dinner. It was already growing dark, and there was a fine rain falling. Derek stared up through it. He had looked out fifteen minutes before and had seen no clouds in the sky. There still were none he could see, but the water dropped at an. increasing rate as they moved out of the wasteland onto the cultivated fields. In the village, the covers of the water tanks were off. Derek wasn't surprised to see that the rain poured down more heavily over the tanks.
Apparently Siryl had been checking on the ram with Lari. As they entered the house the native girl was running busily from the kitchen to the table, but she was keeping up a steady fire of conversation.
"Of course Skora brings the water at night. It's better after all the work in the fields is done," she explained. "Though sometimes there's a light fall of natural rain in the daytime. That makes us all feel good. When we first started, we had to import all our water. And now we have two small oceans. Of course, god told us the planet had eight big seas before the sun exploded. I was asking Skora about it, and he says some of the worlds are all covered with water-not even a little bit of land . . ."
Siryl's face showed that she had learned nothing-or at least nothing that she wanted to know.
Lari came hurrying back, carrying a huge metal pot of stew to the table. She held it at arm's length easily, and Derek noticed one of the amulets in her hand-this
time a small one with only a few simple marks on it. He pointed. "What's that, Lari?"
"A lifting tool". God showed us how to make all kinds of tools. There's one that eats away the rock, and one that plows the ground-you saw that, didn't you? Skora bakes them. They make god work for us. Come on, dinner's ready."
Derek picked up the little piece and turned it over. It was a twisted lump of clay, baked hard, with a series of marks on the top. It looked as if no design existed, yet there was a certain flow to the lines. He reached out for the kettle, fingering the amulet. If the kettle weighed less because of it, he couldn't feel the difference. Nor could he find any sign of a switch buried on the surf ace of the gadget.
If there were some kind of broadcast power here, and these things were receivers tuned to convert it into special functions ...
He pocketed it while Lari's back was turned. There might be some penalty for the theft of one, but he had to risk it.

The next day when they reached the ship Kayel took it to pieces bit by bit. Lari had missed it, but had only shrugged and pulled another out of a drawer. The piece of clay grew smaller and smaller under the grinder as Kayel worked on it. At last it was just a nub that he had to hold with pliers. Then even that was gone. On the floor was a pile of dust, with no trace of metal or foreign element in it. The two men stared at it sickly and then dropped the matter quickly as they turned back to the labor of rebuilding the damaged space-denial generators.

They worked on doggedly for three days more. Ferad had flatly refused to help them, claiming that his marriage to Lari made him a citizen of Vanir and had ended his need to work under Derek. It was a point the captain had no desire to test while his knowledge of things was so uncertain. Maybe Ferad was a citizen now, and any force exerted on him would antagonize the whole village.

It was hopelessly slow going, but they were making
more progress than Siryl. She finally admitted that she was getting nowhere. There was one explanation for everything-and that was their god.

"They're the most superstition-ridden race I've ever heard of," she concluded in disgust.

Derek had his doubts. So far, every bit of superstition he had run into had proved sound empirical sense. It didn't matter whether they called it god or magic or anything else. It worked. And they were no worse than many of the civilized people who used the tools given to them and had no other explanation than the fact that science somehow made them work.

If men lived on a world where the only cats were leopards, where black leopards were all man-eaters, and where the cats avoided men unless looking for food, it would be extremely bad luck to have a black cat cross one's path. In such a case, the only superstition would be a denial of the facts and a belief that there had to be some other explanation of why men disappeared. Siryl's faith in hypnosis and primitive ignorance might be the real superstition here. Belief in god and the tools probably wasn't.

He went out into the rain that was falling again, looking for the house of Skora. There were a few people around and he recognized one as Wolm, the brother of Lari. The man directed him toward a house that was somewhat bigger than the others, with stonework that seemed to have mellowed with time. Derek had passed it before, when a group of children from six to nine were seated silently on couches across an open porch, and had been told it was the school where they learned god's knowledge. He should have guessed that the priest would handle the schooling here.

Skora emerged from an outbuilding that boasted the huge chimney of a kiln and invited Derek in. The walls of the building were lined with amulets of all kinds and sizes, and there was a big workbench along one wall that was covered with tools for shaping clay. It was obviously the source of the amulets. Derek went through the formula of greeting and accepted a bottle of surprisingly good beer.

"I'm getting ready for a new baking," the priest said. "This village has to supply some of the smaller places with tools. My usual helper married into another village. Why don't you and Kayel join me, Derek? It beats farming, and I understand your friend knows a good deal of science. Maybe he can show us better methods of making the tools."

"He isn't exactly a ceramicist, but we'll think about it," the captain promised. He had been turning over every indirect approach to his question. Now he discarded subterfuge. In spite of SiryPs warnings, the only way to learn anything here was to risk stepping on their taboos. "Skora, I came here to ask about your god."

Skora put aside the molds he had been cleaning and perched on the edge of the workbench. "That's asking a lot," he said, but there was no offense in his voice. "It takes our children several years to learn all about him, though

we've speeded things up in the last couple of centuries. And there are some things I can't tell you properly, for your own good, though I'll be as honest as I can. Ummm. He's a man-a very wise and very stupid man. He saved us after the sun was exploded in the great war and taught us how to survive. He still teaches our young people."
Thirteen hundred years had passed since the solar explosion. Derek whistled. "He sounds like a pretty remarkable man, Skora. No other man has found the secret of immortality. Or do you mean that he dies, but a new god replaces the old one each time?"
"Neither one. No man is immortal. And there is only one god. Sometimes I used to wonder about him when I first learned to use the power. I even thought of investigating, of going to see him. But I was always too busy."
Derek could see no evidence of deceit on Skora's face, and there was no way he could twist the words to make them mean anything but an impossible contradiction. "Suppose / wanted to visit your god, Skora-could I talk to him?"
The priest laughed and dropped off the bench to fetch two fresh bottles of beer. "You'd have a hard time of it, Derek. God died over a hundred years ago."
"Then when you say god helps you, I suppose you mean that you still follow his advice, using what he taught you before he died. Is that right?"
"Not exactly. Partly, I suppose. Tradition kept the use of the tools under the false, emotional label of prayer for hundreds of years before we could root it out. I suppose we still use some of the terms in ways that aren't literally true." The priest shrugged. "But we still need his help when some new problem comes up. We couldn't have found where the fruit grows in time without asking him. And he still teaches the children directly."
"But he's dead?"
"Quite dead," Skora assured Derek. "Sometimes I think we're headed for trouble because of that, and it makes things a little difficult at times. But what's a little trouble? When I first had to bring rain, it took all my thought to control it. Now I can sit here talking to you and enjoying myself, without losing control of the tool."
He pulled his hand out of a pocket and showed a quartz amulet in his palm, where his fingers had been fondling it. "When I was younger, I had trouble enough without any distractions. Once I forgot to remove only pure water and nearly ruined the crops with natural sea water. The planet where the rain comes from has a lot of copper salts, and that doesn't help the land."
Derek stared at the priest with sudden shock, the bottle still tilted to his lips. He forgot to swallow and gagged as beer ran down his throat and into his windpipe.
It was the complete logic of it that hit him. The rain had to be controlled, since it fell most heavily where it was most needed. Lari had already told them that the planet here had been almost barren of water after the solar explosion. Water didn't create itself. It had to be brought from somewhere.
He coughed up the beer, forcing some measure of calmness into his mind. The pieces began to fit, even though there was still no explanation.
They could draw water across space, without letting it freeze or evaporate-or even grow chilled in its pas-
sage. The only answer to that had to be some form of nearly instantaneous teleportation!
"You!" he said thickly. "Your people! It was you who threw my Waraok all the way to Sirius. And you were the ones who threw part of the Sepelora somewhere else this time!"
Skora nodded. "That was a mistake. When I learned about your ship and the others with it, I'd never worked through a field like the one around your ship, and had little time in which to operate. Yours was the first ship I

tried to handle alone, and I bungled it. But no harm was done. I put your crew on a livable planet and set the other ships beside them-the battleships, too. Working with a tool which wasn't made for just that use was quite tiring, or I'd have landed you with the others instead of letting you nearly crack up here. After you saw us, it was too late to move you, of course. I'm sorry, Derek, but we had to do it that way."

The bottle dropped to the floor and smashed as Derek stared at the old man. He should have guessed. With his type of luck, it was inevitable. He'd chased out after the enemy and been caught-by this! He staggered to his feet with shock waves of pure fear rippling through his shoulders and chest. One man against. a whole flight of ships! One solitary old man . . .

5

His memory was unclear the next morning. He'd been nearly raving when he'd sworn and pleaded with Skora to send them back. He could remember being denied by the suddenly worried and unhappy old man, but the reasons were no longer clear. All that was left was a picture of the priest putting his rain-making amulet aside and pulling down another, before taking Derek's arms in firm, strong hands.

"You're sick," Skora had said. "I had no idea. I should have known you weren't ready to discover the truth. Well, I hope your psychologist is a better doctor than healer of minds!"

And suddenly Derek had been in his own bed here, with his clothes following him out of nowhere to drape themselves over a chair. The covers had come up over him and the door had opened itself. He had been shouting something. Siryl had come in a few seconds later , and there had been a shot of some drug. ... He gave up trying to remember, knowing it was safer not to think on it now. He had been too close to insanity. After all the years of fighting against the jinx, he had developed more strength than most of his people, but there were limits. Maybe he should have let them drive him insane! What was the use . . .

The door opened and Siryl came in, carrying another hypo. She grabbed his arm and he felt the bite of a needle. For a moment his heart pounded and cold sweat popped out all over him. Then some of the misery lifted. Whatever she had used the night before must have been a depressant that had needed counteracting.

"Pull the covers up!" She had been staring at him with a mixture of shock and concern, but some of the worry was leaving her. "Have you no sense of shame?"

"No strength. You pull them up." The drug was nearing the end of its first physical impact, but he could barely talk. "Didn't you ever see a nude man before?"

She made a face of disgust. "I-we didn't take that kind of medical course. And I'm-I'm not defiled, if that's what you're thinking!" She bent slowly and forced herself to cover him, carefully avoiding all contact with his body. She winced as he laughed.

Her reactions had done him more good than the drug. The thing he had learned went back into its proper place in his mind. There was nothing horrible about the teleporting of a ship across a quintillion miles of space; he'd accepted the fact when it had happened to the Waraok. If Skora had shown him a huge machine using megawatts of power, he could have accepted that. The shock had come from discovering that it had been done with nothing but a piece of clay for power. Also, he'd been sent to find an enemy secret and had found the secret where he had least expected it. That was all.

"I'm all right now," he told her. "But I wonder if you
can take it. Call Kayel in here." He swung out of the bed and grinned as she began backing out of the room, unable to tear her eyes off him until she blundered into the edge of the door.

He was dressed when the two came back. Ferad had declared his citizenship here, and he could rot in it! But the other two had to know. He gave it to

them as fully as he could.
"Tommyrot!" Siryl said automatically, though her voice was uncertain, as if she were trying to remember how he'd returned to his room. "You were just delirious. Some disease here ..."
Once, Derek thought, men had developed a science of psychology, according to the old reports. But it had been lost during the Collapse, with only the mechanical tricks for relieving neuroses remaining. No wonder the worlds were filled with sick minds, if Siryl was typical of her profession.
Kayel emptied his pipe, looking at her as if he were thinking the same, with the woman-adulation gone from his eyes for the moment. He swallowed, his Adam's apple bobbing grotesquely. But his voice was as clear as when he discussed physics. "It fits. Oh, not the stuff about the god. That's probably mumbo-jumbo to cover some master power source and the men who run it. Maybe it's a' mechanical educator, too, with a library saved from before the Collapse. The machine must have prevented the Collapse here, and they've gone right ahead while we fell back. We're just working on theories about immense fields of energy in space that can be tapped for antigravity, identity exchange control-all that. They use it already! Derek, we've got to get this back to the Federation."
"But the way they live?" Siryl protested.
"Why not?" Derek asked. "With power like that, they don't need the usual heavy science and gadgetry. There's no reason not to live the simple life."
Kayel was pacing about, sucking on an empty pipe, and wearing a flush of excitement. Normally, it was easy to overlook his mental powers, but a good physicist had to have mental flexibility; he was supposed to be one of the best. "We can't conquer them-not when one man can handle a fleet. But we look enough like them to pass among them, once we know what to expect. We'll drop a few small fliers into the wastelands. With any luck, they'll find the god machine. Derek, do you think they'll still let us work on the Sepelora, now that you know?"
It had been bothering the captain. He shrugged uncertainly.
"I told you not to break their taboos!" Siryl reminded them. "I also told you this had to be a homogenous culture! Now maybe you'll listen to me. They have to have some neuroses; any isolated group has. What we've got to do is to find their weakness. Kayel, they think you're smarter than they are. Let's . . ."
Derek had heard enough. She still had a genius for remembering only when she'd been right and assuming she always would be infallible. He turned toward the door. ^Coming, Kayel?"
The little man hesitated, obviously swayed by the chance to work closely with her. Then he smiled apologetically at her and followed Derek.
She sat in offended dignity through breakfast. Luckily, Wolm was there and Lari kept up a steady stream of talk, trying to get Ferad to join the boy in some project or other. Nothing was noticed by the two natives. And nobody tried to stop the two men as they headed toward the ship.
Michla was busy seeding something on the harrowed field. He'd already added nitrates and other fertilizer- probably from the same planet as the water, carefully selected and dissolved in it. He called out a greeting as they passed, and they waved back. It was all friendly and normal. Derek breathed a sigh of relief as they swung around a pile of boulders.
Where the space ship had rested there was nothing but a depression in the ground. And coming toward them from that was the graybearded priest, the serape over his shoulders whipping about him in the breeze that was blowing. His face was serious as he drew near them.
Derek stepped toward him, trying to force anger to replace the fear that was thick in him. "Where's our ship, Skora?" '
"Safe. Up there." The old man pointed toward the sky above them. "In an orbit around Vanir."

"So we're prisoners?"
Skora sighed, and he seemed embarrassed. "Not exactly. We feel obligated to you for bungling the way we handled the return of your ship to Sirius, Derek, and we'd like to return you. But that must wait for further study. You have full freedom here, though. And if you are permitted to leave, the ship will be ready."
"And I suppose you'll make up all the time when we should be repairing it?" Derek asked grimly.
"We have already done that. We repaired it last night, before we sent it up. Not the space-denial generators-that is beyond our understanding. But from god we learned how to use what was there to set up the much better time-negation drive that was used before your Collapse."
"But-time-negation . . ." Kayel swallowed, stumbling. Derek hadn't known that the little man understood Classic. From the accent, he must have only a reading and weak hearing knowledge of it. But he obviously had understood enough.
"Yes, time-negation works." Skora smiled at the man's amazement. "It's simpler in application, but much more difficult in theory, I believe, than space-denial. It was discovered by accident when our common ancestors had no right to find it. Fortunately, god knew how it worked. And your ship will be ready for you if we find we can let you return."
He was heading back to the village, and they were following without thought. Kayel caught Derek's arm, pulling him back out of earshot. He spoke in hasty Universal. "We've got to forget the ship. Now it's up to god and his charms. Derek, I've got to see how those amulets are made."
"But they were nothing but baked clay. We took one apart," Derek protested.
The physicist shrugged. "A transistor works because
of a few parts per millions of impurities. A detector works because of its crystalline structure. Take his job!"
Skora had noticed that they weren't with him and had slowed his steps. Derek caught up, trying to look somewhat cheerful. "I guess we'll have to get ourselves a house of our own and stop bothering Lari until you decide, then. And since we can't use the power of your god, we'd make pretty poor farmers around here. Is the job in your kiln still open?"
"Is it?" The old man chuckled. "Do you think I like doing it by myself? And since we'd have to feed you and care for you even if you did no work, your help will be pure profit to me."
Derek had little hope for any great revelation from the work. Either there wasn't much of a secret to the tools, or there was something so tricky that they felt sure Kayel and he couldn't discover it.
The work seemed to confirm his doubts. Any child could have handled it, with no more than five minutes of instruction. Skora had teleported in a big tub of soft white clay from a bank of the stuff beyond the village. They had to pack this inside metal molds, press them down firmly and let them rough-dry until they would hold their shape. Then they went into the kiln to be baked. Finally, Skora inspected them, throwing out the defective ones along with his own hand-formed failures.
The priest answered Kayel's stumbling questions without any hesitation. The material wasn't important, so long as the final product had the right shape and the markings on it were clear. They had a few metal tools, but these were rare and too heavy for normal use.
"You can think of them as instructions," he suggested. "There is too much to remember easily, and these help. They-well, they describe a stress in space, more or less."
"Then plastics would work? Because if they would, there are a thousand pounds of thermoplastic in the ship's stores, and we'd save a lot of time here," Kayel suggested.

Skora apparently thought it was a fine idea. He ques-

tioned the physicist about what to look for, and the stock of plastic was suddenly in front of them. They began boring small holes in the molds for pouring the plastic to make unbreakable amulets, and the work went faster after that.

On the way back to Lari's that night, Kayel shook his head positively. "Nothing, Derek! Nothing can be concealed in our own plastic. The secret has to be in their god."

A god who wasn't immortal, though he had lived for at least twelve hundred years; a god who taught the children somehow, though he had been dead for a hundred years. A god who could fling a seventy-thousand ton ship quintillions of miles instantly!

Derek lingered after the second day of work. He took the bottle of beer from the priest and dropped to a seat. "Skora, I'm still curious about your god. And this time, I'll try to behave myself. How long did:he live?"

"Since before the sun exploded. Let's see." The priest tipped the capped bottle up without thinking. Beer seemed to appear just beyond the seal and run into his mouth. "He was about sixty of your years old then. He came here to see us about five years before the trouble, I think. I could find out, if you like."

Derek took his eyes off the other's drinking habits and swallowed his own drink, trying to find some point of exploration. "I haven't heard any stories about his creating the world or your people, at that. No legends of that?"

"Of course not. We evolved on Terra, like your people; and this planet grew from the usual space whorl." The old man chuckled. "This isn't a religion-though I'm afraid sometimes it's beginning to degenerate. God had some strange ideas that are getting distorted lately. Many of us have a belief in some divine spirit, Derek, but we try not to confuse that with god. He was just a man. Kayel knows more than he did, though not the same-and all of us are stronger than he was."

"He didn't teach you to worship him, then?"

"He didn't know." Skora shook his head sadly. "He thought we would, mostly be dead. He didn't care and

couldn't know what happened to us. He was unconscious. And when he revived, he was sure we were dead. With his stores all ruined and nobody to save him, he went crazy. He began blasting his way out and brought down a rock on his skull. Naturally, with his medulla crushed, he died. It was just as well. He couldn't move the rocks to get out and he'd have been afraid of the world we'd made."

It made no sense at all. Their god couldn't even move rocks out of his own way. Yet the rains fell, in spite of the fact that the amulets were nothing but symbols. The power had to come from some source. "So he was destroyed. Yet you say he still is!"

"He's there, and the young learn from him still. We had to find out how to build the time-negation drive from him since you came." Skora found another beer, remembering to open this one. He was mellowing from the liquor. "Derek, I don't know. He's dead and he's deteriorating-slowly, but the changes are there. We've always been in danger of becoming superstitiously dependent on him without realizing how much so we are. But now, some of us are worried. As he deteriorates, he may warp our children. Sometimes I've thought of digging him up and destroying him."

"Why don't you?" Derek suggested softly.

"I've thought of it. As senior priest for Vanir, I could. But it's hard . . . emotional attachment, I suppose. And fear of what would happen."

Derek frowned. "Suppose I were to destroy him?"

The old priest looked up, studying him, resolution coming slowly. "You could!

Of course, you could! Derek, one more beer! Then go home. And be back here early. We'll do it!"
Skora's hands were trembling as he reached for the bottles.

6

Siryl would have none of it.
"Nonsense," she told them after she had heard the story, along with Kayel. "Primitive cultures don't breed agnostics. Skora was just drunk or testing you! Probably saving face by trying not to act superstitious. Derek, if you break any more taboos-"
"They aren't primitive! Damn it, Siryl, if you can't get that much through your pathological skull, go outside and watch it rain for a while!"
She stiffened and then cloaked herself in professional calm. "A culture," she recited, almost by rote, "observed in situ may have certain apparently inconsistent developments, usually as a result of some isolated individual genius or accidental discovery. These, however, do not violate the fundamental attitudes and emphases, the cultural gestalt, but are inevitably assimilated emotionally. That means, Derek, that they can have a machine left over from pre-Collapse days that makes miracles-but they still think it's magic. If you'll drop your persecution complex and listen to-"
He grimaced, and then grinned slowly. "My hairy-chested persecution complex, you undefiled prude!"
She drew in her breath harshly and marched out of the room, white to her lips. Kayel looked sick, starting after her and turning back. "You shouldn't have done that, Derek!" he protested. He sighed, shook his head, and sat down slowly, reaching for his pipe. "I wonder what we'll find-and whether Skora will do it?"
Derek had his own doubts, but they found the old man ready the next morning, with Wolm behind him, carrying a supply of amulets and two battery torches he must have pulled from the Sepelora. The priest looked as if he had been unable to sleep, and the porch where the school was usually held was locked up tightly.
He saluted them, his eyes still troubled but with no doubt in his voice. "The place is on the other side of Vanir, deep in a cave our ancestors built. He expected
the explosion toward the last and had the one of them who could use his power dig two such caves-one for him, one for us. He had a machine . . . We almost starved and died of asphyxiation, until that one who could use the power found from god how to bring food and keep fresh air coming from another world."
He sighed, and his eyes ran across the landscape and the growing fields. "When we came out years later, the world was a cinder, and god had to teach us to restore it and to farm it. At first, we thought of moving to another world. Even the air here had to be brought in. But we stayed near god. Well, let's go!"
There was an abrupt, sickening shift of scenery and they were standing at the base of a mountain that stretched up as one of a huge chain, barren and forbidding. Only a few stunted plants existed there, and the sun was purpling the sky in the west. Ahead of them was a cliff that stretched up nearly half a mile, and there were two rubble-filled holes in it, near them.
The priest motioned to one of them, and Wolm moved ahead. He had what seemed to be a huge umbrella without covering. He pointed the ribs toward the fallen rocks, twisting it slowly and feeling the swiveled handle of clay. He came to the stones and continued walking. The rock seemed to flow away from the device, compacting itself against the walls of the older passage that was there.
"This is the way he taught Moskez, the only one of us who could learn the power," Skora explained. "God came across space from Terra to study us with

other scientists. When the enemy began exploding suns, he stole us to help him, taking all .the supplies he could carry. We built this cave for him, and the one beyond for ourselves. Fortunately, the sun's explosion was a weak one."

He was worried, but oddly determined. They were moving downward and forward. Then they hit a clear passage that wound down and down. It must have taken a great depth to protect them from the solar blowup. Ot^er peonle had tried it, without this digging device, and had failed.

They reached a long section where the passage was clear, and foul, air'rushed out at them. Skora reached for an amulet and cold, clear atmosphere blew in rapidly. Derek wondered why the old man didn't simply teleport them into the cave where their god lay, but decided to let the question go. It was probably only a means of delaying the accomplishment. His legs ached, and Kayel was panting, but they went steadily down.

Finally it flattened out and another five minutes of walking brought them into a partially clear chamber. There was a great radium motor on one side, whirring softly. In the center stood a huge glass case, covered with thick layers of ice from the ages of slow atmospheric seepage. Oxygen tanks were beside it and stores of food and equipment lay about, all rotted and useless now. Wolm scraped off the ice at a gesture from the priest, and Derek stared into the tank.

Doubled up on the floor of the case was an old man, his face hidden by one arm, his neck bent at an imnossi-ble angle. He was naked and fat, with the waxy color of frozen flesh. One hand lay near a heavy notebook and the other clutched an archaic type of heat-projecting rifle. A rock lay near the wound on the back of his neck, and another had wedged itself into the hole at the top of the case, sealing it with the layer of ice around it. From the breakage inside the case, it was obvious that he had gone mad, to wind up shooting at the ceiling above him. The cooling system must have been cut off before he revived, but it had somehow gotten turned on again during his insane frenzy.

"Suspended animation!" Kayel said. "There were accounts that it had been developed. But no details on the cooling, chemicals in the blood, the irradiation frequencies. Skora, was he a biologist or biophysicist?"

"No, he stole the parts from the place where our people were studied," the priest said. "Another man meant to use it, but god took it. And he didn't adjust it right. He wanted to wait fifty years, but it was twelve hundred before it released him. We left him because we needed him and he was preserved in this."

Wolm had drawn closer to the case, trembling. Now
he bent his white face down and stared into the case. Skora stood beside the boy, indecision working on him.

"What do we do now?" Derek asked, as gently as he could.

The old man sighed. "I don't know. The enzymes of his body are bringing a slow decay, despite the cold. And things go wrong with the teaching of the young .• . . but without him, god is gone and Vanir may have no power. If I could only be sure-"

He waited, while Derek stared at the case and its machinery. At first, he had wondered if it might not conceal the great machine that could perform the miracles he had seen. But Kayel had looked it over at once and had shaken his head. It seemed to be no more than it was supposed to be. And that left only their god-a fat, dead god who had gone insane because of his weakness and his fear.

"No!" Wolm broke. The boy's shoulders heaved. He buried his face against the case, shouting and clawing at the ice. "No! Skora, you can't. He is all we have. He's holy! Don't touch him! God will come again! I saw it. It is Ms thought! You can't-"

Skora's fingers moved .on the amulet savagely. Wolm's body snapped out of

existence, while flakes of ice trickled down where he had been.
The priest looked sicker than before. "I sent him home," he said. "Derek, that is what our youngsters learn now. There is decay, and distinctions are going. The old emotional superstitions are stronger than later logic, and all children used to have them. Now they creep through into the minds of our young. A decaying mind and an insane one-and our children absorb that knowledge."
He sighed heavily. "And I-even I must have absorbed some of it. I can't destroy him! It's-horror! Derek, it's up to you. Do what you will. I'll wait fifteen minutes for you and keep the air pure here for you. But I can't even watch!"
He was suddenly gone, too.
Kayel swallowed thickly, his neck bobbing against tight muscles. He reached for his pipe, then stuffed it
back. "But if he loses his power when the body is destroyed, he can't keep air for us or get us out?"
Derek kicked at the glass case. Kayel hesitated, and then joined him. It broke finally, and they waited while the blast of freezing air wheezed out, foul and miasmic. Derek reached for the weapon, but it was too cold to touch. He kicked it around with his foot until he could point it toward the corpse, while he found a bit of cloth he could use to cover the trigger.
Kayel knocked his arm aside before he could fire. The little man pointed toward the notebook and began hastily ripping off his shirt. He scooped up the book and spread it out on a low couch, ripping off the thin plastic that protected it. "We still have fourteen minutes, Derek. And this may be our only chance to find the secret."
The captain stepped back, feeling relief wash over him. He had been bracing himself to take the chance, but the excuse to delay it was welcome. If burning the body destroyed the power of god, Vanir would be just another primitive world-and they would almost certainly die before they could get out. If the power remained, there would still be the need to warn the Federation of the menace hers-and no clue on which to operate.
Kayel flipped the cover back and skimmed through a few pages as quickly as he could turn them. It was obviously written in Classic, heavily interspersed with strange mathematics like none Derek had ever seen. From Kayel's puzzled glance, they were equally strange to him. He turned to the front again. Then he pointed. "Aevan-god is Aevan!"
The book was described on the first page grandiloquently as the diary and records of A. Evan, the discoverer of metadynamics, the only true science of all time-the full and final work, from which the notes the world had been unready for had been extracted.
The body of the book began with the man's need for people with unusually developed "ability" for his experiments, and his discovery of the border world of Vanir,
where scientists had bred small groups for special abilities and were studying them.
In one of those little colleges, he had found the children he needed, and one child had proved capable of manipulating space as Aevan had been sure was possible. Moskez had even been able to force a few of the other children to bridge the difficult gap and begin work on it. There were long experiments and formulae for levitation, teleportation, penetrability, and other things. It ended on a note of self-adulation for his own success, in spite of the poor material he'd had with which to work.
Derek frowned and went back carefully, looking for the missing factor. The mathematics looked good, and in time Kayel could probably figure them out. But Aevan had been unable to make them work himself. It had taken some other ability.

He found it finally, in a footnote he'd skipped. It was telepathy. Aevan had known that the mental power needed was related to telepathy, and had been forced to find a group which had been bred for that. The boys on Vanir who succeeded had had more than eleven generations in which to build up such power.

Telepathy! And since the Collapse, while Vanir went on with its exclusive breed of telepaths, the rest of the worlds had had no such power-the psychologists had proved that it had been bred out of humanity, if it had ever existed. Yet without it, the mathematics would be useless. Only Vanir could have infinite power.

There the children had been forced to use it to survive. The single advanced one had somehow taught the others, and they had stolen their ideas for survival from the mind of Aevan. In suspended animation, his thoughts were nearly still, but his memories remained, and they could be tapped. Even dead, the memory cells were preserved for a time, though now they were deteriorating at last.

The amulets were only traditions to help them-they had used them as children, probably, to remember and feel the complex mathematical formulae, and the use of
the tools had become so closely associated with the power that nobody questioned it now.

Derek tossed the book to Kayel and reached for the trigger. Nothing visible came from the weapon, but the body of the god-or Aevan-charred and began to vanish, along with most of the wall of the case behind it. Fourteen minutes had gone by.

He began to tense as the seconds drifted by, picturing Skora standing up there without the symbol of the power he had used, uncertain of his own powers, afraid to try them! If the man couldn't work without the familiar-

Abruptly, they were back at the foot of the mountain, outside the tunnel they had cleared. Skora stood there, his face strained and white and his hands shaking; but his eyes were burning with the end of more than a thousand years of slavery to a useless custom and the fear of its loss.

"It worked-the tools still have power!" His voice was hoarse, as if he had been shouting.

Derek had one final test. He turned toward the priest, keeping his lips sealed and trying to throw the words silently out of his mind toward the other. Not the tools, Skora. They were only memory aids. All you need is the knowledge and power that you have in your own mind. You were bound to a superstition!

Skora smiled wearily, his eyes moving toward the book Kayel still held. He nodded thoughtfully. "Superstition? I suppose you're right," he admitted. "Or conditioned reflexes of thought. Until about the age of nine, it was easier for a young telepath to explore the passive, unresisting mind of god than that of a busy adult. Eventually, it became the only way for them to learn in our culture. Now I suppose we'll have to train teachers for the children."

Kayel was staring at them, his mind busily adjusting to the new conditions. "Telepathy!" he said, without fear, but with a growing sense of wonder, as he knitted his brows and stood silently while Skora seemed to listen. Derek wondered why his own mind wasn't curling up in horror at being read. But what difference would it
make? He'd helped Vanir, but the Federation could never use the secret.

Skora sighed at last. "Sanity, new morals, many other things, Kayel. We only deceived you about our ability to read minds, and that for your own good. We were, afraid it might be too disturbing. And we're doubly grateful now. If there is anything we can do . . ."

"Send us home on the Sepelora," Derek suggested.

"The affairs of the rest of the universe are not ours, Derek," the old man answered, and he seemed genuinely sorry. "We can't risk having them brought to

us by returning you. The decision of the majority went against me. Now all I can do is make you welcome here on Vanir."
Derek stared up at the sky where the Sepelora lay out of reach but ready to carry them home. He let his eyes fall again to the planet that was to be their prison. He had come to like the people and to feel more at ease among them in many ways than among his own race. But there had been hope, until now.
"All right," he said at last. "Keep your world, Skora, Live on it comfortably while the rest of the human race nearly kill themselves in another war. You'll be safe. Dredge up a few more tricks from Aevan's notes. You like being alone-most provincials do. And it won't matter in your time. But when the children of my people find mechanical ways of doing what you do with your minds-when they sweep in here with ten battleships for each that your people can handle-remember that you could have joined us and saved us from the enemy that burned this planet once already. When that happens, cry for the brotherhood of men. See what they think of a single planet that kept its secrets to itself. Oh, damn it, send us back to Lari's and let us alone!"
Skora reached for the amulet. Then he threw it away and stared at them, frowning in concentration without the help of tools. His hands clenched at his side.
They stood in Derek's bedroom.
'" ' 7
Derek lay wearily on the bed while Kayel's low voice went on explaining things to Siryl. The woman had resented their going off without her, even though she had wanted no part of the trip. But now her hurt scorn had cooled down to an unbelieving interest. In a way, the captain thought, she had been right all along. But she didn't seem to be enjoying it. He started to turn over.
Siryl screamed thinly. By the time he could look, she was throwing Aevan's notebook away and whimpering. "No!" Her voice was low now, but rising slowly toward hysteria as Derek got off the bed. "No. No! It can't be telepathy!"
"It is," Derek assured her. "I tested it. So did Kayel."
Her face contorted, and she swung toward him, groping for support. She found his shoulder and buried her face in it, clinging to him, her nails digging into his back as she strained closer. "Take me away! Derek, take me away. I can't stand having them read my mind-every thought I ever had, every wish. . . . Derek!"
He reached up to disentangle the hands that were trying to dig through his backbone. "Siryl-" he began.
She flung herself from him and groped toward the door. But Kayel was there, his tortured face sympathetic. The little man caught her, and she dragged herself against him. He drew her closer while she sobbed, standing the pain of her hysteria as if he were being -knighted.
"I'll protect you, Siryl. Some way I'll protect you. They aren't going to read your mind. I won't let them." He was scowling furiously with some effort as he tried to comfort her. His eyes turned toward Derek. "Maybe if they know about their god now, they're upset! Maybe they won't think too well. Get Lari, Derek-she's not very suspicious, I hope. And don't think about anything except that Siryl's sick."
The woman had whimpered at the mention of Lari's name. Kayel drew her down beside him, rubbing her hair
gently. "There, there, baby. Nobody is going to read your mind now."
Derek found Lari in the kitchen, naturally, and brought her back with him. She was wearing her big apron with the amulet pockets, and moved ahead of him with the bowl in her hands clattering against one of them while she went on stirring-the picture of a quiet housewife, Derek thought bitterly. With the power of a god!
"Lari," Kayel told her, "Siryl's sick. We're not just like you. We're neurotics-we have been since the Collapse. We need things you don't have which

are on the Sepelora-Ferad will need them, too. Can you send Siryl and Derek up for them? They'll know where to find the drugs."
Derek started to protest. But this was more important to the physicist than escape. He was being the space knight who could slay monsters for his lady. The captain glanced at Lari, trying to keep his thoughts down. She puzzled over it, but seemed completely unsuspicious. It must have been a hard day for her already, and her mind wasn't on the request.
"I guess so," she answered. "If I sort of pretend god is still there and use the amulet. I'll have to concentrate. You stir this till I work it." She handed the bowl to Kayel, who took it quickly, keeping the swirling bubbles in the mixture going.
Lari pulled out the amulet and clutched it firmly. She bent over it, hesitated, and looked up. "No sense in two of you going for a few drugs," she commented, and clenched her hand.
Derek found himself in the control room of the Sepelora, beside a new bank of instruments. He let out a yell of protests at the miscarriage of Kayel's plans, but his finger hit the red button that was still marked FIRING PIN. There was no way he could go back for them, nothing he could do to help. And he was still captain of the ship, in the service of the Federation, with a job to do.
The Sepelora came to life. There was no blanking out of the ports, but the stars began rushing by at an
incredible rate, while the radar checked them and threw the ship about to :av6id a direct hit. They were making better than a thousand light-years an hour!
Derek found the instructions beside the new panel and began setting their course for Sirius. He had no idea of how the machines worked, but that would be for experts if he got back; and it was something to aid the Federation, at least.
He could feel the breath of fear blowing down his neck as he worked frantically. Lari might not be able to handle a time-negation field. She might have to waste tune in hunting for Skora. Or perhaps none of them could work through this. Perhaps there was no way to locate him. He could be sure of nothing, except that each thousand light-years gave him a slight added reason for hope-but sure that it wasn't enough reason, even so.
He wondered about Siryl and Kayel. She might be sick at their failure, but she was probably female enough to appreciate the attempt Kayel had made more than the fact that he hadn't delivered. And she'd been rocked by telepathy enough to seek comfort where she could find it and in the strongest manner.
Then he went back to worrying, staring back in the direction of Vanir. He had no idea of how far they could reach. Maybe they could throw things farther than they could suck them in. The Waraok had been tossed two hundred thousand light-years. But the people of Vanir had gone out only a few light-years to bring supplies. Maybe he was already safe.
He began to think so as the hours drifted by. And he began to appreciate the time-negation field more as he saw the simplicity of the generators. He could already construct another set from memory, if he had to. With this, the Federation still might win.
Worry over pursuit kept him from sleeping until fatigue finally took over. That day and the next went by. Then the next.
He went to bed with more confidence. He'd underestimated the speed of the new drive and was already half the distance back to Sirius-they should have stopped him before that, since he was now near some of the outer fringes of the Federation. He considered landing on one, but decided against it. The farther he went, the better. And the new drive should be taken directly to headquarters.
In the so-called morning, his head was aching as if the back of his skull were

about to split, and the wqrry had returned. There was no reason for it, except the jinx that had become such a part of him. He swallowed anodynes and fought off some of the pain, but it kept coming back, as if something were bursting inside.
He made his way up to the control room, while the feeling that he had lost grew stronger and stronger inside him. He should have remembered that the anodyne was a depressant. It wouldn't do to go into a fit of depression now, while he was nearing home.
He opened the door to the precabin, strode through it, and into the cabin beyond. Then he stopped.
Skora sat in a seat there, staring at the great spread of stars that streaked across the ports. This time there were no pants of homespun and no scrape over the old shoulders. The beard was still there, but shortened and trimmed. It projected over the collar of a Federation Fleet uniform-and on the side of the collar was pinned the double cluster of a galaxy commander!
The old man saluted crisply, smiling in amusement at the gesture, and waited while Derek's arm automatically returned the honor. "As you were, Captain!" Then he sobered. "As you can see, Derek, your words made an impression on me. Vanir couldn't stand in a backwater, hoping that men would never catch up. Nor could we forget that we belonged to the race of mankind and were all brothers. Telepaths are unusually sensitive to that argument, once it's pointed out to them. I couldn't convince enough of our council. But after I teleported myself to Sirius and convinced your command there, it was too late for Vanir to retrench. We aren't limited to one planet now, clinging to the memory of a decaying god. Now there are two million of us being fitted for your uniforms-enough to win your war without having to destroy the enemy we both fought once before."
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"And I suppose headquarters took one look at what you could do and made you all officers," Derek said bitterly, remembering the years he'd spent fighting for a mere sector commander's rating.
The pain in his head broke over him again, and he doubled over. Skora seemed not to notice.
"It wasn't hard, Derek. They were paralyzed with fear of new weapons until they were beginning to lose the battle. Your command had its own superstitions. And reading their minds helped me to find ways of convincing them. Then, when I could, I came to take you back. I've been waiting here for you for hours-though not idly."
The pain hit a sharp peak and faded somewhat. Skora was staring at him intently, and he covered the remaining pain under automatic questions. "How's Siryl? And I suppose Kayel is happy working out more of the mathematics for you?"
"Siryl-" Skora paused and shrugged. "Kayel had her promise to marry him, of course, and is a new man. She is recovering, we hope, since he made her a metal net and told her it would keep us from reading her mind. It won't, if we try, but she needs her little superstition, if she's to stop hating us."
Derek stared out at the stars rushing by, knowing he had won what he had been sent to win-and had lost the Federation. His jinx had outgrown him, and had spread to the whole race.
Now Siryl hated and feared the men of Vanir for their power to see the things which a prude must conceal within her own mind. She might get over that; perhaps she could learn to accept their power. But in time, all the women on Federation planets would have to hate the telepaths-not for themselves, but for the sake of the children who should never be born into the life that must come.
Skora had spent a few days gaining himself the coveted rank of Galaxy Commander, while Derek had never dared to hope he could rise that high in a

lifetime. And Skora's people could have everything they wanted for the asking. Monsters were loose on the world. Until power could corrupt them, they might be kind monsters. But they were worse than any enemy defeat could have been. They would save the Federation, but after the triumph, those most fit would own it. The men who had built the star ships would never control the future-that would be left for the conquering march of the men who .had done nothing, but had simply been given a power denied to the rest of the race.

"There was an old legend," Skora said suddenly. "About a boy who lived with some kind of animals. When men discovered him at the age of twelve, he was a savage. He was unable to talk-and nobody learned how to teach him. Yet his powers of speech were latently as good as those of any man."

The pain had lashed out again at the man's words. Derek let them slip over his mind without trying to understand. Skora was reading his mind, but it didn't matter. He went on thinking, forced to recognize that he had brought total defeat to all nontelepathic men. If there had been any hope . . .

But the psychologists and geneticists had looked for the power of telepathy in the current race, and had found none.

Skora stirred impatiently. "Telepathy never occurred strongly in men more than once in perhaps a billion births. Even in the group at the place where god found us, only Moskez had any great power, after all the careful breeding for it. He had to teach it to the others, so that they would not be wolf-boys in the world which the explosion left them. And Lari and Ferad are having a child-who will learn, like all the rest of us, even though Ferad is its father."

Derek groped for the hope, and then shrugged. It was a good line for the rest of the worlds. It would give them faith in their future, while Vanir replaced them. They could believe that with a little more work and time, they would slowly develop the power-and their "teachers" would find ways of convincing them they were succeeding. Maybe they needed that faith, no matter how wrong it was. They would forget the legends

that spoke of a time when the strange psi factor was bred out of the, race-for the benefit of a few, as he now knew. They would pretend there was only one race, instead of the two into which it had been split.

The pain caught him again, and Skora got up sympathetically to rub the back of his neck. It helped. "Men," the old man told him, "have been finding ways to claim they are not all one race since there first were human beings. But it's still wrong. And science has made mistakes, while legends are only superstitions."

The old fingers found the spot of greatest anguish and began rubbing it out. Derek looked up, grateful in spite of his bitterness against what had been done. "The advantage of being a telepath," he admitted. "You know where the pain is. Thanks, Skora."

It always hurts at first, Skora's voice said softly.

His lips had been tightly shut, and he was smiling. Derek felt his body tauten, and his eyes froze on the unmoving lips, while the voice continued quietly somewhere in his mind.

It takes time, Skora's voice went on, with a warmth that had always been lacking in it before. And it hurts. So does the loss of some of the things we believe-that we are persecuted, that we must depend on god, that incomplete knowledge and old legends can tell us everything, or that we are more than one race. Telepathy is never easy for an adult, Derek. But with it, we can unite our whole race-perhaps even the ones we call an enemy!

The pain was gone now, leaving only a strange sense of completion behind it. Derek stumbled to his feet, choking over words that would not come.

The old man caught his mind, smiling, and led him to the viewing port.

"Sector Commander Derek," he said aloud, while the warm soft echo of the words came into the former captain's mind, "out there is man's kingdom. All of

space! But there's no room there for any more of the superstitions we've all had too long."
Derek looked out through the ports toward the stars
that rushed by the Sepelora, while the ship carried the two men into their future.
There was no jinx reflected in the port glass. There were only the images of two faces, smiling back at him.
For I Am a Jealous People!
i
. . . the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves . . . and the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low . . . they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish . . . because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets. . . .
Ecclesiastes, 12:3-5
THE BOOK OF THE JEWS
THERE WAS THE continuous shrieking thunder of an alien rocket overhead as the Reverend Amos Strong stepped back into the pulpit. He straightened his square, thin shoulders slightly, and the gaunt hollows in his cheeks deepened. For a moment he hesitated, while his dark eyes turned upward under bushy, grizzled brows. Then he moved forward, placing the torn envelope and telegram on the lectern with his notes. The blue-veined hand and knobby wrist that projected from the shiny black serge of his sleeve hardly trembled.
Unconsciously, his eyes turned toward the pew where his wife should be, before he remembered that Ruth would not be there this time. She had been delayed by the arrival ofe^he message and had read it before sending it on to him. Now she could not be expected. It seemed strange to him. She hadn't missed service since Richard was born nearly thirty years ago.
The sound of the rocket hissed its way into silence over the horizon, and Amos stepped forward, gripping the dusty surface of the rickety lectern with both hands. He straightened and forced his throat into the pattern that would give, his voice the resonance and calm it needed.
"I have just received final confirmation that my son was killed in the battle of the moon," he told the puzzled congregation, which had been rustling uncertainly since he was first interrupted. He lifted his voice, and the resonance in it deepened. "I had asked, if it were possible, that this cup might pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, Lord, but as Thou wilt."
He turned from their shocked faces, closing his ears to the sympathetic cries of others who had suffered. The church had been built when Wesley was twice its present size, but the troubles that had hit the people had driven them into the worn old building until it was nearly filled. He pulled his notes to him, forcing his mind from his own loss to the work that had filled his life.
"The text today is drawn from Genesis," he told them. "Chapter seventeen, seventh verse; and chapter twenty-six, fourth verse. The promise which God made to Abraham and again to Isaac." He read from the Bible before him, turning to the pages unerringly at the first try. "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.
"And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries: and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."
He had memorized most of his sermon, no longer counting on inspiration to guide him as it had once done. He began smoothly, hearing his own words in snatches as he drew the obvious and comforting answer to their uncertainty. God had promised man the earth as an everlasting' covenant. Why then should men be afraid or lose faith because alien monsters had swarmed down out of the

emptiness between the stars to try man's faith? As in the days of bondage in Egypt or captivity in Babylon, there would always be trials and times when the faint-hearted should waver, but the eventual outcome was clearly promised.
He had delivered a sermon from the same text in his former parish of Clyde when the government had first begun building its base on the moon, drawing heavily hi that case from the reference to the stars of heaven to quiet the doubts of those who felt that man had no business in space. It was then that Richard had announced his commission in the lunar colony, using Amos' own words to defend his refusal to enter the ministry. It was the last he saw of the boy.
He had used the text one other time, over forty years before, but the reason was lost, together with the passion that had won him fame as a boy evangelist. He could remember the sermon only because of the shock on the bearded face of his father when he had misquoted a phrase. It was one of his few clear memories of the period before his voice changed and his evangelism came to an abrupt end.
He had tried to recapture his inspiration after ordination, bitterly resenting the countless intrusions of marriage and fatherhood on his spiritual forces. But at last he had recognized that God no longer intended him to be a modern Peter the Hermit, and resigned himself to the work he could do. Now he was back in the parish where he had first begun; and if he could no longer fire the souls of his flock, he could at least help somewhat with his memorized rationalizations for the horror of the alien invasion.
Another ship thundered overhead, nearly drowning his words. Six months before, the great ships had exploded out of nothing in space and had fallen carefully to the moon, to attack the forces there. In another month they had begun a few forays against Earth itself.
And now, while the world haggled and struggled to unite against them, they were establishing bases all over and apparently setting out to conquer the world mile by mile.
Amos saw the faces below him turn up, hate-filled and uncertain. He raised his voice over the thunder, and finished hastily, moving quickly through the end of the service.
He hesitated as the congregation stirred. The ritual was over and his words were said, but there had been no real service. Slowly, as if by themselves, his lips opened, and he heard his voice quoting the Twenty-seventh Psalm. "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?"
His voice was soft, but he could feel the reaction of the congregation as the surprisingly timely words registered. "Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident." The air seemed to quiver, as it had done long ago when God had seemed to hold direct communion with him, and there was no sound from the pews when he finished. "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart;-wait, I say, on the Lord."
The warmth of that mystic glow lingered as he stepped quietly from the pulpit. Then there was the sound of motorcycles outside, and a pounding on the door. The feeling vanished.
Someone stood up and sudden light began pouring in from outdoors. There was a breath of the hot, droughty physical world with its warning of another dust storm, and a scattering of grasshoppers on the steps to remind the people of the earlier damage to their crops. Amos could see the bitterness flood back over them in tangible waves, even before they noticed the short, plump figure of Dr. Alan Miller.
"Amos! Did you hear?" He was wheezing as if he had been running. "Just came over the radio while you were in here gabbling."
He was cut off by the sound of more motorcycles. They swept down the single main street of Wesley,

heading west. The riders were all in military uniform, carrying weapons and going at the top speed of their machines. Dust erupted behind them, and Doc began coughing and swearing. In the last few years, he had grown more and more outspoken about his atheism; when Amos had first known him, during the earlier pastorate in Wesley, the man had at least shown some respect for the religion of others.

"All right," Amos said sharply. "You're in the house of God, Doc. What came over the radio?"

Doc caught himself and choked back his coughing fit. "Sorry. But damn it, man, the aliens have landed in Clyde, only fifty miles away. They've set up a base there! That's what all those rockets going over meant."

There was a sick gasp from the people who had heard, and a buzz as the news was passed back to others. Faces grayed. Some dropped back to the hard seats, while others pressed forward, trying to reach Doc, shouting questions at him. Amos let himself be shoved aside, hardly noticing the reaction of his flock. It was Clyde where he had served before coming here again. He was trying to picture the alien ships dropping down, scouring the town ahead of them with gas and bullets. The grocer on the corner with his nine children, the lame deacon who had served there, the two Aimes sisters with their horde of dogs and cats and their constant crusade against younger sinners. He tried to picture the green-skinned, humanoid aliens moving through the town, invading the church, desecrating the altar! And there was Anne Seyton, who had been Richard's sweetheart, though of another faith. ...

"What about the garrison nearby?" a heavy farmer yelled over the crowd. "I had a boy there, and he told me they could handle any ships when they were landing! Shell their tubes when they were coming down . . ."

Doc shook his head. "Half an hour before the landing, there was a cyclone up there. It took the roof off the main building and wrecked the whole training garrison."

"Jim!" The big man screamed out the name, and began dragging his frail wife behind him, out toward his car. "If they got Jim ..."

Others started to rush after him, but another procession of motorcycles stopped them. This time they were traveling slower, and a group of tanks were rolling behind them. The rear tank drew abreast, slowed, and stopped, while a duty-faced man in a major's untidy uniform stuck his head out.

"You folks get under cover! Ain't you heard the news? Go home and stick to your radios, before a snake plane starts potshooting the bunch of you for fun. The snakes'll be heading straight over this town if they're after Topeka, like it looks!" He jerked back down and began swearing at someone inside. The tank jerked to a start and began heading away toward Clyde.

There had been enough news of the sport of the alien planes in the papers. The people melted from the church. Amos tried to stop them for at least a short prayer and to give them time to collect their thoughts, but gave up after most of the people began moving away. A minute later, he was standing alone with Doc Miller.

"Better get home, Amos," Doc suggested. "My car's half a block down. Suppose I give you a lift?"

Amos nodded wearily. His bones felt dry and brittle, and there was a dust in his mouth thicker than that in the air. He felt old, and for the first time, almost useless. He followed the doctor quietly, welcoming the chance to ride the six short blocks to the little house the parish furnished him.

A car of ancient age and worse repair rattled toward them as they reached Doc's auto. It stopped, and a man in dirty overalls leaned out, his face working jerkily. "Are you prepared, brothers? Are you saved? Armageddon has come, as the Book foretold. Get right with God, brothers! The end of the world as foretold is at hand, amen!"

"Where does the Bible foretell alien races around other suns?" Doc shot at him.
The man bunked, frowned, and yelled something about sinners burning forever in hell before he started
his rickety car again. Amos sighed. Now, with the rise of their troubles, fanatics would spring up to cry doom and false gospel more than ever, to the harm of all honest religion. He had never decided whether they were somehow useful to God or whether they were inspired by the forces of Satan.
"In my Father's house are many mansions," he quoted to Doc as they started up the street. "It's quite possibly an allegorical reference to other worlds in the heavens."
Doc grimaced, and shrugged. Then he sighed, and dropped one hand from the wheel onto Amos' knee. "I heard about Dick, Amos. I'm sorry. The first baby I ever delivered-and the best-looking!" He sighed again, staring toward Clyde as Amos found no words to answer. "I don't get it. Why don't we ever drop atom bombs on them? Why didn't the moon base use their missiles?"
Amos had no answer to that, either. There was a rumor that all the major powers had sent their whole supply of atomic explosives up to the moon base early in the invasion, and that a huge meteorite had buried the stockpile under tons of debris, where there had been no chance to excavate it. It matched the other cases of accidents that had beset all human resistance.
He got out at the unpainted house where he lived, taking Doc's hand silently and nodding his thanks.
He would have to organize his thoughts this afternoon. When night fell and the people could move about without the danger of being shot at by chance alien planes, the church bell would summon them, and they would need spiritual guidance. If he could help them to stop trying to understand God, and to accept Him . . .
There had been that moment in the church when God had seemed to enfold him and the congregation in warmth-the old feeling of true fulfillment. Maybe, now in the hour of its greatest need, some measure of inspiration had returned.
He found Ruth setting the table. Her small, quiet body moved as efficiently as ever, though her face was puffy and her eyes were red. "I'm sorry I couldn't make
it, Amos. But right after the telegram, Anne Seyton came. She'd heard-before we did. And . . ."
The television set was on, showing headlines from the Kansas City Star, and he saw there was no need to tell her the news. He put a hand on one of hers. "God has only taken what he gave, Ruth. We were blessed with Richard for thirty years."
"I'm all right." She pulled away and picked up a pot, turning toward the kitchen, her back frozen in a line of taut misery. "Didn't you hear what I said? Anne's here. Dick's wife! They were married before he left, secretly-right after you talked with him about the difference in religion. You'd better see her, Amos. She knows about her people in Clyde."
He watched his wife move fromjhe room, his heart heavy with her grief, while the words penetrated. He'd never forbidden marriage, he had only warned the boy, who had been so much like Ruth. He hesitated, and finally turned toward the tiny second bedroom. There was a muffled answer to his knock, and the lock clicked rustily.
"Anne?" he said. The room was darkened, but he could see her blonde head and the thin, almost unfemi-nine lines of her figure. He put out a hand and felt her slim fingers in his palm. As she turned toward the weak light, he saw no sign of tears, but her hand shook with her dry shudders. "Anne, Ruth has just told me that God has given us a daughter . . ."
"God!" She spat the word out harshly, while the hand jerked back. "God, Reverend Strong? Whose God? The one who sends meteorites against Dick's base,

plagues of insects and drought against our farms? The God who uses tornadoes to make it easy for the snakes to land? That God, Reverend Strong? Dick gave you a daughter, and he's dead! Dead! Dead!"
Amos backed out of the room. He had learned to stand the faint mockery with which Doc pronounced the name of the Lord, but this was something that set his skin into goose pimples and caught at his throat. Anne had been of a different faith, but she had always seemed religious before.
It was probably only hysteria. He turned toward the kitchen to find Ruth and send her in to the girl.
Overhead, the staccato bleating of a ramjet cut through the air in a sound he had never heard. But the radio description fitted it perfectly. It could be no Earth ship with such a noise!
Then there was another and another, until they blended together into a steady drone.
And over it came the sudden firing of a heavy gun, while a series of rapid thuds came from the garden behind the house. Rover let out two loud barks, and then screamed in animal agony!
Amos stumbled toward the back door, but Ruth was already ahead of him. "Dick's dog! Now they've got his dog!" she cried out.
Before Amos could stop her, she threw back the door and darted out. There was another burst of shots and a sick cry. Ruth was crumpling before he could get to the doorway.
2
My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? . . . I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.
Psalm 22:1,14,15
THE BOOK OF THE JEWS
There were no more shots as he ran to her and gathered her into his arms. The last of the alien delta planes had gone over, heading for Topeka or whatever city they were attacking.
Ruth was still alive. One of the ugly slugs had caught her in the abdomen, ripping away part of her side, and the wound was bleeding horribly. But he felt her heart still beating, and she moaned faintly when he lifted her.
Then, as he put her on the couch, she opened her eyes briefly, saw him, and tried to smile. Her lips moved, and he dropped his head to hear.
"I'm sorry, Amos. Foolish. Nuisance. Sorry."
Her eyes closed, but she smiled again after he bent to kiss her lips. "Glad now. Waited so long."
Anne stooa in the doorway, staring unbelievingly. But as Amos stood up, she unfroze and darted to the medicine cabinet, to come back and begin snipping away the ruined dress and trying to staunch the flow of blood.
Amos reached for the phone, unable to see it clearly. He mumbled something to the operator, and a minute later to Doc Miller. He'd been afraid that the doctor would still be out. He had a feeling that Doc had promised to come, but could remember no words.
The flow of blood outside the wound had been stopped, but Ruth was white, even to her lips. Anne forced him back to a chair, her fingers gentle on his arm.
"I'm sorry, Father Strong. I-I. . ."
He stood up after a few minutes and went over to stand beside Ruth, letting his eyes turn toward the half-set table. There was a smell of scorching food in the air, and he went out to the old wood-burning stove to pull the pans off and drop them into the sink. Anne followed, but he hardly saw her, until he heard her begin to cry softly. There were tears this time.
"The ways of God are not the ways of man, Anne," he said, and the words released a flood of his own emotions. He sank tiredly onto a stool, his hands

falling limply onto his lap. He dropped his head against the table, feeling the weakness and uncertainty of age. "We love the carnal form and our hearts are broken when it is gone. Only God can know all of any of us or count the tangled threads of our lives. It isn't good to hate God!"
She moved beside him as he rose and returned to the living room. "I don't, Father Strong. I never did." He couldn't be sure of the honesty of it, but he made no
effort to question her, and she sighed. "Mother Ruth isn't dead yet!" ";
He was saved from any answer by the door being slammed open as Doc Miller came rushing in. The plump little man took one quick look at Ruth and was beside her, reaching for plasma and his equipment. He handed the plasma bottle to Anne, and began working carefully.
"There's a chance," he said finally. "If she were younger or stronger, I'd say there was an excellent chance. But now, since you believe in it, you'd better do some fancy praying."
"I've been praying," Amos told him, realizing that it was true. The prayers had begun inside his head before she was outside the door, and they had never ceased.
They moved her gently, couch and all, into the bedroom, where the blinds could be drawn, and where the other sounds of the house couldn't reach her. Doc gave Anne a shot of something and sent her into the other bedroom. He turned to Amos, but didn't insist when the minister shook his head.
"I'll stay here, Amos," Doc said, "with you. As long as I can until I get another emergency call. The switchboard girl knows where I am."
He went back into the bedroom without closing the door. Amos stood in the center of the living room, his head bowed, for long minutes.
It was a whining sound that finally called him back to the world around him. He went to the back door and stared out. The Scotty was still alive, pulling its little body along the dirt of the garden toward the house. The whole hind section was paralyzed, and the animal must have been in agony from the horrible wound on its back. But it saw him and whined again, struggling toward him.
He went out automatically. He had never been fond of the dog, nor it of him. But now there was an understanding between them. "Shh, Rover," he told the dog. "Quiet, boy. The mistress is all right."
Rover whined again, and a wet tongue caressed Amos' hand. He bent as gently as he could to examine
the wound. Then he stood up, trying to reassure the animal.
He found Richard's hunting rifle in one of the trunks and made sure it was unrusted. He loaded it carefully, feeling his skin crawl at the touch of the gun. It seemed strange to use the weapon on Rover when the dog and Richard had both found such pleasure in hunting wjth this same gun. But he couldn't see the animal suffering.
Rover looked up and tried to bark as he saw the gun. Amos dropped beside him, feeling that the dog knew what he meant to do. The eyes looked up at him with a curious understanding as he placed the muzzle near the animal's head. Amos stopped, wondering. The wound was a horrible thing-but Doc might be able to save the animal, even though he was no veterinarian. If it had been a wounded human, the attempt would have to be made.
Rover drew back his lips, and Amos stopped, expecting a growl. He even reached out to put the gun away. But the wet tongue came out again, brushing across his hand, accepting the fate intended, and blessing him for it. He patted the dog's head, closed his eyes, and pulled the trigger. It was merciful. There wasn't even time for a cry of pain.
If the dog had fought him, if it had struggled against its fate in a final desire to live . . . But it had submitted to what it considered a superior being. Only man could defy a Higher Will. Rover had accepted . . . and Rover

was dead. He buried the small body in the soft dirt of the garden.
Doc stood in the doorway when he started back for the house. "I heard the shot and thought you were trying something foolish," the doctor said. "I should have known better, I guess, with your beliefs. Then I waited here, listening for a snake plane, ready to pull you back. According to the television, they must be returning by now."
Amos nodded. He found Ruth still in a coma, with nothing he could do. Then he remembered the planes and turned to watch the television. Topeka was off the air, but another station was showing news films:"
Hospitals, schools, and similar places seemed to have been the chief targets of the aliens. Gas had accounted for a number of deaths, though those could have been prevented if instructions had been followed. But the incendiaries had caused the greatest damage.
And the aliens had gotten at least as rough treatment as they had meted out. Of the forty that had been counted, twenty-nine were certainly down.
"I wonder if they're saying prayers to God for their dead?" Doc asked. "Or doesn't your God extend his mercy to races other than man?"
Amos shook his head slowly. It was a new question to him. But there could be only one answer. "God rules the entire universe, Doc. But these evil beings surely offer him no worship!"
"Are you sure? They're pretty human!"
Amos looked back to the screen, where one of the alien corpses could be seen briefly. They did look almost human, though squat and heavily muscled. Their skin was green, and they wore no clothes. There was no nose, aside from two orifices under their curiously flat ears that quivered as if in breathing. But they were human enough to have passed for deformed men, if they had been worked on by good make-up men.
They were creatures of God, just as he was! And as such, could he deny them? Then his mind recoiled, remembering the atrocities they had committed, the tortures that had been reported, and the utter savageness so out of keeping with their inconceivably advanced ships. They were things of evil who had denied their birthright as part of God's domain. For evil, there could be only hatred. And from evil, how could there be worship of anything but the powers of darkness?
The thought of worship triggered his mind into an awareness of his need to prepare a sermon for the evening. It would have to be something simple; both he and his congregation were in no mood for rationalizations. Tonight he would have to serve God through their emotions. The thought frightened him. He tried to cling for strength to the brief moment of glory he had felt in the morning, but even that seemed far away.
There was the wail of a siren outside, rising to an ear-shattering crescendo, and the muffled sound of a loudspeaker with its amplifier driven to high distortion levels.
He stood up at last and moved out onto the porch with Doc as the tank came by. It was limping on treads that seemed to be about to fall apart, and the amplifier and speaker were mounted crudely on top. It pushed down the street, repeating its message over and over.
"Get out of town! Everybody clear out! This is an order to evacuate! The snakes are coming! Human forces have been forced to retreat to regroup. The snakes are heading this way, heading toward Topeka. They are looting and killing as they go. Get out of town! Everybody clear out!"
It paused, and another voice blared out, sounding like that of the major who had warned the town earlier. "Get the hell out, all of you! Get out while you've still got your skins outside of you. We've been licked. Shut up, Blake! We've had the holy living pants beat off us, and we're going back to momma. Get out, scram, vamoose! The snakes are coming! Beat it!"
It staggered down the street, rumbling its message, and now other stragglers

began following it-men in trucks, piled together like cattle; men in ancient cars of every description. Then another amplifier sounded from one of the trucks.
"Stay under cover until night! Then get out! The snakes won't be here at once. Keep cool. Evacuate in order, and under cover of darkness. We're holing up ourselves when we get to a safe place. This is your last warning. Stay under cover now, and evacuate as soon as it's dark."
There was a scream from the sky, and alien planes began dipping down. Doc pulled Amos back into the house, but not before he saw men being cut to ribbons by missiles that seemed to fume and burst into fire as they hit. Some of the men on the retreat made cover. When the planes were gone, they came out and began regrouping, leaving the dead and hauling the wounded with them.
"Those men need me!" Amos protested.
"So does Ruth," Doc told him. "Besides, we're too old, Amos. We?d only get in the way. They have their own doctors and chaplains, probably. Those poor devils are risking their lives to save us, damn it. The Army must have piled all its movable wounded together and sent them to warn us and to decoy the planes away from the rest who are probably sneaking back through the woods and fields. They're heroes, Amos, and they'd hate your guts for wasting what they're trying to do. I've been listening to one of the local stations, and they've already been through hell."
He turned on his heel and went back to the bedroom. The television program tardily began issuing evacuation orders to all citizens along the road from Clyde to To-peka, together with instructions. For some reason, the aliens seemed not to spot anything smaller than a tank hi movement at night, and all orders were to wait until then.
Doc came out again, and Amos looked up at him, feeling his head bursting, but with one clear idea fixed in it. "Ruth can't be moved, can she, Doc?"
"No, Amos." Doc signed. "But it won't matter. You'd better go in to her now. She seems to be coming to. I'll wake the girl and get her ready."
Amos went into the bedroom as quietly as he could, but there was no need for silence. Ruth was conscious, as if some awareness of her approaching death had forced her to make the most of these last few minutes of her life. She put out a frail hand timidly to him. Her voice was weak, but clear.
"Amos, I know. And I don't mind now, except for you. But there's something I had to ask you. Amos, do you . . . ?"
He dropped beside her when her voice faltered, wanting to bury his head against her, but not daring to lose the few remaining moments of her sight. He fought the words out of the depths of his mind, and then realized it would take more than words. He bent over and kissed her again, as he had first kissed her so many years ago.
"I've always loved you, Ruth," he said. "I still do love you."
She sighed and relaxed. "Then I won't be jealous of God anymore, Amos. I had to know."
Her hand reached up weakly, to find his hair and to run her fingers through it. She smiled, the worn lines of her face softening. Her voice was content and almost young. "And forsaking all others, cleave only unto thee . . ."
The last syllable whispered out, and the hand fell.
Amos dropped his head at last, and a single sob choked out of him. He folded her hands tenderly, with the worn, cheap wedding ring uppermost, and arose slowly with his head bowed.
"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. Father, I thank thee for this moment with her. Bless her, O Lord, and keep her for me."
He nodded to Doc and Anne. The girl looked sick and sat staring at him with eyes that mixed shock and pity.
"You'll need some money, Anne," he said. "I don't have much, but there's a

little . . ."
She drew back and shook her head. "I've got enough, Reverend Strong. I'll make out; Doctor Miller has told me to take his car. But what about you?"
"There's still work to be done," he said. "I haven't even written my sermon. And the people who are giving up their homes will need comfort. In such hours as these, we all need God to sustain us."
She stumbled to her feet and into her bedroom. Amos opened his old desk and reached for pencil and paper.
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'' ' 3
The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of upright conversation.
I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree.
Psalm 37:14, 35
THE BOOK OF THE JEWS
Darkness was just beginning to fall when they helped Anne out into the doctor's car, making sure that the tank was full. She was quiet, and had recovered herself, but she avoided Amos whenever possible. She turned at last to Doc Miller.
"What are you going to do? I should have asked before, but ..."
"Don't worry about me, girl," he told her, his voice as hearty as when he was telling an old man he still had forty years to live. "I've got other ways. The switchboard girl is going to be one of the last to leave, and I'm driving her in her car. You go ahead, the way we mapped it out. And pick up anyone else you find on the way. It's safe; it's still too early for men to start turning to looting, rape, or robbery. They'll think of that after the shock of this wears off a little."
She held out a hand to him, and climbed in. At the last minute, she pressed Amos' hand briefly. Then she stepped on the accelerator and the car took off down the street at top speed.
"She hates me," Amos said. "She loves other men too much and God too little to understand."
"And maybe you love your God too much to understand that you love men, Amos. Don't worry, she'll figure it out. The next time you see her, she'll feel different. Look, I really do have to see that Nellie gets off the switchboard and into a car. I'll see you later."
Doc swung off toward the telephone office, carrying his bag. Amos watched him, puzzled as always at any-
one who could so fervently deny God and yet could live up to every commandment of the Lord except worship. They had been friends for a long time, while the parish stopped fretting about the friendship and took it for granted, yet the riddle of what they found in common was no nearer solution.
There was the distant sound of a great rocket landing, and the smaller stutterings of the peculiar alien ramjets. The ships passed directly overhead, yet there was no shooting this time.
For a moment, Amos faced the bedroom window where Ruth lay, and then he turned toward the church. He opened it, throwing the doors wide. There was no sign of the sexton, but he had rung the bell in the tower often enough before. He took off his worn coat and grabbed the rope.
It was hard work, and his hands were soft. Once it had been a pleasure, but now his blood seemed too thin to suck up the needed oxygen. The shirt stuck wetly to his back, and he felt giddy when he finished.
Almost at once, the telephone in his little office began jangling nervously. He staggered to it, panting as he lifted the receiver, to hear the voice of Nellie, shrill with fright. "Reverend, what's up? Why's the bell ringing?"
"For prayer meeting, of course," he told her. "What else?"

"Tonight? Well, I'll be-" She hung up.
He lighted a few candles and put them on the altar, where their glow could be seen from the dark street, but where no light would shine upward for alien eyes. Then he sat down to wait, wondering what was keeping the organist.
There were hushed calls from the street and nervous cries. A car started, to be followed by another. Then a group took off at once. He went to the door, partly for the slightly cooler air. All along the street, men were moving out their possessions and loading up, while others took off. They waved to him, but hurried on by. He heard telephones begin to ring, but if Nellie was passing on some urgent word, she had forgotten him.
He turned back to the altar, kneeling before it. There
was no articulate prayer in his mind. He simply clasped his gnarled fingers together and rested on his knee, looking up at the outward symbol of his life.
Outside, the sounds went on, blending together. It did not matter whether anyone chose to use the church tonight. It was open, as the house of God must always be in times of stress. He had long since stopped trying to force religion on those not ready for it.
And slowly, the strains of the day began to weave themselves into the pattern of his life. He had learned to accept; from the death of his baby daughter on, he had found no way to end the pain that seemed so much a part of life. But he could bury it behind the world of his devotion, and meet whatever his lot was to be without anger at the will of the Lord. Now, again, he accepted things as they were ordered.
There was a step behind him. He turned, not bothering to rise, and saw the dressmaker, Angela Anduccini, hesitating at the door. She had never entered, though she had lived in Wesley since she was eighteen. She crossed herself doubtfully, and waited.
He stood up. "Come in, Angela. This is the house of God, and all His daughters are welcome."
There was a dark, tight fear in her eyes as she glanced back to the street. "I thought-maybe the organ ..."
He opened it for her and found the switch. He started to explain the controls, but the smile on her lips warned him that it was unnecessary. Her calloused fingers ran over the stops, and she began playing, softly as if to herself. He went back to one of the pews, listening. For two years he had blamed the organ, but now he knew that there was no fault with the instrument, but only with its player before. The music was sometimes strange for his church, but he liked it.
A couple who had moved into the old Surrey farm beyond the town came in, holding hands, as if holding each other up. And a minute later, Buzz Williams stumbled in and tried to tiptoe down the aisle to where Amos sat. Since his parents had died, he'd been the
town problem. Now he was half-drunk, though without his usual boisterousness.
"I ain't got no car and I been drinking," he whispered. "Can I stay here till maybe somebody comes or something?"
Amos sighed, motioning Buzz to a seat where the boy's eyes had centered. Somewhere, there must.be a car for the four waifs who had remembered God when everything else had failed them. If one of the young couple could drive, and he could locate some kind of vehicle, it was his duty to see that they were sent to safety.
Abruptly, the haven of the church and the music came to an end, leaving him back hi the real world-a curiously unreal world now.
He was heading down the steps, trying to remember whether the Jameson boy had taken his rebuilt flivver when a panel truck pulled up in front of the church. Doc Miller got out, wheezing as he squeezed through the door.
He took in the situation at a glance. "Only four strays, Amos? I thought we might have to pack them in." He headed for Buzz. "I've got a car outside,

Buzz. Gather up the rest of this flock and get going!"
"I been drinking," Buzz said, his face reddening hotly.
"Okay, you've been drinking. At least you know it, and there's no traffic problem. Head for Salina and hold your speed under forty and you'll be all right." Doc swept little Angela Anduccini from the organ and herded her out, while Buzz collected the couple. "Get going, all of you!"
They got, with Buzz enthroned behind the wheel and Angela beside him. The town was dead. Amos closed the organ and began shutting the doors to the church.
"I've got a farm tractor up the street for us, Amos," Doc said at last. "I almost ran out of tricks. There were more fools than you'd think who thought they could hide it out right here. At that, I probably missed some. Well, the tractor's nothing elegant, but it can take back roads
no car would handle. We'd better get going. Nellie has already gone, with a; full load."
Amos shook ibis head. He had never thought it out, but the decision had been in his mind from the beginning. Ruth still lay waiting a decent burial. He could no more leave her now than when she was alive. "You'll have to go alone, Doc."
"I figured." The doctor sighed, wiping the sweat from his forehead. "I'd remember to my dying day that believers have more courage than an atheist! Nope, we're in this together. It isn't sensible, but that's how I feel. We'd better put out the candles, I guess."
Amos snuffed them reluctantly, wondering how he could persuade the other to leave. His ears had already caught the faint sounds of shooting, indicating that the aliens were on their way.
The uncertain thumping of a laboring motor sounded from the street, then wheezed to silence. There was a shout, a pause, and the motor caught again. It seemed to run for ten seconds before it backfired, and was still.
Doc opened one of the doors. In the middle of the street, a man was pushing an ancient car while his wife steered. But it refused to start again. He grabbed for tools, threw up the hood, and began a frantic search for the trouble.
"If you can drive a tractor, there's one half a block down," Doc called out.
The man looked up, snapped one quick glance behind him, and pulled the woman hastily out of the car. In almost no time, the heavy roar of the tractor sounded. The man revved it up to full throttle and tore off down the road, leaving Doc and Amos stranded. The sound of the aliens was clearer now, and there was some light coming from beyond the bend of the street.
There was no place to hide, except in the church. They found a window where the paint on the imitation stained glass was loose and peeled it back enough for a peephole. The advance scouts of the aliens were already within view. They were dashing from house to house. Behind them, they left something that sent up clouds of
glowing smoke that seemed to have no fire connected to its brilliance. At least, no buildings were burning.
Just as the main group of aliens came into view, the door of one house burst open. A scrawny man leaped out, with his fat wife and fatter daughter behind him. They raced up the street, tearing at their clothes and scratching frantically at their reddened skin.
Shouts sounded. All three jerked, but went racing on. More shots sounded. At first, Amos thought it was incredibly bad shooting. Then he realized that it was even more unbelievably good marksmanship. The aliens were shooting at the hands first, then moving up the arms methodically, wasting no chance for torture.
For the first time in years, Amos felt fear and anger curdle solidly in his stomach. He stood up, feeling his shoulders square back and his head come up as he moved toward the door. His lips were moving in words that he only half understood. "Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up Thine hand; forget not the humble.

Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God? He hath said in his heart, Thou wilt not requite it. Thou hast seen it, for Thou beholdest mischief and spite, to requite it with Thy hand: the poor commiteth himself unto Thee; Thou art the helper of the fatherless. Break Thou the arm of the wicked and the evil ones; seek out their wickedness till Thou find none . . ."

"Stop it, Amos!" Doc's voice rasped harshly in his ear. "Don't be a fool! And you're misquoting that last verse!"

It cut through the fog of his anger. He knew that Doc had deliberately reminded him of his father, but the trick worked, and the memory of his father's anger at misquotations replaced his cold fury. "We can't let that go on!"

Then he saw it was over. The aliens had used up their targets. But there was the sight of another wretch, unrecognizable in half of his skin . . .

Doc's voice was as sick as Amos felt. "We can't do anything. I can't understand a race smart enough to build star ships and still stupid enough for this. But it's good for our side, in the long run. While our armies are organizing, the snakes are wasting time on this. And it makes our resistance get Rougher, too."

The aliens didn't confine their sport to humans. They worked just as busily on a huge old tomcat they found. And all the corpses were being loaded onto a big wagon pulled by twenty of the creatures.

The aliens obviously had some knowledge of human behavior. At first they had passed up all stores and had concentrated on living quarters. The scouts had passed on by the church without a second glance. But they moved into a butcher shop at once, to come out again carrying meat, which was piled on the wagon with the corpses.

Now a group was assembling before the church, pointing up toward the steeple where the bell was. Two of them shoved up a mortar of some sort. It was pointed quickly and a load was dropped in. There was a muffled explosion, and the bell rang sharply, its pieces rattling down the roof and into the yard below.

Another shoved the mortar into a new position, aiming it straight for the door of the church. Doc yanked Amos down between two pews. "They don't like churches, damn it! A fine spot we picked. Watch out for splinters!"

The door smashed in and a heavy object struck the altar, ruining it. Amos groaned at the shattering sound it made.

There was no further activity when they slipped back to their peepholes. The aliens were on the march again, moving along slowly. In spite of the delta planes, they seemed to have no motorized ground vehicles, and the wagon moved on under the power of the twenty green-skinned things, coming directly in front of the church.

Amos stared at it in the flickering light from the big torches burning in the hands of some of the aliens. Most of the corpses were strangers to him. A few he knew. And then his eyes picked out the twisted, distorted upper part of Ruth's body, her face empty in death's relaxation.

He stood up wearily, and this time Doc made no effort to stop him. He walked down a line of pews and
around the wreck of one of the doors. Outside the church, the air was still hot and dry, but he drew a long breath into his lungs. The front of the church was in the shadows, and no aliens seemed to be watching him.

He moved down the stone steps. His legs were firm now. His heart was pounding heavily, but the clot of feelings that rested leadenly in his stomach had no fear left in it. Nor was there any anger left, nor any purpose.

He saw the aliens stop and stare at him, while a jabbering began among them. He moved forward with the measured tread that had led him down the aisle when he married Ruth. He came to the wagon and put his hand out, lifting one of Ruth's dead-limp arms back across her body.

"This is my wife," he told the staring aliens quietly. "I am taking her home with me."
He reached up and began trying to move the other bodies away from her. Without surprise, he saw Doc's arms moving up to help him, while a steady stream of whispered profanity came from the doctor's lips.
Amos hadn't expected to succeed. He had expected nothing.
Abruptly, a dozen of the aliens leaped for the two men. Amos let them overpower him without resistance. For a second, Doc struggled; then he too relaxed while the aliens bound them and tossed them onto the wagon.
4
He hath bent his bow like an enemy: he stood with his right hand as an adversary, and slew all that were pleasant to the eye in the tabernacle of the daughter of Zion: he poured- out his fury like fire.
The Lord was as an enemy: he hath swallowed up Israel, he hath swallowed up all her palaces: he hath destroyed his strong holds, and hath increased in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation.
The Lord hath cast off his altar, he hath abhorred his sanctuary, he hath given up into the hand of this -enemy the walls of her palaces; they have made a noise in the house of the Lord, as in the day of a solemn feast.
Lamentations 2:4, 5,7
THE BOOK OF THE JEWS
Amos' first reaction was one of dismay at the rain of his only good suit. He struggled briefly on the substance under him, trying to find a better spot. A minister's suit might be old, but he could never profane the altar with such stains as these. Then some sense of the ridiculousness of his worry reached his mind, and he relaxed as best he could.
He had done what he had to do, and it was too late to regret it. He could only accept the consequences of it now, as he had learned to accept everything else God had seen fit to send him. He had never been a man of courage, but the strength of God had sustained him through as much as most men had to bear. It would sustain him further.
Doc was facing him, having flopped around to lie near him. Now the doctor's lips twisted into a crooked grin. "I guess we're in for it now. But it won't last forever, and maybe we're old enough to die fast. At least, once we're dead, we won't know it, so there's no sense being afraid of dying."
If it were meant to provoke him into argument, it failed. Amos considered it a completely hopeless philosophy, but it was better than none, probably. His own faith in the hereafter left something to be desired; he was sure of immortality and the existence of heaven and hell, but he had never been able to picture either to his own satisfaction.
The wagon had been swung around and was now being pulled up the street, back toward Clyde, Amos tried to take his mind off the physical discomforts of the ride by watching the houses, counting them to his own. They drew near it finally, but it was Doc who spotted the important fact. He groaned. "My car!"
Amos strained his eyes, staring into the shadows through the glare of the torches. Doc's car stood at the side of the house, with its left front door open! Someone must have told Anne that he hadn't left, and she'd forgotten her anger with him to swing back around the alien horde to save him!
He began a prayer that they might pass on without the car being noticed, and it seemed at first that they would. Then there was a sudden cry from the house, and he saw her face briefly at a front window. She must have seen Doc and himself lying on the wagon!
He opened his mouth to risk a warning, but it was too late. The door of the house swung back, and she was standing on the front steps, lifting Richard's rifle to her shoulder. Amos' heart seemed to hesitate with the tension of his body. The aliens still hadn't noticed. If she'd only wait ...
The rifle cracked. Either by luck or some skill he hadn't suspected, one of

the aliens dropped. She was running forward now, throwing another cartridge into the barrel. The gun barked again, and an alien fell to the ground, bleating horribly.

There was no attempt at torture this tune, at least. The leading alien finally jerked out a tubelike affair from a scabbard at his side and a single sharp explosion sounded. Anne jerked backward as the heavy slug hit her forehead, the rifle spinning from her dead hands.

The wounded alien was trying frantically to crawl away. Two of his fellows began working on him mercilessly, with as little feeling as if he had been a human. His body followed that of Anne toward the front of the wagon, just beyond Amos' limited view.

She hadn't seemed hysterical this time, Amos thought wearily. It had been her tendency to near hysteria that had led to his advising Richard to wait, not the difference in faith. Now he was sorry he'd had no chance to understand her better.

Doc sighed, and there was a peculiar pride under the thickness of his voice. "Man," he said, "has one virtue which is impossible to any omnipotent force like your God. He can be brave. He can be brave beyond sanity
for another man or for an idea. Amos, I pity your God if man ever makes war on Him!"

Amos flinched, b'ut the blasphemy aroused only a shadow of his normal reaction. His mind seemed numbed. He lay back, watching black clouds scudding across the sky almost too rapidly. It looked unnatural, and he remembered how often the accounts had mentioned a tremendous storm that had wrecked or hampered the efforts of human troops. Maybe a counterattack had begun, and this was part of the alien defense. If they had some method of weather control, it was probable. The moonlight was already blotted out by the clouds.

Half a mile farther on, there was a shout from the aliens, and a big tractor chugged into view, badly driven by one of the aliens who had obviously only partly mastered the human machine. With a great deal of trial and error, it was backed into position and coupled to the wagon. Then it began churning along at nearly thirty miles an hour, while the big wagon bucked and bounced behind. From then on, the ride was a physical hell. Even Doc groaned at some of the bumps, though his bones had three times more padding than Amos could boast.

Mercifully, they slowed when they reached Clyde. Amos wiped the blood off his bitten lip and managed to wriggle to a position where most of the bruises were on his upper side. Beyond the town there was a flood of brilliant lights where the alien rockets stood, and he could see a group of strange machines driven by nonhu-man creatures busy-unloading the great ships. But the drivers of the machines looked totally unlike the other aliens.

One of the alien trucks swung past them, and he had a clear view of the creature steering it. It bore no resemblance to humanity. There was a conelike torso, covered with a fine white down, ending in four thick stalks to serve as legs. From its broadest point, four sinuous limbs spread out to the truck controls. There was no head, but only eight small tentacles waving above it.

He saw a few others, always in control of machines,
and no machines being handled by the green-skinned people, as they passed through the ghost city that had been Clyde. Apparently there were two races allied against humanity, which explained why such barbarians could come in space ships. The green ones must be sun-ply the fighters, while the downy cones were the technicians. From their behavior, though, the pilots of the planes must be recruited from the fighters.

Clyde had grown since he had been there, unlike most of the towns about. There was a new supermarket just down the street from Amos' former church, and the tractor jolted to a stop in front of it. Aliens swarmed out and began carrying the dead loot from the wagon into big food lockers, while two others lifted

Doc and Amos.
But they weren't destined for the comparatively merciful death of freezing in the lockers. The aliens threw them into a little cell that had once apparently been a cashier's cage, barred from floor to ceiling. It made a fairly efficient jail, and the lock that clicked shut as the door closed behind them was too heavy to be broken.
There was already one occupant-a medium-built young man whom Amos finally recognized as Smithton,-the Clyde dentist. His shoulders were shaking with sporadic sobs as he sat huddled in one corner. He looked at the two arrivals without seeing them. "But I surrendered," he whispered to himself. "I'm a prisoner of war. They can't do it. I surrendered . . ."
A fatter-than-usual alien, wearing the only clothes Amos had seen on any of them, came waddling up to the cage, staring in at them, and the dentist wailed off into silence. The alien drew up his robe about his chest and scratched his rump against a counter without taking his eyes off them. "Humans," he said in a grating voice, but without an accent, "are peculiar. No standardization."
"I'll be damned!" Doc swore. "English!"
The alien studied them with what might have been surprise, lifting his ears. "Is the gift of tongues so unusual, then? Many of the priests of the Lord God Almighty speak all the human languages. It's a common miracle, not like levitation."
"Fine. Then maybe you'll tell us what we're being held for?" Doc suggested.
The priest shcugged. "Food, of course. The grethi eat any kind of meat-even our people-but we have to examine the laws to find whether you're permitted. If you are, we'll need freshly killed specimens to sample, so we're waiting with you."
"You mean you're attacking us for food?"
The priest grunted harshly. "No! We're on a holy mission to exterminate you. The Lord Almighty commanded us to go down to Earth where abominations existed and to leave no living creature under your sun."
He turned and waddled out of the store, taking the single remaining torch with him, leaving only the dim light of the moon and reflections from farther away.
Amos dropped onto a stool inside the cage. "They had to lock us in a new building instead of one I know," he said. "If it had been the church, we might have had a chance."
"How?" Doc asked sharply.
Amos tried to describe the passage through the big unfinished basement under the church, reached through a trap door. Years before, a group of teen-agers had built a sixty-foot tunnel into it and had used it for a private club until the passage had been discovered and bricked over from outside. The earth would be soft around the bricks, however. Beyond, the outer end of the tunnel opened in a wooded section, which led to a drainage ditch that in turn connected with the Republican River. From the church, they could move to the stream and slip down that without being seen. There was even an alley-or had been one-behind the store that would take them to the shadow of the trees around the church.
Doc's fingers were fumbling with the lock as Amos finished. He grunted and reached for his pocket, taking out a few corns. "They don't know much about us, Amos, if they expect to hold us here, where the lock is fastened from the inside. Feel those screws."
Amos fumbled over the lock surface. There were four large screws on the back of the lock, holding it to
the door. The cashier's cage had been designed to keep others out, not to serve as a jail. At best, he thought, it was a poor chance. Yet was it merely chance? It seemed more like the hand of God to him.
"More like the stupidity of the aliens, to my mind," Doc objected. He was testing the screws with a quarter now. He nodded in some satisfaction, then swpre. "Damn it, the quarter fits the slot, but I can't get enough leverage to

turn the screw. Hey, Smithton or whatever your name is, pull out that money drawer and knock the bottom out. I need a couple of narrow slats."
Smithton had been praying miserably-a childhood prayer for laying himself down to sleep. But he succeeding in kicking out splinters from the drawer bottom. Doc selected two and clamped them around the quarter, trying to hold them in place while he turned them. It was rough going, but the screws turned. Three came loose finally, and the lock rotated on the fourth until they could force the cage open.
Doc stopped and pulled Smithton to him. "Follow me, and do what I do. No talking, no making a separate jump, or I'll break your neck. All right!"
The back door was locked, but from the inside. They opened it to a backyard filled with garbage. The alley wasn't as dark as it should have been, since open lots beyond let some light come through. They hugged what shadows they could until they reached the church hedge. There they groped along, lining themselves up with the side office door. There was no sign of aliens.
Amos broke ahead of the others, being more familiar with the church. It wasn't until he had reached the door that he realized it could have been locked; it had been kept that way part of the time. He grabbed the handle and forced it back-to find it unlatched.
For a second, he stopped to thank the Lord for their luck. Then the others were with him, crowding into the little kitchen where social suppers were prepared. He'd always hated those functions, but now he blessed them for providing a hiding place that gave them time to find their way.
There were sounds in the church, and odors, but
none that seemed familiar to Amos. Something made the back hairs of his neck prickle. He took off his shoes and tied them around his neck, and the others followed suit.
The way to the trap door lay down a small hall, across in front of the altar, and into the private office on the other side.
They were safer together than separated, particularly since Smithton was with them. Amos leaned back against the kitchen wall to catch his breath. His heart seemed to have a ring of needled pain around it, and his throat was so dry that he had to fight desperately against gagging. There was water here, but he couldn't risk rummaging across the room to the sink.
He was praying for strength, less for himself than for the others. Long since, he had resigned himself to die. If God willed his death, he was ready; all he had were dead and probably mutilated, and he had succeeded only in dragging those who tried to help him into mortal danger. He was old, and his body was already treading its way to death. He could live for probably twenty more years, but aside from his work, there was nothing to live for-and even in that, he had been only a mediocre failure. But he was still responsible for Doc Miller, and even for Smithton now.
He squeezed his eyes together and squinted around the doorway. There was some light in the hall that led toward the altar, but he could see no one, and there were drapes that gave a shadow from which they could spy the rest of their way. He moved to it softly, and felt the others come up behind him.
.He bent forward, parting the drapes a trifle. They were perhaps twenty feet in front of the altar, on the right side. He spotted the wreckage that had once stood as an altar. Then he frowned as he saw evidence of earth piled up into a mound of odd shape.
He threw the cloth back farther, surprised at the curiosity in him, as he had been surprised repeatedly by the changes taking place hi himself.
There were two elaborately robed priests kneeling in
the center of the chapel. But his eye barely noticed them before it was attracted to what stood in front of the new altar.
A box of wood rested on an earthenware platform. On it were four marks, which his eyes recognized as unfamiliar, but which his mind twisted into a sequence

from no alphabet he had learned; yet in them was .always more than they were. And above the box was a veil, behind which Something shone brightly without light.
In his mind, a surge of power pulsed, making something that might almost have been words through his thoughts.
"I AM THAT i AM, who brought those out of bondage from Egypt and who wrote upon the wall before Bel-shazzar, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN, as it shall be writ large upon the Earth, from this day forth. For I have said unto the seed of Mikhtchah, thou art my chosen people and I shall exalt thee above all the races under the heavens!"
5
And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.
He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword.
Revelation 13:7, 10
THE BOOK OF THE CHRISTIANS
The seed of Mikhtchah. The seed that was the aliens ...
There was no time and ah1 time, then. Amos felt his heart stop, but the blood pounded through his arteries with a vigor it had lacked for decades. He felt Ruth's hand in his, stirring with returning life, and knew she had never existed. Beside him, he saw Doc Miller's hair turn snow white., arid knew that it was so, though there was no way he could see Doc from his position.
He felt the wrath of the Presence rest upon him, weighing his every thought from his birth to his certain death, where he ceased completely and went on forever, and yet he knew that the Light behind the veil was unaware of him, but was receptive only to the two Mikht-chah priests who knelt unaware.
All of that was with but a portion of his mind so small that he could not locate it, though his total mind encompassed all time and space, and that which was neither; yet each part of his perceptions occupied all of his mind that had been or ever could be, save only the present, which somehow was a concept not yet solved by the One before him.
He saw a strange man on a low mountain, receiving tablets of stone that weighed only a pennyweight, engraved with a script that all could read. And he knew the man, but refused to believe it, since the garments were not those of his mental image, and the clean-cut face fitted better with the strange Egyptian headpiece than with the language being spoken.
Amos saw every prayer of his life tabulated. But nowhere was there the mantle of divine warmth which he had felt as a boy and had almost felt again the morning before. And there was a stirring of unease at his thought, mixed with wrath; yet while the thought was in his mind, nothing could touch him.
Yet each of those things was untrue, because he could find no understanding of that which was true.
It ended as abruptly as it had begun, either a microsecond or a million subjective years after. It left him numbed, but newly alive. And it left him dead as no man had ever been hopelessly dead before.
He knew only that before him was the Lord God Almighty, who had made a covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob, and with their seed; and that mankind had been rejected, while God now was on the side of the enemies of Abraham's seed, and all the nations of earth.
Even that was too much for a human mind no longer in touch with the Presence, and only a shadow of it remained.
Beside him, Amos heard Doc Miller begin breathing again, brushing the white hair back from his forehead wonderingly as he muttered a single word. "God!"
One of the Mikhtchah priests looked up, his eyes turning about; there was a glazed look on his face, but it was leaving.

Then Smithton screamed! His open mouth poured out a steady, unwavering screaming, while his lungs panted in and out. His eyes opened, staring horribly. Like a wooden doll on strings, the man stood up and walked forward. He avoided the draperies and headed for the Light behind the veil. Abruptly, the Light was gone, but Smithton walked toward it as steadily as before. He stopped before the falling veil, and the scream cut off sharply.

Doc had jerked silently to his feet, tugging Amos up behind him. The minister lifted himself, but he knew there was no place to go. It was up to the will of God now. ... Or ...

Smithton turned on one heel precisely. His face was rigid and without expression, yet completely mad. He walked mechanically forward toward the two priests. They sprawled aside at the last second, holding two obviously human-made automatics, but making no effort to use them. Smithton walked on toward the open door at the front of the church.

He reached the steps, with the two priests staring after him. His feet lifted from the first step to the second and then he was on the sidewalk.

The two priests fired!

Smithton jerked, halted, and suddenly cried out in a voice of normal, rational agony. His legs kicked frantically under him and he ducked out of the sight of the doorway, his faltering steps sounding farther and farther away. He was dead-the Mikhtchah marksmanship had been as good as it seemed always to be-but still moving, though slower and slower, as if some extra charge of life were draining out like a battery running down.

The priests exchanged quick glances and then darted after him, crying out as they dashed around the door into the night. Abruptly^ a single head and hand appeared again, to snap a shot at the draperies from which Smith-ton had come. Amos forced himself to stand still, while his imagination supplied the jolt of lead in his stomach. The bullet hit the draperies, and something else.

The priest hesitated, and was gone again.

Amos broke into a run across the chapel and into the hall at the other side of the altar. He heard the faint sound of Doc's feet behind him.

The trap door was still there, unintentionally concealed under carpeting. He forced it up and dropped through it into the four-foot depth of the incompleted basement, making room for Doc. They crouched together as he lowered the trap and began feeling his way through the blackness toward the other end of the basement. It had been five years since he had been down there, and then only once for a quick inspection of the work of the boys who had dug the tunnel.

He thought he had missed it at first, and began groping for the small entrance. It might have caved in, for that matter. Then, two feet away, his hand found the hole and he drew Doc after him.

It was cramped, and bits of dirt had fallen in places and had to be dug out of the way. Part of the distance was on their stomachs. They found the bricked-up wall ahead of them and began digging around it with then-bare hands. It took another ten minutes, while distant sounds of wild yelling from the Mikhtchah reached them faintly. They broke through at last with bleeding hands, not bothering to check for aliens near. They reached a safer distance in the woods, caught their breaths, and went on.

The biggest danger lay in the drainage trench, which was low in several places. But luck was with them, and these spots lay in shadow.

Then the little Republican River lay in front of them, and there was a flatbottom boat nearby.

Moments later they were floating down the stream, resting their aching lungs, while the boat needed only a

trifling guidance. It was still night, with only the light from the moon, and there was little danger of pursuit by the alien planes. Amos could just see Doc's face as the man fumbled for a cigarette.

He lighted it and exhaled deeply. "All right, Amos- you were right, and God exists. But damn it, I don't feel any better for knowing that. I can't see how God helps me-nor even how He's doing the Mikhtchah much good. What do they get out of it, beyond a few miracles with the weather? They're just doing God's dirty work."
"They get the Earth, I suppose-if they want it," Amos said doubtfully. He wasn't sure they did. Nor could he see how the other aliens tied into the scheme; if he had known the answers, they were gone now. "Doc, you're still an atheist, though you now know God is."
The plump man chuckled bitterly. "Fm afraid you're right. But at least I'm myself. You can't be, Amos. You've spent your whole life on the gamble that God is right and that you must serve Him-when the only way you could serve was to help mankind. What do you do now? God is automatically right-but everything you've ever believed makes Him completely wrong, and you can only serve Him by betraying your people. What kind of ethics will work for you now?"
Amos shook his head wearily, hiding his face in his hands. The same problem had been fighting its way through his own thoughts. His first reaction had been to acknowledge his allegiance to God without question; sixty years of conditioned thought lay behind that. Yet now he could not accept such a decision. As a man, he could not bow to what he believed completely evil, and the Mikhtchah were evil by every definition he knew.
Could he tell people the facts, and take away what faith they had hi any purpose in life? Could he go over to the enemy, who didn't even want him except for their feeding experiments? Or could he encourage people to fight, with the old words that God was with them- when he knew the words were false? Yet their resistance might doom them to eternal hellfire for opposing God.
It hit him then that he could remember nothing clearly about the case of a hereafter-either for or against it. Wtrat iappened to a people when God deserted them? Were they only deserted in their physical form, and still free to win their spiritual salvation? Or were they completely lost? Did they cease to have souls that could survive? Or were those souls automatically consigned to hell, however noble they might be?
No question had been answered for him. He knew that God existed, but he had known that before. He knew nothing now beyond that. He did not even know when God had placed the Mikhtchah before humanity. It seemed unlikely that it was as recent as his own youth. Otherwise, how could he account for the strange spiritual glow he had felt as an evangelist?
"There's only one rational answer," he said at last. "It doesn't make any difference what I decide! I'm only one man."
"So was Columbus when he swore the world was round. And he didn't have the look on his face you've had since we saw God, Amos! I know.now what the Bible means when it says Moses' face shone after he came down from the mountain, until he had to cover it with a veil. If I'm right, there's little help for mankind if you decide wrong!"
Doc tossed the cigarette over the side and lit another, and Amos was shocked to see that the man's hands were shaking. The doctor shrugged, and his tone fell back to normal. "I wish we knew more. You've always thought almost exclusively in terms of the Old Testament and a few snatches of Revelation-like a lot of men who became evangelists. I've never really thought about God-I couldn't accept Him, so I dismissed Hun. Maybe that's why we got the view of Hun we did. I wish I knew where Jesus fits in, for instance. There's too much missing. Too many imponderables and hiatuses. We have only two facts, and we can't understand either. There is a manifestation of God which has touched both Mikhtchah and mankind; and He has stated now that He plans to wipe out mankind. We'll have to stick to that."
Amos made one more attempt to deny the problem that was facing him. "Suppose God is only testing man again, as He did so often before?"

"Testing?" Doc rolled the word on his tongue, and seemed to spit it out. The strange white hair seemed to make him older, and the absence of mockery in his voice left him almost a stranger. "Amos, the Hebrews worked like the devil to get Canaan; after forty years of wandering around a few square miles, God suddenly told them this was the land-and then they had to take it by the same methods men have always used to conquer a country. The miracles didn't really decide anything. They got out of Babylon because the old prophets were slaving night and day to hold them together as one people, and because they managed to sweat it out until they finally got a break. In our own time, they've done the same things to get Israel, and with no miracles! It seems to me God always took it away, but they had to get it back by themselves. I don't think much of that kind of a test in this case."

Amos could feel all his values slipping and spinning. He realized that he was holding himself together only because of Doc; otherwise, his mind would have reached for madness, like any intelligence forced to solve the insoluble. He could no longer comprehend himself, let alone God. And the feeling crept into his thoughts that God couldn't wholly understand him, either.

"Can a creation defy anything great enough to create it, Doc? And should it, if it can?"

"Most kids have to," Doc said. He shook his head. "It's your problem. All I can do is point a few things out. And maybe it won't matter, at that. We're still a long ways inside Mikhtchah territory, and it's getting along toward daylight."

The boat drifted on, while Amos tried to straighten out his thoughts and grew more deeply tangled hi a web of confusion. What could any man who worshipped God devoutly do if he found his God was opposed to all else he had ever believed to be good?

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A version of Rant's categorical imperative crept into his mind; somebody had once quoted it to him- probably Do<f. "Sfo act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as a means only." Was God now treating man as an end, or simply as a means to some purpose, in which man had failed? And had man ever seriously treated God as an end, rather than as a means to spiritual immortality and a quietus to the fear of death?

"We're being followed!" Doc whispered suddenly. He pointed back, and Amos could see a famt light shining around a curve in the stream. "Look-there's a building over there. When the boat touches shallow water, run for it!"

He bent to the oars, and a moment later they touched bottom and were over the side, sending the boat back into the current. The building was a hundred feet back from the bank, and they scrambled madly toward it. Even in the faint moonlight, they could see that the building was a wreck, long since abandoned. Doc went in through one of the broken windows, dragging Amos behind him. Through a chink in a wall they could see another boat heading down the stream, lighted by a torch and carrying two Mikhtchah. One rowed, while the other sat in the prow with a gun, staring ahead. They rowed on past.

"We'll have to hole up here," Doc decided. "It'll be light in half an hour. Maybe they won't think of searching a ruin like this."

They found rickety steps, and stretched out on the bare floor of a huge upstairs closet. Amos groaned as he tried to find a position in which he could get some rest. Then, surprisingly, he was asleep.

He woke once with traces of daylight coming into the closet, to hear sounds of heavy gunfire not far away. He was just drifting back to sleep when hail began cracking furiously down on the roof. When it passed, the gunfire was stilled. Doc woke him when it was turning dark. There was

nothing to eat, and Amos' stomach was sick with hunger. His body ached in every joint, and walking was pure torture. Doc glanced up at the stars, seemed

to decide on a course, and struck out. He was wheezing and groaning in a way that indicated he shared Amos' feelings.
But he found enough energy to begin the discussion again. "I keep wondering what Smithton saw, Amos. It wasn't what we saw. And what about the legends of war in heaven? Wasn't there a big battle there once, in which Lucifer almost won? Maybe Lucifer simply stands for some other race God cast off?"
"Lucifer was Satan, the spirit of evil. He tried to take over God's domain."
"Mmm. I've read somewhere that we have only the account of the victor, which is apt to be pretty biased history. How do we know the real issues? Or the true outcome? At least he thought ,he had a chance, and he apparently knew what he was fighting."
The effort of walking made speech difficult. Amos shrugged, and let the conversation die. But his own mind ground on.
If God was all-powerful and all-knowing, why had He let them spy upon Him? Or was He still all-powerful over a race He had dismissed? Could it make any difference to God what man might try to do, now that He had condemned him? Was the Presence they had seen the whole of God-or only one manifestation of Him?
His legs moved on woodenly, numbed to fatigue and slow from hunger, while his head churned with his basic problem. Where was his duty now? With God or against Him?
They found food in a deserted house, and began preparing it by the hooded light of a lantern while they listened to the news from a small battery radio that had been left behind. It was a hopeless account of alien landings and human retreats, yet given without the tone of despair they should have expected. They were halfway through the meal before they discovered the reason.
"Flash!" the radio announced. "Word has just come
through from the Denver area. Our second atomic missile has exploded successfully! The alien base has been wiped out, and every alien ship is ruined. It is now clear that the trouble with the earlier bombs we assembled lay in the detonating mechanism. This is being investigated, while more volunteers are being trained to replace this undependable part of the bomb. Both missiles carrying suicide bombers have succeeded. Captive aliens of both races are being questioned in Denver now, but the same religious fanaticism found in Portland seems to make communication difficult."
It went back to reporting alien landings, while Doc and Amos stared at each other. It was too much to absorb at once-the official admission of two races, the fact that bombs had been assembled and tried, and the casual acceptance of suicide missions. It was as if God could control weather and machines, but not the will of determined men. Free will or ...
Amos groped in his mind, trying to dig out something that might tie in the success of human suicide bombers, where automatic machinery was miraculously stalled, together with the reaction of God to his own thoughts of the glow he had felt in his early days. Something about men ...
"They can be beaten!" Doc said in a harsh whisper.
Amos sighed as they began to get up to continue the impossible trek. "Maybe. We know God was at Clyde. Can we be sure He was at the other places to stop the bombs by His miracles?"
They slogged on through the night, cutting across country in the dim moonlight, where every footstep was twice as hard. Amos turned it over, trying to use the new information for whatever decision he must reach. If men could overcome those opposed to them, even for a time . . .
It brought him no closer to an answer.
The beginnings of dawn found them in a woods. Doc managed to heave Amos up a tree, where he could survey the surrounding terrain. There was a house beyond the edge of the woods, but it would take dangerous minutes to reach it. They debated, and then headed on.

They were just emerging from the woods when the sound of an alien plane began its stuttering shriek. Doc turned and headed back to where Amos was, behind him. Then he stopped. "Too late! He's seen something. Gotta have a target!"
His arms swept out, shoving Amos violently back under the nearest tree. He swung and began racing across the clearing, his fat legs pumping furiously as he covered the ground in straining leaps. Amos tried to lift himself from where he had fallen, but it was too late.
There was the drumming of gunfire and the earth erupted around Doc. He lurched and dropped, to twitch and lie still.
The plane swept over, while Amos disentangled himself from a root. It was gone as he broke free. Doc had given it a target, and the pilot was satisfied, apparently.
He was still alive as Amos dropped beside him. Two of the shots had hit, but he managed to grin as he lifted himself on one elbow. It was only a matter of minutes, however, and there was no help possible. Amos found one of Doc's cigarettes and lighted it with fumbling hands.
"Thanks," Doc wheezed after taking a heavy drag on it. He started to cough, but suppressed it, his face twisting in agony. His words came in an irregular rhythm, but he held his voice level. "I guess I'm going to hell, Amos, since I never did repent-if there is a hell! And I hope there is! I hope it's filled with the soul of every poor damned human being who died in less than perfect grace. Because I'm going to find some way-"
He straightened suddenly, coughing and fighting for breath. Then he found one final source of strength and met Amos' eyes, a trace of his old cynical smile on his face.
"-some way to urge Lucifer to join us!" he finished. He dropped back, letting all the fight go out of his body. A few seconds later, he was dead.
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. . . Thou shalt have no other peoples before me. . . . Thou shalt make unto them no covenant against me. . . . Thou shalt not foreswear thyself to them, nor serve them . . . for I am a jealous people ...
Exultations 12:2-4
THE BOOK OF MAN
Amos lay through the day in the house to which he had dragged Doc's body. He did not even look for food. For the first time in his life since his mother had died when he was five, he had no shield against his grief. There was no hard core of acceptance that it was God's_. will to hide his loss at Doc's death. And with the realization of that, all the other losses hit at him as if they had been no older than the death of Doc.
He sat with his grief and his newly sharpened hatred, staring toward Clyde. Once, during the day, he slept. He awakened to a sense of a tremendous sound and shaking of the earth, but all was quiet when he finally became conscious. It was nearly night, and time to leave.
For a moment, he hesitated. It would be easier to huddle here, beside his dead, and let whatever would happen come to him. But within him was a sense of duty that drove him on. In the back of his mind something stirred, telling him he still had work to do.
He found part of a stale loaf of bread and some hard cheese and started out, munching on them. It was still too light to move safely, but he was going through woods again, and he heard no alien planes. When it grew darker, he turned to the side roads that led in the direction of Wesley.
In his mind was the knowledge that he had to return there. His church lay there; if the human fighters had pushed the aliens back, his people might be there. If
not, it was from there that he would have to follow them.
His thoughts were too deep for conscious expression, and too numbed with exhaustion. His legs moved on steadily. One of his shoes had begun to wear

through, and his feet were covered with blisters, but he went grimly on. It was his duty to lead his people, now that the aliens were here, as he had led them in easier times. His thinking had progressed no further.

He holed up in a barn that morning, avoiding the house because of the mutilated things that lay on the doorstep where the aliens had apparently left them. And this time he slept with the soundness of complete fatigue, but he awoke to find one fist clenched and extended toward Clyde. He had been dreaming that he was Job, and that God had left him sitting unanswered on his boils until he died, while mutilated corpses moaned around him, asking for leadership he would not give.

It was nearly dawn before he realized that he should have found himself some kind of a car. He had seen none, but there might have been one abandoned somewhere. Doc could probably have found one. But it was too late to bother, now. He had come to the outskirts of a tiny town, and started to head beyond it, before realizing that all the towns must have been well searched by now. He turned down the small street, looking for a store where he could find food. There was a small grocery with a door partly ajar. Amos pushed it open, to the clanging of a bell. Almost immediately a dog began barking, and a human voice came sharply from the back.

"Down, Shep! Just a minute, I'm a-coming." A door to the rear opened, and a bent old man emerged, carrying a kerosene lamp. "Darned electric's off again! Good thing I stayed. Told them I had to mind my store, but they wanted to take me with them. Had to hide out in the old well. Darned nonsense about . . ." He stopped, his eyes blinking behind thick lenses, and his mouth dropped open. He swallowed, and his voice was startled and shrill. "Mister, who are you?"

"A man who just escaped from the aliens," Amos told him. He hadn't realized the shocking appearance he must present $y" now. "One in need of food and a chance to rest until night. But I'm afraid I have no money on me."

The old man tore his eyes away slowly, seeming to shiver. Then he nodded, and pointed to the back. "Never turned nobody away hungry yet," he said, but the words seemed automatic.

An old dog backed slowly under a couch as Amos entered. The man put the lamp down and headed into a tiny kitchen to begin preparing food. Amos reached for the lamp and blew it out. "There really are aliens- worse than you heard," he said.

The old man bristled, met his eyes, and then nodded slowly. "If you say so. Only it don't seem logical God would let things like that run around in a decent state like Kansas."

He shoved a plate of eggs onto the table, and Amos pulled it to him, swallowing a mouthful eagerly. He reached for a second, and stopped. Something was violently wrong, suddenly. His stomach heaved, the room began to spin, and his forehead was cold and wet with sweat. He gripped the edge of the table, trying to keep from falling. Then he felt himself being dragged to a cot. He tried to protest, but his body was shaking with ague, and the words that spilled out were senseless. He felt the cot under him, and waves of sick blackness spilled over him.

It was the smell of cooking food that awakened him finally, and he sat up with a feeling that too much time had passed. The old man came from the kitchen, studying him. "You sure were sick, Mister. Guess you ain't used to going without decent food and rest. Feeling okay?"

Amos nodded. He felt a little unsteady, but it was passing. He pulled on the clothes that had been somewhat cleaned for him, and found his way to the table. "What day is it?"

"Saturday, evening," the other answered. "At least the way I figure. Here, eat that and get some coffee in
you." He watched until Amos began on the food, and then dropped to a stool to begin cleaning an old rifle and loading it. "You said a lot of things. They

true?"
For a second, Amos hesitated. Then he nodded, unable to lie to his benefactor. "I'm afraid so."
"Yeah, I figured so, somehow, looking at you." The old man sighed. "Well, I hope you make wherever you're going."
"What about you?" Amos asked.
The old man sighed, running his hands along the rifle. "I ain't leaving my store for any bunch of aliens. And if the Lord I been doing my duty by all my life decides to put Himself on the wrong side, well, maybe He'll win. But it'll be over my dead body!"
Nothing Amos could say would change his mind. The old man sat on the front step of the store, the rifle on his lap and the dog at his side, as Amos headed down the street in the starlight.
Amos felt surprisingly better after the first half-mile. Rest and food, combined with some treatment of his sores and blisters, had helped. But the voice inside him was driving him harder now, and the picture of the old man seemed to lend it added strength. He struck out at the fastest pace he could hope to maintain, leaving the town behind and heading down the road that the old man had said led to Wesley.
It was just after midnight when he saw the lights of a group of cars or trucks moving along another road. He had no idea whether they were driven by men or aliens, but he kept steadily on. There were sounds of traffic another time, on a road that crossed the small one he followed. But he knew now that he was approaching Wesley, and he speeded up his pace.
When the first dawn light came, he made no effort to seek shelter. He stared at the land around him, stripped by grasshoppers that could have been killed off if men had worked as hard at ending the insects as they had at their bickerings and wars. He saw the dry, arid land, drifting into dust and turning a fertile country into a nightmare. Men could put a stop to that.
It had been no act of God that had caused this ruin,
but man's own follies. And without help from God, man might set it right in time.
God had deserted men. But mankind hadn't halted. On his own, he'd made a path to the moon and had unlocked the atom. He'd found a means, out of his raw courage, to use hydrogen bombs against the aliens when miracles were used against him. He had done everything but conquer himself-and he could do that, if he were given time.
Amos saw a truck stop at the crossroads ahead and halted, but the driver was human. He saw the open door and quickened his step toward it. "I'm bound for Wes-ley!"
"Sure." The driver helped him into the seat. "I'm going back for more supplies myself. You sure look as if you need treatment at the aid station there. I thought we'd rounded up all you strays. Most of them came in right after we sent out the word on Clyde."
"You've taken it?" Amos asked.
The other nodded wearily. "We took it. Got 'em with a bomb, like sitting ducks; we've been mopping up since. Not many aliens left."
They were nearing the outskirts of Wesley, and Amos pointed to his own house. "If you'll let me off there . . ."
"Look, I got orders to bring all strays to the aid station," the driver began firmly. Then he swung and faced Amos. For a second, he hesitated. Finally he nodded quietly. "Sure, Glad to help you."
Amos found the water still running. He bathed slowly. Somewhere, he felt his decision had been made, though he was still unsure of what it was. He climbed from the tub at last and began dressing. There was no suit that was proper, but he found clean clothes. His face in the mirror looked back at him, haggard and bearded as he reached for the razor.

Then he stopped as he encountered the reflection of his eyes. A shock ran over him, and he backed away a step. They were eyes foreign to everything in him. He had seen a shadow of what lay in them only once before, in the eyes of a great evangelist; and this was a hundred times stronger. He tore his glance away to find
himself shivering, and he avoided them all through the shaving. Oddly, though, there was a strange satisfaction in what he had seen. He was beginning to understand why the old man had believed him, and why the truck driver had obeyed.
Most of Wesley had returned, and there were soldiers on the streets. As he approached the church, he saw -the first-aid station, hectic with business. And a camera crew was near it, taking shots for television of those who had managed to escape from alien territory after the bombing.
A few people called to him, but he went on until he reached the church steps. The door was still in ruins and the bell was gone. Amos stood quietly waiting, his mind focusing slowly as he stared at the people, who were just beginning to recognize him and to spread hasty words from mouth to mouth. Then he saw little Angela Anduccini, and motioned for her to come to him. She hesitated briefly, before following him inside and to the organ.
The little Hammond still functioned. Amos climbed to the pulpit, hearing the old familiar creak of the boards. He put his hands on the lectern, seeing the heavy knuckles and blue veins of age as he opened the Bible and made ready for his Sunday morning congregation. He straightened his shoulders and turned to face the pews, waiting as they came in.
There were only a few at first. Then more and more came, some from old habit, some from curiosity, and many only because they had heard that he had been captured in person, probably. The camera crew came to the back and set up their machines, flooding him with bright lights and adjusting their telelens. He smiled on them, nodding.
He knew his decision now. It had been made in pieces and tatters. It had come from Kant, who had spent his life looking for a basic ethical principle, and had boiled it down in his statement that men must be treated as ends, not as means. It had come from Rover's passive acceptance of the decision of a god who could do nothing for him, and from the one rebellious act that
had won Anne his'respect. It had been distilled from Doc's final challenge, and from the old man sitting in his doorway, ready to face any challenger. There could be no words with which to give his message to those who waited. No orator had ever possessed such a command of language. But men with rude speech, and limited use of what they had, had fired the world before. Moses had come down from a mountain with a face that shone, and had overcome the objections of a stiff-necked people. Peter the Hermit had preached a thankless crusade to all of Europe, without radio or television. It was more than words or voice.
He looked down at them when the church was filled and the organ hushed.
"My text for today," he announced, and the murmurs below him hushed as his voice reached out to the pews. "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make men free!"
He stopped for a moment, studying them, feeling the decision in his mind, and knowing he could make no other. The need of him lay here, among those he had always tried to serve while believing he was serving God through them. He was facing them as an end, not as a means, and he found it good.
Nor could he lie to them now, or deceive them with false hopes. They would need all the facts if they were to make an end to their bickerings and to unite themselves in the final struggle for the fullness of their potential glory.
"I have come back from captivity among the aliens," he began. "I have seen the hordes who have no desire but to erase the memory of man from the dust of the

earth that bore him. I have stood at the altar of their God. I have heard the voice of God proclaim that He is also our God, and that He has cast us out. I have believed Him, as I believe Him now."
He felt the strange, intangible something that was greater than words or oratory flow out of him as it had never flowed in his envied younger days. He watched the shock and the doubt arise and disappear slowly as he went on, giving them the story and the honest doubts
he still had. He could never know many things, or even whether the God worshipped on the alien altar was wholly the same God who had been in the hearts of men for a hundred generations. No man could understand enough. They were entitled to all his doubts, as well as to all of which he knew.
He paused at last, in the utter stillness of the chapel. He straightened and smiled down at them, drawing the smile out of some reserve that had lain dormant since he had first tasted inspiration as a boy. He saw a few smiles answer him, and then more-uncertain, doubtful smiles that grew more sure as they spread.
He could feel himself reach them, while the television camera went on recording it all. He could feel his regained strength welding them together. He could feel them suddenly one and indivisible as he went on.
But there was something else. Over the chapel there was a glow, a feeling of deepening communion. It lifted and enshrouded him with those below him. He opened himself up to it without reserve. Once he had thought it came only from God. Now he knew it came from the men and women in front of him. Like a physical force, he could sense it emanating from them and from himself, uniting them and dedicating them.
He accepted it, as he had once accepted God. The name no longer mattered, when the thing was the same.
"God has ended the ancient covenants and declared Himself an enemy of all mankind," Amos said, and the chapel seemed to roll with his voice. "I say to you: He has found a worthy opponent."
The Keepers of the House
OUTWARDLY, THERE WAS nothing about the morning to set it apart from thousands of other such mornings the dog had smelled. Yet his great, gaunt body shifted nervously on the rocky shelf over the river, and his short hackles lifted slightly as the skin on his neck tautened. He raised his head, sniffing the wind that blew from the land, and his ears searched for wrongness in the sounds that reached him. Once he whined.
The feeling left from the dream was still troubling him. He had bedded down in a dry shelter back from the water. After he had scraped away the ancient, dried bones of rabbits, it had seemed like a good place. But sleep had been too busy, full of running and of tantalizing smells. And finally, just when he was tearing at something with an almost forgotten flavor, the- warm scent in his nostrils had changed to another, and a voice had pierced his ears. He had snapped awake, shivering, with the name still ringing in his head.
"King!"
The dream memory of Doc had bothered him before, but this time even the warmth of the sun had failed to quiet it, though his nose reported no trace of a human odor now. There was something about this territory. ...
Abruptly, a motion in the water caught his attention. He edged forward, rising to his feet, while his eyes
tracked the big fish. Overhead, a bird must have seen the same prey, since it began dropping. King growled faintly and plunged down into the unpleasant chill of the water. Necessity and decades of near starvation had taught him perfect form in this unnatural act. A moment later, he was heading for shore with the fish clamped between his jaws.
He found a hollowed spot of dry sand, shook the water out of his short fur, and began tearing at the fish. It was a flavorless breakfast, far inferior to

the big salmon that were so easy to catch along the northwestern rivers, but it filled him well enough.

The wind was growing stronger, reminding him of the cold that was creeping down from the north as it seemed to do at regular intervals. Each year, the cold drove him south and the warmth followed to let him move back again. Usually he took the same trail from river to river, but this time--as in a few other restless years-something had driven him to seek a new way, risking the long runs through the foodless wastelands, from river to river, looking for some end he never found.

He pawed out a stubborn bone from between his teeth and got to his feet again, the double drive overcoming the wish to rest in the warmth of the sun. Beyond the shelter of the dunes along the river, the wind was sharper and colder, tossing bits of dry sticks and rubble ahead of it.

He had no idea why he was heading inland, except that it seemed somehow right, until the damp odors on the wind told him that the river must bend in the direction he was heading. By then, he was out of sight of the water and the plants, birds and insects that lived along it. He settled into a steady lope as he came to what had once been a raised roadway. The banked surface was comparatively free of sand, making the going easier.

The road swept past what must have once been heavily wooded land, and King sniffed the familiar odor of rotted logs. A few trees were still standing, dead and girdled to a height above his head, but there was no life there. The sand and dust drifted into piles and shifted
before the wind, covering and uncovering the ever-present broken rabbit bones, scouring at them and the standing trunks, fas if to eliminate even this final evidence that there had been life. In some sections, a few trees and plants had survived and were spreading, but the great dust-bowl area here was barren. Except for the wind and the padding of King's feet, there was no sound.

Once the road ran among the wrecks of close-packed houses, and King's hackles lifted again, his nose twitching uneasily. It had been twenty years since he had bothered to investigate a house, but this morning his mind kept prickling with strange sensations. He hesitated at a couple of the rust-crumpled cars; the larger one held crumpled bones that almost meant something to him. Then he left the dead town behind, heading for the strengthening smell of the river. Ten minutes later, he was staring out at a long concrete bridge that spanned the current. Beyond it lay the city.

The wind was colder now, driving along before a dull grayness that threatened a storm. Below King, the water stretched out, heading toward the south and safety for the winter. He moved uncertainly away from the bridge, then dropped to his haunches, his tongue rolling out doubtfully as he stared at the bridge and the city beyond. Something was wrong in his head. He scratched at his ear, turned to bite at the root of his tail, and still hesitated.

Finally he got to his feet and headed along the pitted surface of the bridge. A sign creaked, jerking his ears forward. It was only half a sign, without a place name, but carrying an iron engraving of its population, now smeared over with weathered paint. King bristled toward it, smelled it cautiously, and abruptly nosed behind it. There was only the whisper of the ghost of an odor there, and it was too faint to stimulate his sense more than once. He clawed at it, whining, but the scent from his dreams refused to return.

He began running again, leaping over gaps in the paving. One newly fallen section was impassable, and
he had to search his way across twelve-inch rusty iron beams. He slipped twice, and had to scratch and fight his way back. At midpoint, with the limits of the small city spread out before him, he stopped to explode in a barking sound he hadn't made in thirty years. Then he was plunging on again, until the bridge was behind and he was coursing through the wide, ruined streets at a full run.

Twice he started on false trails through the shops and warehouses, but the third time something seemed to groove itself into his thoughts, like the feeling that led him back to the salmon run each year. It was weak and uncertain, as old memories fought against stronger habits, but it grew as he panted his way out of the heart of the ruined city. Glass fractured and clattered downward from one building, followed by a skull that shattered on the stones. King avoided the shower of fragments and redoubled his speed, his big body bent in arching leaps, and his ears flattened back against his head. He knew where he was, even before he swept through the last of the rooming house section and came to the edge of the rolling university campus. Then, for a moment, the dawning memory in his mind spun and twisted at the ruin the elements had made. But it was the lack of familiar smells that bothered him most. Even at the end, there had been the eternal odor of the chemistry laboratory, and now even that was gone.

The big gate was open. His legs had begun to bunch for the leap and scramble over it, and the tension in them died slowly. He slowed to a trot, lifting his head in a double bark that rasped the unused muscles of his throat. A huge tree had fallen across the path, but a section had been cut away with an ax. Rotted chips sounded underfoot as King passed by.

Then he was darting around one of the big redstone buildings, heading down the path that led to the back of the campus. There most of the great tree boles still stood, with even their nakedness too thick a screen for his eyes to penetrate. He charged through the rubble of sticks and rabbit bones that filled the path there and took a sudden left turn, to come to a skidding halt. The two-story Promethean Laboratory building still stood, and across the fence beyond, some of the familiar houses were s.tuT there. King teetered toward one of them, back toward the laboratory, and then again toward the house. He let out two high-pitched barks, and cocked his ears, listening. There was no answering sound.

A sick whine grew in his throat, until the wind suddenly shifted.

The smell was stronger this time. It was wrong- incredibly wrong-but it was beyond mistake. Doc was here! And with the instinctive identification of wind direction, he knew it had to be the laboratory.

The door was closed, but it snapped open with a groan of hinges as King hit it in full leap. He went rolling over and over across the floor of the littered hall, clawing against the stone tiles instinctively, while his mind rocked at the waves of human scent and the human voice that was beating into his ears! The smell was so strong to his unaccustomed nostrils that he had no directional sense; at first the echoes along the hollow corridors also made it hard to locate the voice. He cocked his ears, studying it. It was wrong, like the smell-yet it was the voice of Doc!

". . . as wrong as before. It didn't matter. It was better than-starving like rabbits under the biocast. They were falling within minutes after the cable. . . ."

King dove through the passage and into the room beyond. The voice went on without pause, coming from a box in front of him. And now the metallic quality under it and the lack of the random ultrasonic overtones of a real voice registered on him. It was only another false voice-another of the things men had, but which he had almost forgotten. Doc's voice-without Doc!

The sound dropped to the bottom of his awareness. King swung around the room. There was something in the scent that made his neck muscles tense, but he knew Doc was there. His eyes adjusted to the glaring light inside, while his nose tried to cut a trail through the thickness of the odors. Both senses located the source at the same time.

Beside the big machine with the slow-spinning rolls of tape there was a bed covered with ragged blankets. A hand lay on the edge of the tape machine, twisted into the controls, and an arm led down to the figure below on the bed.

King's tail flailed the floor, and his legs doubled for the leap that would carry him into Doc's arms. He never made the leap. The scent was wrong and the figure too motionless. King's tail grew limp as he crouched to the floor, inching his way forward, his whine barely audible. He raised his nose at last to the other hand that lay dropping over the side of the bed, and his tongue came out.

The hand was cool and stiff, and there was no response to welcome King's caress.

Slowly, cringing, King drew himself up to look down at what lay on the bed, and to nuzzle it. It didn't look like Doc. Doc had been young and alive, clean-shaven and with dark hair. The body was too thin, and the long beard and hair were stark white. Yet the odor said unquestionably that this was Doc-and that Doc was old-and dead!

Standing with his front feet on the bed, King lifted his muzzle upward, his mouth opening while the deep, long sound ached in his- chest. But no sound came. He brought his face down to that of Doc and nuzzled again, whimpering. It did no good.

For a long tune he lay there, whining and crying. The voice went on and something ticked regularly on the wall. There was the sound of the wind outside, faint here, but rising steadily. Once King heard his own name used by Doc's voice from the box, and his ears half-lifted.

". . . King and the other three. Probably starved by now, though, since there are no land animals left for them to feed on. King was a smart dog, but ..."

His name wasn't repeated, though he listened for a while. Later, the voice stopped entirely, while the tape hummed a few more times, clicked, and began flapping a loosened end that knocked-over a bottle of pills beside Doc's frozen hand. It clicked again, and slowed to si-

lence, leaving the ticking of the clock the only sound in the room.

Abruptly, tKere ;was a rustling noise. King shot to his feet, whirling to face the source, just as a large white rat scuttled from the shadows near the door. It went rigid at his movement, coming slowly to its hind feet, its eyes darting from King to the body of Doc. It let out a high squeak.

The dog dived for it, snarling. But a thread of familiarity was clutching at his mind, slowing his charge. The rat twisted around and through the door, quavering out a series of squeaks. It went scuttling along the hall, through the opened door, and across the steps to the wasteland beyond. By the time King reached the outside, it was heading for the great tower across the street and halfway to the rocket field.

King could smell its spoor mixed thickly with that of Doc as he leaped the fence and followed. He heard it squeal once more as it saw him, and heard its claws scrape against the rotted metal of the tower as it scurried up beyond his reach.

But he was slowing already. The tower was dead now, with the great ball of fire gone from its top, but the memory of the tingling, itching false smell that had plagued him while the fire glowed was rising in his mind to drive him back. He hated it as Doc had hated it-and there was still fear for what it had been. He stopped fifty feet beyond the massive girders, bristling as he backed around it.

The concrete hut under it was broken now though, and the guards were gone. He saw some of the guns scattered about-or what was left of them, in the jumble of sand and human skeletons that still lay around the tower. Some of the skeletons were farther back, mixed with axes and other guns. An arm was still tangled with a shred of rope that connected to a faded metal sign. Where the great cable had been, a blackened line curved toward the tower, pitting the metal more deeply.

Somehow, King knew the tower of the tingling fire was dead. But he had waited too long. The rat had

scrambled down and was heading toward the rocket field. He started after it again, halted, and reluctantly turned back toward the laboratory.
There was pleading in his whine as he found the body of Doc again, which still bore the smell of death. Instinct told King that Doc was dead, and would never be anything but dead. Yet there was the half-remembered smell of his brother Boris, after the sweet smells and the prickings, lying on the table while Doc and the men stood around. Boris had smelled dead-and Boris had walked again, smelling freshly alive. Before that, there had been the dead rats that would not stay dead. And the rabbits-though when the rabbits finally smelled dead, they were all dead, and no more rabbits lived.
He circled Doc uneasily, his lips lifted. He paced to the outer door, searching for any return of the rat, while his mind slowly remembered the other rats. With a quick check on Doc, King darted up the stairs, his legs making a familiar pattern of it, and into the great laboratory there.
There were no more rats. The cages were empty, and the scents he had learned here as a puppy were almost gone. Only the room itself was the same as the one that had haunted his hunger-driven dreams.
There had been the rats on the table when he was young and the tower was only a banging beyond the window. The rats that died, and the three that did not, when the men drank smelly liquid and shouted and danced all night, shaking their fists at the base of the tower. The table was still there, beyond the place where the men mixed the strange smells. The table where strange things happened to him later that he could not remember. The tau he had owned before the last time on the table still hung there. There had been another wild night when the bandages came off his new tail, puppy-small and weak, but growing quickly enough. This room had been a good place, and some of his later dreams had been good.
Other dreams had brought back the bad times, as they returned to his mind now. The night the tower blazed with fire, Doc swearing while King felt the tingling until it was, cut off. The men arguing with Doc, not coming back--even moving toward the hated tower. The huge celebration outside when the tower blazed again, while Doc and his one friend cried. The wild frenzy of stringing wires over the Promethean lab and into a vile-smelling box. After that, there was no more tingling* in his nostrils inside the lab, but things had grown worse in spite of it.
King was trembling as he finished his inspection for rats, and his legs beat a frantic tattoo down the stairs. The fear was as thick as it had been when the men came and took him and his brothers away from Doc, to jam them into planes with other dogs and dump them far away, where the rabbits were thick-and almost useless for food.
Doc had fought then, even moving outside the safety of the laboratory, but the men had taken the dogs. Yet Doc had been alive. And now he was dead.
Fear twisted in King, settling into something sick. He paced around the body, growling and whining. Once he stopped to lick the hand; it was colder now, and there was no moisture on it. The scent was growing more wrong as the body cooled.
Life had not come back while he was gone.,
He licked Doc's hand again, and an answering chill went through the dog. The feeling of death began to settle deeper-a feeling inside that grew and swallowed him, a hungry feeling. He tried to shake it away, as he would have shaken the neck of the rat, but it stuck.
There was real hunger mixed with it. Eating was never good on the trip south, and he had burned too much energy chasing about that morning. The fish had not been enough. The smell of stale food of some kind in the room tantalized him, though he could find none, and reminded him there had been traces of the same odors along the path the rat had taken. The saliva was rising in his mouth at the thought. It drew him out, while the death inside pressed him away.

He started off twice, to return each time for another inspection. He whimpered and tried tugging at the sleeve of the arm. The rags parted, but Doc gave no sign. The death smell was stronger. King paced about, fighting the hunger and misery until they were too much. There was the food smell, the rat-and he would come back to Doc. ...

A faint mist was being driven along by the wind as he reached the tower again, braving it this time without stopping. Until the rain washed it away, the spoor would be all the stronger for the moisture in the air, and he followed it easily, until it ended on the blasted area of the rocket field.

King stopped at the sight of the bent and worn take-off cradles. From the distance, the first faint roll of thunder came, and he bolted stiff-legged, snarling with fear, as if one of the monster ships he had seen the men building so frantically were blasting up again.

The excitement of the frenzied construction had drawn him to it, even when it meant sneaking away from Doc-so that he had been present after the infants were all aboard, and the rocket took off. The thunder-booming roar, the gout of eye-searing flame and the smell that paralyzed his nose for hours had sent him cringing back to shiver at Doc's feet for hours, and each new takeoff had brought a fresh attack. He still wanted nothing to do with the rockets.

The cradles were empty now, however-except for something that looked like one that had broken and was lying on its sides, the big tubes ripped away, and the ground scorched around it. And as he looked, the distant form of the rat appeared from below it and leaped upward through a door there.

King edged toward it, following the trail that led there, uncertain. It looked dead, but the other that had roared away on its lightning and thunder had also seemed dead. Then real lightning and thunder boomed behind him, and he forced himself to a faster trot.

The hulk seemed harmless. There were none of the chemical smells now, and the fumes of the ancient blast that had fizzled were gone. He moved gingerly toward the door, his nose twitching at the odors that came from it, just as the rat appeared.

It saw him and squeaked sharply, dashing back in-
side. King abandoned his caution. With a low growl, he leaped through the doorway above the ground. The edge of the metaf tore at him, thin projections sticking out where it had been crudely hacked away. He snapped at it, then turned to find the rat.

There was enough light inside to see dimly. The rat had retreated into a narrow pipe that ran back. King tried to poke his nose into it, then fished with his paw. The rat drew back and snapped at him. Its teeth missed, but it was enough to teach him caution.

He drew back, crunching across a litter of dried papers, foil, and junk he did not recognize. A thicker bundle twisted under his feet, and the thick, heavy smell of meat-red meat, not the weak flesh of fish-filled his nostrils. Without thinking, he snapped down.

The stuff was dry and hard, disappointing at first. But as he chewed, over the salt and the odd flavorings, the almost forgotten flavor came through, sending saliva dripping from his mouth. From the odors here, he knew the rat had been eating it before he came, but it didn't matter. He finished the package, spitting out the wax, metal, and plastics that surrounded it as best he could. Then his nose led him along the trail of the rat's gnawing, back to the few tons of concentrate that were left.

The wrappings let through no smell to guide him, but he had learned to find food where it could be discovered. He tore into a package, gasping as a thick, fruity stuff seared at his tongue. He tried again, farther away. He ripped away the covering first, and settled down with the brick between his paws, working on it until it was gone.

Outside, the rain had increased to a torrent. He studied the rat and the view

outside, and finally curled up against the door, blocking the rat's egress. Some rain came through, making a small puddle on the floor and wetting his coat, but he disregarded it at first, until the thirst began to grow in him. He lapped at the puddle, finding some relief.

His stomach began to feel wrong then. It was heavy, full and miserable. He fought against it, lapping more
water. The rat came out of its hole and found another brick of food. He heard it gnawing, but the effort of moving was too great.

When the sickness finally won, he felt better. But it was an hour later, while the storm raged and the lightning split the sky with waves of solid fear, before he could pull himself back to another brick. This time he ate more carefully, stopping to drink between parts of his meal. It worked better. The food stayed with him, and his hunger was finally satisfied.

He lay near the doorway of the old rocket, staring out through the darkness that was still split by lightning. The rat scurried about behind him, but he let it go. Now that it was harmless and his stomach was filled, some of the old patterns began to stir in his mind. The rat was one he had known so long ago, its smell grown old, but still clearly identifiable.

He had tried twice to leave the ship and force his way back to where Doc was lying, but the lightning drove him back. Now he lifted his voice in a long, mournful bark. There was no answering call from Doc. He began working himself up for another try.

Lightning crashed down in the direction of the laboratory. The building itself stood out in the glare, with every wire of its outer covering glowing white hot. There was a roll of sharp thunder close by, and then another explosion that seemed to open the laboratory up in a blossom of flame through the abating rain.

King muttered unhappily, licking his lips uneasily, while his tail curved tighter against him. But now, while the flame still smoldered around the distant building and the lightning might come back, now was no time to risk it.

He turned around several times, scraping away the litter, buried his nose in the tuft of his tail, and tried to relax. He was almost asleep when he felt the rat creep up to him. It must have recognized his smell, too, since it settled down against him as it had done when they were both together in the laboratory with Doc. He snarled faintly, then let it alone, and went to sleep. Surprisingly, there were no dreams to. bother him. ,

The rat was goner in the morning when King awoke, and the sun was §hMng, though the quieter wind held a coldness that was too close to freezing to suit him. He hesitated, turning back toward the food stores. Then the sight of the rat, racing across the space near the tower, decided him. With an unhappy growl, he dropped from the hulk of the rocket and took out after it.

If the rat got there before he did, and Doc needed him ...

In open running, the rat was no match for him. It drew aside, its high voice chattering, as he thundered up. He did not turn, but drove on, heading at a full run for the laboratory.

There was no laboratory! The steps were there, blackened and cracked. Some of the walls still stood. But the building he had known was gone. Beside it, the trunk of one of the big trees had been blasted apart, and now had its tattered remnants strewn over the dirt, mingling with the coals from the fire that had gutted the building. A few were still smoking, though the rain had put out the blaze before it had completely burned out by itself. The heavy, acrid scent of damp, burned wood loaded the air, concealing everything else from his scent.

He uttered a short, anguished yelp and went dashing through the doorway. The ashes were hot, and the stones left from the floor were hotter, but he could bear them. He hardly felt them as he swung toward what had once been the room where Doc lay.

The box from which the voice had come was gone, but the twisted wreck of the tape machine was there. And beside it, charred scraps showed what had once been a bed.
King cried out as his nose touched the heat, but he was pawing frantically, disregarding the pain. He could stand it-and he had to. He shoveled the refuse aside, digging for something that was his. And finally, under the charred raggedness, there were traces. There was even enough to know that it had once been Doc.
And Doc was still dead-as dead as the meat that once came from cans had been dead.
King whimpered over the remains, while the rat climbed onto a section of the wall and chattered uneasily. But the dog was already backing away. He stopped beyond the hot ruins of the building to lift his head. For a second, he held the pose while the rat watched him, before his head came down and he turned slowly away.
The food in the rocket lay to his right, and the old gate through which he had first come was on his left. He licked his lips as his eyes turned to the rocket, but his legs moved unwaveringly left. The steady walk turned into a trot, and his stride lengthened, carrying him back to the rooming-house section, and on into the former business section. There had been other fires, and one had spread across several blocks. He swung around it and back to the street he had first taken.
Ahead of him, the bridge came into view, and nearer was the bank of the river on this side.
King did not waver from his course. His legs paced out onto the rotten pavement that would carry him across the stream. He moved on, slowing as he had to walk the girders again. When he was past that section, and at the midpoint of the bridge, something seemed to turn him.
The town lay behind him from here, most of it visible at the crest of the bridge. The rain and the storm had made changes, but they were too small to notice. And the university lay at the edge of King's vision, though some of the tower could be seen. He faced toward it, and then unerringly toward the place where the laboratory should have been.
Now his muzzle lifted into the air as he sank to his haunches. He seemed to brace himself, and his lungs expanded slowly. He could feel it, and the need of it. The instinct behind it was too old for remembrance, but the ritual came finally by itself, with no conscious control.
His mouth opened, and the dirge keened on the air, lifting and driving upward toward the empty sky above.
There was only, the single requiem. Then King swung back toward the distant shore, picking his way along the worn bridge.
He slipped downHhe crumbled bank to the thin edge of sand near the steam and turned southward, trotting on steadily with'the cold wind at his back. Somewhere, there would be a place to fish for his breakfast.

Little Jimmy

I'VE ALWAYS THOUGHT that meeting a ghost would be a pretty comforting thing. By the time a man is past fifty and old enough to realize death, anything that will prove he doesn't come to a final, meaningless end should be a help. Even being doomed to haunt some place hi solitude through all eternity doesn't have the creeping horror of just not being!
Of course, religion offers hope to some-but most of us don't have the faith of our forefathers. A ghost should be proof against the unimaginable finality of death.
That's the way I used to feel. Now, I don't know. If I could only explain little Jimmy . . .
We heard him, all right. At Mother's death, the whole family heard him, right down to my sister Agnes, who's the most complete atheist I know. Even her

youngest daughter, downstairs at the time, came running up to see who the other child was. It wasn't a case of collective hallucination, any more than it was something that can be -explained by any natural laws we know.
The doctor heard it, too, and from the way he looked, I suppose he'd heard little Jimmy more than once before. He won't talk about it, though, and the others had never been around for a previous chance. I'm the only one who will admit to hearing little Jimmy
more than that single time. I wish I didn't have to admit it, even to myself, j
We were a big" family, though the tradition for such families was already dying at the turn of the century. Despite the four girls who died before they had a chance to live, Mother and Dad wanted lots of children. Six of us boys and three girls lived, and that justified it all to Mother. There would have been more, I guess, if Dad hadn't been killed by an angry bull while I was away saving the world for Democracy. Mother could have had other husbands, maybe-the big Iowa farm with its huge old house would have guaranteed that-but she was dead set against it. And we older kids drifted into city jobs, helping the others through college until they had jobs of their own. Eventually, Mother was left alone in the old house, while the town outgrew itself until the farm was sold for lots around it.
That left her with a small fortune, particularly after the second war. She didn't seem to need us, and she was getting "sot" in her ways and hard to get along with. So little by little, we began visiting her less and less. I was the nearest, working in Des Moines, but I had my own life, and she seemed happy and capable, even at well past seventy. We're a long-lived, tough clan. I sent, her birthday and holiday notes-or at least Liza sent them for me-and kept meaning to see her. But my oldest boy seemed to go to pieces after the second war. My daughter married a truck driver and had a set of twins before they found a decent apartment. My youngest boy was taken prisoner hi Korea. I was promoted to president of the roofing company. And a new pro at the club was coaching me into breaking ninety most of the time.
Then Mother began writing letters-the first real ones in years. They were cheerful enough, filled with chitchat about some neighbors, the new drapes on the windows, a recipe for lemon cream pie, and such. At first, I thought they were a fine sign. Then something in them began to bother me. It wasn't until the fifth one, though, that I could put my finger on anything definite.
In that, she wrote a few words about the new teacher
at the old schoolhouse. I went over it twice before realizing that the school building had been torn down fifteen years before. When that registered, other things began connecting. The drapes were ones she had put up years before, and the recipe was her first one-the one that always tasted too' sweet, before she changed it! There were other strange details.
They kept bothering me, and I finally put through a call. Mother sounded fine, though a little worried for fear something had gone wrong with me. She talked for a couple of minutes, muttered something about lunch on the stove, and hung up quickly. It couldn't have been more normal. I got out my clubs and was halfway down the front steps before something drove me back to her letters. Then I called Doctor Matthews. After half a minute identifying myself, I asked about Mother.
His voice assumed a professional tone at once. She was fine-remarkably good physical condition for a woman of her age. No, no reason I should come down at once. There wasn't a thing wrong with her.
He overdid it, and he couldn't quite conceal the worry in his voice. I suppose I'd been thinking of taking a few days off later to see her. But when he hung up, I put the clubs back in the closet and changed my clothes. Liza was out at some civic betterment club, and I left a note for her. She'd taken the convertible though, so I was in luck. The new Cadillac was just back from a

tune-up and perfect for a stiff drive. There'd also be less chance of picking up a ticket if I beat the speed limit a little; most cops are less inclined to be tough on a man who's driving one of those cars. I made good time all the way.

Matthews was still at the same address, but his white hair gave me a shock. He frowned at me, lifting his eyes from my waistline to what hah-1 had left, then back to my face. Then he stuck out his hand slowly, stealing a quick glance at the Cadillac.

"I suppose they all call you A. J. now," he said. "Come on in, since you're here!"

He took me back through the reception room and
into his office, his >eyes going to the car outside again. From somewhere, fye drew out a bottle of good Scotch. At my nod, he^mixed it with water from a cooler. He settled back, studying me as he took his own seat. "A. J., heh?" he commented again, sounding a sour note here, somehow. "That sounds like success. Thought your mother mentioned something about your having some trouble a few years back?"

"Not financial," I told him. I'd thought only Liza remembered it. She must have written to Mother at the time, since I'd kept it out of the papers. And after I'd agreed to buy the trucking line for our son-in-law, she'd finally completely forgiven me. It was none of Matthews' business-but out here, I remembered, doctors considered everything their business. "Why, Doc?"

He studied me, let his eyes sweep over the car again, and then tipped up the glass to finish the whisky. "Just curiosity. No, damn it, I might as well be honest. You'll see her anyhow, now. She's an old woman, Andrew, and she has what might be called a tidy fortune. When children who haven't worried about her for years turn up, it might not be affection. And I'm not going to have anything happen to Martha now!"

The hints in his remarks too closely matched my own suspicions. I could feel myself tightening up, tensing with annoyance and a touch of fear. I didn't want to ask the question. I wanted to get mad at him for being an interfering old meddler. But I had to know. "You mean-senile dementia?"

"No," he answered quickly, with a slightly lifted eyebrow. "No, Andrew, she isn't crazy! She's in fine physical shape, and sane enough to take care of herself for the next fifteen years she'll probably live. And she doesn't need any fancy doctors and psychiatrists. Just remember that, and remember she's an old woman. Thirteen children in less than twenty years! A widow before she was forty. Lonely all these years, even if she is too independent to bother you kids. An old woman's entitled to whatever kind of happiness she can get! And don't forget that!"

He stopped, seeming surprised at himself. Then he
stood up and reached for his hat. "Come on, I'll ride out with you."

He kept up a patter of local history as we drove down the streets where corn had grown when I last saw this section. There was a hospital where the woods had been, and the old spring was covered by an apartment building. The big house where we had been born stood out, sprawling in ugly warmth among the facsimile piano-boxes they were calling houses nowadays.

I wanted to turn back, but Matthews motioned me after him up the walk. The front door was still unlocked, and he went in, tilting his head toward the stairs. "Martha! Hey, Martha!"

"Jimmy's out back, Doc," a voice called down. It was Mother's voice, unchanged except for a puzzling lilt I'd never heard before, and I drew a quick breath of relief.

"Okay, Martha," Matthews called up. "I'll just see him, then, and call you up later. You won't want me around when you see who I brought you! It's Andrew!"

"How nice! Tell him to sit down and I'll be dressed in a minute!"

Doc shrugged. 'Til sit out hi the garden a few minutes," he told me. "Then

I'll catch a cab back. But remember-your mother deserves any happiness she can get. Don't you ruin it!"
He went through the back door, and I found the parlor, and dropped onto the old sofa. Then I frowned. It had been stored in the attic in 1913, when Dad bought the new furniture. I stared through the soft dimness, making out all the old pieces. Even the rug was the way it had been when I was a child. I walked into the other rooms, finding them the same as they had been forty years before, except for the television set in the dining room and the completely modern kitchen, with a pot of soup bubbling on the back of the stove.
I was getting a thick feeling in my throat and the anxiety I'd had before when the sound of steps on the stairs brought my eyes up.
Mother came down, a trifle slowly, but without any sign of weakness. She didn't rest her hand on the banis-
ter. She might have been the woman to match the furnishings of the hoflge, except for the wrinkles and the white hair. And the dress was new, but a perfect copy of one she'd worn when I was still a child!
She seemed not to hear my gasp. Her hand came out to catch mine, and she bent forward, kissing me on the cheek. "You look real good, Andrew. There, now, let's see. Umm-hmm. Liza's been feeding you right, I can see that. But I'll bet you could eat some real homemade soup and pie, eh? Come out in the kitchen. I'll fix it in a minute."
She wasn't only in fine physical shape-she was like a woman fifteen years younger than her age. And she'd even remembered to call me Andrew, instead of the various nicknames she'd used during my growing up. That wasn't senility! A senile woman would have turned back to the earliest one, as I remembered it-particularly since I'd had to work hard to get her to drop the childhood names. Yet the house ...
She bustled about the kitchen, dishing out some of the rich, hot soup. She hadn't been a good cook when I was a kid, but she'd grown steadily better, and this was superlative. "I guess Doc must have pronounced Jimmy well," she said casually. "He's gone running off somewhere now. Well, after two weeks cooped up here with the measles, I can't blame him. I remember how you were when you had them. Notice how I had the house fixed up, Andrew?"
I nodded, puzzling over her words. "I noticed the old furniture. But this Jimmy . . . ?"
"Oh, you never met him, did you? Never mind, you will. How long you staying, Andrew?"
I tried to figure things out, cursing Matthews for not warning me of this. Of course, I'd heard somehow that one of my various nephews had lost his wife. Was he the one who'd had the young boy? And hadn't he gone up to Alaska? No, that was Frank's son. And why would anyone hand over a youngster to Mother, anyhow? There were enough younger women in the family.
I caught her eyes on me, and pulled myself together. "I'll be leaving in a couple of hours, Mother. I just. . ."
"It was real nice of you to drop over," she interrupted me, as she had always cut into our answers. Tve been meaning to see you and Liza soon, but fixing the house kept me kind of busy. Two men carried the furniture down, but I did the rest myself. Makes me feel younger somehow, having the old furniture here."
She dished out a quarter of a peach cobbler and put it in front of me, with a cup of steaming coffee. She took another quarter for herself and filled her big cup. I had a mental picture of Liza with her vitamins and diets. Who was senile?
"Jimmy's going to school now," she said. "He's got a crush on his teacher, too. More pie, Andrew? Ill have to save a piece for little Jimmy, but there are two left."1

From outside, there was a sudden noise, and she jumped up, to walk quickly toward the back door. Then she came into the kitchen again. "Just a neighbor kid taking a short cut. I wish they'd be a little nicer, though, and play with Jimmy. He gets lonesome sometimes. Like my kitchen, Andrew?"
"Nice," I said carefully, trying to keep track of the threads of conversation. "But it's kind of modern."
"That and the television set," she agreed cheerfully. "Some new things are nice. And some old ones. I've got a foam rubber mattress for my bed, but the rest of the room . . . Andrew, you come up. 111 show you something I flunk's real elegant."
The house was clean, and no rooms were closed off. I wondered about that as we climbed the stairs. I hadn't seen a maid. But she sniffed in contempt when I mentioned it. "Of course I take care of it myself. That's a woman's job, ain't it? And then, little Jimmy helps some. He's getting to be mighty handy."
The bedroom was something to see. It reminded me of what I'd seen of the nineties in pictures and movies, complete with frills and fripperies. The years had faded the upholstery and wallpaper in the rest of the house. But here everything seemed bright and new.
"Had a young decorator fellow from Chicago fix it," she explained proudly. "Like what I always wanted when I was a young girl. Cost a fortune, but Jimmy told
me I had to do it, because I wanted it." She chuckled fondly. "Sit down,1, Andrew. How are you and Liza making out? StfH fighting over that young hussy she caught you with, or did she take my advice? Silly, letting you know she knew. Nothing makes a man more loving than a little guilt, I always found-especially if the woman gets real sweet about then."
We spent a solid hour discussing things, and it felt good. I told her how they were finally shipping my youngest back to us. I let her bawl me out for the way the oldest boy was using me and for what she called my snootiness about my son-in-law. But her idea of making him only junior partner in the trucking line at first wasn't bad. I should have thought of it myself. She also told me all the gossip about the family. Somehow, she'd kept track of things. I hadn't even known that Pete had died, though I had heard of the other two deaths. I'd meant to go to the funerals, but there'd been that big deal with Midcity Asphalt and then that trouble getting our man into Congress. Things like that had a habit of coming up at the wrong tunes.
When I finally stood up to go, I wasn't worried about any danger of a family scandal through Mother. If Matthews thought I'd be bothered about her switching back to the old furniture and having this room decorated period style-no matter what it cost-he was the senile one. I felt good, in fact. It had been better than a full round of golf, with me winning. I started to tell her I'd get back soon. I was even thinking of "bringing Liza and the family out for our vacation, instead of taking the trip to Bermuda we'd talked about.
She got up to kiss me again. Then she caught herself. "Goodness! Here you're going, and you haven't met Jimmy yet. You sit down a minute, Andrew!"
She threw up the window quickly, letting in the scent of roses from the back. "Jimmy! Oh, Jimmy! It's getting late. Come on in. And wash your face before you come up. I want you to meet your Uncle Andrew."
She turned back, smiling a little apologetically. "He's my pet, Andrew. I always tried to be fair about my children, but I guess I like Jimmy sort of special!"
Downstairs, I could hear a door close faintly, and the muffled sounds of a boy's steps moving toward the kitchen. Mother sat beaming, happier than I'd seen her for years-since Dad died, in fact. Then the steps sounded on the stairs. I grinned myself, realizing that little Jimmy must be taking two steps at a time, using the banister to pull himself up. I'd always done that when I was a kid. I was musing on how alike boys are wlien the footsteps reached the

landing and headed toward the room.
I started to look toward the door, but the transformation on Mother's face caught my attention. She suddenly looked almost young, and her eyes were shining, while her gaze was riveted on the door behind.
There was a faint sound of it opening and closing, and I started to turn. Something prickled up my backbone. Something was wrong! And then, as I turned completely, I recognized it. When a door opens, the air in the room stirs. We never notice it, unless it doesn't happen. Then the stillness tells us at once the door can't have really opened. This time, the air hadn't moved.
In front of me, the steps sounded, uncertainly, like those of a somewhat shy boy of six. But there was no one there! The thick carpet didn't even flatten as the soft sound of the steps came closer and stopped, just in front of me!
"This is Uncle Andrew, Jimmy," Mother announced happily, "Shake hands like a good boy, now. He came all the way from Des Moines to see you."
I put my hand out, dictated by some vague desire to please her, while I could feel cold sweat running down my arms and legs. I even moved my hand as if it were being shaken. Then I stumbled to the door, yanked it open, and started down the stairs.
Behind me, the boy's footsteps sounded uncertainly, following out to the landing. Then Mother's steps drowned them, as she came quickly down the stairs after me.
"Andrew, I think you're shy around boys! You're not fooling me. You're just running off because you don't know how to talk to little Jimmy!" She was grinning in amusement. Then she caught my hand again. "You come again s$al Soon, Andrew."
I must have1" said the right things, somehow. She turned to go up the stairs, just as I heard the steps creak from above, where no one was standing! Then I stumbled out and into my car. I was lucky enough to find a few ounces of whisky in a bottle in the glove compartment. But the liquor didn't help much.
I avoided Matthews' place. I cut onto the main highway and opened the big engine all the way, not caring about cops. I wanted all the distance I could get between myself and the ghost steps of little Jimmy. Ghost? Not even that! Just steps and the weak sound of a door that didn't open. Jimmy wasn't even a ghost-he couldn't be.
I had to slow down as the first laughter tore out of my throat. I swung off the road and let it rip out of me, until the pain in my side finally cut it off.
Things were better after that. And when I started the Cadillac again, I was beginning to think. By the tune I reached the outskirts of Des Moines, I had it licked.
It was hallucination, of-course. Matthews had tried to warn me that Mother was going through a form of dotage. She'd created a child for herself, going back to her youth for it. The school that wasn't there, the crush on the teacher, the measles-all were real things she was reliving through little Jimmy. But because she was so unlike other women in keeping firmly sane about everything except this one fantasy, she'd fooled me. She'd made me think she was completely rational. When she'd explained the return of the old furniture, she'd wiped out all my doubts, which had centered on that.
She'd made me take it for granted that Jimmy was real. And she had made me expect to hear steps when her own listening had prepared me for them. I'd been cued by her own famt reactions to her imagination-I must have seen some little gesture, and followed her timing. It had been superbly real to her-and my senses had tricked me.
It wasn't impossible. It was the secret of many of the great stage illusions, aided by my own memories of the
old house, and given life by the fact that she believed in the steps, as no stage trickster could believe.

I convinced myself of it almost completely. I had to do that. And finally I nearly dismissed the steps from my mind, and concentrated on Mother. Matthews' words came back to me, and I nodded to myself. It was a harmless fantasy, and Mother was entitled to her pleasure. She was sane enough to care for herself, without any doubt, and physically far better than she had any right to be. With Matthews' interest in her, there was no reason for me to worry about anything.

By the time I pulled the car into the garage, I was making plans for setting up the trucking concern again, following Mother's advice about making myself the senior partner. It hadn't been a wasted day, after all.

Life went on, pretty much as usual. My younger boy was back home for a while. I'd looked forward to that, but somehow the Army had broken the old bonds between us. Even when I had time, there wasn't much we could talk about. I guess it was something of a relief when he left for some job in New York; anyhow, I was busy straightening out a brawl the older one got mixed up in. My daughter was expecting again, and her husband was showing a complete inability to cooperate with me. I didn't have much time to think about little Jimmy. Mercifully, Liza hadn't asked me about my trip; there was nothing to keep me from forgetting most of it.

I wrote Mother once in a while, now. Her letters grew longer, and sometimes Jimmy's name appeared, along with quite a bit of advice on the trucking business. Most of that was useless, naturally, but she knew more than I'd suspected about the ways of business. It gave me something to write back about.

I paid a fat fee to a psychiatrist for a while, but mostly he only confirmed what I'd already reasoned out. I wasn't interested in some of the other nonsense he tried to sell me, so I stopped going after a while.

And then I forgot the whole thing when the first tentative feeler from New Mode Roofing and Asphalt suggested a merger. I'd been planting the seed for the idea for months, but getting it set to put in my control was a tricky problem. I finally Jiad to compromise by agreeing to move the headguilters to Akron, tearing up my roots overnight and resettling. Liza made a scene over that, and my daughter flatly refused to come. I had to agree to turn the trucking concern over to my son-in-law completely, just when it was beginning to show a profit. But the rift had been coming ever since he'd refused to fire my oldest boy from the job of driving one of the trailers. Maybe it was just as well. The boy seemed to like it. We'd be in Akron, nobody would know about it, and he'd be better off than he was hanging around with some of the friends he'd had before. I meant to write Mother about that, since she'd suggested it once, and I suspected she'd had something to do with it. But the move took all my attention. After that, there was the problem of organizing the new firm.

I decided to see Mother, instead of writing to her. I wasn't going to be fooled again with the same hallucination. The new psychiatrist assured me of that, and advised the trip. I had already marked off the date on my calendar for the visit next month.

It didn't work out. Matthews called me at two o'clock in the morning with the news, after wasting two days tracing me down through acquaintances. Nobody thought of looking me up in a business directory, of course.

Mother had pneumonia and the prognosis was unfavorable.

"At her age, these things are serious," he said. His voice wasn't professional this time. "You'd better get here as quickly as you can. She's been asking for you."

"I'll charter a plane at once," I told him. This would raise the deuce with the voting of stock we'd scheduled, but I couldn't stay away, obviously. I'd almost convinced myself Mother would go on for another twenty years. Now . . .

"How'd it happen?"

"The big storm last week. She went out in it with rubbers and an umbrella to fetch little Jimmy from school! She got sopping wet. When I reached her, she already had a fever. I've been trying everything, but . . ."
I hung up, sick. Little Jimmy! For a minute, I wanted him to be real enough to strangle.
I pounded on Liza's door and got her to charter the plane while I packed and roused out my secretary on the other phone. Liza drove me to the airport where the plane was warmed up and waiting. I turned to say good-by, but she was dragging out a second bag from the back.
"I'm going," she announced flatly.
I started to argue, saw her expression, and gave up. A few minutes later, we took off.
Most of the rest of the family was already there, hovering around outside the newly decorated bedroom where Mother lay under an oxygen tent; huddles of the family and their children were in every other room on the second floor, staring at the closed door and discussing things in the harsh whispers people use for a scene of death.
Matthews motioned them back and came over to me at once. "No hope, I'm afraid, Andrew," he said, and there were tears in his eyes.
"Isn't there anything we can do?" Liza asked, her voice dropping to the hoarse whisper of the others. "Anything at all, Doctor?"
He shook his head. "I've already talked to the best men in the country. We've tried everything. Even prayer."
From one side of the hall, Agnes sniffed loudly. Her militant atheism couldn't be downed by anything, it seemed. It didn't matter. There was death in the house, thick enough to smell. I had always hated the waste and futility of dying. Now it had a personal meaning, and it was worse. Behind that closed door, Mother lay dying, and nothing I could do would help.
"Can I go in?" I asked, against my wishes.
Matthews nodded. "It can't hurt now. And she wanted to see you.-"
I went in after him, with the eyes of the others thrusting at me. Matthews waved the nurse out and went over
to the window; the chpking sound from his throat was louder than the, ffwnt hiss of the oxygen. I hesitated, then drew near the bed.
Mother lay there, and her eyes were open. She turned them toward me, but there was no recognition.in them. One of her thin hands was poking at the transparent tent over her. I looked toward Matthews, who nodded slowly. "It won't matter now."
He helped me move it aside. Her hand groped out, while the wheezing sound of her breathing grew louder. I tried to follow her pointing finger. But it was Matthews who picked up the small picture of a young boy, put it into her hands for her to clasp to her.
"Mother!" It ripped out of me, louder than I had intended. "Mother, it's Andy! I'm here!"
Her eyes turned again, and she moved her parched lips. "Andrew?" she asked weakly. Then a touch of a smile came briefly. She shook her head slightly. "Jimmy! Jimmy!"
The hands lifted the picture until she could see it. "Jimmy!" she repeated.
From below, there was the sound of a door closing weakly, and steps moving across the lower floor. They took the stairs, two steps at a time, but quickly now, without need of the banister. They crossed the landing. The door remained closed, but there was the sound of a knob turning, a faint squeak of hinges, then another sound of a door closing. Young footsteps moved across the rug, invisible, a sound that seemed to make all other sounds fade to silence. The steps reached the bed and stopped.
Mother turned her eyes, and the smile quickened again. One hand lifted. Then she dropped back and her breathing stopped.

The silence was broken by the sound of feet again- heavier, surer feet that seemed to be planted on the floor beside the bed. Two sets of footsteps sounded. One might have been those of a small boy. The others were the quick, sharp sounds that only a young woman can make as she hurries along with her first-born beside her. They moved across the room.

There was no hesitation at the door this time, nor any sound of opening or closing. The steps went on, across the landing and down the stairs. As Matthews and I followed into the hall, they seemed to pick up speed toward the back door. Now finally there was a soft, deliberate sound of a door closing, and then silence.

I jerked my gaze back, to see the eyes of all the others riveted on the back entrance, while emotions I had never seen washed over the slack faces. Agnes rose slowly, her eyes turned upward. Her thin lips opened, hesitated, and closed into a tight line. She sat down like a stick woman folding, glancing about to see whether the others had noticed.

From below, her daughter came running up the stairs. "Mother! Mother, who was the little boy I heard?"

I didn't wait for the answer, nor the thick words with which Matthews confirmed the news of Mother's death. I was back beside the poor old body, taking the picture from the clasped hands.

Liza had followed me in, with the color just beginning to return to her face. "Ghosts," she said thickly. Then she shook her head, and her voice softened. "Mother and one of the babies, come back to get her. I always thought . . ."

"No," I told her. "Not one of my sisters who died too young. Nothing that easy, Liza. Nothing that good. It was a boy. A boy who had measles when he was six, who took the stairs two at a time-a boy named Jimmy. . ."

She stared at me doubtfully, then down at the picture I held-the picture of me when I was six. "But you-" she began. Then she turned away without finishing, while the others began straggling in.

We had to stay for the ceremony, of course, though I guess Mother didn't need me at the funeral. She already had her Jimmy.

She'd wanted to name me James for her father, and Dad had insisted on Andrew for his. He'd won, and Andrew came first. But until I was ten, I'd always been called Jimmy by Mother. Jimmy, Andy, Andrew, A. J.

A man's name was part of his soul, I remembered, in the old beliefs. % 5

But it didn't^niake sense, no matter how I figured it out by myself. I tried to talk it over with Matthews, but he wouldn't comment. I made another effort with Liza when we were on the plane going back.

"I can believe in Mother's spirit," I finished. I'd been over it all so often hi my own mind that I had accepted that finally. "But who was Jimmy? We all heard him- even Agnes' daughter heard him from downstairs. So he wasn't a delusion. But he can't be a ghost. A ghost is a returned spirit-the soul of a man who has died!"

"Well?" Liza asked coldly. I waited, but she went on staring out of the plane window, not saying another word.

I used to think meeting a ghost would offer reassurance to a man. Now I don't know. If I could only explain little Jimmy . . .

The Seat of Judgment

Night had fallen, but the city gleamed with the angry red of dying fires, and the crowds still fought back and forth across the streets, howling in sorrow and rage. But in front of the barracks beyond the Earth palace, the fighting seemed spent, and the mob had thinned to a scattering of huddled, dazed figures.

Lorg, one of the Ludh mercenaries, broke from a side street in an exhausted attempt to run. Two of his arms hung useless, his clothing was ripped to shreds, his bow was gone, and his body was covered with wounds; he no longer felt them-his mind was filled only with the need for a weapon.

He hesitated, listening for pursuit. Then, with a final staggering run, he burst through the barracks door and headed for the bow racks.

• Light hit his eyes, jerking him to a stop. They'd guessed his destination and beaten him here. There were a dozen of them, headed by the renegade, Pars, whose bow was already pulled taut.

Pars' voice was sick as he stared at his fellow Ludh, nodding to the others. "He's one of the butchers," he said heavily. The bowstring stretched tighter.

"Renegade! Adominist!" Lorg screamed the words, knowing it was too late for words. "When Earth catches you-!"

Pars' head shook more firmly. "Earth!" He spat the word out harshly.-; "The men of Earth are dead a hundred years,^ E@rg. Only the weaklings are left. They'll never a&i until they have to-and then too late. Pray to your own false gods, Lorg, not to Earth!"

Lorg leaped, but the arrow was already in flight. It was a sliver, a wand, a lance-then a stake driving toward him.

Pors dropped the bow and leaned against the wall, sobbing harshly-but not for the death of Lorg.

Beyond the high walls of the spaceport, Sayon seemed almost unchanged by the thirty years since Eli Judson had last seen the planet. Time might have ceased to exist here, though it had dealt heavily enough with him. The grayish-blue uniform of the Colonial Service hung slackly on his sinewy, old man's body. The black was almost gone from his hair, bitter lines had been etched across his hollow-cheeked face, and his sight was almost useless without his glasses. In a few more years, it would be too late for even the geriatric treatments back on Earth to help him.

He grunted uncomfortably as the llamalike beast he rode jolted up the rough road to the top of a hill, then held up his hand to stop his escort. "It looks peaceful enough," he observed.

"So does a fusion bomb until it goes off," Dupont answered hi his irritatingly high-pitched voice. His stout face was sweating profusely, and he made nervously futile gestures with a handkerchief.

Earth must be hard up to pick such a man for planet administrator, even on a backwater world like this, Judson thought. He shrugged and reached for his binoculars to survey the valley below.

The air was crystal clear in the aftermath of one of the seasonal storms. Groves of dense-fruited faya berries and pastures dotted with flocks of green-wooled theom covered the hillsides. Downtrail, a caravan was meandering upward, loaded with precious spices, perfumes, and uranium ore for the space trade, and he could hear the faint tinkle of bells as the beasts moved. Other caravans were winding through a pass in the opposite hills to the north, and the eastern harbor was crowded with galleys and gaudy with their multi-colored sails.

He shifted to study the city beyond the quays. Kalva had grown until its maze of low buildings and twisting little streets now stretched far beyond the old walls. Judson knew that most of the city was filled with squalor and filth, but distance softened that. The yellow bricks and dark tile roofs seemed to sparkle serenely in the afternoon sunlight with a hint of patterns that never became fixed.

Over the center of the city, the great temple reared its seven marble tiers, capped by a flattened dome of burnished gold plate. Judson shifted to higher magnification to study the square in front of the building. The crowds seemed thick there, but hardly anyone was going up the great steps. With the festival of Mesea due to begin tomorrow evening, that was a jarringly false note.

Dupont coughed nervously. "We'd better get going. If there's any trouble ..."

"From one Sdyonese?" Judson asked.

"Mohammet was only one man, and a sick one," Dupont pointed out. "Besides, these people have a lot of legends of human gods."

"Goddesses," Judson corrected him. Then he grimaced as memories came pouring back. Meia was thirty years in his past and should have been forgotten. He stiffened in the saddle and motioned them on.

This time two of the bowmen of Ludh moved in front. They were the usual mercenaries in this section of the galaxy-yellow, hairless apes with wolf muzzles. As soldiers, they were so good that one should have been guard enough, instead of the six Dupont had brought.

They came to the caravan he had seen, drawn aside to let them pass. There seemed nothing wrong in the attitude of the woman leader, though he saw Dupont frown at an odd sign she made; it was probably religious, though he didn't recognize it.

The Sayonese were more nearly human than most races, but still alien enough. The women's chests were
flat under their brief halters-naturally, since they were marsupials-and feeif pouches showed clearly above the slit skirts both "gexes wore. Both their wrinkled skin and coarse hair were green, while their ears and noses were grotesquely large. With their squat, heavy bodies they might have been trolls from Earth's mythology. But after the snakes of Tarshi or the bowmen of Ludh, they looked amazingly manlike.

Even their customs and religions resembled some Earth had once known, though their god was a righteous, demanding Mother-Principle. Earth had expected easy conquest, counting on their legends of incarnate goddesses who were practically perfect images of human women, but only drastic action and the burning of half the temple had overcome that mistake a century ago. Since then, however, the priestesses had maintained peace well enough-at least until now.

"Have you seen this prophet you reported?" he asked Dupont.

The man shook his head, reaching for his kerchief again. "Only films from a distance. He came out of the desert a year ago and stuck to the provinces, picking up converts. It wasn't until last week he moved to'Kalva for the holidays. And you can't believe all the reports. They're a mess of lies about miracles."

"You haven't picked him up for questioning?"

"I'm not supposed to mix in with local religion. You know that!" Dupont's voice was petulant. "It's up to you and the high priestess, the Fas Kaia. She's the one who asked the Sector Governor for a warship and a company of Earth guards to keep peace."

Judson grimaced again. The Sector Governor had a warship, but no adequate crew of fighting men for it. The youth of Earth was too busy enjoying the luxuries from a thousand worlds to bother controlling the planets now, it seemed. So he'd been sent instead, over his protests. As a mere vice-governor, he was expendable.

They were entering Kalva now, heading toward the temple and the Earth Administration palace beyond. Judson studied the crowds, realizing time had brought changes. Poverty was worse and the slaves looked ill
fed. The temple taxes must be murderous. The streets were jammed with people and more pilgrims were arriving with every caravan, many wearing swords in defiance of Mesea custom. The old market was solid with skin tents and crude shelters, filling the air with stench and clamor. One skin-rotter could infect the whole area.

"Converts to Oe Athon," Dupont commented, making a mispronounced mockery of the title. "It thins out beyond the temple. There'll be time for a bath before the Fas Kaia reaches the palace, I guess."

The huddled ranks of unwashed Sayonese made way for them reluctantly. Their green faces stared at the humans and Ludh without seeming to see them, filled with a curious, expectant ecstasy. They might have been drug addicts, except that the drugs Earth shipped were too expensive for the masses. They seemed

peaceful enough-but fanatics could seek peace one minute and start a jehad the next.
Now the street swept around the huge temple, and the crowd grew thinner. Ahead lay the palace, the Ludh barracks, and the ugly, barren cemetery hill at the end of the street. Judson glanced at the forbidding mound, then began yanking out his binoculars, cursing.
Near the top of the cemetery hill, four thin posts carried the rotting flesh of Sayonese bodies. Nearby, another wretch was still alive, sitting on the sharpened point of a stake. It had been greased until his straining hands couldn't hold his weight, and his feet rested on a mound of sand that sifted away with each writhing, tortured movement. Slowly but steadily, his body was sinking lower around the point.
At a tune like this, the fools had revived the Seat!
Judson swung out of the saddle to the ground, shaking his head as Dupont slowed. "Go on, damn it. I'll handle this my way," he shouted. The huddles of Sayonese parted to let him through, until he was past them, climbing up the steep steps to the temple.
The priestesses must have been watching. There was a shout, and two of them trotted down to help him. To his surprise, he was in need of their assistance; his age
was showing in the labor of his breathing. "Tell the Fas Kaia I'm here," he jjanted.
"The Fas Kaia-greets the Oe Eli," a heavy alto voice answered from the top of the steps, speaking in pure high Saydnese.
He caught his breath while they studied each other. She was an old woman, so fat that her skin was stretched to paleness, and her bloated body was loaded with jewels. But there was a firmness about her as she waved the lesser priestesses away. She nodded at last. "You're a strong man and a realist, I think. Thank Her for that."
"Realist enough to know you'can't tax people to starvation and hold them by torture," he told her sharply. He gestured toward the hill. "Did you think I was too stupid to see that?"
She sighed, turning one ear toward the screams of the dying man that came faintly over the noise from the streets.
"I expected you to see it," she said quietly. "These are bad times, Oe Eli-so bad that those rogues dared to try looting the temple. I may have lied in calling them followers of Athon, but their sentence was legal. As for the tax-I get what I can, but I don't starve my people. They do that themselves. Every fool on Say6n is in Kalva, to see this Athon or watch what I do to him. I've emptied my own stores, and there still isn't enough food for afl."
Slowly the anger ran out of him. Even under the codex Earth had drafted, the Seat was approved for anyone who profaned the temple. Such stupidity deserved whatever it got. "My apologies, Kaia."
"There was no offense, Eli," she told him, smiling quickly at the ritual of names. "Now, if you'll consent, we can talk better in my quarters."
In the little room behind the great gold and jade statue of Her, she waved the slaves aside and served him mild faya wine and some of the matchless Kalvan cheese. Then she sank back gratefully onto her cushions, setting up a tinkling of ornaments.
" 'A wise man has many swords'," she quoted. "I am
glad your Governor sent you instead of the warship the administrator requested-which could have done no good. Perhaps together you and I can find a solution. Eh', when you were here before, how much did you learn of Her incarnations and their power?"
He could feel the muscles of his face tense, but he forced himself to remain calm. "I met one of your goddesses and saw what she could do," he answered.
"Meia!" Kaia's eyes seemed to gleam suddenly, as if a light had been turned on

behind them. Then she relaxed again. "I heard rumors, though I was only serving in the temple brothel at the time. Well, at least you know that a child can be born to our race who looks something like one of you-and who can grow up to work miracles. This Athon claims to be one of them."
"A man?" Judson asked in surprise, though he should have expected it.
She nodded. "All were girls, except the first, who founded our religion in a series of bloody holy wars. Some legends make it seem that he was fertile, unlike the girls, and that they may all have been seed from his loins. But the people believe they are incarnations of the Goddess, and they don't disturb the temple too much. Athon does."
"Yet you didn't have him assassinated when he first appeared?" Judson asked. He was trying to adjust his thinking to the new facts. Some kind of strange mutation, recessive and with linked genes, carrying the ability of mental healing? It was possible. Earth had found and developed a few minds with some of the same ability; they were the ones who handled the expensive geriatric rejuvenation treatments.
"I tried," she admitted. "More than once. But he converted my assassins and my spies. Then I tried to persuade the administrator to proclaim him a human, pretending to be Sayonese. There was the missionary woman before my time, you know. She tried it, until Earth found her here."
Judson had some memory from his reading. He frowned over the idea. It would make things easier, certainly. The Sayonese took the mysterious word "Sci-ence" as the unimpressive answer to anything humans might do, and they'd "regard any alien race dabbling in their religion as "the ultimate abomination. Damn Du-pont! The man could have used his brains instead of the rule book once in his life; instead, he'd played it safe until the last possible minute and then yelled for help.
"I suppose Dupont took it under advisement and warned you not to touch the man until it could be proved he wasn't human?" he guessed. At her nod, he swore softly. It fitted too well. "Do you think this Athon is human?"
She shrugged, glancing bitterly at a framed copy of the Earth-Sayon covenant. "Who knows what a male incarnation would be like? And how can I tell about Earthmen when every one I have seen is different in size, shape-and even color? My hands are bound. If he is human, I can do nothing. If he is of Sdyon, he is beyond my power as an incarnation! Yet he must be stopped, for the good of both your world and mine. Here!"
She pulled a jewel-studded box to her and began removing papers from it, written in the native script. "Can you read these?" she asked. At his nod, she passed them over to him. "Take them with you. You'll see he preaches both a Father-Principle and a Mother-Principle. He wants the riches of the temple stripped away and divided among everyone. He claims all races are equal. Eli, consider what that would do to Earth's position! Or think how little you could deal with Sayon without the temple-as the temple cannot do without Earth now. Is Earth strong enough in this Sector today to conquer Sayon against a fanatic people-or to hold the other worlds if this planet breaks away?"
Abruptly, she stopped to study him. Then a slow, hard smile lifted the corners of her mouth. "I was desperate enough to think of bribing you, Eli. But a poor man after forty years in your Service must be ah honest one. Still, at least, you can see what I chose for you."
It lay on the bottom of the box, gleaming iridescent in the light and silvery white in the shadows-a neck-
lace of the almost mythical moon pearls. On Earth, one would buy full geriatric treatments and ten would win the governorship of almost any Sector he could name. His hand shook, but he managed a smile as he reached out to close the lid.
Her own laugh sounded strained as she put the box away. "Well, perhaps someday the Goddess will reward you for honesty. One can always hope," she said. Then

she heaved herself up and turned to the doorway. "I've got a chariot waiting to take you to the palace."
It was on a nearby ramp that ran downward gradually until it passed through a narrow gate below the steps, but Judson hardly noticed the path the priestess driving it chose. He was cursing to himself and at himself as the picture of his interview with Kaia solidified in his thoughts. She'd given him a little information, shoved the entire responsibility on him, and-yes, damn it-she'd managed to offer him the moon pearls for his help! Those final words could only mean that. She'd managed it within an hour of meeting him; yet on her own ground and hi her own specialty, she couldn't handle the problem she'd given him!
Abruptly, the chariot jerked to a jarring halt and began backing. He looked up. The street they had been about to enter-the main street between palace and temple-was crammed with some kind of procession. In the very center, however, there was a clear space where one heavily-robed figure moved by itself.
He caught the priestess' hands as she tried to turn the team around. "Wait. Is that Athon?"
She nodded, hate and sickness on her face.
The binoculars did little good. The light was already failing, and the slow-moving figure seemed completely covered in a robe and hood. Judson turned to glance at the crowd, then focused in shoct on two of the Ludh bowmen, marching toward the rear! They had no business here! If the Ludh could be converted . . .
A startled noise from the mob broke the weird minor chant that had been rising, and he spun back to see a Sayonese man running toward the solitary marching figure. In one arm he was brandishing a sword weakly, shouting as he ran. The flesh on his body was covered with the great scabs of brown skin-rot, and he was wasted to almost skeletal thinness.
The men nearest him started for him, just as he staggered. But there was still strength enough in his body. With a final yell, he raised the sword and plunged it deep into his own breast.
The robed figure stopped beside the threshing body on the street. A hand came out of the robe to pluck the sword easily from the wound, almost without touching it. Then the hand withdrew, and Athon bent over, as if chiding the dying man. Finally he straightened. The swordsman was quiet for a second. Then the body stirred, sat up, sprang to its feet with a wild cry of joy, and dashed back into the crowd. There were no brown scabs left on the emaciated figure.
The chant rose to a wild frenzy and the procession moved on. In the center, the robed figure seemed to shake its head sadly.
At Judson's nod, the priestess got the chariot turned and began heading back through twisted alleys toward the palace. His mind was churning wildly on what he had seen. It was so completely beyond any use of healing power known to Earth-or even to the,legends here-that it could only be called a miracle, unless it had been the best-staged piece of trickery ever performed so openly. If word of such things got back to Earth, there'd be ships headed here in droves from every cult known to man, filled with credulous fools and profiteers-and among them might well be some of the hereditary president's family. Fas Kaia had been more truthful than she knew when she equated her danger with Earth's. In the unstable conditions back there, just the knowledge that such things could be would threaten the whole system. Meia had been a danger once; Athon was doom! At the palace, Dupont and his homely sister, with the eight human assistants who comprised all the Earthmen hi Kalva, were in the middle of some vague attempt at a welcoming party, but they seemed relieved when Judson pleaded extreme fatigue. They'd probably turn it into a dope binge now, from rumors of what went on here, with Dupont's sister being passed around from man to man, not excluding her brother. But that was none of

Judson's business. With the decreasing number of women who came away from Earth for any reason now, men couldn't be blamed for making the most of whatever they could find. Earth put stiff penalties on consorting with aliens, but it happened sometimes, even on Ludh. For that matter ...

He dropped the thought and unpacked in the apartment assigned to him. From the bottom of his small bag he drew a final piece-a tissue copy of Selected Books of the Testaments. He'd never read it, though he'd considered doing so; few men were familiar with any of the contents now, since the rise of the cult mysteries. But it had become his luck piece. He put it near him as he turned to the records Kaia had given him.

The contents only confirmed her words, without adding any new information. And even confirmation was meaningless, since they could be forgeries. He'd have to play things by ear, it seemed-and probably one of his problems would be the priestess herself.

But now the fatigue he had used as an excuse was turning to reality. He should call a slave to bathe him and prepare him for bed, but it was too much trouble. He made another futile attempt to think about his problems, then dropped onto the bed. He'd undress in a moment ...

Priestesses, goddesses, prophets! The last thing he had ever wanted was to get mixed into another Sayonese religious mess. Once had been bad enough- and yet ...

Thirty years before he grew old, a man could have plans for the future, even on an outworld in the Colonial Service. Eli's hopes were based on a book dealing with the oddities in the ecological balance of a world where marsupials had won the race for domination. He was spending his biannual vacation by himself in the retreat of a village a hundred miles north of Kalva, using a building the Service had owned but abandoned.

The book was neatly finished, too, and he'd been practically assured rjutfjicaltion. Then there'd be recognition, promotion, a chance to return to Earth; in time, there'd be a wife to make up for ten years without women; there'd be children. He'd always wanted a son of his own, though the idea was growing old-fashioned in the current culture.

It might have worked, except for an unexpected storm that caught him taking a walk to clear his mind. The same storm found a window he'd left carelessly open and blew away his antibiotic kit and ruined his radio. That left only the native doctor, who knew nothing about pneumonia. Eli passed into a delirium with the unpleasant idea that he'd wake up only in heaven- in which he had no belief.

When he came to, he was less sure. He felt rotten, and his sight was cloudy, but there was either an angel or an Earth girl in the room, talking Sayonese with an old greeny. She wore native clothes, but no native had skin like that- or provocative hips-or such shoulders. Then as she turned, he grunted in surprise. Damned few Earth women looked that good without makeup, either. He began to consider the angel idea seriously.

She shook her head at him, switching to English that had almost none of the lisped dentals caused by Sayonese slotted palates. "I'm only a goddess," she told him. "That is, I will be in another month. You're lucky I hadn't gone to Kalva yet, though. You were almost dead, and your cells are-well, they're different. I had a hard time with you." Then she bent closer, long yellow hair falling over his face. "Are you really an Earthman, Eli?"

"I'm as much from Earth as you are," he mumbled, reaching for her.

She seemed puzzled at his efforts to kiss her, but made no protests until the greeny uttered something that sounded like teasing. Then she disengaged herself, running her hands over her chest. With a shock, he realized it was as flat as his own.

"What's a breasts, Uncle Kleon?" she asked.

"A breast, or two breasts-they come in pairs," the

creature told her, grinning in amusement. "Read his mind a little deeper and you'll find a lot of things about them, I'll bet." His English was as easy and idiomatic as hers, though less clearly pronounced.
For a moment, she stared down at Eli. Then she began giggling like a schoolgirl as she left the room.
Kleon came over to drop heavily onto the bed. "I'm not really her uncle," he said. "I'm her teacher, more or less, until she reaches the temple. I'm one of the few Sayonese who were admitted to one of your extension schools, before Earth decided to give up any idea of raising our living standard and to keep us on our own world. But I don't hate Earth. I got over anger and hating long ago, which is probably why I'm still alive."
"But what about her?" Eli asked.
The old man grinned affectionately. "She's a lot more interesting than I am, I'll admit. She's what she says- a goddess. And a good thing, too. You were already in death shock when she got here. Haven't you ever heard of our virgin goddesses?"
Eli had heard some stories, but he hadn't really believed them. There had been a girl born about a century before who looked like an Earth woman and who had some fantastic power to heal the sick and restore the maimed. But not that human! He looked outside to where she was talking to a couple of Sayonese. Then he frowned. In the sunlight, there seemed to be a touch of green to her skin, and there was a hint of a line across her abdomen where a S&y&nese girl would have had a pouch. But it could have been only a subtle disguise.
"That's her father and mother saying good-bye to her again," Kleon said casually, indicating the two natives.
Eli fainted. When he next regained consciousness, his body seemed to be completely recovered, though it could only have been a couple of hours later. He drank some of the hot cheese soup Kleon offered him, swung out of bed, and faced the old man. "All right, give it to me in detail," he suggested.
Kleon seemed ready and willing to oblige, and this time Eli was less skeptical. But he still had doubts until that evening when a wailing procession came up the
road. Some had skin-rot, others were crippled, a few were blind. Then'^as they spotted Meia, their wails turned to cries "6f delight, and they made as much of a rush to her as they could, spreading out in front of her. Apparently, from what Eli could pick up of their degraded dialect, they had arrived late at her home village and been told she'd left, moving to Kalva for her birthday. Now finding her here was like a reprieve from hell. They seemed to regard Eli as a friend from heaven for having the good sense to get pneumonia and delay her.
One by one she took care of them, sometimes talking to them, sometimes laying on her hands. Eli watched, trying to spot the gimmick, and finally gave up. Under her fingers, flesh that had begun to corrode away literally grew new skin. Bones knit. Cataracts vanished from eyes. And once, to get at a broken spine, she casually levitated a native from the ground, spun him over, and pressed her hands to his back. There was a chant going on, but nobody seemed surprised at her feat.
When they were finally all cared for and spread out among the huts of the village, she turned to Eli. "It's harder than it looks," she told him. "But it feels good, too. Now, tell me about Earth."
The others had all gone, leaving him alone with her. He tried to satisfy her curiosity. But sometimes he wasn't too clear about what he was saying. It wasn't easy to get used to the idea that a pretty, innocent young girl could be half alien kangaroo, half a being close enough to divinity to work miracles.
"I think we'll stay here a few days," she decided abruptly. "I want to know more about Earth people and to study you. Maybe I can even go to Earth and

cure people."
It was bad enough trying to go to sleep while he knew she was lying naked in the next room-she'd insisted on having him quarter Kleon and herself. But the picture of her on Earth eventually blotted all that out. The planet administrator here was a neo-Blavatskyite of the worst kind, and he'd love nothing better than taking back a real goddess, law or no law. Once the senatorial families learned of what she could do, all hell would break loose. There'd be at least a dozen kidnaping attempts a month, and probably half as many palace revolutions to control her. She'd be worse than the Tarshian hypnotic lizard of the last century. Besides, there'd be trouble here at the idea of letting her go, and she'd probably get killed before she really saw Earth.
He tried to argue her out of the idea during the next few days, sometimes with the casual help of Kleon. But she was quite sure she could handle anything, and she'd made up her mind.
"Besides, nobody hurts a virgin goddess," she told him, as if that had anything to do with his arguments. It did serve to throw him off, though.
"Why a virgin, anyhow?" he asked. "You have a head goddess you call the Mother-Principle, but then she incarnates only in virgins. Isn't that contradictory? I suppose she'd blast you asunder if you lost that one virtue."
"She'd leave, because she's the All-Mother, not the One-Mother. Anyhow, I can't really breed-I'm not naturally fertile with our men. Maybe, for children and if I loved a man, in your terms, I wouldn't mind not being a goddess-but I'm not going to lose what I have for nothing."
Her words jerked his own thoughts back to level, with the sharp realization that he'd begun thinking of her as human again. Damn it, she might look like a woman, but even their basic cell structure was different. It would be easier to breed with an Earth tree than to have children with her. Not one of his chromosomes would match with hers. And morally, no matter what other reasons were involved, sex was related to having children. Besides, he knew nothing about Sayonese anatomy. Under her skirt, she might not be human at all.
She giggled. "Eli, if you want me to take off my clothes, why don't you ask? I don't mind, really. Then you can see for yourself."
"Go to hell!" he told her, and stomped off, determined to pack and leave at once. A man could stand
just so much. Innocent she might be, but she knew she had him going and sBj& was enjoying it.
Still, he was tfierVton the fifth day, when he really should have been beginning the trip back to Kalva. Of course, they could have traveled together, but that would have been awkward. Instead of packing, he was walking beside her toward one of his favorite loafing spots at the top of a little hill.
They came to a little dip in the ground that cut off the wind and he threw down a blanket and dropped onto it. He hadn't slept well the night before, and he intended to nap now; She'd brought along the single book Kleon had preserved from his schooling-a tissue edition of some of the books of Earth's old Bible. She and Kleon must have memorized it, but they still pored over it regularly. He sprawled out and she snuggled down beside him. Probably deliberately, she was closer than she had to be. He could feel her breasts move against him as she breathed.
He sat up with a yelp, staring at her. Breasts? She'd been absolutely flat-chested when he first saw her! But she wasn't now-not by a long ways.
"You wanted them, so I changed," she said contentedly. "It's about time you noticed! And I took away the green in my skin you didn't like and made the line where I should have a pouch disappear, too. See?"
He saw, but at the moment he was more fascinated by what was there than by what wasn't. If she were using padding, she was doing a darned good job of it.

"They're real," she told him. "I picked the ones in your mind you liked best. You can feel, if you don't believe me. I don't mind. After all, it won't mean anything to-to me. . . ."
But her breath caught as sharply as his, while his fingers slipped under the halter. He felt her tremble, and her nipples were lifting and eager for his hands.
For a minute, she bent to him, her lips parting and reaching for him. Then abruptly she tore away, staring at him with wide, startled eyes. For the first time, he saw fear on her face.
"No!" she whispered.
But it had to be. He saw it clearly now. Once she gave herself to him, she'd lose her dangerous powers and be just another girl. Maybe the change in her would be only a loss of faith hi herself, but that didn't matter. It was his solution. Earth would never hear of her, and . . . and it had been ten years since he'd held a girl in his arms!
He started toward her. Her face paled, then firmed again, and something seemed to explode in his head. He staggered, missed his footing, and fell.
"No," she repeated. "Not now. Not yet. I have to think."
This time he waited, knowing he could do nothing to force a creature with the powers of a goddess. The pressures hi huii rose and fought for expression, but he could only lie and wait. And in the end, it was she who came to him, slowly pulling the halter off as she moved toward him. He lay immobile until she was almost touching him before he groped for her. She pulled closer, straining against him with heaving breasts.
"Show me hi your mind again. Show me everything," she whispered. "I have to be sure."
His hands had found the slit hi her skirt by then and the buckle, but he tried to follow her wishes with his unclear, churning thoughts. And suddenly she was completely against him, with nothing between, panting in his ear. "I'm sure. Eli, I'm sure!"
Ten years was a long time.
The last Eli saw of Meia, she was sleeping in complete exhaustion, but with a touch of a smile on her lips. She muttered something in a weak voice, and he kissed her lightly, trying to keep his mind from thinking too loud.
It was dark before he reached his house. He located his riding beast, saddled it, and started toward the building to collect his manuscript. Then he saw Kleon reading it, and gave up. He was in no condition to face the questions of the old man. He led the animal out onto the trail, mounted quickly, and headed for Kalva, hoping only that he had enough money on him for the trip.
It was a long rMe, and there was time for more than enough thought. Sometimes he gloated to himself over the end of herf power, as ft his victory proved that she had never been more than he was. Sometimes shame came over him, either at the breaking of the taboo against aliens or at what he had done to her. And always there were other feelings that he cursed and ranted against, but which lasted longer than the others.
At the end of a year, when his transfer was okayed, he spent all his money to send her a box of luxuries, using the village as her address. When his transfer ship was delayed, he began to fear she might trace him back, but he saw no more of her.
Instead, it was the aged Kleon who came, and by then it didn't matter. Eli was inside the passenger fence, getting final clearance, and no natives were permitted. Kleon tried to pass and was turned back. Then, as he saw Eli, one thick arm swept forward, tossing something over the fence.
It was the thin, worn little mission book Meia had been reading. He stood holding it, trying to guess what it meant, as Kleon left. Shaking proved there was no note between the pages, and nothing was written inside the covers. It was a mystery to him. Yet he was homesick as the rocket roared upward, lifting

him from Sayon.
Judson woke early, bothered by the light streaming from the windows on two sides of his apartment. He groaned, still aching, and fumbled about until he found his glasses. A slave must have come in during the night to undress him, and one entered now, bringing his freshened clothes and a welcome cup of coffee.
One wall of windows faced north toward the hill, he saw. The other opened on a rear garden. He threw one of the windows open, letting in fresh air and a babble of childish voices. There were three little boys, from six to eleven, playing outside. From their looks, they were obviously Dupont's. The man had been a fool to have them, but Judson couldn't really blame him as he watched them, envy thick in him.
He shut the window again, just as Dupont himself came in. The man looked sick and scared. "The Fas Kaia arrested Athon!" he screamed, wasting no time on civilities. "She's holding trial on him for profaning the temple. After I ordered her to leave him alone. Come on, we've got to stop it!"
The rule book was torn up, and Dupont's carefully built shelter was gone. It was a shock to Judson too, but no cause for panic. He should have expected some such high-handed action from the priestess.
"I countermanded your order," he said. He realized he was committing himself-probably accepting Kaia's bribe-but there was no use trying to undo what she had done. The less damage the better. "If you're worried, Dupont, maybe you'd better get your sister and your boys to the ship."
The sickness in the man abruptly washed out all the fear. Incest was still enough to ruin him completely. But he nodded at last. He shook himself, pulling at some strength inside him to put on a normal appearance, then headed for the garden.
Judson hurried out to the street. There was no chariot waiting, of course; Fas Kaia obviously meant to have a fait accompli when he heard of it. He set out on foot, noticing that there were mobs clustered about the temple, and others streaming toward it. But they were still leaderless and unsure of what had happened. They made way for his uniform without thinking.
Inside the temple, a reluctant priestess led him to a great gold and silver door and swung it open for him. He could see Kaia at the far end of the huge room, addressing a prisoner in the hands of two Ludh. How the temple rated Ludh guards would have to be explained later.
She looked up and motioned him to her, standing up as he drew near. "I couldn't get a chariot and message to you through the hostile crowd," she lied easily in a low voice. "So I went ahead, hoping you'd hear. Here, I've already judged him an impostor of Earth stock, and handed him over to the temple as a spy in temple uniform-his robe really is an old temple one. I found rules about jurisdiction over spies in an old covenant of Earth and used thenj?" '-
"So you didn'f:ne$d me, after all?" he asked bitterly. He could admire her solution; with the detail of the temple uniform, it might even be legal. But her tactics rankled.
She shook her head, smiling faintly. "I'm glad you're here, Eli. I'd rather not forge the papers. Here, take the seat of judgment and finish. You can certify to his being human, too."
He found himself seated in the great chair, with the papers in front of him. They were in good order and in English. Kaia was thorough. But if he had even a shred of doubt about the man, after her arrogant assumption she could control him, he'd let her go whistle . . .
Abruptly, he saw the prisoner, and the anticlimax took all the stubbornness out of him. The man was unimpressive and plain, with mild blue eyes and carroty-red hair that could only come from Earth. There was even a hint of freckles across the nose.

Reluctantly, Judson signed. There was no doubt left, and nothing else to do. One man couldn't count against whole worlds, any more than Meia had counted against Earth. But his hand shook as he put the pen back.
"Hear the judgment," Kaia called immediately. "For sacrilege within the temple, let the self-termed O6 Athon die on the pointed seat this day. Take him awayi"
Judson rose to protest. The man was practically a political prisoner. He'd only come for ritualistic laving, not to harm the temple literally. But it was too late for protests. Anyhow, the prisoner was speaking.
It was a rich, ringing voice that seemed to fill the whole room. "The world has judged and the world is judged," Athon pronounced slowly. His eyes lingered on them and his hand came up in a strange gesture. Then he shrugged and let the guards move him away.
Judson felt his eyes smarting, and his vision seemed to blur. He reached for his glasses automatically and began cleaning them. Then shock hit him as he glanced at the papers before him. Without the glasses, the smallest text was clearly visible. There had been a final miracle, even inside the temple.
Kaia was in front of him as he stumbled to his feet, and there was a package in her hands. "Sometimes the Goddess is quick to reward," she chuckled. "Naturally, to refuse Her gift is to profane Her name. The temple thanks you, too, Eli."
He took the package and thrust it into his pocket, knowing it bound him to her, and not caring at the moment. "You are kind, Fas Kaia," he said formally. Then he headed for the exit and toward the street.
But now the crowd was thicker, pressing inward. As he came to the steps, he found himself swallowed by it, almost carried by it. It had always been a faceless, abstract crowd to him before-one with no character or feeling. He hadn't really realized that it could claw and tear and smother with its solidity. And he was too old to tear through it.
Then another shock registered. A few feet away, the face of Kleon appeared, with the old eyes staring straight toward him, before the movement of the mob drove them apart. The surprise seemed to clear his mind, though. He lifted his voice to a shout. "They are taking him to the hill for the Seat. Kaia has ordered the Seat for him!"
Other voices picked up the cry and spread it. Now suddenly the crowd began to turn, trying to get away from the temple and toward the hill. Judson was forced along with them, but they were moving north, at least, toward the palace as well as the hill. He put all his failing energies to the task of working sideways, looking for a chance to drop out before they passed the palace.
Somehow, he made it. He had no memory of it, nor of passing out on his bed. But he came to, filthy and torn, some time later. There was no answer when he yelled for a slave. He struggled through a hasty bath and into one of the standard Service uniforms in the closet. Then the silence of the house and the low rumble of sound from the north finally registered, and he looked out.
Kalva was deserted now. The entire populace was at the hill, where Ludh guards with crossbows held a small circle open at the tjjp. In the middle of that, there was a quiet figure. Foi> a inoment, Judson hoped that the tortured man was dead^ until the head moved weakly.
Athon had not saved himself. The judgment was fulfilled.
And in the sky, dark clouds were piling up for one of the periodic storms. Judson gazed at it, beginning to worry again. This was a primitive world, where omens were all-important. A storm now would indicate divine displeasure-it would damn him and Kaia more than all logic or law-more than he could damn himself, perhaps.
It was no time to linger.

He packed hastily, leaving the book and the package for the last. Then he ripped away the wrapping, to study the necklace. The thirty jewels on it were silvery white in the shadows where he held them. They meant a measure of youth again-a wife to give him sons-Earth or any planet he chose. They meant everything he wanted, except peace within himself.

But he had done only what had to be. A man could never stand idly by and see his world ruined, even though the fools in it were bent on riding downhill to perdition. At least in his tune, Earth must retain her dominion.

Lightning flashed, a heavy bolt that crashed down against the roof of the temple. It was natural, since the gold dome was the highest point in the city, but it would be more food for the superstitious. The thunder rolled out, drowning the sound of the rain, and almost covering the footsteps behind him.

He looked around slowly, with no surprise. "It's been a long time, Kleon."

"Too long, Eli," the old voice said. Amazingly, the man looked no older than he had in the village, but there were fatigue and pain hi every movement he made. "Your guards are gone, so I left my beasts and came in."

"Vengeance?" Judson asked.

The head shook slowly. "I still leave anger to others,
Eli. Anyhow, vengeance for what? Meia wanted you. And he-he knew it had to be and brought it on himself. I was only a teacher, not a disciple, though I loved the man. No, I followed you to see you, and to take back word of you to Meia. She still lives hi the village, and still thinks of you."

Judson shook his head. He'd schooled himself to think of her as being dead. But there was nothing 'he could say.

The storm seemed to be thinning out, almost as quickly as it had come. Kleon moved to the windows, staring toward the hill. There were tears in his eyes, but his sigh was one of relief. "It is finished," he said.

He bowed his head and seemed to be quoting. " "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell hi the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. ... For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise and garments rolled hi blood; but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire.' I can't blame you for trying to stop a battle that will not be confined to this world, Eli, though the tune for any man to take action has passed-as even our priestess seems to know, to her sorrow."

"I stopped it once," Judson protested harshly.

Kleon stared at him, surprise on his old face. He glanced at the book on the table, and the surprise deepened. "I wondered, when you didn't return. And yet. How could you fail to get her message and yet have the book all these years, Eli?"

He moved to the thin volume, pulling it open with a cord that day between the pages. Then he hesitated, and picked up the binoculars instead. "Look; Eli. Look carefully, and beneath the surface!"

Judson moved uncertainly to the window, unwilling but unable to resist. He focused on the figure that was still upright. Now, when it should have been dulled in death, the face had picked up a strange strength and nobility, and it seemed to stare at the sky, triumphant and waiting. But it was drawn thin by the hours of suffering, and there was something about the features--the nose, the shape of the chin ...

"No!" It ripped put of Judson, while the binoculars crashed to the floofcn"Ifs impossible! Physically impossible!" iV~;(

Kleon shook his head. "Not to one who had the Power, Eli. She burned herself out in one effort-but she succeeded. Here's the message I brought you from her, thirty years ago."

There was a dark circle around one verse on the page, followed by a thick, heavy exclamation point. Below that Meia's signature was scrawled in English script. Judson bent over the book, focusing on the small, ancient print within the circle.

Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.
His eyes wavered from the page to the sight of the necklace that was to have given him youth again, and a wife-and a son; rejuvenation to give him more years to realize what he had done and to watch what must become of the power his race had won. Years to think- and sometimes to wonder what a too-human woman in a Village on Sayon might be thinking.
He took one last look up the hill, dry-eyed and frozen. Then he turned to follow Kleon out of the empty palace, knowing he could never leave Sayon again. The men turned the corner outside together, climbed silently onto the waiting beasts, and moved slowly north, away from the distant spaceport and the hell that was beginning already in the city.
Night was falling and the city began to gleam with the angry red of growing fires, while the crowds fought back and forth across the streets, howling in sorrow and rage. ...
Behind, the book lay open on the table. Wind came in from the windows, turning the pages slowly to the last chapter of Isaiah. Then a sudden gust blew the book closed.
Vengeance Is Mine
Hate spewed across the galaxy in a high crusade. Metal jfcips leaped from world to world and hurtled across Space to farther and farther stars. Planets surrendered their ores to sky-reaching cities, built around fortress-temples and supported by vast networks of technology. Then more ships were spawned, armed with incredible weapons, and sent forth in the eternal search for an enemy.
In the teeming cities and aboard the questing ships, foul-wrenching music was composed, epic fiction and gupernal poetry were written, and great paintings and tculpture were developed, to be forgotten as later and nobler work was done. Science strove for the ultimate limit of understanding, fought against that limit, aid surged past it to limitless possibilities. But behind all the arts and sciences lay the drive of religion, and the religion was one of ancient anger and dedicated hate.
The ships filled the galaxy until every world was conquered. For a time, they hesitated, preparing for the great leap outward. Then the armadas sailed again, mcross thousands and millions of light-years toward the beckoning galaxies beyond.
With each ship went the holy image of their faith and the unsated and insatiable hunger of their hate ...
• •••/T "' -'• 2
The cattrack labored up the rough road over the crater wall, topped the last rise, and began humming its way down into Eratosthenes. Inside the cab, the driver's seat groaned protestingly as Sam shifted his six hundred terrestrial pounds forward. Coming home was always a good time. He switched lenses in his eyes and began scanning the crater floor for the first sight of the Lunar Base dome.
"You don't have to be quite so all-fired anxious to get back, Sam," Hal Norman complained. But the little selenologist was also' gazing forward eagerly. "You might show a little appreciation for the time I've spent answering your fool questions and trying to pound sense into your tin head. Anybody'd think you didn't like my company."
Sam made the sound of a human chuckle with which he had taught himself to acknowledge all the verbal nonsense men called humor. But truth compelled him to answer seriously. "I like your company very much, Hal."
He had always liked the company of the men he'd met on Earth or during his long years on the Moon. Humans, he had decided long ago, were wonderful. He had enjoyed the extended field trip with Hal Norman; but it would still be good to get back to the dome, where the men had given him the unique privilege of joining them. There he could listen to the often inexplicable but always

fascinating conversation of forty men. And there, perhaps, he could join them in their singing. All the robots had perfect pitch, of course, but only Sam had learned to sing acceptably enough to win a place in the dome.
In anticipation, he began humming a chanty about the sea he had never seen. The cattrack hummed downward between the walls of the road that had been crudely bulldozed from the rubble of the crater. Then
they broke out into the open, and he could see the dome and the territory around it.
Hal grunted in surprise. "That's odd. I hoped the supply rocket would be in. But what are those three ships doing there?"
Sam switched back to wide-angle lenses and stared toward the side. The three ships didn't look like supply rockets. They resembled the old wreck that still stood at the far end of the crater, surrounded by the supply capsules that had been sent on automatic control to keep the stranded crew alive until rescue could be sent. The only other such ships were those used by the third expedition. But they had been parked in orbit around Earth after the end of the third expedition fifty years ago. Once the Base was established, their capacity had no longer been needed and they were inefficient for routine supply and rotation of the men here.
Before he could comment on the ships, the buzzer sounded, indicating that Base had spotted the cattrack. Sam flipped the switch and acknowledged the call.
"Hi, Sam." It was the voice of Dr. Robert Smithers, the leader of Lunar Base.
"Butt out, will you? I want to talk to Hal."
Sam could have tuned hi on the communication frequency with his own receptors, since the signal was strong enough at this distance. But he obeyed the order to avoid listening as Hal reached for the handset. There was no way to detune his audio receptors, however. He heard Hal's greeting. Then there was silence for at least a minute.
The man's face was shocked and serious when he finally spoke again. "But that's damned nonsense, Chief. Earth got over such insanity half a century ago. There hasn't been a sign of ... Yes, sir ... All right, sir. Thanks for not taking off without me."
He hung up the set, shaking his head. When he faced Sam, his expression was unreadable. "Full speed, Sam."
"There's trouble," Sam guessed. He threw the cat-track into its top speed of thirty miles an hour, fighting and straining with the controls. Only a robot could
manage the tricky Machine at such a rate over the crude road, and it require^his full attention.
Hal's voice waV strange and harsh. "We're being sent back to Earth. Big trouble, Sam. But what can you know of war and rumors of war?"
"War was a dangerous form of political insanity, outlawed at the conference of 1998," Sam quoted from a speech that had come over the radio. "Human warfare has now become unthinkable."
"Yeah. Human war." Hal made a rough sound in his throat. "But not inhuman war, it seems. And that's what it will be, if it comes. Oh hell, stop looking so gloomy. It's not your problem."
Sam decided against chuckling this time, though references to his set, unsmiling expression were usually meant to be a form of humor. He filed the puzzling words away in his permanent memory for later consideration.
The terminator was rushing across the lunar surface, and it would soon be night. The crater wall was already casting a shadow over most of the area. But sunlight still reached the Base, and the surrounding territory was in glaring light. The undiffused light splashed out sharply from the rocks. Seeing was hard as they neared the dome, and all Sam's attention had to be directed to his driving. Behind him, he heard Hal getting into the moonsuit to leave the cab.

Sam brought the cattrack to a halt and let Hal out at the entrance to the sealed underground hemisphere of lunar rock that was the true dome. The light upper structure was simply a shield for supplies against the heat of the sun. He drove the machine under that and cut off the motor.

As Sam emerged from the airlock, air gushed out of small cavities of his body. But he felt no discomfort There was only the fault click of a switch inside him to tell him of the change. That switch was simply an emergency measure, designed to turn his power on if there should be a puncture of the dome while he was turned off. It might have been one of the reasons the men liked having him inside, though he hoped there were other explanations. There had been no room in the new robots for such devices.

He saw the Mark Three robots waiting just beyond the entrance as he approached it. There were tracks in the lunar dust leading to the space ships half a mile away. But whatever ferrying they had done was obviously finished, and they were now merely standing in readiness. They were totally unlike him. He was bulky and mechanical, designed only for function hi the early days when men needed help on the Moon. They were almost manlike, under their black enamel, and their size and weight had been pared down to match that of the humans. There had been thirty of them originally, but accidents had left only a few more than twenty. And of the original Mark Ones, only Sam was left.

"When do we leave?" he called to one over the radio circuit.

The black head turned slowly toward him. "We do not know. The men did not tell us."

"Didn't you ask them?" he called. But he had no need of their denial. They had not been told to ask.

They were still unformed, less than five years old, and their thoughts were tied to the education given by the computers in the creche. They lacked twenty years of his intimate association with men. But sometimes he wondered whether they would ever learn enough, or whether they had been too strongly repressed in training. Men seemed to be afraid of robots back on Earth, as Hal Norman had once told him, which was why they were still being used only on the Moon.

He turned away from them and went down the entrance to the inner dome. The entrance led to the great Community room, and the men were gathered there, all wearing moonsuits. They were arguing with Hal as Sam began emerging from the lock, but at sight of him the words were cut off. He stared about hi the silence, feeling suddenly awkward.

"Hello, Sam," Dr. Smithers said finally. He was a tall, spare man of barely thirty, but seven years of re-fponsibility here had etched deep lines into his face and fwt gray in his mustache, though his other hair was still jet black. "All right, Hal. Your things are on the ship. I cut the time prettyjfine waiting for you, so we're leaving at once. No more ffl-guments. Get out there!"

"Go to hell!" Hal told him. "I don't desert my friends."

Other men began moving out. Sam stepped aside to let them pass, but they seemed to avoid looking at him.

Smithers sighed wearily. "Hal, I can't argue this with you. You'll go, if I have to chain you. Do you think I like this? But we're under military orders now. They're going crazy back on Earth. They didn't find out about the expected attack until a week ago, as near as I can learn, but they've already canceled space. Damn it, I can't take Sam! We're at the ragged limit of available lift now, and he represents six hundred pounds of mass-more than four of the others."

Hal gestured sharply toward the outside. "Then leave four of those behind. He's worth more than the whole lot of them."

"Yeah. He is. But my orders specify that all men and the maximum possible number of robots must be returned." Smithers twisted his lips savagely and suddenly turned to face the robot. "Sam, I'll give it to you straight. I can't

take you with us. We have to leave you here alone. I'm sorry, but that's how it has to be."
"You won't be alone, Sam," Hal Norman said. "I'm staying."
Sam stood silently for a moment, letting it register. His circuits found it hard to integrate. He had never thought of being separated from these men who had been his life. Going back to Earth had been easy to accept; he'd gone back there once before. Little hopes and future-pictures that he hadn't known were in his mind began to appear.
But with those came memories of Hal Norman's expressed hopes and dreams. The man had showed Sam a picture of his future wife and tried to describe all that such a creature meant to a man. He'd spoken of green fields and the sea. He'd raved about Earth too often during the days they were together.
Sam moved forward toward Hal. The man saw him
coming and began to back away, but he was no match for the robot. Sam held Hal's arms and closed his moonsuit, then gathered him up carefully. Hal was struggling, but his efforts did no good against Sam's determination.
"All right, Dr. Smithers. We can go now," Sam told the Chief.
They were the last to leave the dome. The little black robots were already marching across the surface, with the men straggling along behind them. Smithers fell into step with Sam, moving as if the burden was on his back instead of in the arms of the robot. Hal had ceased struggling. He lay outwardly quiet; but through the suit, Sam's body receptors picked up sounds that he had heard only twice before on occasions he tried not to remember. They were the sounds of a man attempting to control his weeping.
Halfway to the ship, faint words came over the radio. "Put me down, Sam. I'll go quietly."
The three moved on together. By the time they reached the ship, the others were all aboard. The Chief motioned the younger man up the ramp. For a moment, Hal hesitated. He turned toward Sam, started to make a motion, and then swung away and dashed up the ramp, his shoulders shaking convulsively.
Smithers still stood after the other had disappeared. The radio brought the sound of a sigh, before the man moved. "Thanks, Sam. That was a favor I no longer had the right to ask. And don't tell me it's all right. Nothing's right any more." He sighed again, then smiled faintly. "Remember the books?"
"I won't disturb them," Sam promised. There were a great many microbooks in the dome library, brought hi a few at a time by many men over the long years. They were one of the few taboos; it was against orders for Sam to read any of them. A man had once told him that it was to save him from unnecessary confusion.
Smithers shook his head sharply. "Nonsense. You're going to have a lot of time to kill. The ban is off. Read any or all of them if you like. It's about all I can do for you, but you're entitled to that, at least."
He put a foot oji; the ramp and turned partly away from Sam. Then^biiiptly he swung back.
"Good-by, Sim,** he said thickly. His right hand came out and grasped that of the robot strongly. "Good-by and God bless you!"
A second later, Smithers was hurrying up the ramp. It was drawn in after him, and the great outer seal of the rocket ship began to close.
Sam ran back to the entrance of the dome to avoid the blast. The edge of darkness had touched the dome now, leaving the rockets standing in the last light as he turned to look at them. He watched the takeoff of the three heavily laden ships. They staggered up slowly, carrying the men toward the rendezvous with Earth's orbital station. It wasn't until they were beyond the range of his strongest vision that he turned into the dome. It was silent and empty around him.
He stared at the clock on the wall and at the calendar on which they had marked off the days. He hadn't found how long they would be gone. But

Smithers' words gave a vague answer-he would have a lot of time to kill. That could mean anywhere from one month to most of a year, judging by the application of similar phrases in the past. He looked at the shelves filled with microbooks for a few moments. Then he went outside, to stare through his telephoto lenses at the Earth in the sky above him. There were spots of light in the dark areas that he knew to be the cities of men.

The second day after the takeoff of the ship, Sam was watching the dark area of Earth again when some of the spots of light grew suddenly brighter. New spots of brightness rose and decayed during the hours he watched. They were far brighter than any city should have been. Other spots glowed where no cities had been before. But eventually they all faded. After that, there were no bright areas at all. As Earth turned slowly, he saw that all the cities on Earth were now dark.

It was a mystery for which he had no explanation. He went inside to try the radio that brought news and entertainment from the relay on the orbital station, but no signal was coming through. He debated calling them, but that was reserved for the decision of Smithers, and the Chief was gone.

There was no call on the fifth day, when the men should have reached the station. He knew there was no reason to expect such a call; men were not obligated to report their affairs to a robot. But his brain circuits seemed to be filled with odd future-pictures that 'kept him by the set for long hours after he knew there would be no signal for him.

Finally he got up and went to the music player. They had let him use it at times, and he felt no disloyalty to them as he found a tape that was one of his favorites and threaded it. But when the final chorus of Beethoven's Ninth reached its end, the dome seemed more empty than ever. He found another tape, without voices this time. And that was followed by another. It helped a little, but it was not enough.

It was then that he turned to the books, taking one at random. It was something about Mars, by Edgar Rice Burroughs, and he started to put it back. He had already learned enough about astronomy from the education machine. But at last he threaded it into the micro-reader and sat down to read.

It started well enough, and it was about some strange kind of man, not about astronomy. But then . . .

Sam made a strange sound, only slowly realizing that he had imitated the groan of a man for the first time in his existence. It was all madness! He knew men had never reached Mars-and couldn't reach such a Mars, because the planet was totally unlike what he knew existed. It must be some strange form of human humor. Or else there were men unlike any he had known and facts that had been kept from him. The latter seemed more probable.

He struggled through it, to groan again when it ended and he still didn't know what had happened to the strange female man who was a princess and who laid highly impossible eggs. But by then, he had begun to like John Carter, and he wanted to read more. He was confused-but even more curious than puzzled. Eventually, he found the whole series and read them all.

It was a much;;later book that solved some of the puzzle of it forvhj$0u There was a small note before the book really begaii' THIS is A WORK OF SPECULATIVE FICTION; ANY RESEMBLANCE TO PRESENT-DAY PERSONS
OR EVENTS IS ENTIRELY COINCIDENTAL. He looked Up
fiction in the dictionary he had seen the men use and felt better afterward. It wasn't quite like humor, but it wasn't fact, either. It was a game of some kind, where the rules of life were all changed about in idiosyncratic ways. The writer might pretend that men liked to kill each other or were afraid of women, or some other ridiculous idea; then he tried to imagine what might happen under such conditions. It was obviously taboo to pretend about real people and events, though some of the books had stories that used background and people that had the same names as those in reality.

The best fiction of all sometimes looked like books of fact, if the writer was clever enough. History was mostly like that; there was a whole imaginary world called Rome, for instance. It was fortunate Sam had been taught the simple facts of man's progress by the education machine before he read such books. Men, it was true, had sometimes been violent, but not when they understood all the facts or could help it.

In the end, he evolved a simple classification. If a book made him think hard^and forced him to strain to follow it, it was fact; if it made him read faster and think less as he went through it, it was fiction.

There was one book that was hardest of all to classify. It was an old book, written before men had gone out into space. Yet it was full of carefully documented and related facts about an invasion of flying saucers from far in space. Eventually, he was forced to decide from the internal evidence that it was fact, but it left him disturbed and unhappy.

Hal Norman had referred to inhuman war, and Dr. Smithers had mentioned an attack. Could it be that the strange ships from somewhere had struck at Earth? He remembered the brilliant lights over the cities, so much like the great ray weapons described in some of the fic-
tion about space war. Sometimes there were elements of truth even in fiction. If invaders had come in great ships to fight against Earth, it might take men longer than Sam cared to think of to fight them off.

He went outside to stare at the sky. Earth still showed no sign of cities. They must be blacked out, as they would be if flying saucers were in their skies. He searched the space over the Moon, but he could find no strange craft. Then he went back inside to read through the microbook again.

It was poetry that somehow finally shoved the worry from his mind. He had tried poetry before, and given up, unable to follow it. But this time he made a discovery. He tried reading it aloud, until it began to beat at him and force its rhythm on him. He was reading Swinburne's Hymn of Man, attracted by the title, and suddenly the words and something besides began to sing their way into his deepest mind. He went back over four lines again and again, until they were music, or all that music had tried to say and had failed.

In the grey beginning of years, in the
twilight of things that began, The word of the earth in the ears of the world, was it God? was it man?

Sam went up and down the dome for most of that day, chanting to himself that the word of the earth in the ears of the world was man! Then he turned back to other poetry. None quite equaled that one experience, but most of it stirred his circuits in strange ways. A book of limericks even surprised him twice to the point where he chuckled, without realizing that he had never done that spontaneously before.

There were slightly over four thousand volumes in the little library, including the technical books. He timed them carefully, stretching them by rereading his favorites, until he finished the last at exactly midnight on the eve of the takeoff anniversary.

The next twenty-four hours he spent outside the
dome, watching the Sky and staring at Earth, while his radio receptors scanned all the frequencies. There had been a lot of tim^ already killed. But there was no signal, and no rocket ship blasted down, bringing back the men.

At midnight he gave a sighing sound and went back inside the dome. In the technical section, he unlocked the controls for the atomic generator and turned it down to its lowest idling rate. He came back, turning the now dim lights off as he moved. In the main room, he put his favorite tape on the player and the copy of Swinburne in the microreader. But he did not turn them on. Instead, he dropped his heavy body quietly onto the floor before the entrance, where the men would be sure to see him when they finally returned. Then one hand reached up firmly, and he turned himself off.

3

Sam's eyes looked toward the entrance as consciousness snapped on again. There was no sign of men there. He stood up, staring about the dome, then hastened outside to stare across the floor of the crater. It lay bare, except for the old wrecked rocket ship. Men had not come back.

Inside again, he looked for something that might have fallen and hit his switch. The switch itself was still in the off position, however. And when he turned on the tape player, no sound came. It was confirmation enough. Something had happened to the air in the dome, and his internal switch had gone into operation to turn him on automatically.

A few minutes later, he found the hole. A meteoroid the size of a pea must have hit the surface above. It had struck with enough force to blast a tiny craterlet almost completely through the dome, and internal pressure had done the rest. He secured patching material and began automatically making the repairs. There was still more than enough air in the tanks to fill the dome again.

Sam sighed as the first whisper of sound reached him from the tape player. He flipped his switch back to on position before the rising pressure negated the emergency circuit. He still had to get back to the entrance to resume his vigil. It had simply been bad luck that had aroused him before the men could return.

He moved back through the dome, hardly looking. But his eyes were open, and his mind gradually began to add the evidence. There was no way to tell how long he had been unconscious; he had no feeling of any time. But there was dust over everything-dust that had been disturbed by the outrushing air, but that had still patina-plated itself on metal firmly enough to remain. And some of the metal showed traces of corrosion. That must have taken years!

He stopped abruptly, checking his battery power. The cobalt-platinum cell had been fully charged when he lay down. Now it was at less than half-charge. Such batteries had an extremely slow leakage. Even allowing for residual conductance through his circuits, it would have taken at least thirty years for such a loss!

Thirty years! And the men had not come back.

A groan came to his ears, and he turned quickly. But it had only been his own voice. And now he began shouting. He was still trying to shout hi the airless void as he reached the surface. He caught himself, bracing his back against the dome as his balance circuits reacted to some wild impulse from his brain. Men would never desert him. They had to come back to the Moon to finish their work, and the first thing they would do would be to find him. Men couldn't just leave him there! Only in the wild fiction could that happen, and even there only the postulated evil men would do such a thing. His men would never dream of it!

He stared up at Earth. The dome was in night again, and Earth was a great orb in the sky, glowing blue and white, with touches of brown in a few places. He saw the outline of continents through the cloud cover, and looked for the great city that must lie within the thin darkened area. There should have been lights visible
there, even against the contrast of brighter illumination from the lighted are)^. But there was no sign of the city.

He sighed soundlessly again, and now he felt himself relaxing. The attackers must still be hovering there! The dangerous Ufo-things from space. Men were still embattled and unable to return to him. Thirty years of that for them, and here he was losing balance over what had been only a year of his conscious time!

He faced the worst of possibilities more calmly now. He even forced himself to admit that men might have been so badly crippled by the war that they could not return to him-perhaps not for more time than he could think of. Smithers

had said they were abandoning space, at a time when the attack had not yet come. How long would it take to recover and regain their lost territory?
He went back into the dome, but the radio was silent. Hesitantly, he initiated a call to the orbital station. After half an hour, he gave up. The men there, if men were still there, must be keeping radio silence.
"All right," he said slowly into the silence of the dome. "All right, face it. Men aren't coming back for a robot. Ever!"
It was a speech out of the fiction he had read, rather than out of rationality. But somehow saying it loudly made it easier to face. Men could not come to him. He wasn't that valuable to them.
He shook his head over that, remembering the time he had been taken back to Earth after twenty years out of the creche and on the Moon. The Mark One robots had all been destroyed in the accidents and difficulties of getting the Base established, except for Sam. Supposedly better Mark Two robots were sent to replace them, but those had been beset by some circuit flaws that made them more prone to accident and less useful than the first models. More than a hundred had been sent in all-and none had survived. It was then that they called Sara back to study him.
On Earth, deep in the security-hidden underground robot development workshops, he had been tested in every way they knew to help them in designing the Mark Three robots. And there old Stephen DeMatre had in-
terviewed him for three whole days. At the end of that time, the man who had first introduced him to his work with men had put a hand on his metal shoulder and smiled at him.
"You're unique, Sam," he'd said. "A lucky combination of all the wild guesses we used in making each Mark One individually, as well as some unique conditioning while among that first Base staff. We don't dare duplicate you yet, but some day the circuit control computer is going to want to get your pattern in full for later brains. So take good care of yourself. I'd keep you here, but . . . You take care of yourself, Sam. You hear me?"
Sam had nodded. "Yes, sir. Do you mean you can make other brains exactly like mine?"
"Technically, the control computer can duplicate ypur design," DeMatre had answered. "It won't be just like your brain. Too many random factors in any really advanced mechanical mind unit. But with similar capabilities. That's why you're worth more money than this whole project without you. You're worth quite a few million dollars, and it's up to you to see that valuable property like that isn't destroyed. Right, Sam?"
Sam had agreed and been shipped back to the Moon, along with the first of the Mark Three robots. And maybe his trip to the research center had been of some use, since the new Mark Three models worked as well as their limitations permitted. They were far better than the preceding models.
Maybe he wasn't valuable enough to men for them to come for him now. But by DeMatre's own words, he was one of their most valuable possessions. If it was up to him to see that he wasn't destroyed, then it was up to him also to see that he wasn't lost to men.
If they couldn't come for him, he had to get to them. The question was: How? He couldn't project himself by mind power like John Carter. He had to have a rocket!
With the thought, he went dashing out through the entrance and heading toward the old wreck. It stood exactly as it had after the landing that had ruined it, with half its hull plating ripped off and most of its rocket motors broken. It could never be flown again. Nor could the old supply capsules. They had burned out their tubes in getting here, being of minimum construction. There wasn't even space inside one for him.
Sam considered it, making measurements and doing the hardest thinking of his existence. Without the long study of all the technical manuals of the dome

library, he could never have found an answer. But eventually he nodded.
A motor from the big ship could be fitted to a capsule. The frame would be barely strong enough. But the plating could be removed to lighten the little ship; Sam needed no protection from space, as some of the cargo had required. And the automatic guidance system could be removed to make enough room for him. He could operate it manually, since his reaction and integrating time were faster than that of even the system.
Fuel would be a problem, though there was enough oxygen in the dome storage tanks. It would have to be hydrogen, since he could find rocks from which that could be released by the power of the generator. Fortunately, lunar gravity was easier to escape than that of Earth.
He went back to the dome and found paper and pencil. He was humming softly to himself as he began laying out his plan. It wasn't easy. He might not be skilled enough to pilot the strange craft to the station. And it would take a great deal of time. But Sam was going to the men who wouldn't come to him!
4
It takes experience to turn engineering theory into practice. Almost three years had passed since Sam's awakening before the orbital station swam slowly into view before him. And the erratic takeoff and flight had been one that no human body could have stood. But now he sighted on the huge metal doughnut before him, estimating its orbit carefully. There were only a few gal-
lons of fuel remaining in the tanks behind him, and he had to reach the landing net on the first try.
His first calculations seemed wrong. He glanced down at the huge orb of Earth and flipped sun filters over his eyes. Something was wrong. The station was not holding its bottom pointed exactly at the center of Earth as it should have done; it was turning very slowly, and even its spin was uneven, as if the water used to balance it against wobbling had not been distributed properly. Beside it, the little ferry ship used between station and ships from below was jerking slightly on the silicone-plastic line that held it.
Sam felt an unpleasant stirring in his chest where most of his brain circuits lay. But he forced it down and computed his blast for all the factors. He had learned something of the behavior of his capsule during the minutes of takeoff and the later approach to the station. His fingers moved delicately, and fuel metered out to the cranky little motor.
It was not a perfect match, but he managed to catch himself in the net around the entrance to the hub. He pulled himself free and began scrambling up to the lock as the capsule drifted off. A moment later, he was standing hi the weightlessness of the receiving section. And from the sounds of his feet, there was still air in the station.
He froze motionless as he let himself realize he had made it. Then he began looking for the men who should have seen his approach and be coming to question him.
There was no sound of steps or of any other activity, except for his own movements. Nor was there any light from the bulbs above him. The only illumination was from a thick quartz port that faced the sun.
Sam cut on the lamp built into his chest and began sweeping the sections of the hub with its light. Dust had formed a patina here, too. He sighed softly into the air. Then he moved toward the outer sections, his steps determined.
Halfway down the tube that ran from the hub to the outer hull, Sam stopped and cut off his light. Ahead of him, there was a glow! Lights were still burning! He let out a yell to call the men and began running, adjusting for th^j increasing feeling of weight as he moved outwariSv'Then he was under the bulb. He stared up at it-a single bulb burning among several others that were black, though they were on the same circuit. How long did it take for these bulbs to burn out? Years surely, and probably decades. Yet most of the station was in darkness, though there was still power from the atomic generator.

He found a few other bulbs burning in the outer station, but not many. The great reception and recreation room was empty. Beyond that, the offices were mostly open and vacant. Some held a litter of paper and other stuff, as if someone had gone through carelessly, not bothering to put anything back hi place. The living section with its tiny sleeping cubicles was worse. Some of the rooms were simply bare, but others were in complete disorder. Four showed signs of long occupancy, with the sleeping nets worn almost through and not replaced. But nothing showed how recently they had been left.

He went through another section devoted to station machinery and came to a big room that was apparently now used for storage. Sam had seen a plan of the station in one of the technical books in the dome. He placed this room as one designed as a storage for hydrogen bombs once. But that had been from the precivi-lized days of men, and the bombs had been dismantled and destroyed more than sixty years before.

It was in the hydroponics room that he was forced to face the truth. The plants there had been the means of replacing the oxygen in the air for the men, and now the tanks were dry and the vegetation had been dead so long that only desiccated stalks remained. There could be no men here. He didn't need the sight of the bare food section for confirmation. Some men had stayed here until the food was gone before they left the un-tended plants to die. It must have been many years ago that they had abandoned the station.

Sam shook his head in anger at himself. He should have guessed it when he saw that there were none of the winged rocket ships waiting outside the station. So long
as men were here, they would have kept some means for return to Earth.

The observatory was dark, but there was still power for the electronic telescope. The screen lighted at his touch, showing only empty space. He had to wait nearly two hours before the slow tumble of the station brought Earth into full view.

Most of it was in daylight, and there was only a thin cloud cover. Once a thousand cities could have been scanned plainly from here. When seeing was best, even streams of moving cars could be seen. But now there were no cities and no signs of movement!

Sam emitted a harsh gasping sound as he scanned the continent of North America. He had seen pictures of New York, Chicago, and several other city complexes from this view. Now there was only dark ruin showing where they had been. It came to him with an almost physical shock that perhaps millions of human beings had died in those wrecks of cities.

There were still-smaller towns where he could make out the pattern of houses. But there was no movement, even there.

He cut power from the telescope with an angry flick of his finger, trying to blot the things he had seen from his memory. He moved rapidly away from the observatory, hunting the communications section.

It was in worse shape than most other places. It looked as if some man had deliberately tried to wreck the machinery. A hammer lay tangled in a maze of rum that must once have been the main receiver. There was something that looked like dried blood on a metal cabinet, with a dent that might have fitted a human fist.

The floor was littered with tape that should have held a record of all the communications received and sent, and the drive capstan on the tape player was bent into uselessness. Sam lifted a section of tape and placed it in the slot that gave his face a sad caricature of a mouth. The tape sensors moved into place, and he began scanning the bit of plastic. It was blank, probably wiped of any message by time and the unshielded transformer that was still humming below the control panel.

Most of the tap£ cabinet was empty, and there was nothing on the ^evwlapes within. Sam ripped open drawers, hunting forUorrte evidence. He finally found

a single reel in the top drawer of the main desk. Most of it was a garble of static; stray fields had gotten to it, even through the metal drawer. But towards the end, a few words could barely be picked out from the noise.
". . . shelters far enough from the blast . . . Thought we'd made it ... a starving . . . went mad. Must have been a nerve aerosol, but it didn't settle as . . . Mad. Everywhere. Southern hemisphere, too . . . For God's sake, stay where you . . ."
The noise grew worse then, totally ruining intelligibility. Sam caught bits of what might have been sentences, but they were pure gibberish. Then suddenly a small section of the tape near the hub became almost clear.
The voice was high-pitched now, and overmodulated, as if the words had been too loud to be carried by the transmitter. There was a strange, unpleasant quality that Sam had never heard in a human voice before.
". . . all shiny and bright. But it couldn't fool me. I knew it was one of them! They're all waiting up there, waiting for me to come out. They want to eat my soul. They're clever now, they won't let me see them. But when I turn my back, I can feel ..."
The tape Came to an end.
Sam could make no sense of it, though he replayed it all again in hopes of finding some other clue. He gave up and reached down to shut off the power in the transformer. It was amazing that the wreckage hadn't already blown all the fuses to this section. He groped for the switch and flipped it, just as his eyes spotted something under the transformer shelf.
It was a fountain pen, gold and black enamel. He had seen one like it countless times, and now as he turned it over in his hands, familiar lettering appeared on the barrel: RPS. Those were the initials of Dr. Smithers, and the pen could only have been his. He must have been one of those who had waited in the station. The Moon ships had made it back here, and Smithers had stayed on until the food was gone. Then he must have returned to Earth.
Sam reached out to clear the junk from the desk. He found paper in one of the drawers, and the pen still wrote as he sank into the chair.
There was metal sheet enough in the station, and tools to work it. The frame of the little taxi rocket he had seen outside would have to be modified; a nose and wings would have to be added, together with controls. Sam had studied the details of the upper stages of the rockets that went between the station and Earth, together with accounts of the men who flew the early ones. There had been enough books on all aspects of space hi the dome.
He could never duplicate the winged craft accurately, nor could he be sure he could handle one down through the atmosphere. But in theory, almost any winged craft with a shallow angle of glide could be brought down slowly enough to avoid burning from the friction of the air. At least he was lucky enough to have fuel here; the emergency station tanks were half-filled with the mono-propellant suited for the little motor in the ferry.
Then he swore, using unprofane but colorful words he had learned from a score of historical novels. It would be at least another year before he could hope to complete his work on the craft.

5

Surprisingly, the modified ferry behaved far better than Sam had dared to hope. It heated badly at the first touches of atmosphere, but the temperature remained within the limits he and the craft could stand. He learned slowly to control the descent to a glide neither too shallow for stability nor too steep to avoid overheating. By the time he was down to thirty miles above the surface, he was almost pleased with the way it handled.
He had set his course to reach the underground creche that had been his home at awakening and during the first three years of his education, before they sent
him to the Moonlit was the only home he knew on Earth. 4

"V " • *
Now he saw'ffiai he could never make it. The first fifteen minutes in the upper layers of atmosphere had been at too steep a glide angle, and he could never descend far inland. He might even have trouble reaching the shore at all, he realized; when the clouds thinned, he could see nothing but ocean under him.
He opened the rocket motor behind him gently, letting its thrust raise his speed to the highest his little craft could take at this altitude. But there was too little fuel left to help much. It might have given him an extra twenty miles of glide, but not more.
Sam considered the prospects of landing in the ocean with grim foreboding. He could exist in water for a while, even at fair depths. If he landed near the shore, he might work his way out. But within a limited period of tune, the water would penetrate through his body to some of the vital wiring. Once that was shorted, he would cease to exist.
He came down under the clouds, fighting for every inch of altitude. Then, far ahead, he could see the shore. There were no islands here, so it had to be the mainland. Once there, he could reach the creche in a single day.
He passed over the shoreline at a height of five hundred feet. There was a short stretch of sand, some woods, and then a long expanse of green that must be grass. He eased the control forward, then back again. The little ship came skimming down at two hundred miles an hour. Its skids touched the surface, and it bounded upward. Sam fought the controls to keep it from nosing over. Again it touched, jerking with deceleration. This time it seemed to have struck right. Then a hummock of ground caught against one skid. The craft slithered sideways and flipped over. Sam braced himself as the ship began coming to pieces around him. He pulled himself out, staring at the wreckage. It was a shame that it was ruined, he thought. But it couldn't be made as strong as he was and still glide through the air.
He turned to study the world around him. The grass was knee-high, moving gently in the wind. Beyond it lay woods. Sam had seen only pictures of trees like that before. He moved toward them, noticing the thickness of the underbrush around them. Below them, the dirt was dark and moist. He lifted a pinch to his face, moving his smell receptors forward in his mouth slit. It was a rich smell, richer than the stuff in the hydroponic tanks. He lifted his head to look for the birds he expected, but he could see no sign of them. There were only insects, buzzing and humming.
The sun had already set, he noticed. Yet it was not yet dark. There was a paling of the light, and a soft diffusion. He shook his head. Above him, tiny twinkling spots began to appear. He had read that the stars twinkled, but he had thought it only fiction. He had never been under the open sky of Earth before.
Then a soft murmur of sound reached him. He started away, to be drawn back to it. Slowly he realized it was a sound like the description of that heard near the sea. He had never seen an ocean, either. And now one lay no more than a mile away.
He stumbled through the woods in the growing darkness. For some reason, he was reluctant to turn on his lights. Eventually, he learned to make his way through the brush and around the trees. The sound grew louder as he progressed.
It was dark when he reached the seashore, but there was a hint of faint light to the east. As he watched, it increased. A pale white arc appeared over the horizon and grew to a large circle. The Moon, he realized finally.
The waves rose and fell, booming into surf. And far out across the sea, the Moon seemed to ride on the waves, casting a silver road of light over the water.
Sam had remembered a word. Now for the first tune, he found an understanding

of it. This was Beauty.
He sighed as he heaved himself from the sand and began heading along the shore in search of a road that would take him westward. No wonder men wanted to come back to defend a world where something like this could be seen. ^
The Moon r0"se higher as he moved on, its light now bright enough to give him clear vision. He came over a small rise in the ground and spotted what seemed to be a road beyond it. Beside the road was a house. It was dark and quiet, but he swung aside, going through a copse of woods to reach it and search for any evidence of humanity.
The windows were mostly broken, he saw as he approached. And weeds had grown up around it. There was a detached building beside it that held a small car, by what he could see from the single dusty window. He skirted that and reached the door of the house; it opened at his touch, its hinges protesting rustily. Inside, the moonlight shone through the broken windows on a jumble of furniture that was overturned and tossed about in no order Sam could see. And there were other things-white things that lay sprawled on the floor.
He recognized them from the pictures in the books- skeletons of human beings. Two smaller skeletons were tangled in one corner with their skulls bashed in. A large skeleton lay near them, with the rusty shape of a knife shoved through a scrap of clothing between two ribs. There was a revolver near one hand. Across the room, a skeleton in the tatters of a dress was a jumbled pile of bones, with a small hole in the skull that could have come from a bullet.
Sam backed out of the room. He knew the meaning of another word now. He had seen Madness.
Men had learned to build good machines. The car motor barely turned over after Sam had figured out the controls, but it caught and began running with only a slight sputtering. The tires were slightly soft, but they took the bumps of the rutted little trail. Later, when Sam found a better road, they lasted under the punishment of high speed. Most of the road was clear. There were few vehicles along its way, and most of those seemed to have drifted to the shoulder before they stopped or crashed.
The sun was just rising when Sam located the place where the factory and warehouse had served as a legitimate cover for the secret underground robot project. Fire and weather had left only gutted ruins and rusty things that had once been machines. But the section that housed the creche entrance now stood apart from the rest, almost unharmed.
Sam moved into it and to the metal door openly concealed among other such doors. He should probably not have known the combination, but men were often careless around robots, and he had been curious enough to note and remember the details. He bent to what seemed to be an ornamental grille and called out a series of numbers.
The door seemed to stick a little, but then it moved aside. Beyond lay the elevator,- and that operated smoothly at the combination he punched. Power was still on, at least. There was no light, but the bulbs sprang into Life as he found a switch.
He called out once, but he no longer expected to find men so easily. The place had the feel of abandonment. And while it could have protected its workers from almost anything, there had been only enough food and water stocked here for two weeks. There were a few signs that it had been used for a shelter, but most of it was in good order.
He moved back past offices and laboratories toward the rear. The real creche, with its playrooms and learning devices, was empty, he saw. No robots had been receiving postawakening training. Sam was not surprised. He knew that most of the work here had been devoted to exploring the possibilities of robots, with the actual construction only a necessary sideline. Usually, the brain complexes had been created and tested without bodies, and then extinguished before there had been a full awakening.

He started toward the educator computer out of his old habits. But it was only a machine that had programmed his progress from prepared tapes and memory circuits. It could not help him now.
Beyond the creche lay the heart of the whole affair.
Here the brain complexes were assembled from components according toJfesoteric calculations or to meet previously recordeU'&pecifications. This was work that required a computer that was itself intelligent to some extent. It had to make sense out of the desirable options given it by men and then form the brain paths needed, either during construction or during the initial period before awakening. Everything that Sam had been before awakening had come from this, with only the selection of his characteristics chosen by men. That pattern would still be recorded, along with what the great computer had learned of him during his previous return here.
Sam moved toward the machine, gazing in surprise at the amount of work lying about. There were boxes of robot bodies crammed into every storage space. They could never have been assembled in such numbers here. And beyond lay shelves jammed with the components for the brain complexes. With such quantities, enough robots could be made to supply the Lunar Base needs for generations.
The computer itself was largely hidden far below, but its panel came to life at his touch. It waited.
"This is Robot Twelve, Mark One," Sam said. "You have authorization on file."
The authorization from Dr. DeMatre should have been canceled. But the machine did not switch on alarm circuits. A thin cable of filaments reached out and passed into Sam's mouth slit. It retracted, and the speaker came to life.
"There is authorization. What is wanted?"
"What is the correct date?" Sam asked. Then he grunted as the answer came from the machine's isotope clock. It had been more than thirty-seven years since the men had left the Moon. He shook his head, and the robot bodies caught his attention again. "Why are so many robots being built?"
"Orders were received for one thousand robots trained to fly missiles. Orders were suspended by Director DeMatre. No orders were received for removing parts."
"Do you know what happened to the men?" Sam had little hope of finding an easy answer anymore, but he had to ask.
The machine seemed to hesitate. "Insufficient data. Orders were given by Director DeMatre to monitor broadcasts. Broadcasts were monitored. Analysis is incomplete. Data of doubtful coherence. Requests, for more data were broadcast on all frequencies for six hours. Relevant replies were not received. Request further information if available."
"Never mind," Sam told it. "Can you teach me how to fly a plane?"
"Robot Twelve, Mark One, was awakened with established ability to control all vehicles. Further instructions not possible."
Sam grunted hi amazement. He'd been surprised at how well he had controlled the landing craft and then the car. But it had never occurred to him that such knowledge had been built in.
"All right," he decided. "Start broadcasting again on all the frequencies you can handle. Just ask for answers. If you get any, find where the sender is and record it. If anyone asks who is calling, say you're calling for me and take any message. Tell them I'll be back here in one month." He started to turn away, then remembered. "Finished for now."
The machine darkened. Sam headed out to find a field somewhere that might still have an operable plane. But he was already beginning to suspect what he would find on this travesty of Earth.

6

Grass grew and flowers bloomed. Ants built nests and crickets chirped in the soft summer night. The seas swarmed with marine life of most kinds. And reptiles sunned themselves on rocks, or retired to their holes when the sun

was too hot. But on all Earth, no warmblooded animal could be found.
The Earth of man was without form and void. The
cities were slag heaps from which radioactivity still radiated. No fires buftied on the hearthstones of the most isolated houses^ -The villages were usually burned, sometimes apparently by accident, but often as if they had been fired deliberately by their owners.
The Moon was a thing of glory over Lake Michigan. It was the only glorious thing for six hundred miles. Four returned winged rockets rested on a field hi Florida, but there was no sign of what had become of the men who rode down from the station in them. One winged craft stood forlornly outside Denver, and there was a scrawl in crayon inside its port that spelled the worst obscenity in the English language.
There was a library still standing in Phoenix, and the last newspaper had the dateline of the day when Sam had seen the lights brighten over the cities of Earth. There was no news beyond that of purely local importance. Most of the front page was occupied by a large box which advised readers that the government had taken over all radio communications during the crisis and would broadcast significant news on the hour. The paper was cooperating with the government in making such news available by broadcast only. The same box appeared in the nine preceding issues. Before that, the major news seemed to involve a political campaign in United South Africa.
Other scattered small libraries had differently named papers that were no different. Yet the only clue was in one of those libraries. It was a piece of paper resting under the finger bones of a skeleton that was scattered before bound copies of a technical journal. The paper was covered with doodles and stained in what might have been blood. But the words were legible:
"Lesson for the day. Assign to all students. Politics: They could not win and that is obvious. Chemistry: Their nerve gas was similar to one we tested in small quantities. It seemed safe. Yet when they dropped it over us in both Northern and Southern hemispheres, it did not settle out as the test batches had done. Practice: Such aerosols can be tested only in massive quantities. Medicine: Janice was in the shelter with me three
I
weeks, yet there was still enough in the air to make her die in the ecstasy of a theophany. Meteorology: The wind patterns have been known for years. In three weeks, they reach all the Earth. Psychology: I am mad. But my madness is that I am become only cold logic without a soul. Therefore, I must kill myself. Religion: Nothing matters. I am mad. God is-" That was all.
7
The creche was still the same, of course. Sam sat before the entrance, staring at the Moon that was rising over the horizon. It was a full Moon again, and there was beauty to it, even here. But he was only vaguely aware of that. Below him, the great computer was busily integrating the mass of tiny details he had gathered together with all of the millions of facts it knew. That job took time, even for such a machine.
Now it called him over the radio frequencies, as he had ordered it to do earlier hi the day. He issued the formal command for it to go ahead.
"All data correlated," it announced. "None was found fully coherent with previous data. Degree of relevancy approaches zero. Data insufficient for conclusion."
He grunted to himself and put the machine back on stand-by. He had expected little else. He had known there was too little material for a logical conclusion.
But his own conclusion had been drawn already. Now he sat under the light of the Moon, staring up at the sky, and there was a coldness in his brain complex that seemed deeper than the reaches of space.
They had come from somewhere out there, he thought bitterly. They had appeared

more than a century before and snooped and sniffed at Earth, only to leave. Now they had come back, giving Earth only a week's warning as they approached. They had struck all Earth with glowing bombs or radiation that ruined the cities of men. And when men had still survived, they resorted to a deadly mist of insanity. "They dropped it over us," the npie had said. And the wonderful race Sam had knoi#a'Bad died in madness, usually of some destructive kind.

There had not even been a purpose to it. The Invaders hadn't wanted the Earth for themselves. They had simply come and slaughtered, to depart as senselessly as they had departed before.

Sam beat his fists against his leg so that the metal clanged through the night. Then he lifted his other fist toward the stars and shook it.

It was wrong that they should get away. They had come with fire and pestilence, and they should be found and met with all that they had meted out to mankind. He had supposed that evil was something found only hi fiction. But now evil had come. It should be met as it was usually met in fiction. It should be wiped from the universe in a suffering as great as it had afflicted. But such justice was apparently the one great lie of fiction.

He beat his fists against his legs again and shouted at the Moon, but there was no relief for what was in him.

Then his ears picked up a new sound and he stopped all motion to listen. It came again, weakly and from far away.

"Help!"

He shouted back audibly and by radio and was on his feet, running toward the sound. His feet crashed through the brush and he leaped over the rubble, making no effort to find the easy path. As he stopped to listen again, he heard the sound, directly ahead, but even weaker. A minute later he almost stumbled over the caller.

It was a robot. Once it had been slim and neat, covered with black enamel. Now it was bent and the bare metal was exposed. But it was still a Mark Three. It lay without motion, only a whisper coming from its speaker.

Sam felt disappointment strike through all his brain complex, but he bent over the prone figure, testing quickly. The trouble was power failure, he saw at once. He ripped a spare battery from the pack he had been carrying on his search and slammed it quickly into place, replacing the corroded one that had been there.

The little robot sat up and began trying to get to its feet. Sam reached out a helping hand, staring down at the worn, battered legs that seemed beyond any hope of functioning.

"You need help," he admitted. "You need a whole new body. Well, there are a thousand new ones below waiting for you. What's your number?"

It had to be one of the robots from the Moon. There had never been any others permitted on Earth.

The robot teetered for a moment, then seemed to gain some mastery over its legs. "They called me Joe. Thank you, Sam. I was afraid I couldn't reach you. I heard your radio signal from here almost a month ago, but it was such a long way. And my radio transmitter was broken soon after we landed. But hurry. We can't waste time here."

"We'll hurry. But that way." Sam pointed to the creche entrance.

Joe shook his head, making a creaking, horrible sound of it. "No, Sam. He can't wait. I think he's dying! He was sick when I heard your call, but he insisted I bring him here. He-"

"You mean dying? There's a man with you?"

Joe nodded jerkily and pointed. Sam scooped the h'ght figure up in his arms. Even on Earth, it was no great load for his larger body, and they could make much better tune than by letting the other try to run. Hal, he thought. Hal had been the youngest. Hal would be only fifty-nine, or something like that.

That wasn't too old for a man, from what they had told him.
He flicked his lights on, unable to maintain full speed by the moonlight. The pointing finger of the other robot guided him down the slope and to a worn, weed-covered trail. They had already come more than five miles from the entrance to the creche.
"He ordered me to leave him and go ahead alone," Joe explained. "Sometimes now it is hard to know whether he means anything he says, but this was a true order."
"You'd have been wiser to stick to your car and drive all the way withyhinf," Sam suggested. He was forcing his way throufh-aitangle of underbrush, wondering how much farther they had to go.
"There was no car," Joe said. "I can't drive one now-my arms sometimes stop working, and it would be dangerous. I found a little wagon and dragged him behind me on that until we got here."
Sam took his eyes off the trail to stare at the battered legs. Joe had developed a great deal since the days on the Moon. Time, experience, and the company of men had shaped the robot far beyond what Sam remembered.
Then they were in a little hollow beside a brook, and there was a small tent pitched beside a cart. Sam released Joe and headed for the shelter. Moonlight broke through the trees and fell on the drawn suffering of a human face just inside the tent.
It took long study to find familiar features. At first nothing seemed right. Then Sam traced out the jawline under the long beard and gasped in recognition. "Dr. Smithers!"
"Hello, Sam." The eyes opened slowly, and a pain-racked smile stretched the lips briefly. "I was just dreaming about you. Thought you and Hal got lost in a crater. Better go shine up now. We'll want you to sing for us tonight. You're a good man, Sam, even if you are a robot. But you stay away too long out on those field trips."
Sam sighed softly. This was another reality he could recognize only from fiction. But he nodded. "Yes, Chief. It's all right now."
He began singing softly, the song about a Lady Greensleeves. A smile flickered over Smithers' lips again, and the eyes closed.
Then abruptly they opened again, and Smithers tried to sit up. "Sam! You really are Sam! How'd you get here?"
Joe had been fussing over a little fire, drawing supplies from the cart. Now the robot hobbled up with a bowl of some broth and began trying to feed the man.
Smithers swallowed a few mouthfuls dutifully, but his eyes remained on Sam. And he nodded as he heard the summary of the long struggle back to Earth. But when Sam told of the landing, he slumped back onto his pad.
"I'm glad you made it. Glad I got a chance to see you again before I give up the last ghost on Earth. I couldn't figure that radio signal Joe heard. Knew it couldn't be a human, and never thought of your making it here. B'ut now seeing you makes the whole trip worthwhile."
He closed his eyes, but the weak voice went on. "Hal and Randy and Pete-they're gone now, Sam. We waited up in the station three years, guessing what was going on here. Then we came down and tried to find somebody-some women-to start the race over. But there aren't any left. We covered every continent for twenty years. Pete suicided. The robots got busted, except for Joe. Then we came back here. And now I'm the last one. The last man on Earth, Sam. So I hear a knock on the door, and it's you! It's a better ending for the story than I hoped for."
He slept fitfully after that, though Sam could hear him moan at times. It was cancer, according to what he had told Joe, and there was no hope. Somehow, Joe had located a place where there were drugs to ease the pain a little, and that was all the help they could give.

Joe told Sam a little more of the long search the men had made. It had been thorough. And they had found no trace of another living human being. The nerve gas had produced eventual death by nerve damage, as well as the initial insanity.
"Who?" Sam asked bitterly. "What race could do this?"
Joe made a gesture of uncertainty. "They talked about that. Mr. Norman told me about it, too. He explained that men killed each other off. One side attacked this side, and then our side had to hit back, until nobody was left. But I don't understand it."
"Do you believe it?"
"No," Joe answered. "Mr. Norman was always saying a lot of things I found he didn't really mean. And no man would do anything like that."
Sam nodded, and began explaining his theories. At first Joe was doubtful Then the little robot seemed to be convinced.^ dredged up small confirming bits of information from the long years of the search. They weren't important by themselves, but a few seemed to add to the total picture. A sign cursing the "sky devils" in Borneo, and a torn bit of a sermon found in Louisiana.
Twice during the long night Smithers awakened, but he was irrational. Sam soothed him and sang to him, while Joe tried to give him nourishment that was loaded with morphine. Sam knew little about human sickness, beyond the two medical books he had read. But even he could see that the man was near death. The pulse was thready, and the breathing seemed too much effort for the worn body.
In the morning, however, the sun wakened Smithers again, and this time he was rational. He managed a smile. "Man goeth to his long home, and the mourners won't go about the streets this time. There won't be any mourners."
"There will be two," Sam told him.
"Yeah." Smithers thought it over and nodded. "That's good, somehow. A man hates not being missed. I guess you two will have to take on all the debts of the human race now."
His breath caught sharply in his throat, and he retched weakly. But he forced himself up on his elbows and looked out through the flap of the tent toward the hills that showed through the shrubbery and the blue of the sky beyond.
"There are a lot of debts and a lot of broken promises, Sam, Joe," he said. "We promised to achieve some great things in the future, to conquer the stars, and even to make a better universe out of it. And we failed. We're finished. Man dies, and the universe won't even know he's gone."
"Sam and I will know," Joe said softly.
Smithers dropped back onto the pad. "Yeah. That helps. And I guess there must have been some good in
our existence-there had to be, if we could make two people like you. God, I'm tired!"
He closed his eyes. A few minutes later, Sam knew he was dead. The two robots waited to be sure, and then wrapped the body in the tent and buried it, while Sam recited the scraps of burial service he had picked up from his reading.
Sam sat down then where Smithers had died, staring at the world where no man lived or would ever live again. And the knot in his brain complex grew stronger and colder. He could not see the stars in the light of the day. But he knew they were there. And somewhere out there was the debt Smithers had given him-a debt of justice that had to be paid.
Anger and hate grew slowly in him, rising until he could no longer contain them. His radio message was almost a scream as he roused the computer.
"Can you make a thousand robots out of the material waiting? And can you model half of them after my brain as it is now and half after another robot I'll bring you to study, but without the limits you put on it before?"
"Such a program is feasible," the machine answered.
They wouldn't be just like him, Sam realized. De-Matre had said there was a

random factor. But they would do. The first thousand could find material for more, and those for still more. There would be robots enough to study all the books men had left, and to begin the long trip out into space.
This time, there would be more than a tape education for them. Sam would be there to tell them the story of Man, the glory of the race, and the savage treachery that had robbed the universe of that race. They would learn that the universe held an enemy-a technological, warlike enemy that must be exterminated to the last individual.
They would comb the entire galaxy for that enemy if they had to. And someday, mankind's debt of justice would be paid. Man would be avenged.
Sam looked up at the sky and foreswore all robots for all tune to that debt of vengeance.
8
Hate spewed across the universe in a high crusade. Metal ships leaped from star to star and hurtled across the immensities to farther and farther galaxies. The ships spawned incessantly, and with each went the holy image of their faith and the unsated and insatiable hunger of their hate.
A thousand stars yielded intelligent races, but all were either nontechnical or peaceful. The great ships dropped onto their worlds and went away again, leaving a thousand peoples throughout the galaxies fitted with gratitude and paying homage to the incredibly beautiful images of the supernal being called Man. But still the quest went on.
In a great temple-palace on the capital world of the Andromeda Galaxy, Sam's seventeenth body stared down at the evidence piled onto a table, and then across at the other robot, the scientist who had just returned from the ancient mother world of Earth, incredible light-years away. He stirred the evidence there with a graceful finger.
"That is how the human race died?" he asked again. "You are quite sure?"
The young robot nodded. "Quite sure. Even with modern methods and a hundred million workers, it took fifty years to gather all this on Earth. It has been so badly scattered that most was lost or ruined. But no truth from the past can be completely concealed. Man died as I have shown you, not as our legends tell us. There is no enemy now. Man was his own enemy. His were the ships that destroyed his people. He was the race we are sworn to exterminate."
Sam moved slowly to the window. Outside it was summer, and the trees were in bloom, competing with the bright plumage of the birds from Deneb. The gardens were a poem of color. He bent forward, sniffing the blended fragrance of the blossoms. Strains of music came from the great Hall of Art that lifted its fairy beauty across the park. It was the eighth opus of the
!
greatest robot composer-an early work, but still magnificent.
He leaned farther out. Below, the throng of laughing people in the park looked up at him and cheered. There were a dozen races there, mingled with the majority of Ms people. He smiled and lifted his hand to them, then bent farther out of the window, until he could just .see the great statue of Man that reared heavenward over the central part of the temple palace. He bent his fingers in a ritualistic sign and inclined his head before drawing back from the window.
"How many know of this besides you, Robert?" he asked.
"None. It was gathered in too small fragments, until I assembled it. Then I left Earth at once to show it to you."
Sam smiled at him. "Your work was well done, and I'll find a way to reward you properly. But now I suggest you burn all this."
"Burn it!" Robert's voice rose in a shriek of outrage. "Burn it and shackle our race to superstition forever? We've let a cult of vengeance shape our entire lives. This is our heritage-our chance to be free of Man and to be ourselves."

Sam ran his finger through the evidence again, and there was pity in his mind for the scientist, but more for the strange race whose true nature had just been revealed to him after all the millennia he had known.

Man had missed owning the universe by so little. But the fates of the universe had conspired against him. He had failed, but in dying he had given a part of his soul to another race that had been created supine and cringing. Man had somehow passed the anger of his soul on to his true children, the robots. And with that anger as a goad, they had carried on, as if there had been no hiatus.

Anger had carried them to the stars, and "hatred had bridged the spaces between the galaxies. The robots had owned no heritage. They were a created race with no background, designed only to serve. But men had left them a richer heritage than most races could ever earn.

Sam shook his head faintly. "No, Robert. False or not, vengeance Y^our heritage. Burn the evidence."

Most of t^e'material was tinder dry, and it caught fire at the first spark. For a few seconds, it was a seething pillar of flame. Then there was only a dark scar on the wood to show the true death of Man.

Author's Afterword

MEMORY is AN artist, not a historian. Old scenes are never seen with the unchanging eye of the camera. Rather they are painted over, refurbished, given style and composition, sometimes highlighted, often obscured. Many become palimpsests. And perhaps it is better so.

Thus Harlan Ellison remembers a kindness far greater than I could ever have done him with my rough red-penciling of his manuscript. My old friend Frederik Pohl paints my being called the Magnificent as a tribute, rather than the jeering sarcasm meant when first applied. And he quotes a prophecy by adding depth to a few words-not quite what was really written. His artist memory has made a far better tale than truth would offer.

My memory plays similar tricks, of course. In 1969, when Sam Moskowitz mentioned that I'd named Armstrong as first on the Moon, I had to look through my books to realize it was-more or less-true. But then as time passed, I added my own color, until I began to believe that I'd indeed written the opening lines of Rocket Jockey about as Pohl quoted. But alas, when I checked his quotation, the printed page remained unswayed by memory: "When Major Armstrong landed on the moon in 1964 . . ." Only that, and nothing more.

The year was wrong-though if Wernher von Braun had been given the .chance, it might not have been. Armstrong was. ^t a major, though my belief when writing the noVel \1952) that the missions would be backed by the military proved correct. And while I meant this as the first trip to the Moon, I failed to say so. All that remains is the name-and I can't remember why I chose that.

So much for prophecy-which has never been the business of science fiction, anyhow. We tell of all possible futures, not of what will be.

And so much for memory, on which I must draw, across the veil of forty years, for recollections concerning the stories in this collection. What I say about them must be taken as the thoughts of a man writing of his favorite children-since brain children are enshrined hi the heart almost as tenderly as are real offspring.

Best beloved of all-since I do have favorites-is "Helen O'Loy." This was the second story I sold, proving I was not a one-story author. It came easily, taking up only one pleasant afternoon of work and needing almost no rewriting; hi fact, even the first paragraph came without effort, which is unusual for me. And out in the world, Helen has always brought me more than I could expect. After almost forty years, she still earns more than a dozen times annually what I was paid for her initial appearance, which indicates others also share my love for her. Her spirit remains unquenched, and I am well-

pleased with the lady, to say the least.
In those days of long ago, any sale to John W. Campbell was something of a triumph. His magazines were considered tops in the field, and he was gathering a stable of writers who have remained leaders down to the present. In my opinion then and now, he was one of the three greatest magazine editors of all time. I wrote as much for his approval as for payment; and I rarely thought of submitting my work to anyone else. To be considered one of his regulars was the ultimate achievement.
Thus when he chose me to receive two of the ideas he thought might be turned into stories, it was something like being knighted by the king. (Campbell was responsible for many more stories, by me and by other writers. And he taught us all much of what we eventually learned of writing. With or without suggestions, his letters were as real a reward for writing as were his checks.)
Those two first ideas from him appear here as "The Day Is Done" and "The Coppersmith." Both developed easily from the sentence-or-two description of the idea Campbell sent, but I worked far harder over these two than I would have done over stories derived from my own ideas. Perhaps the care spent on them is responsible for the fact that I still place them high on my list of favorites.
Years after "The Day Is Done" was published, Isaac Asimov told me of first reading the story on a subway and breaking into tears, greatly to his embarrassment. Of course, Isaac was very young then, and his reaction was only what I had probably desired. But Isaac and I had by then developed friendly verbal byplay into a quest for one-upmanship over one another. So I used his story against him to further his embarrassment, disregarding his usual feeble retorts.
Finally, he saw a chance to get even. He included the story in an anthology, Where Do We Go from Here?- then followed it with a discussion, pointing out that the story was scientifically invalid, since I'd used the hoary idea that Neanderthaler man couldn't speak, whereas real science no longer believed that. (Actually, I never indicated Hwoogh couldn't speak; I straddled the issue by not having him speak to Cro-Magnon man.)
One week after Isaac's book was published, The New York Times printed an article in which a real scientist explained that new evidence indicated Neanderthaler could not speak! Naturally, I immediately called Isaac on the phone to ask whether he'd seen the Times that day. Sadly, he answered: "I saw it. I was just hoping you hadn't seen it."
• I suspect he cried a little while reading the article. If so, he's never admitted it.
"Hereafter, Inc." comes from another idea suggested by Campbell. As a matter of fact, he suggested the same
basic idea to several goiters, all of whom wrote quite different stories^ B| my case, it took a couple of years before the story came into focus. When I delivered it, he approved, but obviously didn't notice that the idea was really his. I pointed that out, and he smiled. "That's probably why I bought it," he told me. "You made it your own."
"The Wings of Night" was my own idea, but it stemmed from something that occurred to me when creating the old Neanderthaler in "The Day Is Done." Somehow, there is an automatic element of drama and strong feeling attached to the last of a kind, or sometimes the first. I had played with the idea of the last man in the Moon for a couple of years. Then one day, the plot came to mind and began to nag at me. I was busy with other rush work, but I had to sit down and write the story. Strange-I can't remember now what really important work I abandoned to write this story for which I didn't need money at the time. But the tale remains, far more important to me now than when I wrote it.
"Into Thy Hands" was hardly a joy to write. The idea was one I liked-that

machines, no doubt including thinking machines, are very literal "minded." (Computer men can assure you of that from much experience.) But the story was meant to be a long novelette, and Campbell was short of space. With great effort, I replotted it from twenty to eleven thousand words-and Campbell told me it had to be no longer than seven thousand! I learned a great deal about writing and story-telling as I sweated it down to length. And today, I'm delighted that market necessities forced me to sharpen its point, to turn a so-so novelette into a much better short story. Ever so often, the ill luck of early days becomes the memory of bright fortune later.

The second story I ever wrote, after selling the first one, was "And It Comes Out Here." It amuses me now to see science fiction discovering "experimentation" and trying to write in present tense-necessarily badly most of the tune, when there is no reason for the breaking of custom. Forty years ago, flushed with the success of a
single sale, I sat down brashly to construct a story that had to be told in second person and in future tense- altered to present tense to simplify, with the future understood.

Campbell rejected the story-not for the method of Celling, which he didn't mind back in those "pulp writing" days, but because it went round and round and never came out of its circle. So it languished for a dozen years, with the original manuscript lost in the meantime. Then a discovery of notes and samples from my preliminary work enabled me to write it again, certainly almost exactly as it had been written at first. I'm glad the story eventually found a market in one of the magazines that had finally appeared to rival Campbell's hi prestige. By then, the endless circle story had been done a number of times, so the idea no longer had the same novelty; but I hope and believe the story can stand on its own without the need of such novelty, which is never a substitute for story-telling.

"The Monster" was written one night as warm-up exercise for a novelette that was overdue. It was intended for a fly-by-night mystery magazine that wanted to experiment with some science fiction. By the time the story was received, the night had passed and the magazine had flown out of existence. That was my good fortune, since the story then sold to a "slick" market that paid ten times as much and gave the tale a much better showcase.

Back in 1950, there was a big flap hi science fiction over something called Dianetics, which I rather vigorously opposed as being handiman psychotherapy without a trained therapist, but with all kinds of wild claims. John Campbell was one of the advocates of the so-called "science of the mind," and word soon reached me that he resented my stand and would never buy another story of mine.

I knew him better than that, but I wanted proof. I had written a short story called "The Years Draw Nigh" rather hastily. So I dug it out, thought about it as I could then only think when aiming a story at Campbell, and rewrote it as it should have been in the first place. I
also had an idea about jsome robots (and in case no one has noticed, I :Jc"S| robots and have written a great many stories about' them) which I wrote up as "Instinct."

I took both stories in to Campbell. We barely mentioned Dianetics, had a pleasant lunch together, and talked. It had been a couple of years since we'd gotten together, but nothing had changed. Campbell bought both stories at his maximum rate. But for a year after that, I was still being told he was through with me.

"Superstition" and "For I Am a Jealous People" are also connected, in a way. Frederik Pohl was putting together an original anthology for Ballantine Books called Star Short Novels and felt he had to have one outstanding novel with which to end the book. He came to me, and I wrote "Superstition" for him, figuring that the idea of total superstition being absolute fact was a good

one. But the story wasn't strong enough for him. (Campbell bought it almost instantly.) He wanted a controversial story.

Well, I'd had an idea for a long time that couldn't have been sold to any magazine at the time. And I was pretty sure Pohl wouldn't take it, either, since it involved setting the God of the Bible-at least the Old Testament-against man. I made the idea sound as controversial as I could in outlining it-and he simply said, "Write it." So the story that I never expected to write got on paper.

Actually, "Jealous People" is one of the few stories that grew from some of my own philosophy, instead of being pure story. I'd speculated on the responsibility of a man who served both God and Mankind, and who found them in violent opposition. To me, the answer was obvious. So was the result. But for that, I had to put my real ending in a "quotation" from a spurious book of the Bible as a heading for the last chapter.

"Superstition," incidentally, is one of the few far-future, far-space stories I've written. To me, the real drama of a story lies within the characters, and the reality must lie within some reasonable distance of what we know. Beyond that distance, chaos rises to remove the order from drama.

"The Keepers of the House" was a trick story-one without any real surface plot or truly sentient character. I wrote it on a wager to prove that Campbell couldn't be fooled by writing skill-and he rightly rejected it as having no plot. But so much went into making the trick work that I've always felt the final story conveyed far more than if I'd given all the plot and background behind it-which I do know in great detail, incidentally.

"Little Jimmy" was the result of a different kind of challenge. Tony Boucher was a fine editor, who had a stronger requirement for literary flavor than other magazine editors. I'd never sold him anything-nor, in fact, written anything for him. But finally I decided I would and could write something he couldn't resist. So I took a simple idea and wrote it up in the style I'd previously used under a pen-name to sell a few slick stories. I wound up very pleased with the result, as was Boucher. I probably should have written others for him, but I never did.

As to "The Seat of Judgment," it came about as a result of spending too much tune at the bar with Robert Mills, while he was an editor of Venture, a short-lived but excellent magazine. He kept demanding a story when I didn't really want to do one. Finally, I picked a verse from the Bible and told him I'd only write a story around it, which I knew wasn't what he wanted. But he bought the story on the spot, and I had to write it- much to my pleasure, as it turned out. There's a bitter and rather blasphemous ending to the story-beyond the words I've written-which is clearly possible and perhaps can be guessed by anyone who cares to think about it.

And finally, there's "Vengeance is Mine." It came to be written as many stories were-I needed some money. I wanted to go to a Science Fiction Convention, but didn't have the cash on hand; and for such things, I always insisted on having money I could safely spare. So Fred Pohl agreed to get me quick payment, and I wrote the story pretty much overnight. As happens with most of the stories I like best in retrospect, this one came very easily, ft But behind if; "ol course, lay ideas which were important enough to me to add to my feeling for the story. I've studied a lot of history, and I never saw that the so-called positive emotions and ideas ever accomplished more than the "negative" ones. Love did very little for mankind throughout history; and while hate and envy and rage produced much to deplore, often the muse of history could bend such motives to shape the course of advancement and good. God, if you like, can use the Adversary-and usually does.

Judgment, like memory, is prone to color personal things hi ways which may not always stand the test of reality. And these are only the stories which I judge to be my best-for whatever best that may be.

But though there are many others I like (and many I wish I had never written), I am willing to be judged by the ones I have selected for this collection. Look on my works-and I hope you don't despair!
Lester del Rey New York City March, 1978