THEY CAME FROM OUTER SPACE

JIM WYNORSKI (editor)

It takes some of the better-known science-fiction movies (some of them so bad that it might be better if they never had surfaced, some so good that you will wish, even if the movie can no longer be had, to watch it) and gives you the stories upon which these movies were based.

After each story is a full credit run for the screened movie, including actors, special effects people, director, camera personnel, etc. Required reading for movie buffs, old and young.

DOUBLEDAY & COMPANY, INC.

Garden CiTy,New York

 ISBN: 0-385-18502-2

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 80-2249

To HARLAN ELLISON, who started it all!

Thank you.

FOR AID, SUPPORT AND COMFORT, A SPECIAL THANKS TO: Terry and Bill Wynorski, Esther and Andrew Varga, Forrest J Ackerman, Ellen Asher, Marlene Connor, Mark McGee, Ron “The Collector” Borst, Mark Frank, R.

J. Robertson, Denetia Arellanes, L. Q. Jones and Dr. Paul Johnston.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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THETURKEY THAT ATTACKEDNEW YORK

an introduction by RAY BRADBURY

EVERYONE KNOWS how you make a pearl: feed a grain of sand to an oyster and hope the oyster gets wondrously ill.

Everyone thinks they know how to make a motion picture: feed the right story into aHollywood dream factory and hope for similar, oyster results.

Easier said than done, as can be witnessed by reading the stories in this collection, then sitting in a dark theater for days, viewing the calamities—and sometimes the beauties—that came from ingesting ideas and cranking them through a camera. A few pearls here and there, but, more often than not, as in the case of The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms, the camera swallowed the dinosaur and birthed a titmouse.

More of my very personal reactions later.

Why am I up front here writing about these stories and the films that arose from same? In many cases I read these stories years ago when they were first published. I knew some of the authors well. I have seen most of the films, many of them a half dozen times. I have been at the premiere performance of at least four of the films included here.

But long before that my cinema training began with a maniac mother who had to be dragged from silent movie theaters, after late matinees, by a hungry husband or a son sent to fetch mama home. More often than not the son forgot why he had come and stayed with mom for one more rerun.

During those hideaway hours I fell in love with the hideous beauties created by Lon Chaney and the brontosaurs in The Lost World who fell off cliffs and landed on me. When Nemo's submarine, run by Lionel Barrymore, surfaced in MGM's The Mysterious Island, I surfaced with it and read Jules Verne the next day. When the futuristic dirigible in Fox Films Just Imagine sailed overManhattan , I was up there in it. In 1935, when Cabal in Things to Come told me to head for the stars, I listened, I flew.

Why is it important to put together a collection like this one? First off, to show how material from one medium can cross-pollinate another.

Then, quite often there is the shock when one discovers that the original story was better than the film that grew from it. Finally you realize that in many instances you could remake the story as a new film, base it more closely on the original story, and wind up with a motion picture that would hardly resemble the first cinema version.

"Who Goes There?" by John W. Campbell, Jr., is a fine case in point.

Someone really ought to reread this story and then go make a proper film based onCampbell 's evocative concept. The Thing, popular as it was, finally wasn't quite good enough, was it?

Similarly, there are rumors that Twentieth Century-Fox may make a sequel to The Day the Earth Stood Still. If they do, they would be wise to reread Harry Bates's "Farewell to the Master" before doing so.

They might well decide to stuff his pages directly into the camera.

The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms is probably the worst of the lot. My story, from which it was supposedly drawn, actually appears for only a few minutes in mid-film and then mercifully vanishes.

How, you ask, did this come about? Why did I let the producer/ director ruin my tale? The facts are simple enough—and fairly amusing.

Ray Harryhausen, the animator of the prehistoric beast in The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms, grew up in Los Angeles, where we met in 1937, and talked about nothing but dinosaurs. Our dream was to make a film together one day, I to write it, Ray to animate the lovely creatures.

In early 1952 I got a telephone call from aHollywood producer asking me to come by to look at the

script of a dinosaur film he was making, with Ray Harryhausen as animation expert in charge. I dropped in, read the script in an hour, and was then asked if I would revise the script.

"Maybe," I said. "And, incidentally," I added, "this film story bears

a slight resemblance to a tale of mine called 'The Beast from 20,000

Fathoms' that appeared in the Saturday Evening Post a few years before."

The producer's face turned to cheese. He swallowed, we exchanged a few more words, and we both staggered away from each other. Outside, I burst into a shout of laughter. Unwittingly, the people connected with this epic had borrowed a concept from my Post story, written it into their script, forgotten where the idea came from, and summoned the original author to revise it!

There was no trouble, no recriminations, no accusations. The next

afternoon a cablegram arrived from the production company asking for

permission to purchase the rights to my "The Beast from 20,000

Fathoms."

The purchase was allowed and the film made. Those of you who have seen it know that it wasn't much of a film. All the good things are Harryhausen's.

When the dinosaur is on camera, things are fine, thank you. When the action stops and the talk begins, children—the best critics—run up and down the aisles to he rest rooms.

So the film didn't so much as flake one barnacle off my Post story.

Someday it'll be made over—and made right.

There's a happier ending here, I must add. John Huston read "The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms," thought he sensed the ghost of Melville in it (though I had never read Melville until after I met Huston), and offered me the job of screenplaying Moby Dick. I accepted and moved up to a greater beast in a greater book and film.

I cite this personal example because it probably represents, in one form or another, the problems faced by the writers of the stories in this book and the fate that befell their good children once they reached the idiot hands of those studio heads, who feel they must open every can of beans and drop a few buffalo chips in for creative flavoring.

The fun, with a collection of this sort, is rating stories versus films as you go. Was or wasn't the film, Dr. Cyclops, better than the story?

Was or wasn't The Seventh Victim an improvement, on screen, over the Robert Sheckley story? Boring, when it wasn't confusing, was the general verdict.

Was The Fly, as made by Twentieth-Century-Fox, as much fun as George Langelaan's printed tale? My daughters have seen the film ten or twelve times, but there is a touch of derision in their sit throughs.

Finally, of course, we arrive at the earthshaker. Arthur C. Clarke's evocative and very small "The Sentinel" is one of those incredible bits that grew outsize to become a massive Rorschach test for late-night cinema fiends to view upside down and sidewise, with beer, mescalin, or both for visual aids. The story plus the film have probably caused more all-night conversations and destroyed more quasi-intellectual friendships than any other film/story combination in history.

What you have in this book is, I would guess, a semester course in ideas, fiction writing, and the art of cinema as it is practiced to birth or abort. Within a few months of publication this volume will probably be seized upon for such a bug-eyed, beer-guzzling, hot-air course.

It almost seems appropriate here, toward the end of my introduction, to mention the fact that the title of this book is remarkably close to the first film story that I wrote for Universal back in 1952, lt Came from Outer Space. The story isn't included here, but my experience with it might shed a little light on why fiction is so often excellent and films so often shoddy.

I was called in by Universal in the summer of '52 because, as usual, visions of bright box office danced in their heads. All they knew was that they wanted Something to arrive from Outer Space: a grisly monster, a proper fright that the Westmore brothers could have fun with in the makeup department. In my preliminary talks with the producer and director, I could see we were light years apart. I wanted a more subtle approach, something with a real idea in it. They saw only the obvious—and the vulgar obvious at that.

I proposed a compromise, and told them that over a two- or three-week period I would write not one story treatment for them but two. One version, with their mildewed idea, would be for them. The second, better version would be for me. On the day I handed both treatments in they would have a week to decide which story to use. If theirs, I would pack up my typewriter, steal some paper clips, and leave with no hard feelings. If mine, I would stay on and finish a fuller version.

Surprisingly, they bought the concept, though the dice were loaded. If I wished, I could have done a really bad first script, using their creaking machinery as center. I didn't. I wrote as good a script as I could.

Considering it was done with the Westmore family leaning over my shoulder, it was all right.

The second outline-treatment, my own just for me, went faster and better.

I had some good fun with it.

I turned both stories in and waited, sure that they would choose the wrong one and I would head home, not much wiser and a lot poorer.

They made up their minds quickly. Within forty-eight hours they called and said, "We like your story, your idea, your version better. Do it your way.

We'll stand aside."

Frankly, I was stunned. I had everything packed, ready to leave.

Instead, immensely pleased, I sat down and did a truly dumb and innocent thing: I wrote not the thirty- or forty-page treatment they had asked for but, delighted by the idea, a whole screenplay in treatment form, some ninety pages.

They got, in essence, an entire screenplay for the grand sum of three thousand dollars, which was my final salary for the four or five weeks I had stayed on at the studio. With the treatment in hand, they fired me and hired Harry Essex to do the final screenplay (which, he told me later, was simply putting frosting on the cake). Why had I made it so easy for him, he asked when I met him later. Because, I replied, I was a fool, and I was in love with an idea—a good combination for writing but a bad one when you find yourself back out on the street supporting a family.

The film was made and, of course, the studio couldn't resist shoving back in some of their bad ideas. I warned them not to bring the "monster" out in the light—ever. They ignored my advice. The bad moments in the film come when the monster does just that: stops being mysterious, steps out, and becomes a laugh riot. Nevertheless the film was good, a modest attempt by all, and a financial success.

Years later I got my greatest reward, however. Going to meet Steven Spielberg for the first time, on the morning after a preview of Close Encounters of the Third Kind, the first thing Spielberg said as I shook his hand was: "How did you like your film?"

"What?" I said.

"Close Encounters wouldn't have been born," he explained, "if I hadn't seen It Came from Outer Space six times when I was a kid. Thanks."

Enough. It's time for you to turn the pages and get on with these stories, remembering how good they were and how often the films that stumbled in their footprints displayed the same nimbleness as the mummy pursuing the terrified lady in high heels across the swamp—not well, but he did finally get her.

When you finish the book, you just might begin to understand what 2001:

A Space Odyssey was all about.

And, remember, I was the chap who viewed the remake of King Kong and titled it The Turkey that Attacked New York. Dino De Laurentius has never forgiven me. I hope he never does.

FOREWORD

ONCE UPON A TIME there was a wonderful theater ... a cavernous, three-level showplace where a kid and his friends could lose the blues any Saturday afternoon for only six bits. It was called the Cove and it had the works—ushers in gaudy red jackets, a giant screen set off with textured velvet curtains, and a nice old lady behind the candy counter who actually melted honest-to-goodness butter for the popcorn.

If you hit puberty anywhere before the late 1960s, there's probably a "Cove" tucked away among your fondest memories as well.

For it was in these marvelous old palaces that we all got our first look into the future. Along with the cowboy shoot-'em-ups and detective mysteries, a new type of genre film hit the silver screen with a splash as the nation entered the atomic age in the late 1940s.

Perhaps you were one of the first to see such prophetic pictures as Destination Moon or Rocketship X-M during their premiere engagements.

Both were dismissed as mere hokum by critics, but today, just thirty years later, their respective visions of lunar landings and Martian explorations have already slipped into past history.

But back then movies such as The Day the Earth Stood Still and It Came from Outer Space were being made just for the dreamers, an enthusiastic young crowd more than willing to be whisked off into deep space or brave the unknown perils of an alien invasion. In our far-reaching imaginations, we all took the dangerous interstellar journey to war-torn Metaluna in This Island Earth; fought the invisible "monsters from the Id" on the Forbidden Planet; then returned to Terra in order to quell the Invasion of the Body Snatchers.

Big budget or small, an all-star lineup or a cast of complete unknowns, the early science fiction pictures all had one thing in common—they inspired an undeniable "sense of wonder" in thousands of impressionable youngsters. They even induced some to pick up an SF paperback or magazine and get a helping of the real thing.

I know ... because it happened to me. Just after a screening of Universal's The Incredible Shrinking Man, there came an overwhelming compulsion to buy a copy of the now classic novel by Richard Matheson.

It meant giving upfive ten -cent comic books, but the half a buck was willingly handed over and the edition promptly tucked between the covers of a textbook for easy round-the-clock access. By the time the last chapter went flying by, I knew the pile of comics at my bedside just wouldn't cut it anymore. For here was excitement and adventure that no caped superhero could ever equal. And like a true SF addict, I had to have more—right away.

Most weekdays found me haunting the local library and secondhand bookstores, searching out names like Asimov, Sturgeon, Bradbury and Clarke.

Meanwhile, on weekends, I specialized in leading gang safaris to every theater in a ten-mile radius—exposing friends to the latest fantasies fromHollywood .

Sometimes an excellent screenplay and fine ensemble acting stole the show, as in pictures like The Thing from Another World, Village of the Damned, and The Day the Earth Caught Fire. Other times, it was the special effects department that kept us riveted with films such as War of the Worlds, Earth vs. the Flying Saucers, and The Time Machine.

Right behind the revered classics were a fair share of honorable mentions: imaginative movies that, for one reason or another, failed to live up to their full potential. Journey to the Seventh Planet, with its novel premise of an omnipotent brain controlling a world, is a prime example of a great idea mired in cheap sets and confusing direction. Other titles from this wide category include such favorites as Mario Bava's haunting Planet of the Vampires and Edward L. Cahn's suspenseful It: The Terror from Beyond

Space—both early precursors to 1979's immensely popular SF shocker Alien.

Yet, as in all genres, for every worthwhile effort there were also dozens of "Grade Z" clunkers glutting the market. Remember the mass disappointment when the alien in Flight to Mars turned out to be character actor Morris Ankrum in a moth-eaten spacesuit? Or how about the booing and hissing for Fire Maidens from Outer Space when the monster was revealed as a man wearing a turtleneck sweater over his head? And although many have tried, who can forget the ghastly alien gorilla in Robot Monster?

Today, of course, even the most popular SF films of yesteryear have been outdistanced by the likes of Star Wars and Close Encounters of the Third Kind. And why not! Youthful directors George Lucas and Steven Spielberg are both admitted devotees of imaginative film and literature. They too grew up reading Amazing Stories and sitting front-row-center for Not of This Earth and Invasion of the Saucermen.

Perhaps someday, thanks to the influence of Luke Skywalker and the Mothership in CE3K, a director of tomorrow will bring even more breathtaking speculative adventures to the screen. But for now, let us celebrate some of the fine films and gifted authors that started it all.

From Henry Kuttner's fast-paced "Dr. Cyclops" to Harlan Ellison's award-winning "A Boy and His Dog," here are a dozen of the most famous SF tales ever put on celluloid. So let the houselights dim.... The curtain goes up immediately.

Jim Wynorski January 1, 1980

Hollywood, California

DR. CYCLOPS by Henry Kuttner filmed as

DR. CYCLOPS

(Paramount, 1940)

The diabolical Dr. Frankenstein, the maniacal Dr. Moreau, and the schizophrenic Dr. Jekyll—all have taken deservedly prominent places in the Mad Scientists' Hall of Fame. But wait! One of the most cunning and twisted brains in the annals of fantastic literature needs mentioning: the malevolent Dr. Cyclops.

Brought to life by the late SF legend Henry Kuttner, Dr. Alexander Thorkel (alias Cyclops) became a tremendously popular character with readers of Thrilling Wonder Stories when he appeared on the cover of the June 1940 issue. Inside, along with the exciting tale, a half-dozen photographs from an upcoming movie version also graced the brittle pulp pages.

Suddenly fantasy enthusiasts everywhere were spreading the good word—Hollywood had finally produced the first Technicolor science fiction extravaganza. Directed by Ernest B. Schoedsack, one of the creative heads behind the classic adventure King Kong, this high-budget spectacle featured a fine performance by Albert Dekker and a wide array of eye-catching special effects.

The action begins when the deranged scientist reduces a group of people to six-inch miniatures with a bizarre atomic ray of his own invention.

From there on it's a deadly cat-and-mouse game, as the shrunken humans attempt to elude their captor and fight off the oversize horrors that inhabit Cyclops' hidden jungle encampment.

And even with this typical B-film plot, the visuals remained strictly class A. Many of the props and sets were constructed to giant scale, and film technicians were constantly busy combining the actors with frightening close-ups of lizards, insects, and the towering doctor himself.

The film became so popular that Kuttner was asked to expand his story into a full-length novel, which he did under the pseudonym Will Garth.

Unfortunately, the book failed to match the impact of the shorter version, a tale that set the stage for such future triumphs as Attack of the Puppet People and The Incredible Shrinking Man.

Reprinted only once since its first publication, Dr. Cyclops is as engrossing as it is entertaining.

DR CYCLOPS

by Henry Kutner

CHAPTER I

Camp in the Jungle

BILL STOCKTON stood in the compound gate, watching Pedro drivino the mules down to the river pasture. The swarthy half-breed's face was split by a broad grin; he twirled his black mustache and sang loudly of a cantina in Buenos Aires, thousands of miles to the east.

"How the devil does he do it?" Stockton moaned, shaking the perspiration out of his eyes. "I can hardly drag myself around in this heat. And that guy actually sings—" Yet it wasn't only the heat, Stockton knew. There was more to it than that. A feeling of sombre menace—hung heavy above this wilderness encampment. During the weeks of jungle travel from the Andes, through tropical swamp and pest-infested jungle, the feeling had grown stronger. It was in the humid, sticky air. It was in the sickly-sweet, choking perfume of the great orchids that grew outside the stockade. Most of all, it was in the actions of Dr. Thorkel.

"He's supposed to be the greatest scientific wizard of the age," Stockton thought skeptically. "But for my money he's nuts. Sends a message to the Royal Academy demanding the services of a biologist and a

mineralogist, and then asks us to look into a microscope. That's all. Won't even let us get inside that mud house of his!"

There was reason for Stockton's bitterness. He had been literally forced into this adventure. Hardy, the mineralogist, had been taken ill at Lima, and Dr. Bulfinch, his colleague, had sought vainly for a substitute. None was available. None, that is, save for a certain beachcomber who was going rapidly to hell with the aid of a native girl, bad gin, and rubber checks.

Bulfinch's assistant, Dr. Mary Phillips, had solved the problem. She had bought up the bad checks, threatened Stockton with jail if he refused to come along. Under the circumstances, the one-time mineralogist had shrugged and acceded. Now he was wondering if he had made a mistake.

There was menace here. Stockton sensed it, with the psychic keenness of a professional adventurer. Secrecy was all around him. Why was the mine yard generally kept locked, if the mine actually was worthless, as Thorkel contended? Why had Thorkel seemed so excited when Stockton had mentioned the iron crystals, crystals Thorkel had been unable to see because of his weak vision?

Then, too, there was the matter of the Dicotylinae—certain bones Mary Phillips had found. They were the bones of a native wild pig, but the molar surfaces had proved it a species of midget swine entirely unknown to science—four inches long at maturity. That was odd.

Finally, only an hour ago, Thorkel had blandly said good-bye, only twenty-three hours after the arrival of his guests. Bulfinch had, Stockton mused with a chuckle, thrown a fit. The goatish face had gone gray; the unkempt Vandyke had bristled.

"Are you attempting to intimate that you summoned me—Dr. Rupert Bulfinch—ten thousand miles just to look into a microscope?" he had roared.

"Correct," Thorkel had answered, and went back to his mud house.

So far, so good. But there was trouble ahead. Neither Bulfinch nor Mary would think of leaving, even though that meant defiance of Thorkel. And Thorkel, Stockton felt, was a dangerous customer, cold-blooded and unscrupulous. His round face, with its bristling mustache and bald dome, could settle into grim, deadly Lines.

Moreover, from the first a quiet, unspoken sort of conflict had arisen between Thorkel and Baker, the guide who had accompanied the party from the Andes. Stockton shrugged and gave it up.

Dr. Bulfinch came up behind Stockton and touched his arm. There was repressed excitement in the biologist's goatish face.

"Come along," he said softly. "I've found something."

Stockton followed Bulfinch into a nearby tent. Mary Phillips was there, mounting the bones of the midget pig. She was, Stockton thought, much too pretty to be a biologist. A wealth of red-gold hair cascaded over her shoulders, and she had a face that belonged on the silver screen rather than in the lab. She also had a hell of a temper.

"Hello, beautiful," said Stockton.

"Oh, shut up," the girl murmured. "What's the matter, Dr. Bulfinch?"

The biologist thrust a rock sample at Stockton.

"Test this."

The younger man's eyes widened.

"This isn't—hell, it can't be!"

"You've seen pitchblende before," Bulfinch said with heavy sarcasm.

"Where'd you get it?" Stockton asked, excited.

"Baker found it near the mine shaft. It's uranium ore," he said

quietly, "and it's a hundred times richer than any deposit ever

discovered. No wonder Thorkel wants to Get rid of us!" Mentally

Stockton added, "And I'LL bet he wouldn't stop at murder to shut US Up

!"

"Good God!" Bulfinch whispered. "Radium! Think of the medical benefits of such a find—the help it can give to science!"

There was an interruption. A black streak shot into the tent, followed by a gaunt, disreputable dog, barking wildly. The two circled a table and fled outside again. There was the sound of a scuffle.

Hastily Stockton raised the tent-flap. Pedro, Thorkel's man-of-all-work, was holding the dog, while a cat retreated hastily into the distance.

The half-breed looked up with a flash of white teeth. "I am sorry.

This foolish Paco—" He pulled the dog's tail. "He does not know he can never catch Satanas. He just wants to play, though. Since Pinto went away, he is lonesome."

"Yeah?" Stockton asked, eying the man. "Who was Pinto?"

"My Little mule. Ah, Pinto was smart. But not smart enough, I suppose."

Pedro shrugged expressively. "Poor mule."

A man came out of the gathering twilight—a tall, rangy figure, with a hard-bitten, harsh face—a Puritan gone to seed.

"Hello, Baker," Stockton grunted.

"Bulfinch told you about the radium?" Baker said, without preamble.

"It's valuable, eh?"

"Yeah. Plenty valuable." Stockton's eyes narrowed. "I've been wondering about that. Wondering why you were so anxious to come along when you could have sent a native. Maybe you'd heard about this radium mine, eh?"

Baker's harsh face did not change, but he sent a glance of sheer black hatred toward the house.

"I don't blame you," he said under his breath. "It does look screwy.

But—listen, Bill, I had a good reason for wanting to come here. If I'd come alone, Thorkel would have been suspicious—shot me on sight, maybe.

I'd have had no chance at all to investigate—" "Investigate what?"

Stockton asked impatient]y.

"I used to know a little native girl. Nice kid. Mira, her name was.

I—well, I thought a lot of her. One day she went off to act as Thorkel's housEkeeper. And that was the last I ever heard of the girl."

"She isn't here now," Stockton said. "Unless she's in the house."

Baker shook his head. "I've been talking to Pedro. He says Mira was here—and disappeared. Like Pinto, his albino mule."

The swift tropic night had fallen. A bright moon silvered the compound.

And suddenly the two men heard the faint, shrill neigh of a horse, from the direction of Thorkel's house.

Simultaneously the figure of Pedro appeared, running from behind a tent. e cried, "Pinto! My mule Pinto is in the house. He has come back!"

Before the half-breed could reach the door of the house, it opened abruptly. Thorkel appeared. In the moonlight his bald head and gleaming, thick-lensed spectacles looked oddly inhuman.

"Well, Pedro?" he asked quietly, in a sneering voice.

The other jerked to a halt. He moistened his lips.

"It is Pinto, senor—" he whispered.

"You are imagining things," Thorkel said, with cold emphasis. "Go back to your work. Do you think I'd keep a mule in the house?"

A new voice broke in.

"Just what do you keep in there, Doctor?"

It was Bulfinch. The biologist emerged from the tent and approached, a lean, gaunt figure in the moonlight. Mary was behind him. Baker and Stockton joined the group. Thorkel held the door closed behind him.

"That is nothing to you," he said, icily.

"On the contrary," Bulfinch snapped, "as I told you, I intend to remain here until I have received an explanation."

"And as I told you," Thorkel said, almost whispering, "you do so at your own peril. I will not tolerate interference or prying. My secrets are my own. I warn you: I shall protect those secrets!"

"Are you threatening us?" the biologist growled.

Thorkel suddenly smiled.

"If I showed you what I have in my house, I think you would-regret it," he observed, a suggestion of subtle menace in his silky tones. "I wish to be left alone. If I find you still here tomorrow morning, I shall take ...

protective measures."

His eyes, behind the thick-lensed spectacles, included the group in one ominous glance. Then, without another word, he reentered the house, locking the door behind him.

"Still staying, Doc?" Stockton asked. Bulfinch growled.

"I certainly am!"

There was a brief pause. Then Pedro, who had been listening intently, made a commanding gesture.

"Come with me. I will show you something—" He hurried around the corner of the house, trailed by the dog Paco.

Bulfinch, his thin lips working, followed, and so did the others.

A tall bamboo fence blocked their way. Pedro pointed, and applied his eye to a crack. Stockton tested the gate, which had previously been open. It was barred now, so he joined Pedro and the others .

"Wait," the half-breed whispered. "I have seen this before."

They could see the mine-shaft, with a crude windlass surmounting it.

And then a gross, strange figure entered their range of vision It resembled, at first glance, a man in a diving suit. Every inch of the stocky body was covered with the rubberlike fabric. A cylindrical helmet shielded the head.

Through two round eyeplates could be seen the heavy spectacles of Dr.

Thorkel.

"Uh-huh," Stockton whispered. "Protective suit. Radium's dangerous stuff."

Thorkel went to the mine and began to turn the windlass. Abruptly Stockton felt a hand touch his arm. He turned.

It was Baker.

"Come along," the other said softly. "I've opened the door. Cheap lock—and Mary uses hairpins. Now we'll be able to see what he's got hidden in that house."

"Si! The doctor will be busy in the yard for a long time—" Pedro said, nodding.

Silently the group retraced their steps. The door of the mud house was ajar.

From within came the sound of a shrill neigh, incredibly high and thin....

CHAPTER II

The Little People

THE ROOM was disappointingly bare. Across from the front door was another, apparently leading to the mine yard. Another door was in the right-hand wall, and a small mica window was let into it.

There were heavy wooden chairs, a work-bench, and a table bearing microscope and notebooks. On the bench were several small wicker baskets.

Littered carelessly about the floor were a rack of test-tubes, books, a beaker, two or three small boxes, and a dirty shirt or two.

Pedro pointed to the floor.

"Hoof prints—Pinto was here, yes!"

Mary bent over the microscope, while Bulfinch examined the notebooks.

"Thieves!"

Thorkel stood in the doorway leading to the mine yard, his eyes glaring behind the glasses. He was whitely livid with rage.

"So you would steal my discoveries. You have no right here! You are merely my employees whom I have discharged and instructed to leave!"

He saw the notebook in Bulfinch's hand, and his voice rose to a scream of rage.

"My notes!"

Stockton and Baker seized him as he sprang at the biologist. Bulfinch smiled coldly.

"Restrain yourself, Dr. Thorkel. Your actions are not reassuring. "

Thorkel relaxed, panting.

"I—you have no right here."

"You are behaving irrationally. For your own good, and for the benefit of science, I must demand an explanation. To leave you here in the jungle would be nothing short of criminal. You are grossly overworked.

You are not"—he hesitated—"not in a normal state mentally. There is no reason to be suspicious or to fear persecution."

Thorkel sighed, removed his glasses, and rubbed his blind eyes with a weary gesture. "T am sorry," he murmured.

"Perhaps you are right, Doctor. I—I am experimenting with radioactivity."

He went to the mica-paned door and opened it, revealing a small closet, plated with lead. From the ceiling hung a projector, resembling the type used medically to treat cancer by radium rays.

"This is my condensor," Thorkel said. "You may examine it, Dr. Bulfinch. I must trust you—I have shown this to no one else in the world."

Bulfinch entered the closet. The others were at his heels, intently scrutinizing the projector which seemed the heart of the mystery.

Pedro paid no attention. He was opening, one by one, the boxes on the bench. And, abruptly, he paused, transfixed with astonishment. His lips formed the word, "Pinto!"

A white mule was within the box. An albino mule, no more than eight inches high!

"Pedro!" Thorkel called sharply. The half-breed sprang up. His elbow overturned the box, which clattered to the floor.

The midget mu]e was flung out. Only Thorkel and Pedro saw the beast as it struggled up and raced across the floor.

The door was still ajar. The mannikin animal fled out into the night.

For a second Thorkel's eyes clashed with Pedro's.

"Come here," the scientist said tonelessly. "I want you to see this, too."

The half-breed went toward Thorkel, his face blank with amazement.

"What—what has happened to—" Thorkel smiled. He pointed to the closet where the others were still examining the projector. Pedro turned to look.

Thorkel moved with the swiftness of an uncoiled steel spring. He struck at Pedro. Caught unawares, the half-breed was hurled into the closet. The door slammed shut behind him.

Thorkel locked it with a swift movement. His hand closed on one of the switches nearby; he pulled it down. Instantly there was a low hum, which rose swiftly to a sibilant crackling buzz.

Green light blazed through the mica window.

From a shelf Thorkel took a heavy helmet and donned it. He leaned forward to peer through the mica pane.

"Thieves!" he whispered. "I told you to go! I could not force you—but if you insist on staying, I must be sure that you will not interfere with my experiments or try to steal my secret. So you wished to help me, Dr. Bulfinch? Well, you shall—but not quite as you expected ! " Thorkel's laughter rose above the crackling snarl of the condensor.

The infra-red lamp suspended from the ceiling sent down a rich, warm glow.

Beneath it was a glass dish, containing a colorless liquid that was boiling gently, warmed by an electrode. From the dish steamed a whitish vapor which shrouded the floor, almost hiding the dim outlines nearby.

One of these figures writhed and sat up, tearing away the silken wrappings that bound it. The swart face of Pedro appeared. He sprang up, knee-deep in the white vapor, coughing and choking for breath.

Beside him another form stirred. Bill Stockton rose shakily, breathing in great gasps.

"Air—air's better up here ... what the hell!" Discovering that he was naked save for the si]k shroud, he adjusted it, looking rather like a Roman, with his hal sh eagle face and keen eyes.

Mary and Baker were the next to appear. Then came the grim face of Dr. Bulfinch. For a moment each was busy adjusting their makeshift garments.

"Where are we?" Pedro gasped. "I cannot see—" He choked and coughed.

"Calm down," Bulfinch said curtly. "We won't be asphyxiated." He sniffed and glanced at the light above. "Ozone, ammonia, humidity, temperature—calculated to revive consciousness."

"Where are we?" Mary asked. "In the mine?"

They could not see beyond the small circle of light. Stockton gripped Pedro's arm.

"You know this place better than we do. Where are we? What's Thorkel done?"

Suddenly horror grew in Pedro's eyes as he remembered something.

"Pinto," he gasped. "He has made Pinto—little!"

"Nuts," Stockton grunted. "Let's grab hands and feel our way around.

Come on!"

"He has made me little like my mule!" Pedro whispered.

Without warning the faint red glow of the lamp faded and died. It was almost utterly black. Stockton felt Mary's hand tighten in his own, and squeezed it reassuringly.

Light shafted in whitely. Instantly Stockton saw that they were in a cellar, at the foot of a flight of stairs that led up to an opening door.

On the threshold stood Dr. Thorkel, looking down at them. Satanas, the cat, crouched by the scientist's feet.

"He has made us little!" Pedro screamed.

And it was true! Thorkel was—a giant! A thirty-foot titan towered over them! The cellar door seemed as big as a two-story house; Satanas was a sabre-toothed tiger!

Bulfinch was chalk-white. He sprang back suddenly as Satanas spat down at the tiny group. Thorkel hastily bent down and picked up the cat.

His voice was booming thunder.

"No, no—you must not frighten them," he told the cat. Thorkel stepped down into the cellar, and the others shrank from this colossus. Mary's voice rose in a scream.

"Good," said Thorkel. "Vocal cords unimpaired, eh? You have no temperature? Dr. Bulfinch, will you be good enough to take the pulse of your companions?"

Pedro broke and raced for the stairway. Thorkel nodded, smiling.

"Little creatures—their first instinct is to escape. Run if you like, then."

And the wee folk fled....

Climbing those stairs was a feat. Each tread came up to their breasts.

But, pushing, pulling, scrambling, the miniature humans swarmed up toward the light. Soon they were gone from sight. Thorkel put down the cat and followed, shutting the cellar door. He turned to glance around the room.

The little people had hidden themselves.

"Come out. You have nothing to fear," he said smoothly.

Thorkel waited, and then sank down into a chair.

"Where is your scientific spirit, Dr. Bulfinch?" He smiled. "Did you not wish to join me in my experiments?" He mopped perspiration from his bald head and slid the chair away from the patch of

sunlight that slanted in through the window fronting the mine yard.

Bulfinch's head appeared cautiously from behind one of Thorkel's discarded boots. He walked toward the giant.

"Come closer," Thorkel urged.

Bulfinch obeyed, staring up at the other.

"What is the matter?" Thorkel said fearfully. "Can you not speak?"

The biologist's voice was thin and high.

"Yes, I can speak. What have you done—and why?"

Thorkel leaned forward, his huge hand reaching toward the tiny figure on the floor. Bulfinch retreated in alarm.

"I only wish to weigh and measure you," he said softly. He rose and settled back in his chair. "Come out. I won't eat you. As you can see, I have reduced your size."

His pale eyes, behind the thick glasses, watched intently as, emboldened, the others appeared one by one. Pedro had been hiding behind a chair leg; the others behind a stack of books on the floor.

They advanced until they were in a group with Bulfinch.

"You should be proud," Thorkel said. "You are almost the first successful experiment—Pinto was the first, Pedro. Too bad you let him escape. Again I thank you, Mr. Stockton, for identifying the iron crystals. They gave me the last clue."

He blinked down at then. "Till you came, I could reduce organic substances, but life could not be preserved in them. It is a matter of electronic compression of matter under ray bombardment. The radium in the mine gave me unimaginable power. Look." He lifted a sponge from the table and squeezed it in his fist. "That is it. Compression. But energy is required, rather than brute force—" Baker spoke up suddenly.

"Did you do this to Mira?"

"The native girl—my housekeeper? Why, yes. But I failed—she was reduced in size, but she was dead. How do you know of her?" Thorkel did not wait for an answer. He rubbed his eyes wearily. "I am very tired. It has taken days to reduce you, and I have not had one moment's sleep...." His voice trailed off wearily. Sleep smothered him.

Stockton was staring around.

"We've got to get out of here. Do you realize that this fiend intends to kill us all?"

Bulfinch looked a question. "That scarcely—" "He told us he murdered the native girl, didn't he? He's a cold-blooded devil."

Instinctively they glanced at the door. The bar that locked it from the inside was thrice the height of

Stockton's head.

Human beings—scarcely more than half a foot tall!

On the floor nearby a book stood on end—Human Physiology, by Granger.

Stockton went to stand beside it. His head scarcely came to the top of the volume.

"Well?" he asked bitterly. "Any suggestions?"

Bulfinch nodded. "Yes. Books are handy things. If we can pile them up and reach the door-latch ..."

It took time, but Thorkel did not awaken. A pencil, used as a lever, opened the door a crack. And then the little people were outside in the compound. Strange sight! A cactus patch not far away was taller than the tallest tree. The camp tables were fantastically high. A chicken was moving jerkily in its quest for food-and its bobbing comb rose higher than Stockton's head!

If it saw them, it made no hostile move. Slowly the tiny group moved forward, toward Bulfinch's tent. Each box and crate was a mountain to be skirted. The rough ground hurt their bare feet.

Pedro was glancing around nervously. Abruptly he cried out and pointed.

Stockton whirled with the others, and he showed his panic.

Out of a crumbling hole in the mud hut's base Satanas, the cat, was crawling. The creature's eyes were intent on the little people.

More formidable than a tiger, it wriggled free and bounded toward them, sharp fangs bared!

CHAPTER III

Death in the Jungle

STOCKTON SEIZED Mary by the hand and dragged her toward the shelter of the cactus clump. The others were not slow in following. Baker paused to hurl a pebble at the cat, but the gesture was futile.

Snarling, Satanas came on. The cacti were too far away for safety.

Hopelessness tore at Stockton as he realized that none of them could reach the clump. He could almost feel sharp fangs sinking into his flesh.

The cat spat viciously. There was an uproar of furious barks. As the little people miraculously found concealment amid the cactus spines, they turned to see Satanas fleeing from Paco, Pedro's dog.

"Whew!" Baker gasped. "That was a close one."

Bulfinch regarded him sombrely, tugging at his Vandyke. "There will be more 'close ones,'" he said with grim meaning. "Every creature larger than a rat is apt to be a deadly menace."

"What can we do?" Mary asked.

"First—food, weapons," Stockton said. "Then we'll deal with Thorkel and find some way out of this."

The day dragged on, and Thorkel still slept. Satanas did not reappear.

Mary engaged herself in making sandals, a difficult task at best, and worse when the knife is larger than you are.

As for Stockton, he managed to take the screw out of a pair of scissors, and one blade provided him with a serviceable weapon, about the size of a sword.

Thorkel's voice startled them when it came. He was leaning out the window, like a giant in the sky, regarding them.

"You are resourceful, my small friends," his voice boomed out. "But now come back. I must weigh and measure all of you."

The group drew together. Thorkel laughed evilly at them.

"I won't harm you. Come, Dr. Bulfinch," he said silkily.

"I demand that you restore us to our normal size," the biologist snapped.

"That is impossible," the other said. "At present, anyway. All my energies have been devoted to the problem of atomic shrinkage—compression. Perhaps, in time, I can find the antidote, the ray that will turn men to giants. But it will take months of research and experiment—perhaps years."

"Do you mean we must remain like this—" "I shall not harm you," Thorkel smiled. "Come—" He leaned forward.

Bulfinch drew back, and, with an impatient grunt, Thorkel disappeared from the window. His feet thudded across the floor. Bulfinch hastily fled back to the others.

"The cactus," he gasped, panting. "Let's hide!"

But already Thorkel was emerging from the door. His figure loomed gigantic. A few quick strides, and he had cut off the retreat of his quarry. He crouched down, spreading his fingers wide.

Escape was impossible. Mary and Baker were gathered up in one titan hand.

With the other Thorkel reached for the fleeing Bulfinch.

Pedro had secured a fork from somewhere, and held it like a spear. He thrust at the huge hand.

Chuckling, Thorkel brushed the weapon aside, knocking Pedro headlong.

Contemptuously he stood up, still gripping Mary and Baker.

"Dr. Bulfinch!" His voice was thunderous. "Listen to me!"

The biologist was peering out from the depths of the cactus. "Yes?"

"I wish to weigh and measure you. You are a scientist; your reactions will be more valuable than those of the others. I am conducting an experiment for Germany—my fatherland. If my reduction method proves successful, we will be able to reduce our armies to miniature size.

Our men will be able to steal into enemy territory, sabotage industrial centers. And no one will suspect the destruction due to—men in miniature. You will not be harmed. I promise you that. Will you come out?"

Bulfinch shook his head stubbornly. His whole being revolted at the ruthless plan outlined by this sinister genius. A plan that might mean the death of thousands of innocent civilians.

"No? Then, perhaps, if I apply a little pressure—a very little—to these tiny people I hold so gently in my hand—" The constricting fingers tightened. From Baker's lips came a grunt of pain. Mary's voice rose in a scream.

"Oh, damn!" Bulfinch snarled. "All right, Thorkel. You win. Put them down." He emerged from the cactus as the scientist gently deposited Baker and Mary on the ground. They were unharmed, but so giddy from the rapid descent that they could scarcely stand.

Calmly, Thorkel picked up Bulfinch's tiny figure. The biologist made no resistance. The others were left staring as Thorkel walked back to the mud house; then, swiftly, they fled into the cactus. There was silence.

"He won't hurt him," Pedro said, without conviction.

Stockton stepped out from the protection of the cactus. "I'll just make sure. Wait here." He started toward the house, gripping his scissor-blade harder than was necessary.

It was minutes later when he reached the door, still slightly ajar. He peered through the crack, just in time to hear Bulfinch's cry and witness the murder of the biologist.

Thorkel was seated at his table. With one hand he gripped the tiny Bulfinch; with the other he pressed a wad of cotton down over his victim's face.

Then, swiftly, he dropped the limp body into a glass beaker. Stockton drew back, sick with horror, and his improvised sword made a noise against the door. Thorkel glanced down and saw the small watcher.

"So you would spy on me?" he asked quietly, and without haste picked up a butterfly net from the table. As he rose Stockton fled.

Thorkel got to the door just in time to see him disappear into the cactus.

Nodding, he found a shovel and followed his quarry.

It took ten minutes to clear and break down the cactus bed. And then Thorkel realized that he was looking at the outlet of a tile drain pipe that extended to and under the compound wall. He straightened, staring nearsightedly across the barrier.

"You had better come back!" Thorkel shouted. "You cannot live an hour in the jungle—and there is a storm approaching!"

Storm in the jungle—the greatest rain forest in the world. Bear, deer, and monkey fleeing from thunderbolt and unchained devils of the lightning.

The screaming of parrots clinging to their wind-buffeted perches.

The black hell of night closed upon the jungle.

Through that madness fled the little people. And, by sheer luck, they found a cave in which they cowered through the eternal, dragging hours of shaking fury, helpless, hopeless beings in a world of gigantic menace....

It was dawn. Chilled, dispirited, and shivering, the little people emerged from their refuge. In the dawn light they examined each other.

"We look like hell," Stockton said.

"I'm glad you include yourself," Mary told him, trying to adjust her tangled hair. "I wish I had a few pins."

"They'd be as big as you are, about. What now?"

Baker had been talking to the half-breed. Now he turned to face the others.

"Pedro has an idea. If we can get to the river and find a boat, we can float downstream to civilization. There'll be help there."

"That's an idea," Stockton nodded. "Which way is the water, Pedro?"

The half-breed pointed, and without delay they set out, plodding through the rain-wet jungle. Once a monkey, larger to them than a gorilla, swung down uncomfortably close, and once the inconceivable ferocity of a bear crossed their path, luckily without seeing them.

They kept to a well-trodden path, but on all sides the monolithic trees stretched up, higher than skyscrapers. The weedy grass rose above their heads. It was a world of stark fantasy and lurking menace.

Once Stockton, lagging behind the others, saw Paco, the dog. He was frisking about an albino colt which was diligently cropping grass. For a second Stockton considered the idea of catching and riding the colt, but gave it up immediately. The beast was much too large. He shrugged and followed the rest of the band.

The river bank did not prove an insurmountable obstacle, though it took time to descend. They went upstream to a little cove, where Pedro, he said, had moored his canoe. Picking their way around a thick patch of weeds, they reached the craft. It was gigantic. Beached on the sand, it remained immovable no matter how they strained and pushed.

"Great idea," Stockton grunted. "It's like trying to move a

steamship."

"Well, even that can be done," the girl told him. "If you use rollers."

"Isn't she smart?" Pedro said with naive admiration. "We can cut bamboo—" "Sure!" Baker joined in. "We can rig up a lever and windlass-it'll take time, but that's all right."

It took even more time than they had thought. With their crude tools, and the unexpected toughness of the plant-life to tiny hands, it took hours, and the morning dragged on with little accomplished.

Pedro lifted his head and dashed sweat from his dripping mustache. "I hear—Paco, I think," he said doubtfully.

"Never mind Paco," Baker told him. "Lend a hand with this windlass."

"But Paco—he is a hunting dog. Dr. Thorkel knows that. If he—" "Time to rest," Stockton decreed, and straightened, rubbing his aching back. Mary, who had been toiling with the rest, sank down with a groan. She tossed her red-gold hair back from her tired young face.

Stockton made a cup out of a tiny leaf and brought the girl water from the river. She drank it gratefully.

"No use to boil it," the man explained. "If there're any germs in the water, we can see 'em without a microscope."

Pedro and Baker flung themselves down full length on the sand and lay panting. "This is devil work," the half-breed observed with conviction. "If I live, I shall burn twenty candles before my patron saint."

"If I live, I'll kill twenty bottles," Baker said. "But there's one guy I'd like to kill first." His face darkened. He was remembering Mira, the native girl, whom Thorkel had murdered so casually. And poor Bulfinch.

"What about you, Bill?" Mary asked.

He glanced at her. "I know what you mean. Well—I wouldn't even make a good beachcomber now. I might go native with the field mice."

Abruptly Stockton turned to face her. "No. I didn't mean that. This is pretty terrible, but it's shown me something. All this—" He flung out an arm toward the towering grasses in the background. "Wonder and strangeness, which we never quite realize—until we're small. I—I was a good mineralogist once. I could be again. Remember those checks I tore up, Mary?

I'm going to pay you back every cent they cost you. That's rather important to me now...." He frowned. "If we come out of this alive—" In the distance Paco barked again. Pedro stood up, shading his eyes with a calloused palm. "It is Dr. Thorkel," he stated. "He carries a specimen box, and Paco leads him."

"Damn!" Stockton snapped. "We've got to hide. Take to the water, to break the trail."

"No," Pedro said. "There are alligators." He nodded toward the tall patch of grass near them. "We can hide in—" He stopped, and horror grew in his eyes.

Mary, following his glance, gave a little gasp and recoiled.

For something was coming out of the high grasses. Dragonlike and hideous it slid forward, cold eyes intent on the little people. The sunlight gleamed on rough, warty scales.

Only a lizard—but to Thorkel's victims it was like a triceratops, a dinosaur out of Earth's ferocious past!

Stockton barely had time to snatch up his scissor-blade sword before the reptile rushed. He was bowled over by that blind charge. Gasping, still clinging to his weapon, he scrambled to his feet.

Mary was backed up against a tall weed-stem, her eyes abrim with fear.

Before her Pedro had planted his squat form.

He gripped a bit of wood, holding it like a cudgel—a matchstick in the hands of a mannikin!

The lizard came back, jaws agape, hissing. Baker had found a sharpened splinter of bamboo, and held it as a spear. He thrust, and the point glanced off the reptile's armored flank.

The barking of Paco was thunderously loud. A shadow fell on the group.

Something seemed to swoop down out of the sky—and the vast face of Dr.

Thorkel stared at them as the man crouched down.

"So there you are!" he boomed. "What is this? A lizard? Wait—" In his left hand he gathered the struggling forms of Mary and Pedro. They struck vainly at the huge, imprisoning fingers. He reached toward Stockton.

Simultaneously the lizard rushed again. Stockton drove his blade at the gaping jaws; Baker thrust at the wattled throat. The creature gave back, writhed aside. Thorkel's hand reached out The reptile's jaws closed upon it! Thorkel screamed in pain as he jerked back, cursing with agonized fury. Mary and Pedro dropped unnoticed from the scientist's other hand.

Stockton fled toward them. "The bushes! Quick!"

Habit made him say that. Actually, they darted into the concealing stems of the high grasses, thicker than a forest of bamboo. Behind them they heard Thorkel cursing; then he fell silent.

Paco barked.

"That damn dog of yours," Baker growled. "He's a hunter, all right."

Thorkel's voice sounded. "Come out! I know you're in the grass. Come out or I'll fire it."

Stockton glanced at Mary's white face, and whispered an oath. Baker's thin lips were grim. Pedro rubbed his mustache.

"Paco—he will follow me," the half-breed said. "You stay here."

And he was gone, racing through the grass forest.

There was a moment of silence. Then Stockton, galvanized into activity, crept forward, parting the

fronds till he could see Thorkel.

The scientist was holding a match-box in his fingers.

Blood dripped from the hand to the ground.

Paco's bark came from further away. Thorkel hesitated, looked around, and then extracted a match.

From downstream came Pedro's voice.

"Paco! Fuera! Fuera!"

Thorkel, lighting the match, looked up.

Abruptly he dropped it and snatched at the rifle he had laid down. He took steady aim.

The boom of the gun was deafening thunder.

Pedro screamed once. There was a faint splash from far away.

Sickness tugged at Stockton's stomach as he saw Thorkel go striding off.

He went back to the others.

"Pedro's done for. That leaves three of us."

"Damn Thorkel!" Baker ground out. Mary said nothing, but there was both pity and sorrow in her eyes. They heard Paco go racing past, to leap into the river and swim out.

Then the first coiling tendrils of smoke drifted through the grasses.

Instantly Stockton remembered the lit match that Thorkel had dropped.

He seized Mary's hand and urged her forward.

"Come on, Steve," he said urgently to Baker. "Me's trying to smoke us out.

We can't stay here—" "Come out!" roared the bellowing voice of Thorkel. "Hear me?" His huge boots stamped through the grass patch.

And the fire spread, remorselessly, hungrily.

Mary was gasping with strain. "I can't—go any further, Bill."

"That's right," Baker seconded. "If we come out in the open, he'll see us.

We're trapped."

Stockton stared around. The flames were closing in upon them. Black smoke billowed up. Abruptly Stockton saw something that made his eyes widen.

The specimen case!

Thorkel's box, lying at the edge of the grasses!

Without a word Stockton raced toward it. He still had his improvised sword, and, leaping to a rock beside the box, he used it as a lever to pry the lid open. Instantly the others saw his intention.

Awkwardly, frantic with the need for haste, they clambered in. The lid had scarcely fallen before a jolt and a sense of swinging movement told them that Thorkel had remembered his property.

Through the small ventilators, covered with copper-wire mesh, daylight slanted in vaguely.

Would Thorkel open the case? they wondered.

CHAPTER IV

The Cyclops

IT WAS NIGHT before Thorkel gave up the search. Wearily he pushed open the door of the mud house, put the shotgun on a chair, and dropped the specimen case on the table.

"They must be dead," he groaned. "But I must be sure. I must!"

He polished his spectacles, peering at them vaguely. His watery eyes blinked in puzzlement. Then he went to the door of the radium room and peered through the mica panel. Something he saw there made him turn to the mine-yard door. He flung it open, switched on a floodlight, and went out, leaving the door ajar.

As soon as he had left, the lid of the specimen case lifted. Three tiny people emerged. Fearfully they clambered out, crossed the plain of the table-top, and leaped down to the seat of Thorkel's chair. They gained the floor, and went toward the open door.

"He's busy with the windlass," Mary whispered. "Hurry!"

Stockton halted suddenly. "Okay," he said. "But—I've stopped running. You two go on. I'm going to stay and—kill Thorkel, somehow."

The others stared at him. "But Bill!" Mary gasped. "It's

impossible!

If we reach civilization—" Stockton laughed bitterly.

"We've just been fooling ourselves all along. We can never reach civilization. If we launched a boat, we could never get ashore. We'd starve to death, or crack up in the rapids. We're imprisoned here, as surely as though we were in jail. We can't get away."

"If we—" the girl began. Stockton cut her short.

"It's no use! We can't live long in the forest. Only luck has saved us so far. If we were savages—Indians, perhaps—but we're not. If we go out in the jungle again, it means death."

"And if we stay here?" Baker asked.

Stockton's smile was grim. "Thorkel will kill us. Unless we murder him first."

"All right, suppose we manage to kill Thorkel," Mary asked quietly.

"What then?"

"Then? We live." Stockton nodded, a queer look in his eyes. "I know.

The projector only works one way. We can't regain our normal size, ever. Even if we were large enough to operate the machine, if we could rig up some windlass or lever, it wouldn't help. Thorkel is, I think, the only man in the world who could work out the formula for returning us to our normal size. There's not much chance of his doing that."

Baker said slow]y, "If we kill Thorkel, we'll have to remain-like this—forever?"

"Yeah. And if we don't—he'll get us, sooner or later. Well?"

"It's a—a hard choice," Mary whispered. "But at least we'd be alive—" Baker nodded, and pointed to where Thorkel's discarded gun lay across the chair.

It was aimed at the scientist's cot.

"By God!" Stockton grunted. "That's it!"

Having come to a decision, the three acted quickly. They climbed the chair, and using books as props and the scissor-blade as a lever, adjusted the shotgun.

"Sight it at his pillow," Stockton told Baker, who was looking down the gun barrel. "Up a little ... there! Right at his left ear!"

Mary was tying a piece of thread to the gun. "Can you cock it, Bill?"

"Yeah." He was straining with the lever. "Okay." But, despite Stockton's apparent assurance, he was feeling slightly sick. The choice was—horrible!

To die at Thorkel's hands, or else to remain in this world of littleness forever....

"Thorkel's coming back!" There was panic in Mary's voice.

The three scurried to cover. Stockton managed to capture the thread's dangling end, and ran with it around a box, out of sight. Mary and Baker found shelter beside him.

The scientist's shadow fell across the threshold. He entered, yawning wearily.

Carelessly he scaled his hat on a corner and sat down on the cot, unlacing his boots.

Stockton's hand tightened on the thread. Would the titan notice the altered position of the shotgun?

Thorkel dropped his boots to the floor and started to lie down. Then, struck by a thought, he rose again and went to a cupboard, taking from it a dish of smoked meat and some cassava bread.

Placing this on the table, he drew up a chair and began to eat.

Apparently his eyes ached. Several times he polished his glasses, and presently discarded them entirely, substituting another pair which he took from a tray on the table. He ate slowly, nodding with weariness.

And at last he removed the new pair of spectacles and slumped down, pillowing his head in his arms.

He slept.

"Oh, damn!" Baker said with heart-felt fury. "We can't use the gun now. We couldn't prop it up at the right angle. It looks like the jungle, after all—unless maybe we can use a knife on him."

Stockton looked speculatively at the scissor-blade. "Wouldn't be sure enough. We've got to kill him, not disable him."

"Disable him—that's it!" Mary said suddenly.

"Bill, he's blind without his glasses!"

The three stared at each other, new hope springing to life within them "That's it!" Stockton approved. "We can hide them, and bargain with him, perhaps—" "We must be quiet," Mary warned.

But Thorkel slept heavily. He did not stir when the little people climbed up to the table, and, one by one, handed down the spectacles till they could be thrust out of sight through a hole in the floor.

"That's the last pair," Mary said with satisfaction, peering down into the depths. "He won't find them in a hurry."

"The last but one," Baker denied. "Bill—" He stopped. Stockton was gone.

They saw him back on the table-top, tip-toeing toward the sleeping Thorkel. He skirted the specimen box and approached the spectacles, gripped in the scientist's huge hand.

Gingerly he attempted to disengage them. Thorkel stirred. He mumbled something, and his head lifted, slow with sleep.

Fear tightened Stockton's throat. On impulse he jerked the spectacles from Thorkel's hand and fled behind the specimen box.

Blinking, Thorkel felt around for the glasses. His pale eyes stared unseeingly.

There was a little thud. Stockton, crouching at the table-edge, saw the spectacles hit the floor, without

breaking. He did not see Thorkel rise and fumble toward the specimen box.

Mary's voice was ice-shrill.

"Jump, Bill, jump!"

Hastily, Stockton slipped over the edge, hung by his hands, and dropped The floor rushed up to meet him. He landed heavily, but sprang up and fled before Thorkel could see the movement.

The scientist said, a curious tremor in his voice, "So you've come back.

So you are here, eh?"

There was no answer. Thorkel stumbled to the back door, closed it, and put his back against it.

And, for the first time, Thorkel knew fear.

Thorkel tugged at his mustache. His voice shook when he spoke.

"You would dare attack me? Well, that is a mistake. You are shut up in this room. And I will find you—" He whirled at a fancied movement or sound, glaring blindly, swinging his bald head from side to side with a slow, jerky motion.

"I will find you!"

Stockton pulled Mary back farther into their place of concealment behind a crate. "He's crazy with fear. Keep quiet!"

Thorkel began to stumble around the room, kicking aside apparatus, boxes, clothing.

He fell, and when he rose there was blood trickling from the corner of his mouth.

His hand closed on the shotgun. He snatched it up, and stood silent, waiting.

Without warning Thorkel flung up the gun and fired. The crashing echoes filled the room. Stockton peered out, saw that there was a gaping, splintered hole in the bottom of the back door.

Thorkel waited. Then a grim smile twisted his lips. He felt his way to the table and sought for the tray of extra glasses. His hand encountered nothing. The room was utterly still.

"Then—this is war?" Thorkel asked slowly. With a sudden furious motion he broke down the shotgun and gripped the barrel, holding it like a club.

He dropped to hands and knees and felt beneath the table. Slowly he advanced. In a moment, Stockton realized, he would find the glasses where they lay.

Stockton's sandaled feet made no sound as he raced forward. Before Thorkel could react, the geologist had sprung beneath his nose, snatched up the glasses, and smashed them against the table-leg.

Thorkel swung viciously with the gun-barrel.

Stockton, perforce, dropped the glasses and fled. The huge metal club missed him by inches. He vanished into the shadows.

Crouching in their hiding-places, the three little people stared, frozen, as the titan form of Thorkel rose above the table-edge. He was donning his glasses. One lens was splintered and useless.

Blood-stained, dirt-smeared, and terrible, the giant towered there.

His voice rose in a shout of laughter.

"Now!" he roared. "Now you can call me Cyclops!"

Swiftly he strode forward. With methodical haste he began to search the room, overturning boxes, flinging the cot aside to examine some cases beneath it. Stockton made a peremptory signal. Mary and Baker dashed out from their hiding-place between Thorkel's discarded boots.

They followed Stockton swiftly toward the back door.

"Outside, quick!" he whispered. "He can't see us. The cot's in the way."

They clambered through the gaping hole the shotgun charge had made. It was not easy, and Mary's clothing caught on a sharp splinter.

The cloth ripped as Stockton jerked at it.

Footsteps thudded across the floor. The door was flung open. Thorkel switched on the floodlight.

His shadow momentarily hid the three as they raced forward. The mouth of the mine-shaft loomed up before them, a plank stretched across the pit.

"Down there!" Stockton gasped. "It's our only chance."

It was the only possible place of concealment. But Thorkel's one good eye did not miss the little people's movements as they scrambled over the brink and down the steep rock of the shaft-walls. Skirting the windlass, he fell to his hands and knees and crawled out upon the plank, steadying himself with one hand on the rope that ran down into black depths.

Stockton, clinging to a rock, realized that he still held his

scissor-blade sword.

He lifted it in futile threat.

There was a splintering crack as Thorkel struck at his quarry. The gun-barrel clashed on rock. And, abruptly, the plank caved in and dropped.

Thorkel still gripped the windlass-rope with one hand, and that saved him.

For a second he swung wildly, while the echoing crash of the falling wood and the gun-barrel echoed up

from the depths. Then his grip became surer.

Panting, he hung there briefly, his bald head gleaming with sweat.

He began to climb up the rope.

Stockton glanced around quickly. Mary was clinging to a sloping rock, her white face turned toward the giant.

Baker was looking at the mineralogist, and his gaunt gray features were twisted with hopeless fury.

Stockton made a quick gesture, pointed to his sword, and began to swarm back up to the surface.

Instantly Baker caught his meaning. If the rope to which Thorkel clung could be cut But it was thick, terribly thick, for a tiny man and a scissor-blade!

Thorkel pulled himself slowly upward. In a moment Baker saw, he would reach safety. The trader's lips drew back from his teeth in a mirthless grin; he abruptly rose and edged forward a few paces.

Then he sprang.

Out and down he went, and his clutching hands found Thorkel's collar.

Before the scientist could understand what had happened, Baker was clawing and snarling like a terrier at his throat. Thorkel almost lost his grip.

Gasping with fear and rage, he shook his head violently, trying to knock his assailant free.

"You dirty killer!" Baker snarled.

He was tossed about madly, once a]most crushed between Thorkel's chin and chest. And then, suddenly, Thorkel was falling.

With a whine and a whir the windlass ran out as the rope was severed.

A long, quavering cry burst from Thorkel's throat as he dropped away into the darkness. Higher and higher it rose—and ended.

Stockton ran to the brink and peered over. Mary was clambering weakly up toward him. And, behind her, was Baker.

Bill was standing beside an upright book, a curious expression on his face. He looked around vaguely.

"The machine—" he told Mary. "Can you work it?"

Mary was poring over Thorkel's notebooks. She said despondently, "It's no good, Bill. The device is only a condensor. It can't bring people back to normal size. We'll have to remain this size the rest of our lives. And now, we've got to get back to civilization, somehow—" "As we are?" Baker's face fell. "That's impossible."

"Wait a minute," Stockton interrupted. "I've a hunch—do you remember when we first saw Thorkel,

after he reduced us?"

"Yeah. So what?"

"He wasn't trying to kill us then. He just wanted to weigh and measure us But after he examined Dr. Bulfinch, he turned into a vicious killer. Why do you suppose that happened?"

"He probably intended to kill us all along. For trying to steal his secrets," Baker suggested. "He was probably afraid that we would warn the Allies of his plans."

"Maybe. But he wasn't in any hurry at first. He knew he could dispose of us any time he wanted. Only after he examined Dr. Bulfinch he—found out something that made it necessary to get rid of us in a hurry."

Mary caught her breath. "What?"

"I saw a white mule in the jungle a while ago. A colt. Paco was playing with it. At first I figured it might be Pinto's colt, but mules are sterile, of course. That meant two albino mules here—which isn't very probable—or else it was Pinto. Remember, Pedro said the dog used to play with the mule."

"How big was the mule?" Baker asked abruptly.

"The size of a half-grown colt. Listen, Steve, when we first came out of the cellar I measured myself against that book-Human Physiology. It was just higher than my head. But now it only comes up to my chest!"

"We're growing!" Mary whispered. "That's it."

"Sure. That's what Thorkel found out when he examined Dr. Bulfinch, and why he tried to kill us before we grew back to normal size. I think it's a progressively accelerative process. In two weeks, or perhaps ten days, we'll be back to normal."

"It's logical," the girl commented. "Once the compressive force of radium power is removed, we expand—slow]y but elastically. The electrons swing back to their normal orbits. The energy we absorbed under the ray will be liberated in quanta—" "Ten days," Baker murmured. "And then we can go back down the river again!"

But it was a month before the three, once more normal in size, reached the Andean village that was their first destination. The sight of human beings, no longer gigantic, was warmly reassuring. Indians leaned against the huts, scratching lazily for fleas, Peering down the archway along the street, a ragged Bill Stockton turned to grin at Mary.

"Looks good, eh?"

Baker was absorbed in thought. "We've got to decide," he said, scratching his stubbled chin. "One way, we get our pictures in the paper and tanks of free pulqua But it's just as likely we'll end up in a padded cell if we tell the truth. If we don't tell the truth—" He paused, stiffening. A mangy cat had appeared from beyond the arch.

Baker's muscles tensed; his breath burst out in an explosive "Scat!"

as he sprang forward.

The cat vanished, shocked to the core.

Baker's chest inflated several inches. "Well," he said, with the quiet pride of achievement, "did either of you see that?"

"No," murmured Stockton, who was seizing the opportunity to kiss Mary.

"Go away. Quietly. And quickly."

Baker shrugged and followed the cat, a predatory gleam in his eye.

DR. CYCLOPS Paramount 1940

76 minutes. Produced by Dale Van Every; directed by Ernest B.

Schoedsack; screenplay by Tom Kilpatrick; director of photography, Henry Sharp; process photography by Farciot Edouart and Wallace Kelley; art direction by Hans Dreier and Hearl Hendrick; music composed and conducted by Ernst Toch.

Gerard Carbonara and Albert Hay Malotte; edited by Ellsworth Hoagland; sound by Harry Lindren and Richard Olson; Technicolor consultant, Natalie Kalmus.

cast Albert Dekker (Dr. Alexander Thorkel), Janice Logan (Mary Mitchell), Tom Coley (Bill Stockton), Charles Halton (Dr. Rupert Bulfinch), Victor Kilian (Steve Baker), Frank Yaconelli (Pedro), Bill Wilkerson (Silent Indian), Allen Fox (Cab Driver), Paul Fix (Dr. Mendoza), Frank Reicher (Prof.

Kendall).

WHO GOES THERE? by John W. Campbell, Jr.

filmed as

THE THIN FROM ANOTHER WORLD

(RKO, 1951)

The original concept for The Thing from Another World came about in the August 1938 issue of Astounding Stories. That magazine's prolific editor, John W. Campbell, Jr., wrote the chilling tale under the pseudonym Don A.

Stuart (after his wife, Donna Stuart) and it became an immediate success.

More than a dozen years later, at the dawn of the nuclear age, noted director-producer Howard Hawks (Red River, Rio Bravo) unleashed his own motion picture treatment of this classic alien-invasion story. The two versions are so different that direct comparisons are just about impossible, and it would be difficult to decide which of the pair is more exciting.

In the novella, the tension revolves around the Thing's ability to change form and assume the identities of humans, after conveniently disposing of the originals. Thus, destroying the monster becomes almost

secondary to identifying it.

The "alien chameleon idea was apparently discarded by screenwriter Charles Lederer, who chose instead to instill the theatrical creature with the dread ability to reproduce itself in hoards at an amazingly accelerated rate.

In the first-draft screenplay, the monster came the closest to resembling Campbell's original description of a hunched-over anthropoid with three eyes, rubbery blue hair and razor-sharp tentacles. However, in succeeding rewrites, the Thing's appearance was ultimately changed to that of a giant, hairless Frankenstein-like humanoid. It may not have done much to improve on the story, but it did wonders for the career of "Gunsmoke's" future Marshal Dillon, James Arness—who, at the time, was tagged out of hundreds of hopefuls to play the unusual part of the outer-space invader.

The huge six-foot-three actor was just the first of many to portray various "Things" during the science fiction film boom in the 1950s.

"Who Goes There?" and the film it inspired spawned countless other creature-features with such bloodcurdling titles as The Man f rom Planet X, Invaders from Mars and It Came from Outer Space.

But viewers and critics agree that none of these successors equaled the combined force of John Campbell's novel premise and Howard Hawks's powerful cinematic approach to it.

WHO GOES THERE?

by John W. Campbell, Jr.

CHAPTER I

ThE PLACE STANK. A queer, mingled stench that only the ice-buried cabins of an Antarctic camp know, compounded of reeking human sweat, and the heavy, fish-oil stench of melted seal blubber. An overtone of liniment combatted the musty smell of sweat-and-snow-drenched furs.

The acrid odor of burnt cooking fat, and the animal, not-unpleasant smell of dogs, diluted by time, hung in the air.

Lingering odors of machine oil contrasted sharply with the taint of harness dressing and leather. Yet, somehow, through all that reek of human beings and their associates—dogs, machines and cooking—came another taint. It was a queer, neck-ruing thing, a faintest suggestion of an odor alien among the smells of industry and life. And it was a life smell. But it came from the thing that lay bound with cord and tarpaulin on the table, dripping slowly, methodically onto the heavy planks, dank and gaunt under the unshielded glare of the electric light.

Blair, the little bald-pated biologist of the expedition, twitched nervously at the wrappings, exposing clear, dark ice beneath and then pulling the tarpaulin back into place restlessly. His little birdlike motions of suppressed eagerness danced his shadow across the fringe of dingy gray underwear hanging from the low ceiling, the equatorial fringe of stiff, graying hair around his naked skull a comical halo about the shadow's head.

Commander Garry brushed aside the lax legs of a suit of underwear, and stepped toward the table. Slowly his eyes traced around the rings of men sardined into the Administration Building. His tall, stiff body straightened finally, and he nodded. "Thirty-seven. All here." His voice was low, yet carried the

clear authority of the commander by nature, as well as by title.

"You know the outline of the story back of that find of the Secondary

Pole Expedition. They have been conferring with Second-in-Command

McReady, and Norris, as well as Blair and Dr. Copper. There is a

difference of opinion, and because it involves the entire group, it is

only just that the entire Expedition personnel act on it

"I am going to ask McReady to give you the details of the story, because each of you has been too busy with his own work to follow closely the endeavors of the others. McReady?"

Moving from the smoke-blued background, McReady was a figure from some forgotten myth, a looming, bronze statue that held life, and walked.

Six-feet-four inches he stood as he halted beside the table, and, with a characteristic glance upward to assure himself of room under the low ceiling beams, straightened. His rough, clashingly orange windproof jacket he still had on, yet on his huge frame it did not seem misplaced. Even here, four feet beneath the drift-wind that droned across the Antarctic waste above the ceiling, the cold of the frozen continent leaked in, and gave meaning to the harshness of the man. And he was bronze—his great red-bronze beard, the heavy hair that matched it. The gnarled, corded hands gripping, relaxing, gripping and relaxing on the table planks were bronze.

Even the deep-sunken eyes beneath heavy brows were bronzed.

Age-resisting endurance of the metal spoke in the cragged heavy outlines of his face, and the mellow tones of the heavy voice. "Norris and Blair agree on one thing; that animal we found was not—terrestrial in origin.

Norris fears there may be danger in that; Blair says there is none.

"But I'll go back to how, and why, we found it. To all that was known before we came here, it appeared that this point was exactly over the South Magnetic Pole of Earth. The compass does point straight down here, as you all know. The more delicate instruments of the physicists, instruments especially designed for this expedition and its study of the magnetic pole, detected a secondary effect, a secondary, less powerful magnetic influence about 80 miles southwest of here.

"The Secondary Magnetic Expedition went out to investigate it. There is no need for details. We found it, but it was not the huge meteorite or magnetic mountain Norris had expected to find. Iron ore is magnetic, of course; iron more so—and certain special steels even more magnetic. From the surface indications, the secondary pole we found was small, so small that the magnetic effect it had was preposterous.

No magnetic material conceivable could have that effect. Soundings through the ice indicated it was within one hundred feet of the glacier surface.

"I think you should know the structure of the place. There is a broad plateau, a level sweep that runs more than 150 miles due south from the Secondary station, lan Wall says. He didn't have time or fuel to

fly farther, but it was running smoothly due south then. Right there, where that buried thing was, there is an ice-drowned mountain ridge, a granite wall of unshakable strength that has dammed back the ice creeping from the south.

"And four hundred miles due south is the South Polar Plateau. You have asked me at various times why it gets warmer here when the wind rises, and most of you know. As a meteorologist I'd have staked my word that no wind could blow at--70 degrees—that no more than a 5-mile wind could blow at --50--without causing warming due to friction with ground, snow and ice, and the air itself.

"We camped there on the lip of that ice-drowned mountain range for twelve days. We dug our camp into the blue ice that formed the surface, and escaped most of it. But for twelve consecutive days the wind blew at 45 miles an hour. It went as high as 48, and fell to 41 at times. The temperature was--63 degrees. It rose to--60 and fell to--68. It was meteorologically impossible, and it went on uninterruptedly for twelve days and twelve nights.

"Somewhere to the south, the frozen air of South Polar Plateau slides down from that 18,000-foot bowl, down a mountain pass, over a glacier, and starts north. There must be a funneling mountain chain that directs it, and sweeps it away for four hundred miles to hit that bald plateau where we found the secondary pole, and 350 miles farther north reaches the Antarctic Ocean.

"It's been frozen there since Antarctica froze twenty million years ago.

There never has been a thaw there.

"Twenty million years ago Antarctica was beginning to freeze.

We've investigated, thought and built speculations. What we believe happened was about like this.

"Something came down out of space, a ship. We saw it there in the blue ice, a thing like a submarine without a conning tower or directive vanes, 280 feet long and 45 feet in diameter at its thickest.

"Eh, Van Wall? Space? Yes, but I'll explain that better later."

McReady's steady voice went on.

"It came down from space, driven and lifted by forces men haven't discovered yet, and somehow—perhaps something went wrong then—it tangled with Earth's magnetic field. It came south here, out of control probably, circling the magnetic pole. That's a savage country there, but when Antarctica was still freezing it must have been a thousand times more savage. There must have been blizzard snow, as well as drift, new snow falling as the continent glaciated. The swirl there must have been particularly bad, the wind hurling a solid blanket of white over the lip of that now-buried mountain.

"The ship struck solid granite head-on, and cracked up. Not every one of the passengers in it was killed, but the ship must have been ruined, her driving mechanism locked. It tangled with Earth's field, Norris believes.

No thing made by intelligent beings can tangle with the dead immensity of a planet's natural forces and survive.

"One of its passengers stepped out. The wind we saw there never fell below 41, and the temperature never rose above--60. Then—the wind must have been stronger. And there was drift falling in a solid

sheet.

The thing was lost completely in ten paces." He paused for a moment, the deep, steady voice giving way to the drone of wind overhead, and the uneasy, malicious gurgling in the pipe of the galley stove.

Drift—a drift-wind was sweeping by overhead. Right now the snow picked up by the mumbling wind fled in level, blinding lines across the face of the buried camp. If a man stepped out of the tunnels that connected each of the camp buildings beneath the surface, he'd be lost in ten paces. Out there, the slim, black finger of the radio mast lifted 300 feet into the air, and at its peak was the clear night sky.

A sky of thin, whining wind rushing steadily from beyond to another beyond under the licking, curling mantle of the aurora. And off north, the horizon flamed with queer, angry colors of the midnight twilight.

That was spring 300 feet above Antarctica.

At the surface—it was white death. Death of a needle-fingered cold driven before the wind, sucking heat from any warm thing. Cold—and white mist of endless, everlasting drift, the fine, fine particles of licking snow that obscured all things.

Kinner, the little, scar-faced cook, winced. Five days ago he had stepped out to the surface to reach a cache of frozen beef. He had reached it, started back—and the drift-wind leapt out of the south.

Cold, white death that streamed across the ground blinded him in twenty seconds. He stumbled on wildly in circles. It was half an hour before rope-guided men from below found him in the impenetrable murk.

It was easy for man—or thing—to get lost in ten paces.

"And the drift-wind then was probably more impenetrable than we know."

McReady's voice snapped Kinner's mind back. Back to welcome, dank warmth of the Ad Building. "The passenger of the ship wasn't prepared either, it appears. lt froze within ten feet of the ship.

"We dug down to find the ship, and our tunnel happened to find the frozen—animal. Barclay's ice-ax struck its skull.

"When we saw what it was, Barclay went back to the tractor, started the fire up and when the steam pressure built, sent a call for Blair and Dr. Copper. Barclay himself was sick then. Stayed sick for three days, as a matter of fact.

"When Blair and Copper came, we cut out the animal in a block of ice, as you see, wrapped it and loaded it on the tractor for return here.

We wanted to get into that ship.

"We reached the side and found the metal was something we didn't know.

Our beryllium-bronze, non-magnetic tools wouldn't touch it. Barclay had some tool-steel on the tractor, and that wouldn't scratch it either. We made reasonable tests—even tried some acid from the batteries with no results.

"They must have had a passivating process to make magnesium metal resist acid that way, and the alloy must have been at least 95 per cent magnesium.

But we had no way of guessing that, so when we spotted the barely opened lock door, we cut around it. There was clear, hard ice inside the lock, where we couldn't reach it. Through the little crack we could look in and see that only 38 THEY CAME FROM OUTER SPACE metal and tools were in there, so we decided to loosen the ice with a bomb.

"We had decanite bombs and thermite. Thermite is the ice-softener; decanite might have shattered valuable things, where the thermite's heat would just loosen the ice. Dr. Copper, Norris and I placed a 25-pound thermite bomb, wired it, and took the connector up the tunnel to the surface, where Blair had the steam tractor waiting. A hundred yards the other side of that granite wall we set off the thermite bomb.

"The magnesium metal of the ship caught, of course. The glow of the bomb flared and died, then it began to flare again. We ran back to the tractor, and gradually the glare built up. From where we were we could see the whole ice-field illuminated from beneath with an unbearable light; the ship's shadow was a great, dark cone reaching off toward the north, where the twilight was just about gone. For a moment it lasted, and we counted three other shadow-things that might have been other—passengers—frozen there.

Then the ice was crashing down and against the ship.

"That's why I told you about that place. The wind sweeping down from the Pole was at our backs. Steam and hydrogen flame were torn away in white ice-fog; the flaming heat under the ice there was yanked away toward the Antarctic Ocean before it touched us. Otherwise we wouldn't have come back, even with the shelter of that granite ridge that stopped the light.

"Somehow in the blinding inferno we could see great hunched thin;s, black bulks glowing, even so. They shed even the furious incandescence of the magnesium for a time. Those must have been the engines, we knew. Secrets going in blazing glory—secrets that might have given Man the planets.

Mysterious things that could lift and hurl that ship—and had soaked in the force of the Earth's magnetic field. I saw Norris' mouth move, and ducked.

I couldn't hear him.

"Insulation—something—gave way. All Earth's field they'd soaked up twenty million years before broke loose. The aurora in the sky above licked down, and the whole plateau there was bathed in cold fire that blanketed vision. the ice-ax in my hand got red hot, and hissed on the ice. Metal buttons on my clothes burned into me. And a flash of electric blue seared upward from beyond the granite wall.

"Then the walls of ice crashed down on it. For an instant it squealed the way dry-ice does when it's pressed between metal.

"We were blind and groping in the dark for hours while our eyes recovered. We found every coil within a mile was fused rubbish, the dynamo and every radio set, the earphones and speakers. If we hadn't had the steam tractor, we wouldn't have gotten over to the Secondary Camp.

"Van Wall flew in from Big Magnet at sun-up, as you know.

We came home as soon as possible. That is the history of—that."

McReady's great bronze beard gestured toward the thing on the table.

CHAPTER II

BLAiR STIRRED uneasily, his little, bony fingers wriggling under the harsh light. Little brown freckles on his knuckles slid back and forth as the tendons under the skin twitched. He pulled aside a bit of the tarpaulin and looked impatiently at the dark ice-bound thin inside.

McReady's big body straightened somewhat. He'd ridden the rocking, jarring steam tractor forty miles that day, pushing on to Big Magnet here. Even his calm will had been pressed by the anxiety to mix again with humans. It was lone and quiet out there in Secondary Camp, where a wolf-wind howled down from the Pole. Wolf-wind howling in his sleep—winds droning and the evil, unspeakable face of that monster leering up as he'd first seen it through clear, blue ice, with a bronze ice-ax buried in its skull.

The giant meteorologist spoke again. "The problem is this. Blair wants to examine the thing. Thaw it out and make micro slides of its tissues and so forth. Norris doesn't believe that is safe, and Blair does. Dr. Copper agrees pretty much with Blair. Norris is a physicist, of course, not a biologist. But he makes a point I think we should all hear. Blair has described the microscopic life-forms biologists find living, even in this cold and inhospitable place. They freeze every winter, and thaw every summer—for three months—and live.

"The point Norris makes is—they thaw, and live again. There must have been microscopic life associated with this creature. There is with every living thing we know. And Norris is afraid that we may release a plague—some germ disease unknown to Earth—if we thaw those microscopic things that have been frozen there for twenty million years.

"Blair admits that such micro-life might retain the power of living.

Such unorganized things as individual cells can retain life for unknown periods, when solidly frozen. The beast itself is as dead as those frozen mammoths they find in Siberia. Organized, highly developed life-forms can't stand that treatment.

"But micro-life could. Norris suggests that we may release some disease-form that man, never having met it before, will be utterly defenseless against.

"Blair's answer is that there may be such still-living germs, but that Norris has the case reversed. They are utterly non-immune to man. Our life-chemistry probably—" "Probably!" The little biologist's head lifted in a quick, birdlike motion. The halo of gray hair about his bald head ruffled as though angry.

"Heh. One look—" "I know," McReady acknowledged. "The thing is not Earthly. It does not seem likely that it can have a life-chemistry sufficiently like ours to make cross-infection remotely possible. I would say that there is no danger."

McReady looked toward Dr. Copper. The physician shook his head slowly.

"None whatever," he asserted confidently. "Man cannot infect or be infected by germs that live in such comparatively close relatives as the snakes. And they are, I assure you," his clean-shaven face grimaced

uneasily, "much nearer to us than—that."

Vance Norris moved angrily. He was comparatively short in this gathering of big men, some five-feet-eight, and his stocky, powerful build tended to make him seem shorter. His black hair was crisp and hard, like short, steel wires, and his eyes were the gray of fractured steel. If McReady was a man of bronze, Norris was all steel. His movements, his thoughts, his whole bearing had the quick, hard impulse of steel spring. His nerves were steel-hard, quick-acting—swift-corroding.

He was decided on his point now, and he lashed out in its defense with a characteristic quick, clipped flow of words. "Different chemistry be damned. That thing may be dead—or, by God, it may not—but I don't like it. Damn it, Blair, let them see the monstrosity you are petting over there. Let them see the foul thing and decide for themselves whether they want that thing thawed out in this camp.

"Thawed out, by the way. That's got to be thawed out in one of the shacks tonight, if it is thawed out. Somebody—who's watchman tonight?

Magnetic—oh, Connant. Cosmic rays tonight. Well, you get to sit up with that twenty-million-year-old mummy of his.

"Unwrap it, Blair. How the hell can they tell what they are buying if they can't see it? It may have a different chemistry. I don't know what else it has, but I know it has something I don't want. If you can judge by the look on its face—it isn't human so maybe you can't—it was annoyed when it froze. Annoyed, in fact, is just about as close an approximation of the way it felt as crazy, mad, insane hatred. Neither one touches the subject.

"How the hell can these birds tell what they are voting on? They haven't seen those three red eyes, and that blue hair like crawling worms.

Crawling—damn, it's crawling there in the ice right now!

"Nothing Earth ever spawned had the unutterable sublimation of devastating wrath that thing let loose in its face when it looked around this frozen desolation twenty million years ago. Mad? It was mad clear through—searing, blistering mad!

"Hell, I've had bad dreams ever since I looked at those three red eyes.

Nightmares. Dreaming the thing thawed out and came to life—that it wasn't dead, or even wholly unconscious all those twenty million years, but just slowed, waiting—waiting. You'll dream, too, while that damned thing that Earth wouldn't own is dripping, dripping in the Cosmos House tonight.

"And, Connant," Norris whipped toward the cosmic ray specialist, "won't you have fun sitting up all night in the quiet. Wind whining above—and that thing dripping—" He stopped for a moment, and looked around.

"I know. That's not science. But this is, it's psychology. You'll have nightmares for a year to come. Every night since I looked at that thing I've had 'em. That's why I hate it—sure I do—and don't want it around.

Put it back where it came from and let it freeze for another twenty million years. I had some swell nightmares—that it wasn't made like we are—which is obvious—but of a different kind of flesh that it can really control. That it can change its shape, and look like a man—and wait to kill and eat—" That's

not a logical argument. I know it isn't. The thing isn't Earth-logic anyway.

"Maybe it has an alien body-chemistry, and maybe its bugs do have a different body chemistry. A germ might not stand that, but, Blair and Copper, how about a virus? That's just an enzyme molecule, you've said.

That wouldn't need anything but a protein molecule of any body to work

on

"And how are you so sure that, of the million varieties of microscopic life it may hale, none of them are dangerous? How about diseases like hydrophobia—rabies—that attack any warm-blooded creature, whatever its body-chemistry may be? And parrot fever? Have you a body like a parrot, Blair? And plain rot-gangrene—necrosis, do you want? That isn't choosy about body-chemistry.

Blair looked up from his puttering long enough to meet Norris' angry, gray eyes for an instant. "So far the only thing you have said this thing gave of that was catching was dreams. I'll go so far as to admit that." An impish, slightly malignant grin crossed the little man's seamed face "I had some, too. So. It's dream-infectious. No doubt an exceedingly dangerous malady.

So far as your other things go, you have a badly mistaken idea about viruses. In the first place, nobody has shown that the enzyme-molecule theory, and that alone, explains them. And in the second place, when you catch tobacco mosaic or wheat rust, let me know. A wheat plant is a lot nearer your body-chemistry than this other-world creature is.

"And your rabies is limited, strictly limited. You can't get it rom, nor give it to, a wheat plant or a fish—which is a collateral descendant of a common ancestor of yours. Which this, Norris, is not.

Blair nodded pleasantly toward the tarpaulined bulk on the table.

"Well, thaw the damned thing in a tub of formalin if you must thaw it.

I've suggested that—" "And I've said there would be no sense in it.

You can't compromise. Why did you and Commander Garry come down here to study magnetism? Why weren't you content to stay at home? There s magnetic force enough in New York. I could no more study the life this thing once had from a formalin-pickled sample than you could get the information you wanted back in New York.

And—if this one is so treated, never in all time to come can there be a duplicate! The race it came from must have passed away in the twenty million years it lay frozen, so that even if it came from Mars then, we'd never find its like. And—the ship is gone. "There's only one way to do this—and that is the best possible way. It must be thawed slowly, carefully, and not in formalin. d Commander Garry stood forward again, and Norris steppe back muttering angrily. "I think Blair is right, gentlemen.

What do you say?"

Connant grunted. "It sounds right to us, I think—only perhaps he ought to stand watch over it while it's thawing. He grinned ruefully, brushing a stray lock of ripe-cherry hair back from his forehead.

"Swell idea, in fact—if he sits up with his jolly little corpse."

Garry smiled slightly. A general chuckle of agreement rippled over the

group. “I should think any ghost it may have had would have starved to

death if it hung around here that long, Connan,” Garry suggested. “And

you look capable of taking care of it. ‘Ironman’ Connant ought to be

able to take out any opposing players, still.” ù bout

Connant shook himself uneasily. ‘ I’m not worrying about ghosts.

Let’s see that thing. I—“ Eagerly Blair was stripping back the ropes.

A single throw o the tarpaulin revealed the thing. The ice had melted somewhat in the heat of the room, and it was clear and blue as thick, good glass. It shone wet and sleek under the harsh light of the unshielded globe above.

The room stiffened abruptly. It was face up there on the plain, greasy planks of the table. The broken half of the bronze ice-ax was still buried in the queer skull. Three mad, hate-filled eyes blazed up with a living fire, bright as fresh-spilled blood, from a face ringed with a writhing, loathsome nest of worms, blue, mobile worms that crawled where hair should grow Van Wall, six feet and 200 pounds of ice-nerved pilot, gave a queer, strangled gasp and butted, stumbled his way out to the corridor. Half the company broke for the doors. The others stumbled away from the table.

McReady stood at one end of the table watching them, his great body planted solid on his powerful legs. Norris from the opposite end glowered at the thing with smouldering hate. Outside the door, Garry was talking with half a dozen of the men at once.

Blair had a tack hammer. The ice that cased the thing schlued crisply

under its steel claw as it peeled from the thing it had cased for

twenty thousand thousand years CHAPTER II

“I know you don’t like the thing, Connant, but it just has to be thawed out right. You say leave it as it is till we get back to civilization.

All right, I’ll admit your argument that we could do a better and more complete job there is sound. But—how are we going to get this across the Line? We have to take this through one temperate zone, the equatorial zone, and half way through the other temperate zone before we get it to New York. You don’t want to sit with it one night, but you suggest, then, that I hang its corpse in the freezer with the beef?” Blair looked up from his cautious chipping, his bald, freckled skull nodding triumphantly.

Kinner, the stocky, scar-faced cook, saved Connant the trouble of answering. “Hey, you listen, mister. You put that thing in the box with the meat, and by all the gods there ever were, I’ll put you in to keep it company. You birds have brought everything movable in this camp in onto my mess tables here already, and I had to stand for that.

But you go putting things like that in my meat box or even my meat cache here, and you cook your own

damn grub."

"But, Kinner, this is the only table in Big Magnet that's big enough to work on," Blair objected. "Everybody's explained that.

"Yeah, and everybody's brought everything in here. Clark brings his dogs every time there's a fight and sews them up on that table. Ralsen brings in his sledges. Hell, the only thing you haven't had on that table is the Boeing. And you'd 'a' had that in if you coulda figured a way to get it through the tunnels."

Commander Garry chuckled and grinned at Van Wall, the huge Chief Pilot.

Van Wall's great blond beard twitched suspiciously as he nodded gravely to Kinner. "You're right, Kinner. The aviation department is the only one that treats you right."

"It does get crowded, Kinner," Garry acknowledged. "But I'm afraid we all find it that way at times. Not much privacy in an Antarctic camp."

"Privacy? What the hell's that? You know, the thing that really made me weep, was when I saw Barclay marchin' through here chantin' 'The last lumber in the camp! The last lumber in the camp!" and carry;n' it out to build that house on his tractor. Damn it, I missed that moon cut in the door he carried out more'n I missed the sun when it set.

That wasn't just the last lumber Barclay was walkin' off with. He was carryin' off the last bit of privacy in this blasted place."

A grin rode even on Connant's heavy face as Kinner's perennial good-natured grouch came up again. But it died away quickly as his dark, deep-set eyes turned again to the red-eyed thing Blair was chipping from its cocoon of ice. A big hand ruffed his shoulder-length hair, and tugged at a twisted lock that fell behind his ear in a familiar gesture. "I know that cosmic ray shack s going to be too crowded if I have to sit up with that thing," he growled. "Why can't you go on chipping the ice away from around it—you can do that without anybody butting in, I assure you—and then hang the thing up over the power-plant boiler? That's warm enough.

It'll thaw out a chicken, even a whole side of beef, in a few hours."

"I know," Blair protested, dropping the tack hammer to gesture more effectively with his bony, freckled fingers, his small body tense with eagerness, "but this is too important to take any chances. There never was a find like this; there never can be again. It's the only chance men will ever have, and it has to be done exactly right.

"Look, you know how the fish we caught down near the Ross Sea would freeze almost as soon as we got them on deck, and come to life again if we thawed them gently? Low forms of life aren't killed by quick freezing and slow thawing. We have—" "Hey, for the love of Heaven—you mean that damned thing will come to life!" Connant yelled.

"You get the damned thing—Let me at it! That's going to be in so many pieces—" "NO! No, you fool—" Blair jumped in front of Connant to protect his precious find. "No. Just low forms of life. For Pete's sake let me finish.

You can't thaw higher forms of life and have them come to. Wait a moment now—hold it! A fish can come to after freezing because it's so low a form of life that the individual cells of its body can revive, and

that alone is enough to re-establish life Any higher forms thawed out that way are dead.

Though the individual cells revive, they die because there must be organization and cooperative effort to live. That cooperation cannot be re-established. There is a sort of potential life in any uninjured, quickfrozen animal. But it can't—can't under any circumstances-become active life in higher animals. The higher animals are too complex, too delicate.

This is an intelligent creature as high in its evolution as we are in ours.

Perhaps higher. It is as dead as a frozen man would be."

"How do you know?" demanded Connant, hefting the ice-ax he had seized a moment before.

Commander Garry laid a restraining hand on his heavy shoulder. "Wait a minute, Connant. I want to get this straight. I agree that there is going to be no thawing of this thing if there is the remotest chance of its revival. I quite agree it is much too unpleasant to have alive, but I had no idea there was the remotest possibility."

Dr. Copper pulled his pipe from between his teeth and heaved his stocky, dark body from the bunk he had been sitting in. "Blair's being technical.

That's dead. As dead as the mammoths they find frozen in Siberia.

Potential life is like atomic energy-there, but nobody can get it out, and it certainly won't release itself except in rare cases, as rare as radium in the chemical analogy. We have all sorts of proof that things don't live after being frozen—not even fish, generally speaking—and no proof that higher animal life can under any circumstances. What's the point, Blair?"

The little biologist shook himself. The little ruff of hair standing out around his bald pate waved in righteous anger. "The point is," he said in an injured tone, "that the individual cells might show the characteristics they had in life, if it is properly thawed. A man's muscle cells live many hours after he has died. Just because they live, and a few things like hair and fingernail cells still live you wouldn't accuse a corpse of being a Zombie, or something.

"Now if I thaw this right, I may have a chance to determine what sort of world it's native to. We don't, and can't know by any other means, whether it came from Earth or Mars or Venus or from beyond the stars.

"And just because it looks unlike men, you don't have to accuse it of being evil, or vicious or something. Maybe that expression on its face is its equivalent to a resignation to fate. White is the color of mourning to the Chinese. If men can have different customs, why can't a so-different race have different understandings of facial expressions?"

Connant laughed softly, mirthlessly. "Peaceful resignation! If that is the best it could do in the way of resignation, I should exceedingly dislike seeing it when it was looking mad. That face was never designed to express peace. It just didn't have any philosophical thoughts like peace in its make-up.

"I know it's your pet—but be sane about it. That thing grew up on evil, adolescent slowly roasting alive the local equivalent of kittens, and amused itself through maturity on new and ingenious torture."

"You haven't the slightest right to say that," snapped Blair. "How do you know the first thing about the

meaning of a facial expression inherently inhuman? It may well have no human equivalent whatever.

That is just a different development of Nature, another example of Nature's wonderful adaptability. Growing on another, perhaps harsher world, it has different form and features. But it is just as much a legitimate child of Nature as you are. You are displaying the childish human weakness of hating the different. On its own world it would probably class you as a fish-belly, white monstrosity with an insufficient number of eyes and a fungoid body pale and bloated with gas.

"Just because its nature is different, you haven't any right to say it's necessarily evil."

Norris burst out a single, explosive, "Haw!" He looked down at the thing.

"May be that things from other worlds don't have to be evil just because they're different. But that thing was! Child of Nature, eh?

Well, it was a hell of an evil Nature."

"Aw, will you mugs cut crabbing at each other and get the damned thing off my table?" Kinner growled. "And put a canvas over it. It looks indecent."

"Kinner's gone modest," jeered Connant.

Kinner slanted his eyes up to the big physicist. The scarred - cheek twisted to join the line of his tight lips in a twisted grin.

"All right, big boy, and what were you grousing about a minute ago?

We can set the thing in a chair next to you tonight, if you want."

"I'm not afraid of its face," Connant snapped. "I don't like keeping a wake over its corpse particularly, but I'm going to do it."

Kinner's grin spread. "Uh-huh." He went off to the galley stove and shook down ashes vigorously, drowning the brittle chipping of the ice as Blair fell to work again.

CHAPTER IV

"Cluck," reported the cosmic ray counter, "cluck-brrrp-cluck." Connant started and dropped his pencil.

"Damnation." The physicist looked toward the far corner, back at the Geiger counter on the table near that corner, and crawled under the desk at which he had been working to retrieve the pencil. He sat down at his work again, trying to make his writing more even. It tended to have jerks and quavers in it, in time with the abrupt proud-hen noises of the Geiger counter. The muted whoosh of the pressure lamp he was using for illumination, the mingled gargles and bugle calls of a dozen men sleeping down the corridor in Paradise House formed the background sounds for the irregular, clucking noises of the counter, the occasional rustle of falling coal in the copper-bellied stove. And a soft, steady drip-drip-drip from the thing in the corner.

Connant jerked a pack of cigarettes from his pocket, snapped it so that a cigarette protruded and jabbed the cylinder into his mouth. The lighter failed to function, and he pawed angrily through the pile of papers in search of a match. He scratched the wheel of the lighter several times, dropped it with a curse

and got up to pluck a hot coal from the stove with the coal tongs.

The lighter functioned instantly when he tried it on returning to the desk. The counter ripped out a series of clucking guffaws as a burst of cosmic rays struck through to it. Connant turned to glower at it, and tried to concentrate on the interpretation of data collected during the past week. The weekly summary He gave up and yielded to curiosity, or nervousness. He lifted the pressure lamp from the desk and carried it over to the table in the corner.

Then he returned to the stove and picked up the coal tongs. The beast had been thawing for nearly eighteen hours now. He poked at it with an unconscious caution; the flesh was no longer hard as armor plate, but had assumed a rubbery texture. It looked like wet, blue rubber glistening under droplets of water like little round jewels in the glare of the gasoline pressure lantern. Connant felt an unreasoning desire to pour the contents of the lamp's reservoir over the thing in its box and drop the cigarette into it. The three red eyes glared up at him sightlessly, the ruby eyeballs reflecting murky, smoky rays of light.

He realized vaguely that he had been looking at them for a very long time, even vaguely understood that they were no longer sightless. But it did not seem of importance, of no more importance than the labored, slow motion of the tentacular things that sprouted from the base of the scrawny, slowly pulsing neck.

Connant picked up the pressure lamp and returned to his chair. He sat down, staring at the pages of mathematics before him. The clucking of the counter was strangely less disturbing, the rustle of the coals in the stove no longer distracting.

The creak of the floorboards behind him didn't interrupt his thoughts as he went about his weekly report in an automatic manner, filling in columns of data and making brief, summarizing notes.

The creak of the floorboards sounded nearer.

CHAPTER V

BLAIR CAME up from the nightmare-haunted depths of sleep abruptly.

Connant's face floated vaguely above him; for a moment it seemed a continuance of the wild horror of the dream. But Connant's face was angry, and a little frightened. "Blair—Blair you damned log, wake up."

"Uh—eh?" The little biologist rubbed his eyes, his bony, freckled fingers crooked to a mutilated child-fist. From surrounding bunks other faces lifted to stare down at them.

Connant straightened up. "Get up—and get a lift on. Your damned animal's escaped."

"Escaped—what!" Chief Pilot Van Wall's bull voice roared out with a volume that shook the walls. Down the communication tunnels other voices yelled suddenly. The dozen inhabitants of Paradise House tumbled in abruptly, Barclay, stocky and bulbous in long woolen underwear, carrying a fire extinguisher.

"What the hell's the matter?" Barclay demanded.

"Your damned beast got loose. I fell asleep about twenty minutes ago, and when I woke up, the thing was gone. Hey, Doc, the hell you say those things can't come to life. Blair's blasted potential life developed a hell of a lot of potential and walked out on us."

Copper stared blankly. "It wasn't—Earthly," he sighed suddenly.

"I—I guess Earthly laws don't apply."

"Well, it applied for leave of absence and took it. We've got to find it and capture it somehow." Connant swore bitterly, his deepset black eyes sullen and angry. "It's a wonder the hellish creature didn't eat me in my sleep."

Blair stared back, his pale eyes suddenly fear-struck. "Maybe it di—er—uh—we'll have to find it."

"You find it. It's your pet. I've had all I want to do with it, sitting there for seven hours with the counter clucking every few seconds, and you birds in here singing night-music. It's a wonder I got to sleep. I'm going through to the Ad Building."

Commander Garry ducked through the doorway, pulling his belt tight.

"You won't have to. Van's roar sounded like the Boeing taking off down wind. So it wasn't dead?"

"I didn't carry it off in my arms, I assure you," Connant snapped.

"The last I saw, that split skull was oozing green goo, like a squashed caterpillar. Doc just said our laws don't work—it's unearthly. Well, it's an unearthly monster, with an unearthly disposition, judging by the face, wandering around with a split skull and brains oozing out."

Norris and McReady appeared in the doorway, a doorway filling with other shivering men. "Has anybody seen it coming over here?" Norris asked innocently. "About four feet tall—three red eyes—brains oozing—Hey, has anybody checked to make sure this isn't a cracked idea of humor? If it is, I think we'll unite in tying Blair's pet around Connant's neck like the Ancient Mariner s albatross."

"It's no humor," Connant shivered. "Lord, I wish it were. I'd rather wear—" He stopped. A wild, weird howl shrieked through the corridors.

The men stiffened abruptly, and half turned.

"I think it's been located," Connant finished. His dark eyes shifted with a queer unease. He darted back to his bunk in Paradise House, to return almost immediately with a heavy .45 revolver and an ice-ax. He hefted both gently as he started for the corridor toward Dogtown. "It blundered down the wrong corridor—and landed among the huskies.

Listen—the dogs have broken their chains—" The half-terrorized howl of the dog pack changed to a wild hunting melee.

The voices of the dogs thundered in the narrow corridors, and through them came a low rippling snarl of distilled hate. A shrill of pain, a dozen snarling yelps.

Connant broke for the door. Close behind him, McReady, then Barclay and Commander Garry came. Other men broke for the Ad Building, and weapons—the sledge house. Pomroy, in charge of Big Magnet's five cows, started down the corridor in the opposite direction—he had a six-foot-handled, long-tined pitchfork in mind.

Barclay slid to a halt, as McReady's giant bulk turned abruptly away from the tunnel leading to

Dogtown, and vanished off at an angle.

Uncertainly, the mechanician wavered a moment, the fire extinguisher in his hands, hesitating from one side to the other. Then he was racing after Connant's broad back. Whatever McReady had in mind, he could be trusted to make it work.

Connant stopped at the bend in the corridor. His breath hissed suddenly through his throat. "Great God—'; The revolver exploded thunderously; three numbing, palpable waves of sound crashed through the confined corridors. Two more. The revolver dropped to the hard-packed snow of the trail, and Barclay saw the ice-ax shift into defensive position. Connant's powerful body blocked his vision, but beyond he heard something mewing, and, insanely, chuckling. The dogs were quieter; there was a deadly seriousness in their low snarls.

Taloned feet scratched at hardpacked snow, broken chains were clinking and tangling.

Connant shifted abruptly, and Barclay could see what lay beyond. For a second he stood frozen, then his breath went out in a gusty curse. The Thing launched itself at Connant, the powerful arms of the man swung the ice—a flatside first at what might have been a hand. It scrunched horribly, and the tattered flesh, ripped by a half-dozen savage huskies, leapt to its feet again. The red eyes blazed with an unearthly hatred, an unearthly, unkillable vitality.

Barclay turned the fire extinguisher on it; the blinding, blistering stream of chemical spray confused it, baffled it, together with the savage attacks of the huskies, not for long afraid of anything that did, or could live, held it at bay.

McReady wedged men out of his way and drove down the narrow corridor packed with men unable to reach the scene. There was a sure fore-planned drive to McReady's attack. One of the giant blow-torches used in warming the plane's engines was in his bronzed hands. It roared gustily as he turned the corner and opened the valve. The mad mewing hissed louder. The dogs scrambled back from the three-foot lance of blue-hot flame.

"Bar, get a power cable, run it in somehow. And a handle. We can electrocute this—monster, if I don't incinerate it." McReady spoke with an authority of planned action. Barclay turned down the long corridor to the power plant, but already before him Norris and Van Wall were racing down. .

Barclay found the cable in the electrical cache in the tunnel wall. In a half minute he was hacking at it, walking back. Van Wall's voice rang out in a warning shout of "Power!" as the emergency gasoline-powered dynamo thudded into action. Half a dozen other men were down there now; the coal kindling were going into the firebox of the steam power plant. Norris, cursing in a low, deadly monotone, was working with quick, sure fingers on the other end of Barclay's cable, splicing in a contactor in one of the power leads.

The dogs had fallen back when Barclay reached the corridor bend, fallen back before a furious monstrosity that glared from baleful red eyes, mewing in trapped hatred. The dogs were a semicircle of red-dipped muzzles with a fringe of glistening white teeth, whining with a vicious eagerness that near matched the fury of the Ted; eyes. McReady stood confidently alert at the corridor bend, the gustily muttering torch held loose and ready for action in his hands. He stepped aside without moving his eyes from the beast as Barclay came up. There was a slight, tight smile on his lean, bronzed face.

Norris' voice called down the corridor, and Barclay stepped forward.

The cable was taped to the long handle of a snow-shovel, the two conductors split, and held 18 inches apart by a scrap of lumber lashed at right angles across the far end of the handle. Bare copper conductors, charged with 220 volts, glinted in the light of pressure lamps. The Thing mewed and halted and dodged. McReady advanced to Barclay's side. The dogs beyond sensed the plan with the almost-telepathic intelligence of trained huskies. Their whimpering grew shallower, softer, their mincing steps carried them nearer.

Abruptly a huge, night-black Alaskan leapt onto the trapped thing. It turned squalling, saber-clawed feet slashing.

Barclay leapt forward and jabbed. A weird, sharp scream rose and choked out. The smell of burnt flesh in the corridor intensified; greasy smoke curled up. The echoing pound of the gas-electric dynamo down the corridor became a slogging thud.

The red eyes clouded over in a stiffening, jerking travesty of a face.

Armlike, leglike members quivered and jerked. The dogs leapt forward, and Barclay yanked back his shovel-handled weapon. The thing on the snow did not move as gleaming teeth ripped it open.

CHAPTER VI

GARRY LOOkED about the crowded room. Thirty-two men, some tensed nervously standing against the wall, some uneasily relaxed, some sitting, most perforce standing, as intimate as sardines. Thirty-two, plus the five engaged in sewing up wounded dogs, made thirty-seven, the total personnel.

Garry started speaking. "All right, I guess we're here. Some of you—three or four at most—saw what happened. All of you have seen that thing on the table, and can get a general idea. Anyone hasn't, I'll lift—" His hand strayed to the tarpaulin bulking over the thing on the table. There was an acrid odor of singed flesh seeping out of it. The men stirred restlessly, hasty denials.

"It looks rather as though Charnauk isn't going to lead any more teams," Garry went on. "Blair wants to get at this thing, and make some more detailed examination. We want to know what happened, and make sure right now that this is permanently, totally dead. Right?"

Connant grinned. "Anybody that doesn't agree can sit up with i tonight.

"All right then, Blair, what can you say about it? What was it" Garry turned to the little biologist.

I wonder if we ever saw its natural form." Blair looked at the covered mass. "It may have been imitating the beings that built that ship—but I don't think it was. I think that was its true form. Those of us who were up near the bend saw the thing in action; the thing on the table is the result. When it got loose, apparently, it started looking around.

Antarctica still frozen as it was ages ago when the creature first saw it—and froze. Prom my observations while it was thawing out, and the bits of tissue I cut and hardened then, I think it was native to a hotter planet than Earth. It couldn't, in its natural form, stand the temperature. There is no life-form on Earth that can live in Antarctica during the winter but the best compromise is the dog. It found the dogs, and somehow got near enough to Charnauk to get him.

The others smelled it—heard it—I don't know—anyway they went wild, and broke chains, and attacked it before it was finished. The thing we found was part Charnauk, queerly only half-dead, part

Charnauk half-digested by the jellylike protoplasm of that creature, and part the remains of the thing we originally found, sort of melted down to the basic protoplasm.

"When the dogs attacked it, it turned into the best fighting thing it could think of. Some other-world beast apparently."

"Turned," snapped Garry. "How?"

"Every living thing is made up of jelly—protoplasm and minute, submicroscopic things called nuclei, which control the bulk, the protoplasm. This thing was just a modification of that same worldwide plan of Nature; cells made up of protoplasm, controlled by infinitely tinier nuclei. You physicists might compare it—an individual cell of any living thing—with an atom; the bulk of the atom, the space-filling part, is made up of the electron orbits, but the character of the thing is determined by the atomic nucleus.

"This isn't wildly beyond what we already know. It's just a modification we haven't seen before. It's as natural, as logical, as any other manifestation of life. It obeys exactly the same laws. The cells are made of protoplasm, their character determined by the nucleus.

"Only in this creature, the cell-nuclei can control those cells at will.

It digested Charnauk, and as it digested, studied every cell of his tissue, and shaped its own cells to imitate them exactly. Parts of it—parts that had time to finish changing—are dog-cells. But they don't have dog-cell nuclei." Blair lifted a fraction of the tarpaulin.

A torn dog's leg with stiff gray fur protruded. "That, for instance, isn't dog at all; it's imitation. Some parts I'm uncertain about; the nucleus was hiding itself, covering up with dog-cell imitation nucleus.

In time, not even a microscope would have shown the difference."

"Suppose," asked Norris bitterly, "it had had lots of time?"

"Then it would have been a dog. The other dogs would have accepted it.

We would have accepted it. I don't think anything would have distinguished it, not microscope, nor X-ray, nor any other means. This is a member of a supremely intelligent race, a race that has learned the deepest secrets of biology, and turned them to its use."

"What was it planning to do?" Barclay looked at the humped tarpaulin.

Blair grinned unpleasantly. The wavering halo of thin hair round his bald pate wavered in the stir of air. "Take over the world, I imagine."

"Take over the world! Just it, all by itself?" Connant gasped. "Set itself up as a lone dictator?"

"No," Blair shook his head. The scalpel he had been fumbling in his bony fingers dropped; he bent to pick it up, so that his face was hidden as he spoke. "It would become the population of the world."

"Become—populate the world? Does it reproduce asexually? '

Blair shook his head and gulped. "It's—it doesn't have to. It weighed 85 pounds. Charnauk weighed about 90. It would have become Charnauk, and had 85 pounds left, to become—oh, Jack for instance,

or Chinook. It can imitate anything—that is, become anything. If it had reached the Antarctic Sea, it would have become a seal, maybe two seals. They might have attacked a killer whale, and become either killers, or a herd of seals. Or maybe it would have caught an albatross, or a skua gull, and flown to South America."

Norris cursed softly. "And every time it digested something, and imitated it—" "It would have had its original bulk left, to start again," Blair finished. "Nothing would kill it. It has no natural enemies, because it becomes whatever it wants to. If a killer whale attacked it, it would become a killer whale. If it was an albatross, and an eagle attacked it, it would become an eagle. Lord, it might become a female eagle. Go back—build a nest and lay eggs!"

"Are you sure that thing from hell is dead?" Dr. Copper asked softly.

"Yes, thank Heaven," the little biologist gasped. "After they drove the dogs off, I stood there poking Bar's electrocution thing into it for five minutes. It's dead and—cooked."

"Then we can only give thanks that this is Antarctica, where there is not one, single, solitary, living thing for it to imitate, except these animals in camp."

"Us," Blair giggled. "It can imitate us. Dogs can't make four hundred miles to the sea; there's no food. There aren't any skua gulls to imitate at this season. There aren't any penguins this far inland.

There's nothing that can reach the sea from this point—except us.

We've got brains. We can do it. Don't you see—it's got to imitate

us—it's got to be one of us—that's the only way it can fly an

airplane—y a plane for two hours, and rule—be—all Earth's

inhabitants. A world for the taking—if it imitates us!

"It didn't know yet. It hadn't had a chance to learn. It was rushed—hurried—took the thing nearest its own size. Look—I'm Pandora! I opened the box! And the only hope that can come out IS—that nothing can come out. You didn't see me. I did it. I fixed it. I smashed every magneto.

Not a plane can fly. Nothing can fly." Blair giggled and lay down on the floor crying.

Chief Pilot Van Wall made a dive for the door. His feet were fading echoes in the corridors as Dr. Copper bent unhurriedly over the little man on the floor. From his office at the end of the room he brought something, and injected a solution into Blair's arm. "He might come out of it when he wakes up," he sighed, rising. McReady helped him lift the biologist onto a nearby bunk. "It all depends on whether we can convince him that thing is dead."

Van Wall ducked into the shack brushing his heavy blond beard absently.

"I didn't think a biologist would do a thing like that up thoroughly.

He missed the spares in the second cache. It's all right. I smashed them."

Commander Garry nodded. “I was wondering about the radio.”

Dr. Copper snorted. “You don’t think it can leak out on a radio wave, do you? You’d have five rescue attempts in the next three months if you stop the broadcasts. The thing to do is talk loud and not make a sound. Now I wonder—“ McReady looked speculatively at the doctor.

“It might be like an infectious disease. Everything that drank any of its blood—“ Copper shook his head. “Blair missed something. Imitate it may, but it has, to a certain extent, its own body-chemistry, its own metabolism. If it didn’t, it would become a dog—and be a dog and nothing more. It has to be an imitation dog. Therefore you can detect it by serum tests. And its chemistry, since it comes from another world, must be so wholly, radically different that a few cells, such as gained by drops of blood, would be treated as disease germs by the dog, or human body.”

“Blood—would one of those imitations bleed?” Norris demanded.

“Surely. Nothing mystic about blood. Muscle is about 90 per cent water; blood differs only in having a couple per cent more water, and less connective tissue. They’d bleed all right,” Copper assured him.

Blair sat up in his bunk suddenly. “Connant—where’s Connant?”

The physicist moved over toward the little biologist. “Here I am.

What do you want?”

“Are you?” giggled Blair. He lapsed back into the bunk contorted with silent laughter.

Connant looked at him blankly. “Hub? Am I what?”

“Are you there?” Blair burst into gales of laughter.

Connant? The beast wanted to be a man—not a dog—“

CHAPTER VII

DR. COPPER ROSe wearily from the bunk, and washed the hypodermic carefully.

The little tinkles it made seemed loud in the packed room, now that Blair’s gurgling laughter had finally quieted. Copper looked toward Garry and shook his head slowly. “Hopeless, I’m afraid. I don’t think we can ever convince him the thing is dead now.”

Norris laughed uncertainly. “I’m not sure you can convince me. Oh, damn you, McReady.”

“McReady?” Commander Garry turned to look from Norris to McReady curiously.

“The nightmares,” Norris explained. “He had a theory about the nightmares we had at the Secondary Station after finding that thing.”

“And that was?” Garry looked at McReady levelly.

Norris answered for him, jerkily, uneasily. “That the creature wasn’t dead, had a sort of enormously

slowed existence, an existence that permitted it, none the less, to be vaguely aware of the passing of time, of our coming, after endless years. I had a dream it could imitate things."

"Well," Copper grunted, "it cam" "Don't be an ass," Norris snapped.

"That's not what's bothering me. In the dream it could read minds, read thoughts and ideas and mannerisms."

"What's so bad about that? It seems to be worrying you more than the thought of the joy we're going to have with a mad man in an Antarctic camp." Copper nodded toward Blair's sleeping form.

McReady shook his great head slowly. "You know that Connant is Connant, because he not merely looks like Connant—which we're beginning to believe that beast might be able to do—but he thinks like Connant, talks like Connant, moves himself around as Connant does.

That takes more than merely a body that looks like him; that takes Connant's own mind, and thoughts and mannerisms. Therefore, though you know that the thing might make itself look like Connant, you aren't much bothered, because you know it has a mind from another world, a totally unhuman mind, that couldn't possibly react and think and talk like a man we know, and do it so well as to fool us for a moment. The idea of the creature imitating one of us is fascinating, but unreal because it is too completely unhuman to deceive us. It doesn't have a human mind."

"As I said before," Norris repeated, looking steadily at McReady, "you can say the damnedest things at the damnedest times. Will you be so good as to finish that thought—one way or the other?"

Kinner, the scar-faced expedition cook, had been standing near Connant.

Suddenly he moved down the length of the crowded room toward his familiar galley. He shook the ashes from the galley stove noisily.

"It would do it no good," said Dr. Copper, softly as though thinking out loud, "to merely look like something it was trying to imitate; it would have to understand its feelings, its reaction. It i. unhuman; it has powers of imitation beyond any conception of man. A good actor, by training himself, can imitate another man, another man's mannerisms, well enough to fool most people. Of course no actor could imitate so perfectly as to deceive men who had been living with the imitated one in the complete lack of privacy of an Antarctic camp. That would take a super-human skill."

"Oh, you've got the bug too?" Norris cursed softly.

Connant, standing alone at one end of the room, looked about him wildly, his face white. A gentle eddying of the men had crowded them slowly down toward the other end of the room, so that he stood quite alone. "My God, will you two Jeremiahs shut up?" Connant's voice shook. "What am I? Some kind of a microscopic specimen you're dissecting? Some unpleasant worm you're discussing in the third person?"

McReady looked up at him; his slowly twisting hands stopped for a moment.

"Having a lovely time. Wish you were here. Signed: Everybody.

"Connant, if you think you're having a hell of a time, just move over on the other end for a while. You've got one thing we haven't; you know what the answer is. I'll tell you this, right now you're the most feared

and respected man in Big Magnet."

"Lord, I wish you could see your eyes," Connant gasped. "Stop staring, will you! What the hell are you going to do?"

"Have you any suggestions, Dr. Copper?" Commander Garry asked steadily.

"The present situation is impossible."

"Oh, is it?" Connant snapped. "Come over here and look at that crowd.

By Heaven, they look exactly like that gang of huskies around the corridor bend. Benning, will you stop hefting that damned ice-ax?"

The coppery blade rang on the floor as the aviation mechanic nervously dropped it. He bent over and picked it up instantly, hefting it slowly, turning it in his hands, his brown eyes moving jerkily about the room.

Copper sat down on the bunk beside Blair. The wood creaked noisily in the room. Far down a corridor, a dog yelped in pain, and the dog-drivers' tense voices floated softly back. "Microscopic examination," said the doctor thoughtfully, "would be useless, as Blair pointed out. Considerable time has passed. However, serum tests would be definitive."

"Serum tests? What do you mean exactly?" Commander Garry asked.

"If I had a rabbit that had been injected with human blood—a poison to rabbits, of course, as is the blood of any animal save that of another rabbit—and the injections continued in increasing doses for some time, the rabbit would be human-immune. If a small quantity of its blood were drawn off, allowed to separate in a test-tube, and to the clear serum, a bit of human blood were added, there would be a visible reaction, proving the blood was human. If cow, or dog blood were added—or any protein material other than that one thing, human blood—no reaction would take place. That would prove definitely."

"Can you suggest where I might catch a rabbit for you, Doc?" Norris asked.

"That is, nearer than Australia; we don't want to waste time going that far."

"I know there aren't any rabbits in Antarctica," Copper nodded, "but that is simply the usual animal. Any animal except man will do. A dog for instance. But it will take several days, and due to the greater size of the animal, considerable blood. Two of us will have to contribute."

"Would I do?" Garry asked.

"That will make two," Copper nodded. "I'll get to work on it right away."

"What about Connant in the meantime?" Kinner demanded.

"I'm going out that door and head off for the Ross Sea before I cook for him."

"He may be human—" Copper started.

Connant burst out in a flood of curses. "Human! May be human, you damned saw-bones! What in hell do you think I am?"

"A monster," Copper snapped sharply. "Now shut up and listen."

Connant's face drained of color and he sat down heavily as the indictment was put in words. "Until we know—you know as well as we do that we have reason to question the fact, and only you know how that question is to be answered—we may reasonably be expected to lock you up. If you are—unhuman—you're a lot more dangerous than poor Blair there, and I'm going to see that he's locked up thoroughly. I expect that his next stage will be a violent desire to kill you, all the dogs, and probably all of us.

When he wakes, he will be convinced we're all unhuman, and nothing on the planet will ever change his conviction. It would be kinder to let him die, but we can't do that, of course. He's going in one shack, and you can stay in Cosmos House with your cosmic ray apparatus. Which is about what you'd do anyway. I've got to fix up a couple of dogs."

Connant nodded bitterly. "I'm human. Hurry that test. Your eyes—Lord, I wish you could see your eyes staring—" Commander Garry watched anxiously as Clark, the doghandler, held the big brown Alaskan husky, while Copper began the injection treatment. The dog was not anxious to cooperate; the needle was painful, and already he'd experienced considerable needle work that morning. Five stitches held closed a slash that ran from his shoulder across the ribs half way down his body. One long fang was broken off short; the missing part was to be found half-buried in the shoulder bone of the monstrous thing on the table in the Ad Building.

"How long will that take?" Garry asked, pressing his arm gently. It was sore from the prick of the needle Dr. Copper had used to withdraw blood.

Copper shrugged. "I don't know, to be frank. I know the general method, I've used it on rabbits. But I haven't experimented with dogs.

They're big, clumsy animals to work with; naturally rabbits are preferable, and serve ordinarily. In civilized places you can buy a stock of human-immune rabbits from suppliers, and not many investigators take the trouble to prepare their own."

"What do they want with them back there?" Clark asked.

"Criminology is one large field. A says he didn't murder B, but that the blood on his shirt came from killing a chicken. The State makes a test, then it's up to A to explain how it is the blood reacts on human-immune rabbits, but not on chicken-immunes."

"What are we going to do with Blair in the meantime?" Garry asked wearily.

"It's all right to let him sleep where he is for a while, but when he wakes up—" "Barclay and Benning are fitting some bolts on the door of Cosmos House," Copper replied grimly. "Connant's acting like a gentleman. I think perhaps the way the other men look at him makes him rather want privacy. Lord knows, heretofore we've all of us individually prayed for a little privacy."

Clark laughed bitterly. "Not anymore, thank you. The more the merrier."

"Blair," Copper went on, "will also have to have privacy—and locks.

He's going to have a pretty definite plan in mind when he wakes up. Ever hear the old story of how to stop hoof-and-mouth disease in cattle?

"If there isn't any hoof-and-mouth disease, there won't be any hoof-and-mouth disease," Copper explained. "You get rid of it by killing every animal that exhibits it, and every animal that's been near the diseased animal. Blair's a biologist, and knows that story.

He's afraid of this thing we loosed. The answer is probably pretty clear in his mind now.

Kill everybody and everything in this camp before a skua gull or a wandering albatross coming in with the spring chances out this way and—catches the disease."

Clark's lips curled in a twisted grin. "Sounds logical to me. If things get too bad—maybe we'd better]et Blair get loose. It would save us committing suicide. We might also make something of a vow that if things get bad, we see that that does happen."

Copper laughed softly. "The last man alive in Big Magnet wouldn't be a man," he pointed out. "Somebody's got to kill those—creatures that don't desire to kill themselves, you know. We don't have enough thermite to do it all at once, and the decanite explosive wouldn't help much. I have an idea that even small pieces of one of those beings would be self-sufficient.""

"If," said Garry thoughtfully, "they can modify their protoplasm at will, won't they simply modify themselves to birds and fly away? They can read all about birds, and imitate their structure without even meeting them. Or imitate, perhaps, birds of their home planet."

Copper shook his head, and helped Clark to free the dog. "Man studied birds for centuries, trying to learn how to make a machine to fly like them. He never did do the trick; his final success came when he broke away entirely and tried new methods. Knowing the general idea, and knowing the detailed structure of wing and bone and nerve-tissue is something far, far different. And as for otherworld birds, perhaps, in fact very probably, the atmospheric conditions here are so vastly different that their birds couldn't fly. Perhaps, even, the being came from a planet like Mars with such a thin atmosphere that there were no birds."

Barclay came into the building, trailing a length of airplane control cable. "It's finished, Doc. Cosmos House can't be opened from the inside.

Now where do we put Blair?"

Copper looked toward Garry. "There wasn't any biology building. I don't know where we can isolate him."

"How about East Cache?" Garry said after a moment's thought. "Will Blair be able to look after himself—or need attention?"

"He'll be capable enough. We'll be the ones to watch out," Copper assured him grimly. "Take a stove, a couple of bags of coal, necessary supplies and a few tools to fill it up. Nobody's been out there since

last fall, have they?"

Garry shook his head. "If he gets noisy—I thought that might be a good idea."

Barclay hefted the tools he was carrying and looked up at Garry. "If the muttering he's doing now is any sign, he's going to sing away the night hours. And we won't like his song."

"What's he saying?" Copper asked.

Barclay shook his head. "I didn't care to listen much. You can if you want to. But I gathered that the blasted idiot had all the dreams McReady had, and a few more. He slept beside the thing when we stopped on the trail coming in from Secondary Magnetic, remember. He dreamt the thing was alive, and dreamt more details. And—damn his soul—knew it wasn't all dream, or had reason to. He knew it had telepathic powers that were stirring vaguely, and that it could not only read minds, but project thoughts. They weren't dreams, you see. They were stray thoughts that thing was broadcasting, the way Blair's broadcasting his thoughts now—a sort of telepathic muttering in its sleep. That's why he knew so much about its powers. I guess you and I, Doc, weren't so sensitive—if you want to believe in telepathy."

"I have to," Copper sighed. "Dr. Rhine of Duke University has shown that it exists, shown that some are much more sensitive than others."

"Well, if you want to learn a lot of details, go listen in on Blair's broadcast. He's driven most of the boys out of the Ad Building;

Kinner's rattling pans like coal going down a chute. When he can't rattle a pan, he shakes ashes.

"By the way, Commander, what are we going to do this spring, now the planes are out of it?"

Garry sighed. "I'm afraid our expedition is going to be a loss. We cannot divide our strength now."

"It won't be a loss—if we continue to live, and come out of this," Copper promised him. "The find we've made, if we can get it under control, is important enough. The cosmic ray data, magnetic work, and atmospheric work won't be greatly hindered."

Garry laughed mirthlessly. "I was just thinking of the radio broadcasts.

Telling half the world about the wonderful results of our exploration flights, trying to fool men like Byrd and Ellsworth back home there that we're doing something."

Copper nodded gravely. "They'll know something's wrong. But men like that have judgment enough to know we wouldn't do tricks without some sort of reason, and will wait for our return to judge us. I think it comes to this: men who know enough to recognize our deception will wait for our return.

Men who haven't discretion and faith enough to wait will not have the experience to detect any fraud. We know enough of the conditions here to put through a good bluff."

"Just so they don't send 'rescue' expeditions," Garry prayed.

"When—if—we're ever ready to come out, we'll have to send word to Captain Forsythe to bring a stock of magnetos with him when he comes down.

But—never mind that."

"You mean if we don't come out?" asked Barclay. "I was wondering if a nice running account of an eruption or an earthquake via radio—with a swell windup by using a stick of decanite under the microphone—would help.

Nothing, of course, will entirely keep people out. One of those swell, melodramatic 'last-man-alive-scenes' might make 'em go easy though."

Garry smiled with genuine humor. "Is everybody in camp trying to figure that out too?"

Copper laughed. "What do you think, Garry? We're confident we can win out.

But not too easy about it, l guess."

Clark grinned up from the dog he was petting into calmness.

"Confident, did you say, Doc?"

CHAPTER VIII

BLAIR MOVED restlessly around the small shack. His eyes jerked and quivered in vague, fleeting glances at the four men with him; Barclay, six feet tall and weighing over 190 pounds; McReady, a bronze giant of a man; Dr. Copper, short, squatly powerful; and Benning, five-feet-ten of wiry strength.

Blair was huddled up against the far wall of the East Cache cabin, his gear piled in the middle of the floor beside the heating stove, forming an island between him and the four men. His bony hands clenched and fluttered, terrified. His pale eyes wavered uneasily as his bald, freckled head darted about in birdlike motion.

"I don't want anybody coming here. I'll cook my own food," he snapped nervously. "Kinner may be human now, but I don't believe it. I'm going to get out of here, but I'm not going to eat any food you send me. I want cans. Sealed cans."

"O.K., Blair, we'll bring 'em tonight," Barclay promised. "You've got coal, and the fire's started. I'll make a last—" Barclay started forward.

Blair instantly scurried to the farthest corner. "Get out! Keep away from me, you monster!" the little biologist shrieked, and tried to claw his way through the wall of the shack. "Keep away from me—keep away—I won't be absorbed—I won't be—" Barclay relaxed and moved back. Dr. Copper shook his head.

"Leave him alone, Bar. It's easier for him to fix the thing himself.

We'll have to fix the door, I think—" he four men let themselves out.

Efficiently, Benning and Barclay fell to work. There were no locks in Antarctica; there wasn't enough privacy to make them needed. But powerful screws had been driven in each side of the door frame, and the spare aviation control cable, immensely strong, woven steel wire, was rapidly caught between them and drawn taut. Barclay went to work with a drill and a keyhole saw. Presently he had a trap cut in the door through which goods could be passed without unlashing the entrance.

Three powerful hinges from a stock-crate, two hasps and a pair of three-inch cotter-pins made it proof against opening from the other side.

Blair moved about restlessly inside. He was dragging something over to the door with panting gasps and muttering, frantic curses. Barclay opened the hatch and glanced in, Dr. Copper peering over his shoulder.

Blair had moved the heavy bunk against the door. It could not be opened without his cooperation now.

"Don't know but what the poor man's right at that," McReady sighed.

"If he gets loose, it is his avowed intention to kill each and all of us as quickly as possible, which is something we don't agree with. But we've something on our side of that door that is worse than a homicidal maniac.

If one or the other has to get loose, I think I'll come up and undo those lashings here."

Barclay grinned. "You let me know, and I'll show you how to get these off fast. Let's go back."

The sun was painting the northern horizon in multi-colored rainbows still, though it was two hours below the horizon. The field of drift swept off to the north, sparkling under its flaming colors in a million reflected glories. Low mounds of rounded white on the northern horizon showed the Magnet Range was barely awash above the sweeping drift.

Little eddies of wind-lifted snow swirled away from their skis as they set out toward the remain encampment two miles away. The spidery finger of the broadcast radiator lifted a gaunt black needle against the white of the AntarctiC continent. The snow under their skis was like fine sand, hard and gritty.

"Spring," said Benning bitterly, "is come. Ain't we got fun! I've been looking forward to getting away from this blasted hole in the ice."

"I wouldn't try it now, if I were you." Barclay grunted. "Guys that set out from here in the next few days are going to be marvelously unpopular."

"How is your dog getting along, Dr. Copper?" McReady asked. "Any results yet?"

"In thirty hours? I wish there were. I gave him an injection of my blood today. But I imagine another five days will be needed. I don't know certainly enough to stop sooner."

"I've been wondering—if Connant were—changed, would he have warned us so soon after the animal escaped? Wouldn't he have waited long enough for it to have a real chance to fix itself? Until we woke up naturally?" McReady asked slowly.

"The thing is selfish. You didn't think it looked as though it were possessed of a store of the higher justices, did you?" Dr. Copper pointed out. "Every part of it is all of it, every part of it is all for itself, I imagine. If Connant were changed, to save his skin, he'd have to—but Connant's feelings aren't changed; they're imitated perfectly, or they're his own. Naturally, the imitation, imitating perfectly Connant's feelings, would do exactly what Connant would do."

"Say, couldn't Norris or Van give Connant some kind of a test? If the thing is brighter than men, it might know more physics than Connant should, and they'd catch it out," Barclay suggested.

Copper shook his head wearily. "Not if it reads minds. You can't plan a trap for it. Van suggested that last night. He hoped it would answer some of the questions of physics he'd like to know answers to."

"This expedition-of-four idea is going to make life happy." Benning looked at his companions. "Each of us with an eye on the others to make sure he doesn't do something—peculiar. Man, aren't we going to be a trusting bunch! Each man eyeing his neighbors with the grandest exhibition of faith and trust—I'm beginning to know what Connant meant by 'I wish you could see your eyes." Every now and then we all have it, I guess. One of you looks around with a sort of 'I-wonder-if-the-other-three-are look." Incidentally, I'm not excepting myself."

"So far as we know, the animal is dead, with a slight question as to Connant. No other is suspected," McReady stated slowly. "The 'always-four' order is merely a precautionary measure."

"I'm waiting for Garry to make it four-in-a-bunk," Barclay sighed. "I thought I didn't have any privacy before, but since that order—" None watched more tensely than Connant. A little sterile glass test-tube, half-filled with straw-colored fluid. One—two—three-four—five drops of the clear solution Dr. Copper had prepared from the drops of blood from Connant's arm. The tube was shaken carefully, then set in a beaker of clear, warm water. The thermometer read blood heat, a little thermostat clicked noisily, and the electric hotplate began to glow as the lights flickered slightly.

Then—little white flecks of precipitation were forming, snowing down in the clear straw-colored fluid. "Lord," said Connant. He dropped heavily into a bunk, crying like a baby. "Six days—" Connant sobbed, "six days in there—wondering if that damned test would lie—" Garry moved over silently, and slipped his arm across the physiCist's back.

"It couldn't lie," Dr. Copper said. "The dog was human-immune—and the serum reacted."

"He's—all right?" Norris gasped. "Then—the animal is dead-dead forever?"

"He is human," Copper spoke definitely, "and the animal is dead."

Kinner burst out laughing, laughing hysterically. McReady turned toward him and slapped his face with a methodical one-two, one-two action. The cook laughed, gulped, cried a moment and sat up rubbing his cheeks, mumbling his thanks vaguely. "I was scared. Lord, I was scared—" Norris laughed brittlely. "You think we weren't, you ape?

You think maybe Connant wasn't?"

The Ad Building stirred with a sudden rejuvenation. Voices laughed, the men clustering around Connant spoke with unnecessarily loud voices, jittery, nervous voices relievedly friendly again. Somebody called out a suggestion, and a dozen started for their skis. Blair. Blair might recover—Dr. Copper fussed with his test tubes in nervous relief, trying solutions. The party of relief for Blair's shack started out the door, skis clapping noisily. Down the corridor, the dogs set up a quick yelping howl as the air of excited relief reached them.

Dr. Copper fussed with his tubes. McReady noticed him first, sitting on the edge of the bunk, with two precipitin-whitened test-tubes of straw-colored fluid, his face whiter than the stuff in the tubes, silent tears slipping down from horror-widened eyes.

McReady felt a cold knife of fear pierce through his heart and freeze in his breast. Dr. Copper looked

up.

"Garry," he called hoarsely. "Garry, for God's sake, come here."

Commander Garry walked toward him sharply. Silence clapped down on the Ad Building. Connant looked up, rose stiffly from his seat.

"Garry—tissue from the monster—precipitates too. It proves nothing.

Nothing but—but the dog was monster-immune too. That one of the two contributing blood—one of us two, you and I, Garry—one of us is a monster."

CHAPTER IX

"BAR, CALL back those men before they tell Blair," McReady said quietly.

Barclay went to the door; faintly his shouts came back to the tensely silent men in the room. Then he was back.

"They're coming," he said. "I didn't tell them why. Just that Dr.

Copper said not to go."

"McReady," Garry sighed, "you're in command now. May God help you. I cannot."

The bronzed giant nodded slowly, his deep eyes on Commander Garry.

"I may be the one," Garry added. "I know I'm not, but I cannot prove it to you in any way. Dr. Copper's test has broken down. The fact that he showed it was useless, when it was to the advantage of the monster to have that uselessness not known, would seem to prove he was human."

Copper rocked back and forth slowly on the bunk. "I know I'm human. I can't prove it either. One of us two is a liar, for that test cannot lie, and it says one of us is. I gave proof that the test was wrong, which seems to prove I'm human, and now Garry has given that argument which proves me human—which he, as the monster, should not do.

Round and round and round and round and—" Dr. Copper's head, then his neck and shoulders began circling slowly in time to the words.

Suddenly he was lying back on the bunk, roaring with laughter. "It doesn't have to prove one of us is a monster! It doesn't have to prove that at all! Ho-ho. If we're all monsters it works the same! We're all monsters—all of us—Connant and Garry and I—and all of you."

"McReady," Van Wall, the blond-bearded Chief Pilot, called softly, "you were on the way to an M.D. when you took up meteorology, weren't you?

Can you make some kind of test?"

McReady went over to Copper slowly, took the hypodermic from his hand, and washed it carefully in 95 per cent alcohol. Garry sat on the bunk-edge with wooden face, watching Copper and McReady expressionlessly. "What Copper said is possible," McReady sighed.

"Van, will you help here? Thanks." The filled needle jabbed into Copper's thigh. The man's laughter did not stop, but slowly faded into sobs, then sound sleep as the morphia took hold.

McReady turned again. The men who had started for Blair stood at the far end of the room, skis dripping snow, their faces as white as their skis.

Connant had a lighted cigarette in each hand; one he was puffing absently, and staring at the floor. The heat of the one in his left hand attracted him and he stared at it, and the one in the other hand, stupidly for a moment. He dropped one and crushed it under his heel slowly.

"Dr. Copper," McReady repeated, "could be right. I know I'm human—but of course can't prove it. I'll repeat the test for my own information. Any of you others who wish to may do the same."

Two minutes later, McReady held a test-tube with white precipitin settling slowly from straw-colored serum. "It reacts to human blood too, so they aren't both monsters."

"I didn't think they were," Van Wall sighed. "That wouldn't suit the monster either; we could have destroyed them if we knew. Why hasn't the monster destroyed us, do you suppose? It seems to be loose."

McReady snorted. Then laughed softly. "Elementary, my dear Watson.

The monster wants to have life-forms available. It cannot animate a dead body, apparently. It is just waiting—waiting until the best opportunities come.

We who remain human, it is holding in reserve."

Kinner shuddered violently. "Hey. Hey, Mac. Mac, would I know if I was a monster? Would I know if the monster had already got me? Oh Lord, I may be a monster already."

"You'd know," McReady answered.

"But we wouldn't," Norris laughed shortly, half-hysterically.

McReady looked at the vial of serum remaining. "There's one thing this damned stuff is good for, at that," he said thoughtfully. "Clark, will you and Van help me? The rest of the gang better stick together here.

Keep an eye on each other," he said bitterly. "See that you don't get into mischief, shall we say?"

McReady started down the tunnel toward Dogtown, with Clark and Van Wall behind him. "You need more serum?" Clark asked.

McReady shook his head. "Tests. There's four cows and a bull, and nearly seventy dogs down there. This stuff reacts only to human blood and—monsters."

McReady came back to the Ad Building and went silently to the wash stand.

Clark and Van Wall joined him a moment later. Clark's lips had developed a tic, jerking into sudden, unexpected sneers.

"What did you do?" Connant exploded suddenly. "More immunizing?"

Clark snickered, and stopped with a hiccough. "Immunizing. Haw!

Immune all right."

"That monster," said Van Wall steadily, "is quite logical. Our immune dog was quite all right, and we drew a little more serum for the tests.

But we won't make any more."

"Can't—can't you use one man's blood on another dog—" Norris began.

"There aren't," said McReady soft]y, "any more dogs. Nor cattle, T might add."

"No more dogs?" Benning sat down slowly.

"They're very nasty when they start changing," Van Wall said precisely, "but slow. That electrocution iron you made up, Barclay, is very fast.

There is only one dog left—our immune. The monster left that for us, so we could play with our little test. The rest—" He shrugged and dried his hands.

"The cattle—" gulped Kinner.

"Also. Reacted very nicely. They look funny as hell when they start melting. The beast hasn't any quick escape, when it's tied in dog chains, or halters, and it had to be to imitate."

Kinner stood up slowly. His eyes darted around the room, and came to rest horribly quivering on a tin bucket in the galley. Slowly, step by step, he retreated toward the door, his mouth opening and closing silently, like a fish out of water.

"The milk—" he gasped. "I milked 'em an hour ago—" His voice broke into a scream as he dived through the door. He was out on the ice cap without windproof or heavy clothing.

Van Wall looked after him for a moment thoughtfully. "He's probably hopelessly mad," he said at length, "but he might be a monster escaping. He hasn't skis. Take a blow-torch—in case."

The physical motion of the chase helped them; something that needed doing.

Three of the other men were quietly being sick. Norris was lying flat on his back, his face greenish, looking steadily at the bottom of the bunk above him.

"Mac, how long have the—cows been not—cows—" McReady shrugged his shoulders hopelessly. He went over to the milk bucket, and with his little tube of serum went to work on it. The milk clouded it, making certainty difficult. Finally he dropped the test-tube in the stand and shook his head. "It tests negatively. Which means either they were cows then, or that, being perfect imitations, they gave perfectly good milk."

Copper stirred restlessly in his sleep and gave a gurgling cross between a snore and a laugh. Silent eyes

fastened on him. “Would morphia—a monster—“ somebody started to ask.

“Lord knows,” McReady shrugged. “It affects every Earthly animal I know of.”

Connant suddenly raised his head. “Mac! The dogs must have swallowed pieces of the monster, and the pieces destroyed them! The dogs were where the monster resided. I was locked up. Doesn’t that prove—“ Van Wall shook his head. “Sorry. Proves nothing about what you are, only proves what you didn’t do.”

“It doesn’t do that,” McReady sighed. “We are helpless. Because we don’t know enough, and so jittery we don’t think straight. Locked up!

Ever watch a white corpuscle of the blood go through the wall of a blood vessel? No?

It sticks out a pseudopod. And there it is—on the far side of the wall.”

“Oh,” said Van Wall unhappily. “The cattle tried to melt down, didn’t they? They could have melted down—become just a thread of stuff and leaked under a door to re-collect on the other side. Ropes—no—no, that wouldn’t do it. They couldn’t live in a sealed tank or—“ “If,” said McReady, “you shoot it through the heart, and it doesn’t die, it’s a monster. That’s the best test I can think of, offhand.”

“No dogs,” said Garry quietly, “and no cattle. It has to imitate men now.

And locking up doesn’t do any good. Your test might work, Mac, but I’m afraid it would be hard on the men.”

CHAPTER X

CLARK LOOKED UP from the galley stove as Van Wall, Barclay, McReady and Benning came in, brushing the drift from their clothes. The other men jammed into the Ad Building continued studiously to do as they were doing, playing chess, poker, reading. Ralsen was fixing a sledge on the table; Van and Norris had their heads together over magnetic data, while Harvey read tables in a low voice.

Dr. Copper snored softly on the bunk. Garry was working with Dutton over a sheaf of radio messages on the corner of Dutton’s bunk and a small fraction of the radio table. Connant was using most of the table for cosmic ray sheets.

Quite plainly through the corridor, despite two closed doors, they could hear Kinner’s voice. Clark banged a kettle onto the galley stove and beckoned McReady silently. The meteorologist went over to him.

“I don’t mind the cooking so damn much,” Clark said nervously, “but isn’t there some way to stop that bird? We all agreed that it would be safe to move him into Cosmos House.”

“Kinner?” McReady nodded toward the door. “I’m afraid not. I can dope him, I suppose, but we don’t have an unlimited supply of morphia, and he’s not in danger of losing his mind. Just hysterical.”

"Well, we're in danger of losing ours. You've been out for an hour and a half. That's been going on steadily ever since, and it was going for two hours before. There's a limit, you know."

Garry wandered over slowly, apologetically. For an instant, McReady caught the feral spark of fear—horror—in Clark's eyes, and knew at the same instant it was in his own. Garry—Garry or Copper—was certainly a monster.

"If you could stop that, I think it would be a sound policy, Mac," Garry spoke quietly. "There are—tensions enough in this room. We agreed that it would be safe for Kinner in there, because everyone else in camp is under constant eyeing." Garry shivered slightly. "And try, try in God's name, to find some test that will work."

McReady sighed. "Watched or unwatched, everyone's tense. Blair's jammed the trap so it won't open now. Says he's got food enough, and keeps screaming 'Go away, go away—you're monsters. I won't be absorbed. I won't.

I'll tell men when they come. Go away." So—we went away."

"There's no other test?" Garry pleaded.

McReady shrugged his shoulders. "Copper was perfectly right. The serum test could be absolutely definitive if it hadn't been-contaminated. But that's the only dog left, and he's fixed now."

"Chemicals? Chemical tests?"

McReady shook his head. "Our chemistry isn't that good. I tried the microscope, you know."

Garry nodded. "Monster-dog and real dog were identical. But-you've got to go on. What are we going to do after dinner?"

Van Wall had joined them quietly. "Rotation sleeping. Half the crowd asleep; half awake. I wonder how many of us are monsters? All the dogs were. We thought we were safe, but somehow it got Copper—or you." Van Wall's eyes flashed uneasily. "It may have gotten every one of you—all of you but myself may be wondering, looking. No, that's not possible. You'd just spring then. I'd be helpless. We humans must somehow have the greater numbers now. But—" he stopped.

McReady laughed shortly. "You're doing what Norris complained of in me.

Leaving it hanging. 'But if one more is changed—that may shift the balance of power." It doesn't fight. I don't think it ever fights.

It must be a peaceable thing, in its own—inimitable-way. It never had to, because it always gained its end—otherwise."

Van Wall's mouth twisted in a sickly grin. "You're suggesting then that perhaps it already has the greater numbers, but is just waiting—waiting, all of them—all of you, for all I know—waiting till I, the last human, drop my wariness in sleep. Mac, did you notice their eyes, all looking at us?"

Garry sighed. "You haven't been sitting here for four straight hours, while all their eyes silently weighed the information that one of us two, Copper or I, is a monster certainly—perhaps both of us."

Clark repeated his request. "Will you stop that bird's noise? He's driving me nuts. Make him tone down, anyway."

"Still praying?" McReady asked.

"Still praying," Clark groaned. "He hasn't stopped for a second. I don't mind his praying if it relieves him, but he yells, he sings psalms and hymns and shouts prayers. He thinks God can't hear well way down here."

"Maybe He can't," Barclay grunted. "Or He'd have done something about this thing loosed from hell."

"Somebody's going to try that test you mentioned, if you don't stop him," Clark stated grimly. "I think a cleaver in the head would be as positive a test as a bullet in the heart.

"Go ahead with the food. I'll see what I can do. There may be something in the cabinets." McReady moved wearily toward the corner Copper had used as his dispensary. Three tall cabinets of rough boards, two locked, were the repositories of the camp's medical supplies. Twelve years ago McReady had graduated, had started for an internship, and been diverted to meteorology.

Copper was a picked man, a man who knew his profession thoroughly and modernly. More than half the drugs available were totally unfamiliar to McReady; many of the others he had forgotten. There was no huge medical library here, no series of journals available to learn the things he had forgotten, the elementary, simple things to Copper, things that did not merit inclusion in the small library he had been forced to content himself with. Books are heavy, and every ounce of supplies had been freighted in by air.

McReady picked a barbiturate hopefully. Barclay and Van Wall went with him. One man never went anywhere alone in Big Magnet.

Ralsen had his sledge put away, and the physicists had moved off the table, the poker game broken up when they got back. Clark was putting out the food. The click of spoons and the muffled sounds of eating were the only sign of life in the room. There were no words spoken as the three returned; simply all eyes focused on them questioningly, while the jaws moved methodically.

McReady stiffened suddenly. Kinner was screeching out a hymn in a hoarse, cracked voice. He looked wearily at Van Wall with a twisted grin and shook his head. "Hu-uh."

Van Wall cursed bitterly, and sat down at the table. "We'll just plumb have to take that till his voice wears out. He can't yell like that forever."

"He's got a brass throat and a cast-iron larynx," Norris declared savagely. "Then we could be hopeful, and suggest he's one of our friends.

In that case he could go on renewing his throat till doomsday."

Silence clamped down. For twenty minutes they ate without a word.

Then Connant jumped up with an angry violence. "You sit as still as a bunch of graven images. You don't say a word, but oh, Lord, what expressive eyes you've got. They roll around like a bunch of glass marbles spilling down a table. They wink and blink and stare—and whisper things. Can you guys look somewhere else for a change, please?

"Listen, Mac, you're in charge here. Let's run movies for the rest of the night. We've been saving those reels to make 'em last. Last for what? Who is it's going to see those last reels, eh? Let's see 'em while we can, and look at something other than each other."

"Sound idea, Connant. I, for one, am quite willing to change this in any way I can."

"Turn the sound up loud, Dutton. Maybe you can drown out the hymns," Clark suggested.

"But don't," Norris said softly, "don't turn off the lights

altogether.

" "The lights will be out." McReady shook his head. "We'll show all the cartoon movies we have. You won't mind seeing the old cartoons, will you?"

"Goody, goody—a moom pitcher show. I'm just in the mood." McReady turned to look at the speaker, a lean, lanky New Englander, by the name of Caldwell. Caldwell was stuffing his pipe slowly, a sour eye cocked up to McReady.

The bronze giant was forced to laugh. "O.K., Bart, you win. Maybe we aren't quite in the mood for Popeye and trick ducks, but it's something."

"Let's play Classifications," Caldwell suggested slowly. "Or maybe you call it Guggenheim. You draw lines on a piece of paper, and put down classes of things—like animals, you know. One for 'H' and one for 'U' and so on. Like 'Human' and 'Unknown' for instance. I think that would be a hell of a lot better game. Classification, I sort of figure is what we need right now a lot more than movies. Maybe somebody's got a pencil that he can draw lines with, draw lines between the 'U' animals and the 'H' animals for instance."

"McReady's trying to find that kind of a pencil," Van Wall answered quietly, "but we've got three kinds of animals here, you know. One that begins with 'M." We don't want any more."

"Mad ones, you mean. Uh-huh. Clark, I'll help you with those pans so we can get our little peep-show going." Caldwell got up slowly.

Dutton and Barclay and Benning, in charge of the projector and sound mechanism arrangements, went about their job silently, while the Ad Building was cleared and the dishes and pans disposed of. McReady drifted over toward Van Wall slowly, and leaned back in the bunk beside him. "I've been wondering, Van," he said with a wry grin, "whether or not to report my ideas in advance. I forgot the 'U animals' as Caldwell named it, could read minds. I've a vague idea of something that might work. It's too vague to bother with though. Go ahead with your show, while I try to figure out the logic of the thing. I'll take this bunk."

Van Wall glanced up, and nodded. The movie screen would be practically on a line with his bunk, hence making the pictures least distracting here, because least intelligible. "Perhaps you should tell us what you have in mind. As it is, only the unknowns know what you plan. You might be—unknown before you got it into operation."

"Won't take long, if I get it figured out right. But I don't want any more all-but-the-test-dog-monsters things. We better move Copper into this bunk directly above me. He won't be watching the screen either."

McReady nodded toward Copper's gently snoring bulk. Garry helped them lift and move the doctor.

McReady leaned back against the bunk, and sank into a trance, almost, of concentration, trying to calculate chances, operations, methods.

He was scarcely aware as the others distributed themselves silently, and the screen lit up. Vaguely Kinner's hectic, shouted prayers and his rasping hymn-singing annoyed him till the sound accompaniment started. The lights were turned out, but the large, light-colored areas of the screen reflected enough light for ready visibility. It made men's eyes sparkle as they moved restlessly. Kinner was still praying, shouting, his voice a raucous accompaniment to the mechanical sound. Dutton stepped up the amplification.

So long had the voice been going on, that only vaguely at first was McReady aware that something seemed missing. Lying as he was, just across the narrow room from the corridor leading to Cosmos House, Kinner's voice had reached him fairly clearly, despite the sound accompaniment of the pictures. It struck him abruptly that it had stopped.

"Dutton, cut that sound," McReady called as he sat up abruptly. The pictures flickered a moment, soundless and strangely futile in the sudden, deep silence. The rising wind on the surface above bubbled melancholy tears of sound down the stove pipes. "l;inner's stopped," McReady said softly.

"For God's sake start that sound then, he may have stopped to listen," Norris snapped.

McReady rose and went down the corridor. Barclay and Van Wall left their places at the far end of the room to follow him. The flickers bulged and twisted 011 the back of Barclay's gray underwear as he crossed the still-functioning beam of the projector. Dutton snapped on the lights, and the pictures vanished.

Norris stood at the door as McReady had asked. Garry sat down quietly in the bun nearest the door, forcing Clark to make room for him. Most of the others had stayed exactly where they were. Only Connant walked slowly up and down the room, in steady, unvarying rhythm.

"If you're going to do that, Connant," C]ark spat, "we can get along without you altogether, whether you're human or not. Will you stop that damned rhythm?"

"Sorry." The physicist sat down in a bunk, and watched his toes thoughtful]y. It was a]most five minutes, five ages while the wind made the only sound, before McReady appeared at the door.

"We," he announced, "haven-t got enough grief here already.

Somebody's tried to help us out. Kinner has a knife in his throat, which was why he stopped singing, probably. We've got monsters, madmen and murderers. Any more 'M's' you can think of, Caldwell? If there are, we'll probably have 'em before long."

CHAPTER XI

"Is BLAIR LOOSE? someone asked.

"Blair is not loose. Or he flew in. If there's any doubt about where our gentle helper came from—this may clear it up." Van Wall held a foot-long, thin-bladed knife in a cloth. The wooden handle was half-burnt, charred with the peculiar pattern of the top of the galley stove.

Clark stared at it. "I did that this afternoon. I forgot the damn thing and left it on the stove."

Van Wall nodded. "I smelled it, if you remember. I knew the knife came from the galley."

"I wonder," said Benning, looking around at the party warily, "how many more monsters have we? If somebody could slip out of his place, go back of the screen to the galley and then down to the Cosmos House and back—he did come back, didn't he? Yes-everybody's here. Well, if one of the gang could do all that—" "Maybe a monster did it," Garry suggested quietly. "There's that possibility."

"The monster, as you pointed out today, has only men left to imitate.

Would he decrease his—supply, shall we say?" Van Wall pointed out.

"No, we just have a plain, ordinary louse, a murderer to deal with.

Ordinarily we'd call him an 'inhuman murderer' I suppose, but we have to distinguish now.

We have inhuman murderers, and now we have human murderers. Or one at least."

"There's one less human," Norris said softly. "Maybe the monsters have the balance of power now."

"Never mind that," McReady sighed and turned to Barclay. "Bar, will you get your electric gadget? I'm going to make certain—" Barclay turned down the corridor to get the pronged electro cuter, while McReady and Van Wall went back toward Cosmos House. Barclay followed them in some thirty seconds.

The corridor to Cosmos House twisted, as did nearly all corridors in Big Magnet, and Norris stood at the entrance again. But they heard, rather muffled, McReady's sudden shout. There was a savage scurry of blows, dull ch-thunk, shluf sounds. "Bar—Bar—" And a curious, savage mewing scream, silenced before even quick-moving Norris had reached the bend.

Kinner—or what had been Kinner—lay on the floor, cut half in two by the great knife McReady had had. The meteorologist stood against the wall, the knife dripping red in his hand. Van Wall was stirring vaguely on the floor, moaning, his hand half-consciously rubbing at his jaw. Barclay, an unutterably savage gleam in his eyes, was methodically leaning on the pronged weapon in his hand, jabbing—jabbing, jabbing.

Kinner's arms had developed a queer, scaly fur, and the flesh had twisted.

The fingers had shortened, the hand rounded, the fingernails become three-inch long things of dull red horn, keened to steel-hard razor-sharp talons.

McReady raised his head, looked at the knife in his hand and dropped it.

"Well, whoever did it can speak up now. He was an inhuman murderer at that—in that he murdered an inhuman. I swear by all that's holy, Kinner was a lifeless corpse on the floor here when we arrived. But

when It found we were going to jab it with the power—It changed."

Norris stared unsteadily. "Oh, Lord, those things can act. Ye gods—sitting in here for hours, mouthing prayers to a God it hated!

Shouting hymns in a cracked voice—hymns about a Church it never knew.

Driving us mad with its ceaseless howling "Well. Speak up, whoever did it. You didn't know it, but you did the camp a favor. And I want to know how in blazes you got out of that room without anyone seeing you.

It might help in guarding ourselves."

"His screaming—his singing. Even the sound projector couldn't drown it."

Clark shivered. "It was a monster."

"Oh," said Van Wall in sudden comprehension. "You were sitting right next to the door, weren't you! And almost behind the projection screen already."

Clark nodded dumbly. "He—it's quiet now. It's a dead—Mac, your test's no damn good. It was dead anyway, monster or man, it was dead."

McReady chuckled softly. "Boys, meet Clark, the only one we know is human!

Meet Clark, the one who proves he's human by trying to commit murder—and failing. Will the rest of you please refrain from trying to prove you're human for a while? I think we may have another test."

"A test!" Connant snapped joyfully, then his face sagged in disappointment. "I suppose it's another either-way-you-want-it."

"No," said McReady steadily. "Look sharp and be careful. Come into the Ad Building. Barclay, bring your electrocuter. And somebody—Dutton—stand with Barclay to make sure he does it. Watch every neighbor, for by the Hell these monsters came from, I've got something, and they know it. They're going to get dangerous! " The group tensed abruptly. An air of crushing menace entered into every man's body, sharply they looked at each other. More keenly than ever before—is that man next to me an inhuman monster?

"What is it?" Garry asked, as they stood again in the main room. "How long will it take?"

"I don't know, exactly," said McReady, his voice brittle with angry determination. "But I know it will work, and no two ways about it. It depends on a basic quality of the monsters, not on us. 'Kinner' just convinced me." He stood heavy and solid in bronzed immobility, completely sure of himself again at last.

"This," said Barclay, hefting the wooden-handled weapon, tipped with its two sharp-pointed, charged conductors, "is going to be rather necessary, I take it. Is the power plant assured?"

Dutton nodded sharply. "The automatic stoker bin is full. The gas power plant is on stand-by. Van Wall and I set it for the movie operation and—we've checked it over rather carefully several times, you know.

Anything those wires touch, dies," he assured them grimly. "I know that."

Dr. Copper stirred vaguely in his bunk, rubbed his eyes with fumbling hand. He sat up slowly, blinked his eyes blurred with sleep and drugs, widened with an unutterable horror of drug-ridden nightmares. "Garry," he mumbled, "Garry—listen. Selfish-from hell they came, and hellish shellfish—I mean self—Do I? What do I mean?" He sank back in his bunk, and snored softly.

McReady looked at him thoughtfully. "We'll know presently," he nodded slowly. "But selfish is what you mean all right. You may have thought of that, half-sleeping, dreaming there. I didn't stop to think what dreams you might be having. But that's all right. Selfish is the word. They must be, you see." He turned to the men in the cabin, tense, silent men staring with wolfish eyes each at his neighbor.

"Selfish, and as Dr. Copper said every part is a whole. Every piece is self-sufficient, an animal in itself.

"That, and one other thing, tell the story. There's nothing mysterious about blood; it's just as normal a body tissue as a piece of muscle, or a piece of liver. But it hasn't so much connective tissue, though it has millions, billions of life-cells."

McReady's great bronze beard ruffled in a grim smile. "This is satisfying, in a way. I'm pretty sure we humans still outnumber you—others. Others standing here. And we have what you, your other-world race, evidently doesn't. Not an imitated, but a bred-in-the-bone instinct, a driving, unquenchable fire that's genuine.

We'll fight, fight with a ferocity you may attempt to imitate, but you']l never equal! We're human. We're real.

You're imitations, false to the core of your every cell.

"All right. It's a showdown now. You know. You, with your mind reading.

You've lifted the idea from my brain. You can't do a thing about it.

"Standing here "Let it pass. Blood is tissue. They have to bleed, if they don't bleed when cut, then, by Heaven, they're phony! Phony from hell! If they bleed—then that bite, separated from them, is an individual—a newly formed individual in ,d own right, just as they, split, all of them, from one original, are individuals!

"Get it, Van? See the answer, Bar?"

Van Wall laughed very softly. "The blood—the blood will not obey.

It's a new individual, with all the desire to protect its own life that the original—the main mass from which it was split—has. The blood will live—and try to crawl away from a hot needle, say!"

McReady picked up the scalpel from the table. From the cabinet, he took a rack of test-tubes, a tiny alcohol lamp, and a length of platinum wire set in a little glass rod. A smile of grim satisfaction rode his lips. For a moment he glanced up at those around him.

Barclay and Dutton moved toward him slowly, the wooden-handled electric instrument alert.

"Dutton," said McReady, "suppose you stand over by the splice there where you've connected that in. Just make sure no-thing pulls it loose."

Dutton moved away. “Now, Van, suppose you be first on this.”

White-faced, Van Wall stepped forward. With a delicate precision, McReady cut a vein in the base of his thumb. Van Wall winced slightly, then held steady as a half inch of bright blood collected in the tube.

McReady put the tube in the rack, gave Van Wall a bit of alum and indicated the iodine bottle.

Van Wall stood motionlessly watching. McReady heated the platinum wire in the alcohol lamp flame, then dipped it into the tube. It hissed soft]y.

Five times he repeated the test. “Human, I’d say.” McReady sighed, and straightened. “As yet, my theory hasn’t been actually proven—but I have hopes. I have hopes.

“Don’t, by the way, get too interested in this. We have with us some unwelcome ones, no doubt. Van, will you relieve Barclay at the switch?

Thanks. O.K., Barclay, and may I say I hope you stay with us? You’re a damned good guy.”

Barclay grinned uncertainly; winced under the keen edge of the scalpel.

Presently, smiling widely, he retrieved his long-handled weapon.

“Mr. Samuel Dutt—Bar!”

The tensity was released in that second. Whatever of hell the monsters may have had within them, the men in that instant matched it. Barclay had no chance to move his weapon as a score of men poured down on that thing that had seemed Dutton. It mewed, and spat, and tried to grow fangs—and was a hundred broken, torn pieces. Without knives, or any weapon save the brutegiven strength of a staff of picked men, the thing was crushed, rent.

Slowly they picked themselves up, their eyes smouldering, very quiet in their emotions. A curious wrinkling of their lips betrayed a species of nervousness.

Barclay went over with the electric weapon. Things smouldered and stank.

The caustic acid Van Wall dropped on each spilled drop of blood gave off tickling, cough-provoking fumes.

McReady grinned, his deep-set eyes alight and dancing. “Maybe,” he said softly, “I underrated man’s abilities when I said nothing human could have the ferocity in the eyes of that thing we found. I wish we could have the opportunity to treat in a more befitting manner these things. Something with boiling oil, or melted lead in it, or maybe slow roasting in the power boiler. When I think what a man Dutton was “Never mind. My theory is confirmed by—by one who knew? We]l, Van Wall and Barclay are proven. I think, then, that I’ll try to show you what I already know. That I too am human.” McReady swished the scalpel in absolute alcohol, burned it off the metal blade, and cut the base of his thumb expertly.

Twenty seconds later he looked up from the desk at the waiting men.

There were more grins out there now, friendly grins, yet withal, something else in the eyes.

"Connant," McReady laughed softly, "was right. The huskies watching that thing in the corridor bend had nothing on you. Wonder why we think only the wolf blood has the right to ferocity? Maybe on spontaneous viciousness a wolf takes tops, but after these seven days—abandon all hope, ye wolves who enter here!

"Maybe we can save time. Connant, would you step for—" Again Barclay was too slow. There were more grins, less tensity still, when Barclay and Van Wall finished their work.

Garry spoke in a low, bitter voice. "Connant was one of the finest men we had here—and five minutes ago I'd have sworn he was a man. Those damnable things are more than imitation." Garry shuddered and sat back in his bunk.

And thirty seconds later, Garry's blood shrank from the hot platinum wire, and struggled to escape the tube, struggled as frantically as a suddenly feral, red-eyed, dissolving imitation of Garry struggled to dodge the snake-tongue weapon Barclay advanced at him, white-faced and sweating. The Thin;. in the test-tube screamed with a tiny, tinny voice as McReady dropped it into the glowing coal of the galley stove.

CHAPTER XII

"THE LAST of it?" Dr. Copper looked down from his bunk with bloodshot, saddened eyes. "Fourteen of them—" McReady nodded shortly.

"Tn some ways—if only we could have permanently prevented their spreading—I'd like to have even the imitations back.

Commander Garry—Connant—Dutton-Clark—" "Where are they taking those things?" Copper nodded to the stretcher Barclay and Norris were carrying out.

"Outside. Outside on the ice, where they've got fifteen smashed crates, half a ton of coal, and presently will add ten gallons of kerosene. We've dumped acid on every spilled drop, every torn fragment. We're going to incinerate those."

"Sounds like a good plan." Copper nodded wearily. "I wonder, you haven't said whether Blair—" McReady started. "We forgot him! We had so much else! I wonder—do you suppose we can cure him now?"

"If—" began Dr. Copper, and stopped meaningly.

McReady started a second time. "Even a madman. It imitated Kinner and his praying hysteria—" McReady turned toward Van Wall at the long table. "Van, we've got to make an expedition to Blair's shack."

Van looked up sharply, the frown of worry faded for an instant in surprised remembrance. Then he rose, nodded. "Barclay better go along. He applied the lashings, and may figure how to get in without frightening Blair too much."

Three quarters of an hour, through--37ø cold, they hiked while the aurora curtain bellied overhead. The twilight was nearly twelve hours long, flaming in the north on snow like white, crystalline sand under their skis.

A 5-mile wind piled it in drift lines pointing off to the northwest.

Three quarters of an hour to reach the snow-buried shack. No smoke came from the little shack, and the men hastened.

"Blair!" Barclay roared into the wind when he was still a hundred yards away. "Blair!"

"Shut up," said McReady softly. "And hurry. He may be trying a long hike.

If we have to go after him—no planes, the tractors disabled—" "Would a monster have the stamina a man has?"

"A broken leg wouldn't stop it for more than a minute," McReady pointed out.

Barclay gasped suddenly and pointed aloft. Dim in the twilit sky, a winged thing circled in curves of indescribable grace and ease. Great white wings tipped gently, and the bird swept over them in silent curiosity.

"Albatross—" Barclay said softly. "First of the season, and wandering way inland for some reason. If a monster's loose—" Norris bent down on the ice, and tore hurriedly at his heavy, windproof clothing. He straightened, his coat flapping open, a grim blue-metaled weapon in his hand. It roared a challenge to the white silence of Antarctica.

The thing in the air screamed hoarsely. Its great WingS worked frantically as a dozen feathers floated down from its tail. Norris fired again. The bird was moving swiftly now, but in an almost straight line of retreat. It screamed again, more feathers dropped and with beating wings it soared behind a ridge of pressure ice, to vanish.

Norris hurried after the others. "It won't come back," he panted.

Barclay cautioned him to silence, pointing. A curiously, fiercely blue light beat out from the cracks of the shack's door. A very low, soft humming sounded inside, a low, soft humming and a clink and clank of tools, the very sounds somehow bearing a message of frantic haste.

McReady's face paled. "Lord help us if that thing has—" He grabbed Barclay's shoulder, and made snipping motions with his fingers, pointing toward the lacing of control-cables that held the door.

Barclay drew the wire-cutters from his pocket, and kneeled soundlessly at the door. The snap and twang of cut wires made an unbearable racket in the utter quiet of the Antarctic hush. There was only that strange, sweetly soft hum from within the shack, and the queerly, hecticly clipped clicking and rattling of tools to drown their noises.

McReady peered through a crack in the door. His breath sucked in huskily and his great fingers clamped cruelly on Barclay's shoulder.

The meteorologist backed down. "It isn't," he explained very softly, "Blair.

It's kneeling on something on the bunk—something that keeps lifting.

Whatever it's working on is a thing like a knapsack—and it lifts."

"All at once," Barclay said grimly. "No. Norris, hang back, and get that iron of yours out. It may have—weapons."

Together, Barclay's powerful body and McReady's giant strength struck the door. Inside, the bunk jammed against the door screeched madly and crackled into kindling. The door flung down from broken hinges, the patched lumber of the doorpost dropping inward.

Like a blue-rubber ball, a Thing bounced up. One of its four tentacle-like arms looped out like a striking snake. In a seven-tentacled hand a six-inch pencil of winking, shining metal glinted and swung upward to face them. Its line-thin lips twitched back from snake-fangs in a grin of hate, red eyes blazing.

Norris' revolver thundered in the confined space. The hate-washed face twitched in agony, the looping tentacle snatched back. The silvery thing in its hand a smashed ruin of metal, the seven-tentacled hand became a mass of mangled flesh oozing greenish-yellow ichor. The revolver thundered three times more. Dark holes drilled each of the three eyes before Norris hurled the empty weapon against its face.

The Thing screamed in feral hate, a lashing tentacle wiping at blinded eyes. For a moment it crawled on the floor, savage tentacles lashing out, the body twitching. Then it staggered up again, blinded eyes working, boiling hideously, the crushed flesh sloughing away in sodden gobbets.

Barclay lurched to his feet and dove forward with an ice-a. The flat of the weighty thing crushed against the side of the head. Again the unkillable monster went down. The tentacles lashed out, and suddenly Barclay fell to his feet in the grip of a living, livid rope. The Thing dissolved as he held it, a white-hot band that ate into the flesh of his hands like living fire. Frantically he tore the stuff from him, held his hands where they could not be reached. The blind Thing felt and ripped at the tough, heavy, windproof cloth, seeking flesh—flesh it could convert The huge blow-torch McReady had brought coughed solemnly. Abruptly it rumbled disapproval throatily. Then it laughed gurglingly, and thrust out a blue-white, three-foot tongue. The Thing on the floor shrieked, flailed out blindly with tentacles that writhed and withered in the bubbling wrath of the blow-torch. It crawled and turned on the floor, it shrieked and hobbled madly, but always McReady held the blow-torch on the face, the dead eyes burning and bubbling uselessly. Frantically the Thing crawled and howled.

A tentacle sprouted a savage talon—and crisped in the flame. Steadily McReady moved with a planned, grim campaign. Helpless, maddened, the Thing retreated from the grunting torch, the caressing, licking tongue.

For a moment it rebelled, squalling in inhuman hatred at the touch of icy snow.

Then it fell back before the charring breath of the torch, the stench of its flesh bathing it. Hopelessly it retreated—on and on across the Antarctic snow. The bitter wind swept over it twisting the torch-tongue; vainly it flopped, a trail of oily, stinking smoke bubbling away from it McReady walked back toward the shack silently.

Barclay met him at the door. "No more?" the giant meteorologist asked grimly.

Barclay shook his head. "No more. It didn't split?"

"It had other things to think about," McReady assured him. "When I left it, it was a glowing coal. What was it doing?"

Norris laughed shortly. "Wise boys, we are. Smash magnetos, so planes won't work. Rip the boiler tubing out of the tractors. And leave that Thing alone for a week in this shack. Alone and undisturbed."

McReady looked in at the shack more carefully. The air, despite the ripped door, was hot and humid. On a table at the far end of the room rested a thing of coiled wires and small magnets, glass tubing and radio tubes. At the center a block of rough stone rested. From the center of the block came the light that flooded the place, the fiercely blue light bluer than the glare of an electric arc, and from it came the sweetly soft hum. Off to one side was another mechanism of crystal glass, blown with an incredible neatness and delicacy, metal plates and a queer, shimmery sphere of insubstantiality.

"What is that?" McReady moved nearer.

Norris grunted. "Leave it for investigation. But I can guess pretty well.

That's atomic power. That stuff to the left—that's a neat little thing for doing what men have been trying to do with 100-ton cyclotrons and so forth.

It separates neutrons from heavy water, which he was getting from the surrounding ice."

"Where did he get all—Oh. Of course. A monster couldn't be locked in—or out. He's been through the apparatus caches." McReady stared at the apparatus. "Lord, what minds that race must have—" "The shimmery sphere—I think it's a sphere of pure force. Neutrons can pass through any matter, and he wanted a supply reservoir of neutrons.

Just project neutrons against silica—calcium-beryllium—almost anything, and the atomic energy is released. That thing is the atomic generator."

McReady plucked a thermometer from his coat. "It's 120ø in here, despite the open door. Our clothes have kept the heat out to an extent, but I'm sweating now."

Norris nodded. "The light's cold. I found that. But it gives off heat to warm the place through that coil. He had all the power in the world. He could keep it warm and pleasant, as his race thought of warmth and pleasantness. Did you notice the light, the color of it?"

McReady nodded. "Beyond the stars is the answer. From beyond the stars.

From a hotter planet that circled a brighter, bluer sun they came."

McReady glanced out the door toward the blasted, smoke-stained trail that flopped and wandered blindly off across the drift. "There won't be any more coming, I guess. Sheer accident it landed here, and that was twenty million years ago. What did it do all that for?" He nodded toward the apparatus.

Barclay laughed softly. "Did you notice what it was working on when we came? Look." He pointed toward the ceiling of the shack.

Like a knapsack made of flattened coffee-tins, with dangling cloth straps and leather belts, the mechanism clung to the ceiling. A tiny, glaring heart of supernal flame burned in it, yet burned through the ceiling's wood without scorching it. Barclay walked over to it, grasped two of the dangling straps in his

hands, and pulled it down with an effort. He strapped it about his body. A slight jump carried him in a weirdly slow arc across the room.

"Anti-gravity," said McReady softly.

"Anti-gravity," Norris nodded. "Yes, we had 'em stopped, with no planes, and no birds. The birds hadn't come—but they had coffee-tins and radio parts, and glass and the machine shop at night.

And a week—a whole week—all to itself. America in a single jump—with anti-gravity powered by the atomic energy of matter.

"We had 'em stopped. Another half hour—it was just tightening these straps on the device so it could wear it—and we'd have stayed in Antarctica, and shot down any moving thing that came from the rest of the world."

"The albatross—" McReady said softly. "Do you suppose—" "With this thing almost finished? With that death weapon it held in its hand?

"No, by the grace of God, who evidently does hear very well, even down here, and the margin of half an hour, we keep our world, and the planets of the system too. Anti-gravity, you know, and atomic power.

Because They came from another sun, a star beyond the stars. They came from a world with a bluer sun."

THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD RKO/A Winchester Pictures Corporation

Production 1951

87 minutes. Produced by Howard Hawks; associate producer, Edward Lasker; directed by Christian Nyby; screenplay by Charles Lederer; director of photography, Russell Harlan, A.S.C.; art directors, Albert S. D'Agostino and John J. Hughes; music composed and conducted by Dimitri Tiomkin; special effects by Donald Steward; special photographic effects by Linwood Dunn, A.S.C.; set decorations by Darrell Silvera and William Stevens; edited by Roland Gross; recording by Phil Brigandi and Clem Portnan; makeup by Lee Greenway.

Cast Kenneth Tobey (Capt. Patrick Hendry), Margaret Sheridan (Nikki Nicholson), Robert Cornthwaite (Dr. Arthur Carrington), Douglas Spencer (Ned "Scotty" Scott), James Young (Lt. Eddie Dykes), Dewey Martin (Crew Chief Bob), Robert Nichols (Lt. Ken "Mac" MacPherson), William Self (Corp. Barnes), Eduard Franz (Dr. Chapman), Sally Creighton (Mrs. Chapman), James Arness (The Thing), Paul Frees (Dr. Voorhees), George Fenniman (Dr. Redding) .

FAREWELL TO THE MASTER

by Harry Bates filmed as

THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL

(Twentieth Century-Fox, 1951)

Undoubtedly one of the ten best science fiction films that Hollywood ever produced, The Day the Earth Stood Still has enjoyed tremendous popularity with each new generation that views it.

Part of the reason for this widespread acclaim certainly stems in part from the novel ideas presented in the original story. Rather than infuse his tale of an alien voyager with horror and menace, author Harry Bates chose to turn the tables and create a new type of otherworldly visitor.

Instead of toting around the usual death rays and planning to conquer the world, benevolent spaceman Klaatu arrives on Earth promoting only peace and good will. Yet his upstanding intentions are met with fear, suspicion, and finally blind violence.

Likewise in the motion picture, Klaatu, as superbly portrayed by the late Michael Rennie, discovers that Earthmen may not be as civilized as he thought. In a valiant attempt to save humanity from destroying itself with atomic weapons, the spaceman falls victim to treachery, injustice, and eventually a hail of murderous bullets. Only later, through the aid of his robot companion, Gort (Gnut in the short story), is Klaatu brought back to life.

Screenwriter Edmund H. North, who co-scripted Patton and most recently Meteor, readily admits his loose adaptation of the Bates story contains many specific religious references . . . even beyond the obvious "resurrection" sequence. For instance, when Klaatu escapes from the hospital he identifies with the man whose suit he has taken. The name is Carpenter—one he adopts as his own. This too is part of the Christ parallel, a tack the original novella never explored.

But even though the story and screenplay differ on many points, it is curious to note that both place heavy dramatic interest on the idea of a UFO landing in our midst. In 1940, when "Farewell to the Master appeared in Astounding Stories, the first rash of flying saucer sightings were coming in from pilots fighting overseas. By 1951, when the film version hit the screen, all America was scanning the skies in search of the disc-shaped craft.

Director Robert Wise, the creative genius behind The Day the Earth Stood Still plus other fantastic films such as The Andromeda Strain and Star Trek: The Motion Picture, firmly believes in UFOs and things beyond human ken. Perhaps this is why he so effortlessly assembled what has become a milestone in science fiction cinema.

FAREWELL TO THE MASTER

by Harry Bates

CHAPTER I

FROM HIS PERCh high on the ladder above the museum floor, Cliff Sutherland studied carefully each line and shadow of the great robot, then turned and looked thoughtfully down at the rush of visitors come from all over the Solar System to see Gnut and the traveler for themselves and to hear once again their amazing, tragic story.

He himself had come to feel an almost proprietary interest in the exhibit, and with some reason He had been the only freelance picture reporter on the Capitol grounds when the visitors from the Unknown had arrived, and had obtained the first professional shots of the ship. He had witnessed at close hand every event of the next mad few days. He had thereafter photographed many times the eight-foot robot, the ship, and the beautiful slain ambassador, Klaatu, and his imposing tomb out in the center of the Tidal Basin, and, such was the continuing news value of the event to the billions of persons throughout habitable space, he was there now once more to get still other shots and, if possible, a new "angle." This time he was after a picture which showed Gnut as weird and menacing.

The shots he had taken the day before had not given quite the effect he wanted, and he hoped to get it today; but the light was not yet right and he had to wait for the afternoon to wane a little.

The last of the crowd admitted in the present group hurried in, exclaiming at the great pure green curves of the mysterious timespace traveler, then completely forgetting the ship at sight of the awesome figure and great head of the giant Gnut. Hinged robots of crude manlike appearance were familiar enough, but never had Earthling eyes lain on one like this. For Gnut had almost exactly the shape of a man—a giant, but a man—with greenish metal for man's covering flesh, and greenish metal for man's bulging muscles. Except for a loin cloth, he was nude. He stood like the powerful god of the machine of some undreamed-of scientific civilization, on his face a look of sullen, brooding thought. Those who looked at him did not make jests or idle remarks, and those nearest him usually did not speak at all. His strange, internally illuminated red eyes were so set that every observer felt they were fixed on himself alone, and he engendered a feeling that he might at any moment step forward in anger and perform unimaginable deeds.

A slight rustling sound came from speakers hidden in the ceiling above, and at once the noises of the crowd lessened. The recorded lecture was about to be given. Cliff sighed. He knew the thing by heart; had even been present when the recording was made, and met the speaker, a young chap named Stillwell.

"Ladies and gentlemen," began a clear and well-modulated voice—but Cliff was no longer attending. The shadows in the hollows of Gnut's face and figure were deeper; it was almost time for his shot. He picked up and examined the proofs of the pictures he had taken the day before and compared them critically with the subject.

As he looked a wrinkle came to his brow. He had not noticed it before, but now, suddenly, he had the feeling that since yesterday something about Gnut was changed. The pose before him was the identical one in the photographs, every detail on comparison seemed the same, but nevertheless the feeling persisted. He took up his viewing glass and more carefully compared subject and photographs, line by line. And then he saw that there was a difference.

With sudden excitement, Cliff snapped two pictures at different exposures.

He knew he should wait a little and take others, but he was so sure he had stumbled on an important mystery that he had to get going, and quickly folding his accessory equipment he descended the ladder and made his way out. Twenty minutes later, consumed with curiosity, he was developing the new shots in his hotel bedroom.

What Cliff saw when he compared the negatives taken yesterday and today caused his scalp to tingle. Here was a slant indeed! And apparently no one but he knew! Still, what he had discovered, though it would have made the front page of every paper in the Solar System, was after all only a lead.

The story, what really had happened, he knew no better than anyone else. It must be his job to find out.

And that meant he would have to secrete himself in the building and stay there all night. That very night; there was still time for him to get back before closing. He would take a small, very fast infrared camera that could see in the dark, and he would get the real picture and the story.

He snatched up the little camera, grabbed an aircab and hurried back to the museum. The place was filled with another section of the ever-present queue, and the lecture was just ending. He thanked Heaven

that his arrangement with the museum permitted him to go in and out at will.

He had already decided what to do. First he made his way to the "floating" guard and asked a single question, and anticipation broadened on his face as he heard the expected answer. The second thing was to find a spot where he would be safe from the eyes of the men who would close the floor for the night. There was only one possible place, the laboratory set up behind the ship. Boldly he showed his press credentials to the second guard, stationed at the partitioned passageway leading to it, stating that he had come to interview the scientists; and in a moment was at the laboratory door.

He had been there a number of times and knew the room well. It was a large area roughly partitioned off for the work of the scientists engaged in breaking their way into the ship, and full of a confusion of massive and heavy objects—electric and hot-air ovens, carboys of chemicals, asbestos sheeting, compressors, basins, ladles, a microscope, and a great deal of smaller equipment common to a metallurgical laboratory. Three white-smocked men were deeply engrossed in an experiment at the far end. Cliff, waiting a good moment, slipped inside and hid himself under a table half buried with supplies. He felt reasonably safe from detection there. Very soon now the scientists would be going home for the night.

From beyond the ship he could hear another section of the waiting queue filing in—the last, he hoped, of the day. He settled himself as comfortably as he could. In a moment the lecture would begin. He had to smile when he thought of one thing the recording would say.

Then there it was again—the clear, trained voice of the chap Stillwell.

The foot scrapings and whispers of the crowd died away, and Cliff could hear every word in spite of the great bulk of the ship lying interposed.

"Ladies and gentlemen," began the familiar words, "the Smithsonian Institution welcomes you to its new Interplanetary Wing and to the marvelous exhibits at this moment before you."

A slight pause. "All of you must know by now something of what happened here three months ago, if indeed you did not see it for yourself in the telescreen," the voice went on. "The few facts are briefly told. A little after 5:00 p.m. on September 16th, visitors to Washington thronged the grounds outside this building in their usual numbers and no doubt with their usual thoughts. The day was warm and fair. A stream of people was leaving the main entrance of the museum, just outside in the direction you are facing. This wing, of course, was not here at that time. Everyone was homeward bound, tired no doubt from hours on their feet, seeing the exhibits of the museum and visiting the many buildings on the grounds nearby. And then it happened.

"On the area just to your right, just as it is now, appeared the time-space traveler. It appeared in the blink of an eye. It did not come down from the sky; dozens of witnesses swear to that; it just appeared. One moment it was not here, the next it was. It appeared on the very spot it now rests on.

"The people nearest the ship were stricken with panic and ran back with cries and screams. Excitement spread out over Washington in a tidal wave.

Radio, television, and newspapermen rushed here at once. Police formed a wide cordon around the ship, and army units appeared and trained guns and ray projectors on it. The direst calamity was feared.

"For it was recognized from the very beginning that this was no spaceship from anywhere in the Solar System. Every child knew that only two spaceships had ever been built on Earth, and none at all on any

of the other planets and satellites; and of those two, one had been destroyed when it was pulled into the Sun, and the other had just been reported safely arrived on Mars. Then, the ones made here had a shell of a strong aluminum alloy, while this one, as you see, is of an unknown greenish metal.

"The ship appeared and just sat here. No one emerged, and there was no sign that it contained life of any kind. That, as much as any single thing, caused excitement to sky-rocket. Who, or what, was inside?

Were the visitors hostile or friendly? Where did the ship come from?

How did it arrive so suddenly right on this spot without dropping from the sky?

"For two days the ship rested here, just as you now see it, without motion or sign that it contained life. Long before the end of that time the scientists had explained that it was not so much a spaceship as a space-time traveler, because only such a ship could arrive as this one did—materialize. They pointed out that such a traveler, while theoretically understandable to us Earthmen, was far beyond attempt at our present state of knowledge, and that this one, activated by relativity principles, might well have come from the far corner of the Universe, from a distance which light itself would require mil]ions of years to cross.

"When this opinion was disseminated, public tension grew until it was almost intolerable. Where had the traveler come from? Who were its occupants? Why had they come to Earth? Above all, why did they not show themselves? Were they perhaps preparing some terrible weapon of destruction?

"And where was the ship's entrance port? Men who dared go look reported that none could be found. No slightest break or crack marred the perfect smoothness of the ship's curving ovoid surface. And a delegation of high-ranking officials who visited the ship could not, by knocking, elicit from its occupants any sign that they had been heard.

"At last, after exactly two days, in full view of tens of thousands of persons assembled and standing well back, and under the muzzles of scores of the army's most powerful guns and ray projectors, an opening appeared in the wall of the ship, and a ramp slid down, and out stepped a man, godlike in appearance and human in form, closely followed by a giant robot. And when they touched the ground the ramp slid back and the entrance closed as before.

"It was immediately apparent to all the assembled thousands that the stranger was friendly. The first thing he did was to raise his right arm high in the universal gesture of peace; but it was not that which impressed those nearest so much as the expression on his face, which radiated kindness, wisdom, the purest nobility. In his delicately tinted robe he looked like a benign god.

"At once, waiting for this appearance, a large committee of high-ranking government officials and army officers advanced to greet the visitor. With graciousness and dignity the man pointed to himself, then to his robot companion, and said in perfect English with a peculiar accent, 'I am Klaatu,' or a name that sounded like that, 'and this is Gnut." The names were not well understood at the time, but the sight-and-sound film of the television men caught them and they became known to everyone subsequently.

"And then occurred the thing which shall always be to the shame of the human race. From a treetop a

hundred yards away came a wink of violet light and Klaatu fell. The assembled multitude stood for a moment stunned, not comprehending what had happened. Gnut, a little behind his master and to one side, slowly turned his body a little toward him, moved his head twice, and stood still, in exactly the position you now see him.

"Then followed pandemonium. The police pulled the slayer of Klaatu out of the tree. They found him mentally unbalanced; he kept crying that the devil had come to kill everyone on Earth. He was taken away, and Klaatu, although obviously dead, was rushed to the nearest hospital to see if anything could be done to revive him. Confused and frightened crowds milled about the Capitol grounds the rest of the afternoon and much of that night. The ship remained as silent and motionless as before. And Gnut, too, never moved from the position he had come to rest in.

"Gnut never moved again. He remained exactly as you see him all that night and for the ensuing days. When the mausoleum in the Tidal Basin was built, Klaatu's burial services took place where you are standing now, attended by the highest functionaries of all the great countries of the world. It was not only the most appropriate but the safest thing to do, for if there should be other living creatures in the traveler, as seemed possible at that time, they had to be impressed by the sincere sorrow of us Earthmen at what had happened. If Gnut was still alive, or perhaps I had better say functionable, there was no sign. He stood as you see him during the entire ceremony. He stood so while his master was floated out to the mausoleum and given to the centuries with the tragically short sight-and-sound record of his historic visit. And he stood so afterward, day after day, night after night, in fair weather and in rain, never moving or showing by any slightest sign that he was aware of what had gone on.

"After the interment, this wing was built out from the museum to cover the traveler and Gnut. Nothing else could very well have been done, it was learned, for both Gnut and the ship were far too heavy to be moved safely by any means at hand.

"You have heard about the efforts of our metallurgists since then to break into the ship, and of their complete failure. Behind the ship now, as you can see from either end, a partitioned workroom has been set up where the attempt still goes on. So far its wonderful greenish metal has proved inviolable. Not only are they unable to get in, but they cannot even find the exact place from which klaatu and Gnut emerged. The chalk marks you see are the best approximation.

"Many people have feared that Gnut was only temporarily deranged, and that on return to function might be dangerous, so the scientists have completely destroyed all chance of that. The greenish metal of which he is made seemed to be the same as that of the ship and could no more be attacked, they found, nor could they find any way to penetrate to his internals; but they had other means. They sent electrical currents of tremendous voltages and amperages through him. They applied terrific heat to all parts of his metal shell. They immersed him for days in gases and acids and strongly corroding solutions, and they have bombarded him with every known kind of ray. You need have no fear of him now. He cannot possibly have retained the ability to function in any way.

"But—a word of caution. The officials of the government know that visitors will not show any disrespect in this building. It may be that the unknown and unthinkably powerful civilization from which Klaatu and Gnut came may send other emissaries to see what happened to them.

Whether or not they do, not one of us must be found amiss in our attitude. None of us could very well anticipate what happened, and we all are immeasurably sorry, but we are still in a sense responsible, and must do what we can to avoid possible retaliations.

"You will be allowed to remain five minutes longer, and then, when the gong sounds, you will please leave promptly. The robot attendants along the wall will answer any questions you may have.

"Look well, for before you stand stark symbols of the achievement, mystery, and frailty of the human race."

The recorded voice ceased speaking. Cliff, carefully moving his cramped limbs, broke out in a wide smile. If they knew what he knew!

For his photographs told a slightly different story from that of the lecturer. In yesterday's a line of the figured floor showed clearly at the outer edge of the robot's near foot; in today's, that line was covered.

Gnut had moved!

Or been moved, though this was very unlikely. Where was the derrick and other evidence of such activity? It could hardly have been done in one night, and all signs so quickly concealed. And why should it be done at all?

Still, to make sure, he had asked the guard. He could almost remember verbatim his answer:

"No, Gnut has neither moved nor been moved since the death of his master.

A special point was made of keeping him in the position he assumed at Klaatu's death. The floor was built in under him, and the scientists who completed his derangement erected their apparatus around him, just as he stands. You need have no fears."

Cliff smiled again. He did not have any fears.

Not yet.

CHAPTER II

A MOMENT LATER the big gong above the entrance doors rang the closing hour, and immediately following it a voice from the speakers called out, "Five o'clock, ladies and gentlemen. Closing time, ladies and gentlemen."

The three scientists, as if surprised it was so late, hurriedly washed their hands, changed to their street clothes and disappeared down the partitioned corridor, oblivious of the young picture man hidden under the table. The slide and scrape of the feet on the exhibition floor rapidly dwindled, until at last there were only the steps of the two guards walking from one point to another, making sure everything was all right for the night. For just a moment one of them glanced in the doorway of the laboratory, then he joined the other at the entrance.

Then the great metal doors clanged to, and there was silence.

Cliff waited several minutes, then carefully poked his way out from under the table. As he straightened up, a faint tinkling crash sounded at the floor by his feet. Carefully stooping, he found the shattered remains of a thin glass pipette. He had knocked it off the table.

That caused him to realize something he had not thought of before: A Gnut who had moved might be a Gnut who could see and hear—and really be dangerous. He would have to be very careful.

He looked about him. The room was bounded at the ends by two fiber partitions which at the inner ends followed close under the curving bottom of the ship. The inner side of the room was the ship itself, and the outer was the southern wall of the wing. There were four large high windows. The only entrance was by way of the passage.

Without moving, from his knowledge of the building, he made his plan.

The wing was connected with the western end of the museum by a doorway, never used, and extended westward toward the Washington Monument. The ship lay nearest the southern wall, and Gnut stood out in front of it, not far from the northeast corner and at the opposite end of the room from the entrance of the building and the passageway leading to the laboratory. By retracing his steps he would come out on the floor at the point farthest removed from the robot. This was just what he wanted, for on the other side of the entrance, on a low platform, stood a paneled table containing the lecture apparatus, and this table was the only object in the room which afforded a place for him to lie concealed while watching what might go on. The only other objects on the floor were the six manlike robot attendants in fixed stations along the northern wall, placed there to answer visitors' questions. He would have to gain the.table.

He turned and began cautiously tiptoeing out of the laboratory and down the passageway. It was already dark there, for what light still entered the exhibition hall was shut off by the great bulk of the ship. He reached the end of the room without making a sound. Very carefully he edged forward and peered around the bottom of the ship at Gnut.

He had a momentary shock. The robot's eyes were right on him!--or so it seemed. Was that only the effect of the set of his eyes, he wondered, or was he already discovered? The position of Gnut's head did not seem to have changed, at any rate. Probably everything was all right, but he wished he did not have to cross that end of the room with the feeling that the robot's eyes were following him.

He drew back and sat down and waited. It would have to be totally dark before he essayed the trip to the table.

He waited a full hour, until the faint beams from the lamps on the grounds outside began to make the room seem to grow lighter; then he got up and peeped around the ship once more. The robot's eyes seemed to pierce right at him as before, only now, due no doubt to the darkness, the strange internal illumination seemed much brighter. This was a chilling thought.

Did Gnut know he was there? What were the thoughts of the robot? What could be the thoughts of a man-made machine, even so wonderful a one as Gnut?

It was time for the cross, so Cliff slung his camera around on his back, went down on his hands and knees, and carefully moved to the edge of the entrance wall. There he fitted himself as closely as he could into the angle made by it with the floor and started inching ahead.

Never pausing, not risking a glance at Gnut's unnerving red eyes, moving an inch at a time, he snaked along. He took ten minutes to CrOSS the space of a hundred feet, and he was wet with perspiration when his fingers at last touched the one-foot rise of the platform on which the table stood. Still slowly, silently as a shadow, he made his way over the edge and melted behind the protection of the table. At last he was there.

He relaxed for a moment, then, anxious to know whether he had been seen, carefully turned and looked around the side of the table.

Gnut's eyes were now full on him! Or so it seemed. Against the general darkness, the robot loomed a mysterious and still darker shadow that, for all his being a hundred and fifty feet away, seemed to dominate the room.

Cliff could not tell whether the position of his body was changed or not.

But if Gnut were looking at him, he at least did nothing else. Not by the slightest motion that Cliff could discern did he appear to move.

His position was the one he had maintained these last three months, in the darkness, in the rain, and this last week in the museum.

Cliff made up his mind not to give away to fear. He became conscious of his own body. The cautious trip had taken something out of him—his knees and elbows burned and his trousers were no doubt ruined. But these were little things if what he hoped for came to pass. If Gnut so much as moved, and he could catch him with his infrared camera, he would have a story that would buy him fifty suits of clothes. And if on top of that he could learn the purpose of Gnut's moving—provided there was a purpose—that would be a story that would set the world on its ears.

He settled down to a period of waiting; there was no telling when Gnut would move, if indeed he would move that night. Cliff's eyes had long been adjusted to the dark and he could make out the larger objects well enough.

From time to time he peered out at the robot—peered long and hard, till his outlines wavered and he seemed to move, and he had to blink and rest his eyes to be sure it was only his imagination.

Again the minute hand of his watch crept around the dial. The inactivity made Cliff careless, and for longer and longer periods he kept his head back out of sight behind the table. And so it was that when Gnut did move he was scared almost out of his wits. Dull and a little bored, he suddenly found the robot out on the floor, halfway in his direction.

But that was not the most frightening thing. It was that when he did see Gnut he did not catch him moving! He was stopped as still as a cat in the middle of stalking a mouse. His eyes were now much righter, and there was no remaining doubt about their direction: he was looking right at Cliff!

Scarcely breathing half hypnotized, Cliff looked back. His thoughts tumbled. What was the robot's intention? Why had he stopped so still?

Was he being stalked? How could he move with such silence?

In the heavy darkness Gnut's eyes moved nearer. Slowly but in perfect rhythm the almost imperceptible sound of his footsteps beat on Cliff's ears. Cliff, usually resourceful enough, was this time caught flat-footed.

Frozen with fear, utterly incapable of fleeing, he lay where he was while the metal monster with the fiery eyes came on.

For a moment Cliff all but fainted, and when he recovered, there was Gnut towering over him, legs almost within reach. He was bending slightly, burning his terrible eyes right into his own!

Too late to try to think of running now. Trembling like any cornered mouse, Cliff waited for the blow that would crush him. For an eternity, it seemed, Gnut scrutinized him without moving. For each second of that eternity Cliff expected annihilation, sudden, quick, complete. And then suddenly and unexpectedly it was over. Gnut's body straightened and he stepped back. He turned. And then, with the almost jerkless rhythm which only he among robots possessed, he started back toward the place from which he came.

Cliff could hardly believe he had been spared. Gnut could have crushed him like a worm—and he had only turned around and gone back. Why? It could not be supposed that a robot was capable of human considerations.

Gnut went straight to the other end of the traveler. At a certain place he stopped and made a curious succession of sounds. At once Cliff saw an opening, blacker than the gloom of the building, appear in the ship's side, and it was followed by a slight sliding sound as a ramp slid out and met the floor. Gnut walked up the ramp and, stooping a little, disappeared inside the ship.

Then, for the first time, Cliff remembered the picture he had come to get.

Gnut had moved, but he had not caught him! But at least now, whatever opportunities there might be later, he could get the shot of the ramp connecting with the opened door; so he twisted his camera into position, set it for the proper exposure, and took a shot.

A long time passed and Gnut did not come out. What could he be doing inside? Cliff wondered. Some of his courage returned to him and he toyed with the idea of creeping forward and peeping through the port, but he found he had not the courage for that. Gnut had spared him, at least for the time, but there was no telling how far his tolerance would go.

An hour passed, then another, Gnut was doing something inside the ship, but what? Cliff could not imagine. If the robot had been a human being, he knew he would have sneaked a look, but, as it was, he was too much of an unknown quantity. Even the simplest of Earth's robots under certain circumstances were inexplicable things; what, then, of this one, come from an unknown and even unthinkable civilization, by far the most wonderful construction ever seen—what superhuman powers might he not possess? All that the scientists of Earth could do had not served to derange him. Acid, heat, rays, terrific crushing blows—he had withstood them all; even his finish had been unmarred. He might be able to see perfectly in the dark.

And right where he was, he might be able to hear or in some way sense the least change in Cliff's position.

More time passed, and then, some time after two o'clock in the morning, a simple homely thing happened, but a thing so unexpected that for a moment it quite destroyed Cliff's equilibrium. Suddenly, through the dark and silent building, there was a faint whir of wings, soon followed by the piercing, sweet voice of a bird. A mocking bird.

Somewhere in the gloom above his head. Clear and full-throated were its notes; a dozen little songs it sang, one after the other without pause between—short insistent calls, twirrings, coaxings, cooings—the spring love song of perhaps the finest singer in the world. Then, as suddenly as it began, the voice was silent.

If an invading army had poured out of the traveler, Cliff would have been less surprised. The month was December; even in Florida the mocking birds had not yet begun their song. How had one gotten into that tight, gloomy museum? How and why was it singing there?

He waited, full of curiosity. Then suddenly he was aware of Gnut, standing just outside the port of the ship. He stood quite still, his glowing eyes turned squarely in Cliff's direction. For a moment the hush in the museum seemed to deepen; then it was broken by a soft thud on the floor near where Cliff was lying.

He wondered. The light in Gnut's eyes changed, and he started his almost jerkless walk in Cliff's direction. When only a little away, the robot stopped, bent over, and picked something from the floor. For some time he stood without motion and looked at a little object he held in his hand.

Cliff knew, though he could not see, that it was the mocking bird. Its body, for he was sure that it had lost its song forever. Gnut then turned, and without a glance at Cliff, walked back to the ship and again went inside.

Hours passed while Cliff waited for some sequel to this surprising happening. Perhaps it was because of his curiosity that his fear of the robot began to lessen. Surely if the mechanism was unfriendly, if he intended him any harm, he would have finished him before, when he had such a perfect opportunity. Cliff began to nerve himself for a quick look inside the port. And a picture; he must remember the picture. He kept forgetting the very reason he was there.

It was in the deeper darkness of the false dawn when he got sufficient courage and made the start. He took off his shoes, and in his stockinged feet, his shoes tied together and slung over his shoulder, he moved stiffly but rapidly to a position behind the nearest of the six robot attendants stationed along the wall, then paused for some sign which might indicate that Gnut knew he had moved. Hearing none, he slipped along behind the next robot attendant and paused again.

Bolder now, he made in one spurt all the distance to the farthest one, the sixth, fixed just opposite the port of the ship. There he met with a disappointment. No light that he could detect was visible within; there was only darkness and the all-permeating silence.

Still, he had better get the picture. He raised his camera, focused it on the dark opening, and gave the film a comparatively long exposure.

Then he stood there, at a loss what to do next.

As he paused, a peculiar series of muffled noises reached his ears, apparently from within the ship. Animal noises—first scrapings and pantings, punctuated by several sharp clicks, then deep, rough snarls, interrupted by more scrapings and pantings, as if a struggle of some kind were going on. Then suddenly, before Cliff could even decide to run back to the table, a low, wide, dark shape bounded out of the port and immediately turned and grew to the height of a man. A terrible fear swept over Cliff, even before he knew what the shape was.

In the next second Gnut appeared in the port and stepped unhesitatingly down the ramp toward the shape. As he advanced it backed slowly away for a few feet; but then it stood its ground, and thick arms rose from its sides and began a loud drumming on its chest, while from its throat came a deep roar of defiance. Only one creature in the world beat its chest and made a sound like that. The shape was a gorilla!

And a huge one!

Gnut kept advancing, and when close, charged forward and grappled with the beast. Cliff would not have guessed that Gnut could move so fast.

In the darkness he could not see the details of what happened; all he knew was that the two great shapes, the titanic metal Gnut and the squat but terrifically strong gorilla, merged for a moment with silence on the robot's part and terrible, deep, indescribable roars on the other's; then the two separated, and it was as if the gorilla had been flung back and away.

The animal at once rose to its full height and roared deafeningly.

Gnut advanced. They closed again, and the separation of before was repeated. The robot continued inexorably, and now the gorilla began to fa]l back down the building. Suddenly the beast darted at a manlike shape against the wall, and with one rapid side movement dashed the fifth robot attendant to the floor and decapitated it.

Tense with fear, Cliff crouched behind his own robot attendant. He thanked Heaven that Gnut was between him and the gorilla and was continuing his advance. The gorilla backed farther, darted suddenly at the next robot in the row, and with strength almost unbelievable picked it from its roots and hurled it at Gnut. With a sharp metallic clang, robot hit robot, and the one of Earth bounced off to one side and rolled to a stop.

Cliff cursed himself for it afterward, but again he completely forgot the picture. The gorilla kept falling back down the building, demolishing with terrific bursts of rage every robot attendant that he passed and throwing the pieces at the implacable Gnut. Soon they arrived opposite the table, and Cliff now thanked his stars he had come away. There followed a brief silence. Cliff could not make out what was going on, but he imagined that the gorilla had at last reached the corner of the wing and was trapped.

If he was, it was only for a moment. The silence was suddenly shattered by a terrific roar, and the thick, squat shape of the animal came bounding toward Cliff. He came all the way back and turned just between Cliff and the port of the ship. Cliff prayed frantically for Gnut to come back quickly, for there was now only the last remaining robot attendant between him and the madly dangerous brute. Out of the dimness Gnut did appear. The gorilla rose to its full height and again beat its chest and roared its challenge.

And then occurred a curious thing. It fell on all fours and slowly rolled over on its side, as if weak or hurt. Then panting, making frightening noises, it forced itself again to its feet and faced the oncoming Gnut. As it waited, its eye was caught by the last robot attendant and perhaps Cliff, shrunk close behind it. With a surge of terrible destructive rage, the gorilla waddled sideward toward Cliff, but this time, even through his panic, he saw that the animal moved with difficulty, again apparently sick or severely wounded. He jumped back just in time; the gorilla pulled out the last robot attendant and hurled it violently at Gnut, missing him narrowly.

That was its last effort. The weakness caught it again; it dropped heavily on one side, rocked back and forth a few times, and fell to twitching. Then it lay still and did not move again.

The first faint pale light of the dawn was seeping into the room. From the corner where he had taken refuge, Cliff watched closely the great robot. It seemed to him that he behaved very queerly. He stood over the dead gorilla, looking down at him with what in a human would be called sadness. Cliff saw this clearly; Gnut's heavy greenish features bore a thoughtful, grieving expression new to his experience. For some moments he stood so, then as might a father with his sick child, he leaned over, lifted the great

animal in his metal arms, and carried it tenderly within the ship.

Cliff flew back to the table, suddenly fearful of yet other dangerous and inexplicable happenings. It struck him that he might be safer in the laboratory, and with trembling knees he made his way there and hid in one of the big ovens. He prayed for full daylight. His thoughts were chaos.

Rapidly, one after another, his mind churned up the amazing events of the night, but all was mystery; it seemed there could be no rational explanation for them. That mocking bird. The gorilla. Gnut's sad expression and his tenderness. What could account for a fantastic melange like that!

Gradually full daylight did come. A long time passed. At last he began to believe he might yet get out of that place of mystery and danger alive. At 8:30 there were noises at the entrance, and the good sound of human voices came to his ears. He stepped out of the oven and tiptoed to the passageway.

The noises stopped suddenly and there was a frightened exclamation and then the sound of running feet, and then silence. Stealthily Cliff sneaked down the narrow way and peeped fearfully around the ship.

There Gnut was in his accustomed place, in the identical pose he had taken at the death of his master, brooding sullenly and alone over a space traveler once again closed tight and a room that was a shambles.

The entrance doors stood open and, heart in his mouth, Cliff ran out.

A few minutes later, safe in his hotel room, completely done in, he sat down for a second and almost at once fell asleep. Later, still in his clothes and still asleep, he staggered over to the bed. He did not wake up till midafternoon.

CHAPTER III

CLIFF AWOKE SLOWLY, at first not realizing that the images tumbling in his head were real memories and not a fantastic dream. It was recollection of the pictures which brought him to his feet. Hastily he set about developing the film in his camera.

Then in his hands was proof that the events of the night were real.

Both shots turned out well. The first showed clearly the ramp leading up to the port as he had dimly discerned it from his position behind the table. The second, of the open port as snapped from in front, was a disappointment, for a blank wall just back of the opening cut off all view of the interior.

That would account for the fact that no light had escaped from the ship while Gnut was inside. Assuming Gnut required light for whatever he did.

Cliff looked at the negatives and was ashamed of himself. What a rotten picture man he was to come back with two ridiculous shots like these! He had had a score of opportunities to get real ones—shots of Gnut in action—Gnut's fight with the gorilla—even Gnut holding the mocking bird—spine-chilling stuff!--and all he had brought back was two stills of a doorway. Oh, sure, they were valuable, but he was a Grade A ass.

And to top this brilliant performance, he had fallen asleep!

Well, he'd better get out on the street and find out what was doing.

Quickly he showered, shaved, and changed his clothes, and soon was entering a nearby restaurant patronized by other picture and newsmen.

Sitting alone at the lunch bar, he spotted a friend and competitor.

"Well, what do you think?" asked his friend when he took the stool at his side.

"I don't think anything until I've had breakfast," Cliff answered.

"Then haven't you heard?"

"Heard what?" fended Cliff, who knew very well what was coming.

"You're a fine picture man," was the other's remark. "When something really big happens, you are asleep in bed." But then he told him what had been discovered that morning in the museum, and of the world-wide excitement at the news. Cliff did three things at once, successfully—gobbled a substantial breakfast, kept thanking his stars that nothing new had transpired, and showed continuous surprise. Still chewing, he got up and hurried over to the building.

Outside, balked at the door, was a large crowd of the curious, but Cliff had no trouble gaining admittance when he showed his press credentials.

Gnut and the ship stood just as he had left them, but the floor had been cleaned up and the pieces of the demolished robot attendants were lined up in one place along the wall. Several other competitor friends of his were there.

"I was away; missed the whole thing," he said to one of them—Gus.

"What's supposed to be the explanation for what happened?"

"Ask something easy," was the answer. "Nobody knows. It's thought maybe something came out of the ship, maybe another robot like Gnut.

Say—where have you been?"

"Asleep."

"Better catch up. Several billion bipeds are scared stiff. Revenge for the death of Klaatu. Earth about to be invaded."

"But that's—" "Oh, I know it's all crazy, but that's the story they're being fed; it sells news. But there's a new angle just turned up, very surprising. Come here."

He led Cliff to the table where stood a knot of people looking with great interest at several objects guarded by a technician. Gus pointed to a long slide on which were mounted a number of short dark-brown hairs.

"Those hairs came off a large male gorilla," Gus said with a certain hard-boiled casualness. "Most of them were found among the sweepings of the floor this morning. The rest were found on the robot attendants."

Cliff tried to look astounded. Gus pointed to a test tube partly filled with a light amber fiuid.

"And that's blood, diluted—gorilla blood. It was found on Gnut's arms."

"Good Heaven!" Cliff managed to exclaim. "And there's no explanation?"

"Not even a theory. It's your big chance, wonder boy."

Cliff broke away from Gus, unable to maintain his act any longer. He couldn't decide what to do about his story. The press services would bid heavily for it—with all his pictures—but that would take further action out of his hands. In the back of his mind he wanted to stay in the wing again that night, but—well, he simply was afraid. He'd had a pretty stiff dose, and he wanted very much to remain alive.

He walked over and looked a long time at Gnut. No one would ever have guessed that he had moved, or that there had rested on his greenish metal face a look of sadness. Those weird eyes! Cliff wondered if they were really looking at him, as they seemed, recognizing him as the bold intruder of last night. Of what unknown stuff were they made—those materials placed in his eye sockets by one branch of the race of man which all the science of his own could not even serve to disfunction? What was Gnut thinking?

What could be the thoughts of a robot—a mechanism of metal poured out of man's clay crucibles? Was he angry at him? Cliff thought not.

Gnut had had him at his mercy—and had walked away.

Dared he stay again?

Cliff thought perhaps he did.

He walked about the room, thinking it over. He felt sure Gnut would move again. A Mikton ray gun would protect him from another gorilla—or fifty of them. He did not yet have the real story. He had come back with two miserable architectural stills!

He might have known from the first that he would stay. At dusk that night, armed with his camera and a small Mikton gun, he lay once more under the table of supplies in the laboratory and heard the metal doors of the wing clang to for the night.

This time he would get the story—and the pictures.

If only no guard was posted inside!

CHAPTER IV

CLIFF LISTENED HARD for a long time for any sound which might tell him that a guard had been left, but the silence within the wing remained unbroken.

He was thankful for that—but not quite completely. The gathering darkness and the realization that he was now irrevocably committed made the thought of a companion not altogether unpleasant.

About an hour after it reached maximum darkness he took off his shoes, tied them together and slung

them around his neck, down his back, and stole quietly down the passageway to where it opened into the exhibition area.

All seemed as it had been the preceding night. Gnut looked an ominous, indistinct shadow at the far end of the room, his glowing red eyes again seemingly right on the spot from which Cliff peeped out. As on the previous night, but even more carefully, Cliff went down on his stomach in the angle of the wall and slowly snaked across to the low platform on which stood the table. Once in its shelter, he fixed his shoes so that they straddled one shoulder, and brought his camera and gun holster around, ready on his breast. This time, he told himself, he would get pictures.

He settled down to wait, keeping Gnut in full sight every minute. His vision reached maximum adjustment to the darkness. Eventually he began to feel lonely and a little afraid. Gnut's red-glowing eyes were getting on his nerves; he had to keep assuring himself that the robot would not harm him. He had little doubt but that he himself was being watched.

Hours slowly passed. From time to time he heard slight noises at the entrance, on the outside—a guard, perhaps, or maybe curious visitors.

At about nine o'clock he saw Gnut move. First his head alone; it turned so that the eyes burned stronger in the direction where Cliff lay. For a moment that was all; then the dark metal form stirred slightly and began moving forward—straight toward himself. Cliff had thought he would not be afraid—much—but now his heart stood still.

What would happen this time?

With amazing silence, Gnut drew nearer, until he towered an ominous shadow over the spot where Cliff lay. For a long time his red eyes burned down on the prone man. Cliff trembled all over; this was worse than the first time.

Without having planned it, he found himself speaking to the creature.

"You would not hurt me," he pleaded. "I was only curious to see what's going on. It's my job. Can you understand me? I would not harm or bother you. I . . . I couldn't if I wanted to! Please!"

The robot never moved, and Cliff could not guess whether his words had been understood or even heard. When he felt he could not bear the suspense any longer, Gnut reached out and took something from a drawer of the table, or perhaps he put something back in; then he stepped back, turned, and retraced his steps. Cliff was safe! Again the robot had spared him!

Beginning then, Cliff lost much of his fear. He felt sure now that this Gnut would do him no harm. Twice he had had him in his power, and each time he had only looked and quietly moved away. Cliff could not imagine what Gnut had done in the drawer of the table. He watched with the greatest curiosity to see what would happen next.

As on the night before, the robot went straight to the end of the ship and made the peculiar sequence of sounds that opened the port, and when the ramp slid out he went inside. After that Cliff was alone in the darkness for a very long time, probably two hours. Not a sound came from the ship.

Cliff knew he should sneak up to the port and peep inside, but he could not quite bring himself to do it. With his gun he could handle another gorilla, but if Gnut caught him it might be the end. Momentarily he expected something fantastic to happen—he knew not what; maybe the mocking bird's sweet song

again, maybe a gorilla, maybe—anything.

What did at last happen once more caught him with complete surprise.

He heard a sudden muffled sound, then words—human words—every one familiar.

"Gentlemen," was the first, and then there was a very slight pause.

"The Smithsonian Institution welcomes you to its new Interplanetary Wing and to the marvelous exhibits at this moment before you."

It WAS the recorded voice of Stillwell! But it was not coming through the speakers overhead, but much muted, from within the ship.

After a slight pause it went on: "All of you must . . . must—" Here it stammered and came to a stop.

Cliff's hair bristled. That stammering was not in the lecture!

For just a moment there was silence; then came a scream, a hoarse man's scream, muffled, from somewhere within the heart of the ship; and it was followed by muted gasps and cries, as of a man in great fright or distress.

Every nerve tight, Cliff watched the port. He heard a thudding noise within the ship, then out the door flew the shadow of what was surely a human being. Gasping and half stumbling, he ran straight down the room in Cliff's direction. When twenty feet away, the great shadow of Gnut followed him out of the port.

Cliff watched, breathless. The man—it was Stillwell, he saw now

came straight for the table behind which Cliff himself lay, as if to get behind it, but when only a few feet away, his knees buckled and he fell to the floor. Suddenly Gnut was standing over him, but Stillwell did not seem to be aware of it. He appeared very ill, but kept making spasmodic futile efforts to creep on to the protection of the table.

Gnut did not move, so Cliff was emboldened to speak.

"What's the matter, Stillwell?" he asked. "Can I help? Don't be afraid.

I'm Cliff Sutherland; you know, the picture man."

Without showing the least surprise at finding Cliff there, and clutching at his presence like a drowning man would a straw, Stillwell gasped out: "Help me! Gnut . . . Gnut—" He seemed unable to go on.

"Gnut what?" asked Cliff. Very conscious of the fire-eyed robot looming above, and afraid even to move out to the man, Cliff added reassuringly: "Gnut won't hurt you. I'm sure he won't. He doesn't hurt me. What's the matter? What can I do?"

With a sudden accession of energy, Stillwell rose on his elbows.

"Where am l?" he asked.

"In the Interplanetary Wing," Cliff answered. "Don't you know?"

Only Stillwell's hard breathing was heard for a moment. Then hoarsely, weakly, he asked: "How did I get here?"

"I don't know," said Cliff.

"I was making a lecture recording," Stillwell said, "when suddenly I found myself here . . . or I mean in there—" He broke off and showed a return of his terror.

"Then what?" asked Cliff gently.

"I was in that box—and there, above me, was Gnut, the robot. Gnut!

But they made Gnut harmless! He's never moved!"

"Steady, now," said Cliff. "I don't think Gnut will hurt you."

Stillwell fell back on the floor.

"I'm very weak," he gasped. "Something—Will you get a doctor?"

He was utterly unaware that towering above him, eyes boring down at him through the darkness, was the robot he feared so greatly.

As Cliff hesitated, at a loss what to do, the man's breath began coming in short gasps, as regular as the ticking of a clock. Cliff dared to move out to him, but no act on his part could have helped the man now.

His gasps weakened and became spasmodic, then suddenly he was completely silent and still. Cliff felt for his heart, then looked up to the eyes in the shadow above.

"He is dead," he whispered.

The robot seemed to understand, or at least to hear. He bent forward and regarded the still figure.

"What is it, Gnut?" Cliff asked the robot suddenly. "What are you doing?

Can I help you in any way? Somehow I don't believe you are unfriendly, and I don't believe you killed this man. But what happened? Can you understand me? Can you speak? What is it you're trying to do?"

Gnut made no sound or motion, but only looked at the still figure at his feet. In the robot's face, now so close, Cliff saw the look of sad contemplation.

Gnut stood so several minutes; then he bent lower, took the limp form carefully—even gently, Cliff thought—in his mighty arms, and carried him to the place along the wall where lay the dismembered pieces of the robot attendants. Carefully he laid him by their side. Then he went back into the ship.

Without fear now, Cliff stole along the wall of the room. He had gotten almost as far as the shattered figures on the floor when he suddenly stopped motionless. Gnut was emerging again.

He was bearing a shape that looked like another body, a larger one. He held it in one arm and placed it carefully by the body of Stillwell.

In the hand of his other arm he held something that Cliff could not make out, and this he placed at the side of the body he had just put down. Then he went to the ship and returned once more with a shape which he laid gently by the others; and when this last trip was over he looked down at them all for a moment, then turned slowly back to the ship and stood motionless, as if in deep thought, by the ramp.

Cliff restrained his curiosity as long as he could, then slipped forward and bent over the objects Gnut had placed there. First in the row was the body of Stillwell, as he expected, and next was the great shapeless furry mass of a dead gorilla—the one of last night. By the gorilla lay the object the robot had carried in his free hand—the little body of the mocking bird. These last two had remained in the ship all night, and Gnut, for all his surprising gentleness in handling them, was only cleaning house. But there was a fourth body whose history he did not know. He moved closer and bent very low to look.

What he saw made him catch his breath. Impossible!--he thought; there was some confusion in his directions; he brought his face back, close to the first body. Then his blood ran cold. The first body was that of Stillwell, but the last in the row was Stillwell, too; there were two bodies of Stillwell, both exactly alike, both dead.

Cliff backed away with a cry, and then panic took him and he ran down the room away from Gnut and yelled and beat wildly on the door. There was a noise on the outside.

"Let me out!" he yelled in terror. "Let me out! Let me out! Oh, hurry!"

A crack opened between the two doors and he forced his way through like a wild animal and ran far out on the lawn. A belated couple on a nearby path stared at him with amazement, and this brought some sense to his head and he slowed down and came to a stop. Back at the building, everything looked as usual, and in spite of his terror, Gnut was not chasing him.

He was still in his stockinged feet. Breathing heavily, he sat down on the wet grass and put on his shoes; then he stood and looked at the building, trying to pull himself together. What an incredible melange!

The dead Stillwell, the dead gorilla, and the dead mocking bird—all dying before his eyes. And then that last frightening thing, the second dead Stillwell whom he had not seen die. And Gnut's strange gentleness, and the sad expression he had twice seen on his face.

As he looked, the grounds about the building came to life. Several people collected at the door of the wing, above sounded the siren of a police copter, then in the distance another, and from all sides people came running, a few at first, then more and more. The police planes landed on the lawn just outside the door of the wing, and he thought he could see the officers peeping inside. Then suddenly the lights of the wing flooded on.

In control of himself now, Cliff went back.

He entered. He had left Gnut standing in thought at the side of the ramp, but now he was again in his old familiar pose in the usual place, as if he had never moved. The ship's door was closed, and the ramp gone. But the bodies, the four strangely assorted bodies, were still lying by the demolished robot attendants where he had left them in the dark.

He was startled by a cry behind his back. A uniformed museum guard was pointing at him.

"This is the man!" the guard shouted. "When I opened the door this man forced his way out and ran like the devil!"

The police officers converged on Cliff.

"Who are you? What is all this?" one of them asked him roughly.

"I'm Cliff Sutherland, picture reporter," Cliff answered calmly. "And I was the one who was inside here and ran away, as the guard says."

"What were you doing?"' the officer asked, eyeing him. "And where did these bodies come from?"

"Gentlemen, I'd tell you gladly—only business first," Cliff

answered.

"There's been some fantastic goings on in this room, and I saw them and have the story, but"—he smiled—"I must decline to answer without advice of counsel until I've sold my story to one of the news syndicates. You know how it is. If you'll allow me the use of the radio in your plane—just for a moment, gentlemen-you'll have the whole story right afterward—say in half an hour, when the television men broadcast it. Meanwhile, believe me, there's nothing for you to do, and there'll be no loss by the delay." The officer who had asked the questions blinked, and one of the others, quicker to react and certainly not a gentleman, stepped to ward Cliff with clenched fists.

Cliff disarmed him by handing him his press credentials. He glanced at them rapidly and put them in his pocket.

By now half a hundred people were there, and among them were two members of a syndicate crew whom he knew, arrived by copter. The police growled, but they let him whisper in their ear and then go out under escort to the crew's plane. There, by radio, in five minutes, Cliff made a deal which would bring him more money than he had ever before earned in a year. After that he turned over all his pictures and negatives to the crew and ave them the story, and they lost not one second in spinning back to their office with the flash.

More and more people arrived, and the police cleared the building. Ten minutes later a big crew of radio and television men forced their way in, sent there by the syndicate with which he had dealt. And then a few minutes later, under the glaring lights set up by the operators and standing close by the ship and not far from Gnut—he refused to stand underneath him—Cliff gave his story to the cameras and microphones, which in a fraction of a second shot it to every corner of the Solar System.

Immediately afterward the police took him to jail. On general principles and because they were pretty blooming mad.

CHAPTER V

CLIFF STAYED in jail all that night—until eight o'clock the next morning, when the syndicate finally succeeded in digging up a lawyer and got him out. And then, when at last he was leaving, a Federal man caught him by the wrist.

"You're wanted for further questioning over at the Continental Bureau of Investigation," the agent told him. Cliff went along willingly.

Fully thirty-five high-ranking Federal officials and "big names" were waiting for him in an imposing conference room—one of the president's secretaries, the undersecretary of state, the underminister of defense, scientists, a colonel, executives, department heads, and ranking "C" men.

Old gray-mustached Sanders, chief of the CBI, was presiding.

They made him tell his story all over again, and then, in parts, all over once more—not because they did not believe him, but because they kept hoping to elicit some fact which would cast significant light on the mystery of Gnut's behavior and the happenings of the last three nights.

Patiently Cliff racked his brains for every detail.

Chief Sanders asked most of the questions. After more than an hour, when Cliff thought they had finished, Sanders asked him several more, all involving his personal opinions of what had transpired.

"Do you think Gnut was deranged in any way by the acids, rays, heat, and so forth applied to him by the scientists?"

"I saw no evidence of it."

"Do you think he can see?"

"I'm sure he can see, or else has other powers which are equivalent."

"Do you think he can hear?"

"Yes, sir. That time when I whispered to him that Stillwell was dead, he bent lower, as if to see for himself. I would not be surprised if he also understood what I said."

"At no time did he speak, except those sounds he made to open the ship?"

"Not one word, in English or any other language. Not one sound with his mouth."

"In your opinion, has his strength been impaired in any way by our treatment?" asked one of the scientists.

"I have told you how easily he handled the gorilla. He attacked the animal and threw it back, after which it retreated all the way down the building, afraid of him."

"How would you explain the fact that our autopsies disclosed no mortal wound, no cause of death, in any of the bodies—gorilla, mocking bird, or the two identical Stillwells?"—this from a medical officer.

"I can't."

"You think Gnut is dangerous?"—from Sanders.

"Potentially very dangerous."

"Yet you say you have the feeling he is not hostile."

"To me, I meant. I do have that feeling, and I'm afraid that I can't give any good reason for it, except the way he spared me twice when he had me in his power. I think maybe the gentle way he handled the bodies had something to do with it, and maybe the sad, thoughtful look I twice caught on his face."

"Would you risk staying in the building alone another night?"

"Not for anything." There were smiles.

"Did you get any pictures of what happened last night?"

"No, sir." Cliff, with an effort, held on to his composure, but he was swept by a wave of shame. A man hitherto silent rescued him by saying:

"A while ago you used the word 'purposive' in connection with Gnut's actions. Can you explain that a little?"

"Yes, that was one of the things that struck me: Gnut never seems to waste a motion. He can move with surprising speed when he wants to; I saw that when he attacked the gorilla; but most other times he walks around as if methodically completing some simple task. And that reminds me of a peculiar thing: at times he gets into one position, any position, maybe half bent over, and stays there for minutes at a time.

It's as if his scale of time values was eccentric, compared to ours; some things he does surprisingly fast, and others surprisingly slow.

This might account for his long periods of immobility."

"That's very interesting," said one of the scientists. "How would you account for the fact that he recently moves only at night?"

"I think he's doing something he wants no one to see, and the night is the only time he is alone."

"But he went ahead even after finding you there."

"I know. But I have no other explanation, unless he considered me harmless or unable to stop him—which was certainly the case."

"Before you arrived, we were considering incasing him in a large block of glasstex. Do you think he would permit it?"

"I don't know. Probably he would; he stood for the acids and rays and heat. But it had better be done in the daytime; night seems to be the time he moves."

"But he moved in the daytime when he emerged from the traveler with Klaatu."

"I know."

That seemed to be all they could think of to ask him. Sanders slapped his hand on the table.

"Well, I guess that's all Mr. Sutherland," he said. "Thank you for your help, and let me congratulate you for a very foolish, stubborn, brave young man—young businessman." He smiled very faintly. "You are free to go now, but it may be that I'll have to call you back later.

We'll see."

"May I remain while you decide about that glasstex?" Cliff asked. "As long as I'm here I'd like to have the tip."

"The decision has already been made—the tip's yours. The pouring will be started at once."

"Thank you, sir," said Cliff—and calmly asked more: "And will you be so kind as to authorize me to be present outside the building tonight?

Just outside. I've a feeling something's going to happen."

"You want still another scoop, I see," said Sanders not unkindly, "then you'll let the police wait while you transact your business."

"Not again, sir. If anything happens, they'll get it at once."

The chief hesitated. "I don't know," he said. "I'll tell you what.

All the news services will want men there, and we can't have that; but if you can arrange to represent them all yourself, it's a go.

Nothing's going to happen, but your reports will help calm the hysterical ones. Let me know."

Cliff thanked him and hurried out and phoned his syndicate the tip—free—then told them Sanders' proposal. Ten minutes later they called him back, said all was arranged, and told him to catch some sleep. They would cover the pouring. With light heart, Cliff hurried over to the museum. The place was surrounded by thousands of the curious, held far back by a strong cordon of police. For once he could not get through; he was recognized, and the police were still sore.

But he did not care much; he suddenly felt very tired and needed that nap. He went back to his hotel, left a call, and went to bed.

He had been asleep only a few minutes when his phone rang. Eyes shut, he answered it. It was one of the boys at the syndicate, with peculiar news.

Stillwell had just reported, very much alive-the real Stillwell. The two dead ones were some kind of copies; he couldn't imagine how to explain them. He had no brothers.

For a moment Cliff came fully awake, then he went back to bed. Nothing was fantastic any more.

CHAPTER VI

AT FOUR O'CLOCK, much refreshed and with an infrared viewing magnifier slung over his shoulder, Cliff passed through the cordon and entered the door of the wing. He had been expected and there was no trouble.

As his eyes fell on Gnut, an odd feeling went through him, and for some obscure reason he was almost sorry for the giant robot.

Gnut stood exactly as he had always stood, the right foot advanced a little, and the same brooding expression on his face; but now there was something more. He was solidly incased in a huge block of transparent glasstex. From the floor on which he stood to the top of his full eight feet, and from there or. up for an equal distance, and for about eight feet to the left, right, back, and front, he was immured in a water-clear prison which confined every inch of his surface and would prevent the slightest twitch of even his amazing muscles.

It was absurd, no doubt, to feel sorry for a robot, a man-made mechanism, but Cliff had come to think of him as being really alive, as a human is alive. He showed purpose and will; he performed complicated and resourceful acts; his face had twice clearly shown the emotion of sadness, and several times what appeared to be deep thought; he had been ruthless with the gorilla, and gentle with the mocking bird and the other two bodies, and he had twice refrained from crushing Cliff when there seemed every reason that he might. Cliff did not doubt for a minute that he was still alive, whatever that "alive" might mean.

But outside were waiting the radio and television men; he had work to do.

He turned and went to them and all got busy.

An hour later Cliff sat alone about fifteen feet above the ground in a big tree which, located just across the walk from the building, commanded through a window a clear view of the upper part of Gnut's body. Strapped to the limbs about him were three instruments—his infrared viewing magnifier, a radio mike, and an infrared television eye with sound pickup. The first, the viewing magnifier, would allow him to see in the dark with his own eyes, as if by daylight, a magnified image of the robot, and the others would pick up any sights and sounds, including his own remarks, and transmit them to the several broadcast studios which would fling them millions of miles in all directions through space. Never before had a picture man had such an important assignment, probably—certainly not one who forgot to take pictures. But now that was forgotten, and Cliff was quite proud, and ready.

Far back in a great circle stood a multitude of the curious—and the fearful. Would the plastic glasstex hold Gnut? If it did not, would he come out thirsting for revenge? Would unimaginable beings come out of the traveler and release him, and perhaps exact revenge? Millions at their receivers were jittery; those in the distance hoped nothing awful would happen, yet they hoped something would, and they were prepared to run.

In carefully selected spots not far from Cliff on all sides were mobile ray batteries manned by army units, and in a hollow in back of him, well to his right, there was stationed a huge tank with a large gun.

Every weapon was trained on the door of the wing. A row of smaller, faster tanks stood ready fifty yards directly north. Their ray projectors were aimed at the door, but not their guns. The grounds about the building contained only one spot—the hollow where the great tank was—where, by close calculation, a shell directed at the doorway would not cause damage and loss of life to some part of the sprawling capital.

Dusk fell; out streamed the last of the army officers, politicians and other privileged ones; the great metal

doors of the wing clanged to and were locked for the night. Soon Cliff was alone, except for the watchers at their weapons scattered around him.

Hours passed. The moon came out. From time to time Cliff reported to the studio crew that all was quiet. His unaided eyes could now see nothing of Gnut but the two faint red points of his eyes, but through the magnifier he stood out as clearly as if in daylight from an apparent distance of only ten feet. Except for his eyes, there was no evidence that he was anything but dead and unfunctionable metal.

Another hour passed. Now and again Cliff thumbed the levels of his tiny radio-television watch—only a few seconds at a time because of its limited battery. The air was full of Gnut and his own face and his own name, and once the tiny screen showed the tree in which he was then sitting and even, minutely, himself. Powerful infrared long-distance television pickups were even then focused on him from nearby points of vantage. It gave him a funny feeling.

Then, suddenly, Cliff saw something and quickly bent his eye to the viewing magnifier. Gnut's eyes were moving; at least the intensity of the light emanating from them varied. It was as if two tiny red flashlights were turned from side to side, their beams at each motion crossing Cliff's eyes.

Thrilling, Cliff signaled the studios, cut in his pickups, and described the phenomenon. Millions resonated to the excitement in his voice. Could Gnut conceivably break out of that terrible prison?

Minutes passed, the eye flashes continued, but Cliff could discern no movement or attempted movement of the robot's body. In brief snatches he described what he saw. Gnut was clearly alive; there could be no doubt he was straining against the transparent prison in which he had at last been locked fast; but unless he could crack it, no motion should show.

Cliff took his eye from the magnifier—and started. His unaided eye, looking at Gnut shrouded in darkness, saw an astonishing thing not yet visible through his instrument. A faint red glow was spreading over the robot's body. With trembling fingers he readjusted the lens of the television eye, but even as he did so the glow grew in intensity. It looked as if Gnut's body was being heated to incandescence!

He described it in excited fragments, for it took most of his attention to keep correcting the lens. Gnut passed from a figure of dull red to one brighter and brighter, clearly glowing now even through the magnifier. And then he moved! Unmistakably he moved!

He had within himself somehow the means to raise his own body temperature, and was exploiting the one limitation of the plastic in which he was locked. For glasstex, Cliff now remembered, was a thermoplastic material, one that set by cooling and conversely would soften again with heat. Gnut was melting his way out!

In three-word snatches, Cliff described this. The robot became cherry-red, the sharp edges of the icelike block roumded, and the whole structure began to sag. The process accelerated. The robot's body moved more widely. The plastic lowered to the crown of his head, then to his neck, then his waist, which was as far as Cliff could see. His body was free! And then, still cherry-red, he moved forward out of sight!

Cliff strained eyes and ears, but caught nothing but the distant roar of the watchers beyond the police lines and a few low, sharp commands from the batteries posted around him. They, too, had heard, and perhaps seen by telescreen, and were waiting.

Several minutes passed. There was a sharp, ringing crack; the great metal doors of the wing flew open,

and out stepped the metal giant, glowing no longer. He stood stock-still, and his red eyes pierced from side to side through the darkness.

Voices out in the dark barked orders and in a twinkling Gnut was bathed in narrow crisscrossing rays of sizzling, colored light. Behind him the metal doors began to melt, but his great green body showed no change at all. Then the world seemed to come to an end; there was a deafening roar, everything before Cliff seemed to explode in smoke and chaos, his tree whipped to one side so that he was nearly thrown out.

Pieces of debris rained down. The tank gun had spoken, and Gnut, he was sure, had been hit.

Cliff held on tight and peered into the haze. As it cleared he made out a stirring among the debris at the door, and then dimly but unmistakably he saw the great form of Gnut rise to his feet. He got up slowly, turned toward the tank, and sudden]y darted toward it in a wide arc. The big gun swung in an attempt to cover him, but the robot side-stepped and then was upon it. As the crew scattered, he destroyed its breech with one blow of his fist, and then he turned and looked right at Cliff.

He moved toward him, and in a moment was under the tree. Cliff c]imbed higher. Gnut put his two arms around the tree and gave a lifting push, and the tree tore out at the roots and fell crashing to its side.

Before Cliff could scramble away, the robot had lifted him in his metal hands.

Cliff thought his time had come. but strange things were yet in store for him that night. Gnut did not hurt him. He looked at him from arm's length for a moment, then lifted him to a sitting position on his shoulders, legs straddling his neck. Then, holding one ankle, he turned and without hesitation started down the path which led westward away from the building.

Cliff rode helpless. Out over the lawns he saw the muzzles of the scattered field pieces move as he moved, Gnut—and himself-their one focus.

But they did not fire. Gnut, by placing him on his shoulders, had secured himself against that—Cliff hoped.

The robot bore straight toward the tidal Basin. Most of the field pieces throbbed slowly after. Far back, Cliff saw a dark tide of confusion roll into the cleared area—the police lines had broken.

Ahead, the ring thinned rapidly off to the sides; then, from all directions but the front, the tide rolled in until individual shouts and cries could be made o-lt. It came to a stop about fifty yards off, and few people ventured nearer.

Gnut paid them no attention, and he no more noticed his burden than he might a fly. His neck and shoulders made Cliff a seat hard as steel, but with the difference that their underlying muscles with each movement flexed, just as would those of a human being. To Cliff, this metal musculature became a vivid wonder.

Straight as the flight of a bee, over paths, across lawns, and through thin rows of trees Gnut bore the young man, the roar of thousands of people following close. Above droned copters and darting planes, among them police cars with their nerve-shattering sirens. Just ahead lay the still waters of the Tidal Basin, and in its midst the simple marble tomb of the slain ambassador, Klaatu, gleaming black and cold in the light of the dozen searchlights always trained on it at night. Was this a rendezvous with the dead?

Without an instant's hesitation, Gnut strode down the bank and entered the water. It rose to his knees, then waist, until Cliff's feet were under.

Straight through the dark waters for the tomb of Klaatu the robot made his inevitable way.

The dark square mass of gleaming marble rose higher as they neared it.

Gnut's body began emerging from the water as the bottom shelved upward, until his dripping feet took the first of the rising pyramid of steps.

In a moment they were at the top, on the narrow platform in the middle of which rested the simple oblong tomb.

Stark in the blinding searchlights, the giant robot walked once around it, then, bending, he braced himself and gave a mighty push against the top.

The marble cracked; the thick cover slipped askew and broke with a loud noise on the far side. Gnut went to his knees and looked within, bringing Cliff well up over the edge.

Inside, in sharp shadow against the converging light beams, lay a transparent plastic coffin, thick walled and sealed against the centuries, and containing all that was mortal of Klaatu, unspoken visitor from the great Unknown. He lay as if asleep, on his face the look of godlike nobility that had caused some of the ignorant to believe him divine. He wore the robe he had arrived in. There were no faded flowers, no jewelry, no ornaments; they would have seemed profane. At the foot of the coffin lay the small sealed box, also of transparent plastic, which contained all of Earth's records of his visit—a description of the events attending his arrival, pictures of Gnut and the traveler, and the little roll of sight-and-sound film which had caught for all time his few brief motions and words.

Cliff sat very still, wishing he could see the face of the robot.

Gnut, too, did not move from his position of reverent contemplation—not for a long time. There on the brilliantly lighted pyramid, under the eyes of a fearful, tumultuous multitude, Gnut paid final respect to his beautiful and adored master.

Suddenly, then, it was over. Gnut reached out and took the little box of records, rose to his feet, and started down the steps.

Back through the water, straight back to the building, across lawns and paths as before, he made his irresistible way. Before him the chaotic ring of people melted away, behind they followed as close as they dared, trampling each other in their efforts to keep him in sight.

There are no television records of his return. Every pickup was damaged on the way to the tomb.

As they drew near the building, Cliff saw that the tank's projectile had made a hole twenty feet wide extending from the roof to the ground.

The door still stood open, and Gnut, hardly varying his almost jerkless rhythm, made his way over the debris and went straight for the port end of the ship. Cliff wondered if he would be set free.

He was. The robot set him down and pointed toward the door; then, turning, he made the sounds that opened the ship. The ramp slid down and he entered.

Then Cliff did the mad, courageous thing which made him famous for a generation. Just as the ramp started sliding back in he skipped over it and himself entered the ship. The port closed.

CHAPTER VII

IT WAS pitch dark, and the silence was absolute. Cliff did not move.

He felt that Gnut was close, just ahead, and it was so.

His hard metal hand took him by the waist, pu]led him against his cold side, and carried him somewhere ahead. Hidden lamps suddenly bathed the surroundings with bluish light.

He set Cliff down and stood looking at him. The young man already regretted his rash action, but the robot, except for his always unfathomable eyes, did not seem angry. He pointed to a stool in one corner of the room. Cliff quickly obeyed this time and sat meekly, for a while not even venturing to look around.

He saw he was in a small laboratory of some kind. Complicated metal and plastic apparatus lined the walls and filled several small tables; he could not recognize or guess the function of a single piece.

Dominating the center of the room was a long metal table on whose top lay a large box, much like a coffin on the outside, connected by many wires to a complicated apparatus at the far end. From close above spread a cone of bright light from a many-tubed lamp.

One thing, half covered on a near-by table, did look familiar—and very much out of place. From where he sat it seemed to be a brief case—an ordinary Earthman's brief case. He wondered.

Gnut paid him no attention, but at once, with the narrow edge of a thick tool, sliced the lid off the little box of records. He lifted out the strip of sight-and-sound film and spent fully half an hour adjusting it within the apparatus at the end of the big table. Cliff watched, fascinated, wondering at the skill with which the robot used his tough metal fingers.

This done, Gnut worked for a long time over some accessory apparatus on an adjoining table. Then he paused thoughtfully a moment and pushed inward a long rod.

A voice came out of the coffinlike box—the voice of the slain ambassador.

"I am Klaatu," it said, "and this is Gnut."

From the recording!--flashed through Cliff's mind. The first and only words the ambassador had spoken. But, then, in the very next second he saw that it was not so..There was a man in the box! The man stirred and sat up, and Cliff saw the living face of Klaatu!

Klaatu appeared somewhat surprised and spoke quickly in an unknown tongue to Gnut—and Gnut, for the first time in Cliff's experience, spoke himself in answer. The robot's syllables tumbled out as if born of human emotion, and the expression on Klaatu's face changed from surprise to wonder. They talked for several minutes. Klaatu, apparently fatigued, then began to lie down, but stopped midway, for he saw Cliff. Gnut spoke again, at length.

Klaatu beckoned Cliff with his hand, and he went to him.

"Gnut has told me everything," he said in a low, gentle voice, then looked at Cliff for a moment in silence, on his face a faint, tired smile.

Cliff had a hundred questions to ask, but for a moment hardly dared open his mouth.

"But you," he began at last—very respectfully, but with an escaping excitement—"you are not the Klaatu that was in the tomb?"

The man's smile faded and he shook his head.

"No." He turned to the towering Gnut and said something in his own tongue, and at his words the metal features of the robot twisted as if with pain.

Then he turned back to Cliff. "I am dying," he announced simply, as if repeating his words for the Earthman. Again to his face came the faint, tired smile.

Cliff's tongue was locked. He just stared, hoping for light. Klaatu seemed to read his mind.

"I see you don't understand," he said. "Although unlike us, Gnut has great powers. When the wing was built and the lectures began, there came to him a striking inspiration. Acting on it at once, in the night, he assembled this apparatus . . . and now he has made me again, from my voice, as recorded by your people. As you must know, a given body makes a characteristic sound.

He constructed an apparatus which reversed the recording process, and from the given sound made the characteristic body."

Cliff gasped. So that was it!

"But you needn't die!" Cliff exclaimed suddenly, eagerly. "Your voice recording was taken when you stepped out of the ship, while you were well!

You must let me take you to a hospital! Our doctors are very skillful!"

Hardly perceptibly, Klaatu shook his head.

"You still don't understand," he said slowly and more faintly. "Your recording had imperfections. Perhaps very slight ones, but they doom the product. A]l of Gnut's experiments died in a few minutes, he tells me' . .

. and so must I."

Suddenly, then, Cliff understood the origin of the "experiments." He remembered that on the day the wing was opened a Smithsonian official had lost a brief case containing film strips recording the speech of various world fauna. There, on that table, was a brief case! And the Stillwells must have been made from strips kept in the table drawer!

But his heart was heavy. He did not want this stranger to die. Slowly there dawned on him an important idea. He explained it with growing excitement.

"You say the recording was imperfect, and of course it was. But the cause of that lay in the use of an imperfect recording apparatus. So if Gnut, in his reversal of the process, had used exactly the same

pieces of apparatus that your voice was recorded with, the imperfections could be studied, canceled out, and you'd live, and not die!"

As the last words left his lips, Gnut whipped around like a cat and gripped him tight. A truly human excitement was shining in the metal muscles of his face.

"Get me that apparatus!" he ordered—in clear and perfect English! He started pushing Cliff toward the door, but Klaatu raised his hand.

"There is no hurry," Klaatu said gently; "it is too late for me. What is your name, young man?"

Cliff told him.

"Stay with me to the end," he asked. Klaatu closed his eyes and rested; then, smiling just a little, but not opening his eyes, he added: "And don't be sad, for I shall now perhaps live again . . . and it will be due to you.

There is no pain—" His voice was rapidly growing weaker. Cliff, for all the questions he had, could only look on, dumb. Again Klaatu seemed to be aware of his thoughts.

"I know," he said feebly, "I know. We have so much to ask each other.

About your civilization . . . and Gnut's—" "And yours," said Cliff.

"And Gnut's," said the gentle voice again. "Perhaps . . . some day

.

. .

perhaps I will be back—" He lay without moving. e lay so for a long time, and at last Cliff knew that he was dead. Tears came to his eyes; in only these few minutes he had come to love this man. He looked at Gnut. The robot knew, too, that he was dead, but no tears filled his red-lighted eyes; they were fixed on Cliff, and for once the young man knew what was in his mind.

"Gnut," he announced earnestly, as if taking a sacred oath, "I'll get the original apparatus. I'll get it. Every piece of it, the exact same things."

Without a word, Gnut conducted him to the port. He made the sounds that unlocked it. As it opened, a noisy crowd of Earthmen outside trampled each other in a sudden scramble to get out of the building.

The wing was lighted. Cliff stepped down the ramp.

The next two hours always in Cliff's memory had a dreamlike quality.

It was as if that mysterious laboratory with the peacefully sleeping dead man was the real and central part of his life, and his scene with the noisy men with whom he talked a gross and barbaric interlude. He

stood not far from the ramp. He told only part of his story. He was believed. He waited quietly while all the pressure which the highest officials in the land could exert was directed toward obtaining for him the apparatus the robot had demanded.

When it arrived, he carried it to the floor of the little vestibule behind the port. Gnut was there, as if waiting. In his arms he held the slender body of the second Klaatu. Tenderly he passed him out to Cliff, who took him without a word, as if all this had been arranged.

It seemed to be the parting.

Of all the things Cliff had wanted to say to Klaatu, one remained imperatively present in his mind. Now, as the green metal robot stood framed in the great green ship, he seized his chance.

"Gnut," he said earnestly, holding carefully the limp body in his arms, "you must do one thing for me. Listen carefully. I want you to tell your master—the master yet to come—that what happened to the first Klaatu was an accident, for which all Earth is immeasurably sorry.

Will you do that?"

"I have known it," the robot answered gently.

"But will you promise to tell your master—just those words—as soon as he is arrived?"

"You misunderstand," said Gnut, still gently, and quietly spoke four more words. As Cliff heard them a mist passed over his eyes and his body went numb.

As he recovered and his eyes came back to focus he saw the great ship disappear. It just suddenly was not there any more. He fell back a step or two. In his ears, like great bells, ran Gnut's last words.

Never, never was he to disclose them till the day he came to die.

"You misunderstand," the mighty robot had said. "I am the master."

THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL Twentieth Century-Fox 1951

92 minutes. Produced by Julian Blaustein; directed by Robert Wise; screenplay by Edmund H. North; director of photography, Leo Tover; art directors, Lyle Wheeler and Addison Hehr; special photographic effects by Fred Sersen; music by Bernard Herrmann; set decorations by Thomas Little and Claude Carpenter; edited by William Reynolds; makeup by Ben Nye; wardrobe direction by Charles LeMaire; Klaatu's costume designed by Perkins Bailey; costumes designed by Travilla; sound by Arthur H.

Kirbach and Harry M. Leonard.

Cast Michael Rennie (Klaatu), Patricia Neal (Helen Benson), Hugh Marlowe (Tom Stevens), Sam Jaffe (Prof. Barnhardt), Billy Gray (Bobby Benson), Frances Bavier (Mrs. Barley), Lock Martin (Gort), Drew Pearson (Himself), Harry Lauter (Platoon Leader), Gabriel Heatter, H.

V. Kaltenborn and Elmer Davis (Newscasters) .

THE FOG HORN

by Ray Bradbury filmed as

THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS

(Warner Brothers, 1953)

When Ray Bradbury penned "The Fog Horn" for the Saturday Evening Post in 1952, he unknowingly opened Up a Pandora's Box-full of monstrous behemoths that would be attacking theater audiences for years to come.

His poignant tale of a giant lizard hopelessly infatuated by an inanimate lighthouse served as the springboard for The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms, the first of many dinosaur-on-the-loose films that thrill-seeking audiences devoured during the 1950s and early 1960s.

Although the motion picture concentrated mainly on scenes of the ten-story creature wreaking havoc in downtown Manhattan, Bradbury's brief but effective story is depicted beautifully in a short four-minute sequence.

Shots of the giant lizard violently caressing the shadowy stone structure capture superbly the author's masterful blend of pathos and the bizarre.

Part of the credit for this unusually fine segment must go to special effects wizard, Ray Harryhausen. Employing a difficult and time-consuming technique called stop-motion animation, Harryhausen posed a three-foot dinosaur model, exposed a frame of film, moved the lizard replica almost imperceptibly, shot another frame, and so on.

When run normally through a projector, the speeding film breathed lifelike movement into the reptile model.

It took approximately seven months to complete the elaborate special effects and incorporate them into the live-action footage, which, by comparison, had been shot over a mere two-week period. Then, on June 13, 1953, The Beast struck terror in over fifteen hundred theaters across America. By the end of the summer it had earned in excess of five million dollars—more than twenty times its original production cost!

Needless to say, giant monsters from around the globe came out of hiding for a piece of the action. Britain unleashed both The Giant Behemoth and the prehistoric Georgia, the United States had its oversize ants in Them, Italy gave us the slimy blob Caltiki, and Japan laid claim to perhaps the most enduring creature of all time, Godzilla, King of the Monsters.

Had Ray Bradbury only known....

THE FOG HORN

by Ray Bradbury

OUT THERE in the cold water, far from land, we waited every night for the coming of the fog, and it came, and we oiled the brass machinery and lit the fog light up in the stone tower. Feeling like two birds in the gray sky, McDunn and I sent the light touching out, red, then white, then red again, to eye the lonely ships. And if they did not see our light, then there was always our Voice, the great deep cry of our

Fog Horn shuddering through the rags of mist to startle the gulls away like decks of scattered cards and make the waves turn high and foam.

"It's a lonely life, but you're used to it now, aren't you?" asked McDunn.

"Yes," I said. "You're a good talker, thank the Lord."

"Well, it's your turn on land tomorrow," he said, smiling, "to dance the ladies and drink gin."

"What do you think, McDunn, when I leave you out here alone?"

"On the mysteries of the sea." McDunn lit his pipe. It was a quarter past seven of a cold November evening, the heat on, the light switching its tail in two hundred directions, the Fog Horn bumbling in the high throat of the tower. There wasn't a town for a hundred miles down the coast, just a road which came lonely through dead country to the sea, with few cars on it, a stretch of two miles of cold water out to our rock, and rare few ships.

"The mysteries of the sea," said McDunn thoughtfully. "You know, the ocean's the biggest damned snowflake ever? It rolls and swells a thousand shapes and colors, no two alike. Strange. One night, years ago, I was here alone, when all of the fish of the sea surfaced out there.

Something made them swim in and lie in the bay, sort of trembling and staring up at the tower light going red, white, red, white across them so I could see their funny eyes. I turned cold. They were like a big peacock's tail, moving out there until midnight. Then, without so much as a sound, they slipped away, the million of them was gone. I kind of think maybe, in some sort of way, they came all those miles to worship.

Strange. But think how the tower must look to them, standing seventy feet above the water, the God-light flashing out from it, and the tower declaring itself with a monster voice. They never came back, those fish, but don't you think for a while they thought they were in the Presence?"

I shivered. I looked out at the long gray lawn of the sea stretching away into nothing and nowhere.

"Oh, the sea's full." McDunn puffed his pipe nervously, blinking. He

had been nervous all day and hadn't said why. "For all our engines and

so-called submarines, it'll be ten thousand centuries before we set

foot on the real bottom of the sunken lands, in the fairy kingdoms

there, and know real terror. Think of it, it's still the year

300,000

Before Christ down under there. While we've paraded around with trumpets, lopping off each other's countries and heads, they have been living beneath the sea twelve miles deep and cold in a time as old as the beard of a comet."

"Yes, it's an old world."

"Come on. I got something special I been saving up to tell you ." We ascended the eighty steps, talking and taking our time. At the top, McDunn switched off the room lights so there'd be no reflection in the plate glass. The great eye of the light was humming, turning easily in its oiled socket. The Fog Horn was blowing steadily, once every fifteen seconds.

"Sounds like an animal, don't it?" McDunn nodded to himself. "A big lonely animal crying in the night. Sitting here on the edge of ten billion years calling out to the Deeps, I'm here, I'm here, I'm here.

And the Deeps do answer, yes, they do. You been here now for three months, Johnny, so I better prepare you. About this time of year," he said, studying the murk and fog, "something comes to visit the lighthouse."

"The swarms of fish like you said?"

"No, this is something else. I've put off telling you because you might think I'm daft. But tonight's the latest I can put it off, for if my calendar's marked right from last year, tonight's the night it comes. I won't go into detail, you'll have to see it yourself. Just sit down there.

If you want, tomorrow you can pack your duffel and take the motorboat in to land and get your car parked there at the dinghy pier on the cape and drive on back to some little inland town and keep your lights burning nights, I won't question or blame you. It's happened three years now, and this is the only time anyone's been here with me to verify it. You wait and watch."

Half an hour passed with only a few whispers between us. When we grew tired waiting, McDunn began describing some of his ideas to me. He had some theories about the Fog Horn itself.

"One day many years ago a man walked along and stood in the sound of the ocean on a cold sunless shore and said, 'We need a voice to call across the water, to warn ships; I'll make one. I'll make a voice like all of time and all of the fog that ever was; I'll make a voice that is like an empty bed beside you all night long, and like an empty house when you open the door, and like trees in autumn with no leaves. A sound like the birds flying south, crying, and a sound like November wind and the sea on the hard, cold shore. I'll make a sound that's so alone that no one can miss it, that whoever hears it will weep in their souls, and hearths will seem warmer, and being inside will seem better to all who hear it in the distant towns.

I'll make me a sound and an apparatus and they'll call it a Fog Horn and whoever hears it will know the sadness of eternity and the briefness of life.'"

The Fog Horn blew.

"I made up that story," said McDunn quietly, "to try to explain why this thing keeps coming back to the lighthouse every year. The Fog Horn calls it, I think, and it comes...."

"But—" I said.

"Sssst!" said McDunn. "There!" He nodded out to the Deeps.

Somethingœ was swimming toward the lighthouse tower.

It was a cold night, as I have said; the high tower was cold, the light coming and going, and the Fog Horn calling and calling through the raveling mist. You couldn't see far and you couldn't see plain, but there was the deep sea moving on its way about the night earth, fiat and quiet, the color of gray mud, and here were the two of us alone in the high tower, and there, far out at first, was a ripple, followed by a wave, a rising, a bubble, a bit of froth. And then, from the surface of the cold sea came a head, a large head, dark-colored, with immense eyes, and then a neck. And then—not a body—but more neck and more!

The head rose a full forty feet above the water on a slender and beautiful dark neck. Only then did the body, like a little island of black coral and shells and crayfish, drip up from the subterranean.

There was a flicker of tail. In all, from head to tip of tail, I

estimated the monster at ninety or a hundred feet.

I don't know what I said. I said something.

"Steady, boy, steady," whispered McDunn.

"It's impossible!" I said.

"No, Johnny, we're impossible. It's like it always was ten million years ago. It hasn't changed. It's us and the land that've changed, become impossible. Us!"

It swam slowly and with a great dark majesty out in the icy waters, far away. The fog came and went about it, momentarily erasing its shape.

One of the monster eyes caught and held and flashed back our immense light, red, white, red, white, like a disk held high and sending a message in primeval code. It was as silent as the fog through which it swam.

"It's a dinosaur of some sort!" I crouched down, holding to the stair rail.

"Yes, one of the tribe."

"But they died out!"

"No, only hid away in the Deeps. Deep, deep down in the deepest Deeps.

Isn't that a word now, Johnny, a real word, it says so much: the Deeps.

There's all the coldness and darkness and deepness in the world in a word like that."

"What'll we do?"

"Do? We got our job, we can't leave. Besides, we're safer here than in any boat trying to get to land. That thing's as big as a destroyer and almost as swift."

"But here, why does it come here?"

The next moment I had my answer.

The Fog Horn blew. And the monster answered.

A cry came across a million years of water and mist. A cry so anguished and alone that it shuddered in my head and my body. The monster cried out at the tower. The Fog Horn blew. The monster roared again. The Fog Horn blew. The monster opened its great toothed mouth and the sound that came from it was the sound of the Fog Horn itself.

Lonely and vast and far away.

The sound of isolation, a viewless sea, a cold night, apartness. That was the sound.

"Now," whispered McDunn, "do you know why it comes here?"

I nodded.

"All year long, Johnny, that poor monster there lying far out, a thousand miles at sea, and twenty miles deep maybe, biding its time, perhaps it's a million years old, this one creature. Think of it, waiting a million years; could you wait that long? Maybe it's the last of its kind. I sort of think that's true. Anyway, here come men on land and build this lighthouse, five years ago. And set up their Fog Horn and sound it and sound it out toward the place where you bury yourself in sleep and sea memories of a world where there were thousands like yourself, but now you're alone, a]l alone in a world not made for you, a world where you have to hide.

"But the sound of the Fog Horn comes and goes, comes and goes, and you stir from the muddy bottom of the Deeps, and your eyes open like the lenses of two-foot cameras and you move, slow, slow, for you have the ocean sea on your shoulders, heavy. But that Fog Horn comes through a thousand miles of water, faint and familiar, and the furnace in your belly stokes up, and you begin to rise, slow, slow. You feed yourself on great slakes of cod and minnow, on rivers of jellyfish, and you rise slow through the autumn months, through September when the fogs started, through October with more fog and the horn still calling you on, and then, late in November, after pressurizing yourself day by day, a few feet higher every hour, you are near the surface and still alive.

You've got to go slow; if you surfaced all at once you'd explode. So it takes you all of three months to surface, and then a number of days to swim through the cold waters to the lighthouse. And there you are, out there, in the night, Johnny, the biggest damn monster in creation.

And here's the lighthouse calling to you, with a long neck like your neck sticking way up out of the water, and a body like your body, and, most important of all, a voice like your voice. Do you understand now, Johnny, do you understand?"

The Fog Horn blew.

The monster answered.

I saw it all, I knew it all—the million years of waiting alone, for someone to come back who never came back. The million years of isolation at the bottom of the sea, the insanity of time there, while the skies cleared of reptile-birds, the swamps dried on the continental lands, the sloths and saber-tooths had their day and sank in tar pits, and men ran like white ants upon the hills.

The Fog Horn blew.

"Last year," said McDunn, "that creature swam round and round, round and round, all night. Not coming too near, puzzled, I'd say. Afraid, maybe. And a bit angry after coming all this way. But the net day, unexpectedly, the fog lifted, the sun came out fresh, the sky was as blue as a painting. And the monster swam off away from the heat and the silence and didn't come back. I suppose it's been brooding on it for a year now, thinking it over from every which way."

The monster was only a hundred yards off now, it and the Fog Horn crying at each other. As the lights hit them, the monster's eyes were fire and ice, fire and ice.

"That's life for you," said McDunn. "Someone always waiting for someone who never comes home. Always someone loving some thing more than that thing loves them. And after a while you want to destroy whatever that thing is, so it can't hurt you no more."

The monster was rushing at the lighthouse.

The fog Horn blew.

"Let's see what happens," said McDunn.

He switched the Fog Horn off.

The ensuing minute of silence was so intense that we could hear our hearts pounding in the glassed area of the tower, could hear the slow greased turn of the light.

The monster stopped and froze. Its great lantern eyes blinked. Its mouth gaped. It gave a sort of rumble, like a volcano. It twitched its head this way and that, as if to seek the sounds now dwindled off into the fog. It peered at the lighthouse. It rumbled again. Then its eyes caught fire. It reared up, threshed the water, and rushed at the tower, its eyes filled with angry torment.

"McDunn!" I cried. "Switch on the horn!"

McDunn fumbled with the switch. But even as he flicked it on, the monster was rearing up. I had a glimpse of its gigantic paws, fishskin glittering in webs between the fingerlike projections, clawing at the tower. The huge eye on the right side of its anguished head glittered before me like a caldron into which I might drop, screaming. The tower shook. The Fog Horn cried; the monster cried. It seized the tower and gnashed at the glass, which shattered in upon us.

McDunn seized my arm. "Downstairs!"

The tower rocked, trembled, and started to give. The Fog Horn and the monster roared. We stumbled and half fell down the stairs. "Quick!"

We reached the bottom as the tower buckled down toward us. We ducked under the stairs into the small stone cellar. There were a thousand concussions as the rocks rained down; the Fog Horn stopped abruptly.

The monster crashed UpOn the tower. The tower fell. We knelt together, McDunn and I, holding tight, while our world exploded.

Then it was over, and there was nothing but darkness and the wash of the sea on the raw stones.

That and the other sound.

"Listen," said McDunn quietly. "Listen."

We waited a moment. And then I began to hear it. First a great vacuumed sucking of air, and then the lament, the bewilderment, the loneliness of the great monster, folded over and upon us, above us, so that the sickening reek of its body filled the air, a stone's thickness away from our cellar.

The monster gasped and cried. The tower was gone. The light was gone.

The thing that had called to it across a million years was gone. And the monster was opening its mouth and sending out great sounds. The sounds of a Fog Horn, again and again. And ships far at sea, not finding the light, not seeing anything, but passing and hearing late that night, must've thought: There it is, the lonely sound, the Lonesome Bay horn. All's well. We've rounded the cape.

And so it went for the rest of that night.

The sun was hot and yellow the next afternoon when the rescuers came out to dig us from our stoned-under cellar.

"It fell apart, is all," said Mr. McDunn gravely. "We had a few bad knocks from the waves and it just crumbled." He pinched my arm.

There was nothing to see. The ocean was calm, the sky blue. The only thing was a great algaic stink from the green matter that covered the fallen tower stones and the shore rocks. Flies buzzed about. The ocean washed empty on the shore.

The next year they built a new lighthouse, but by that time I had a job in the little town and a wife and a good small warm house that glowed yellow on autumn nights, the doors locked, the chimney puffing smoke.

As for McDunn, he was master of the new lighthouse, built to his own specifications, out of steel-reinforced concrete. "Just in case," he said.

The new lighthouse was ready in November. I drove down alone one evening late and parked my car and looked across the gray waters and listened to the new horn sounding, once, twice, three, four times a minute far out there, by itself.

The monster?

It never came back.

"It's gone away," said McDunn. "It's gone back to the Deeps. It's learned you can't love anything too much in this world. It's gone into the deepest Deeps to wait another million years. And, the poor thing!

Waiting out there, and waiting out there, while man comes and goes on this pitiful little planet. Waiting and waiting."

I sat in my car, listening. I couldn't see the lighthouse or the light standing out in Lonesome Bay. I could only hear the Horn, the Horn, the Horn. It sounded like the monster calling.

I sat there wishing there was something I could say.

THE BEAST FROM 20,000 FATHOMS Warner Brothers 1953

80 minutes. Produced by Hal E. Chester and Jack Dietz; directed by Eugene Lourie; screenplay by Lou Morhe;m and Fred Freiberger, director of photography, Jack Russell; associate producer, Bernard W. Burton; special technical effects by Ray Harryhausen; special effects by Willis Cook; art direction by Robert Boyle; edited by Bernard W. Burton; music composed and conducted by David suttolph; makeup by Louis Phillippi; sound by Max Hutchinson; assistant director, Howard Hough.

Cast Paul Christian (Prof. Tom Nesbitt), Paula Raymond (Lee Hunter), Cecil Kellaway (Prof. Elson), Kenneth Tobey (Col. Evans), Ross Elliot (George Ritchie), Donald Woods (Capt. Jackson), Lee Van Cleef (Corp.

Stone), Steve Brodie (Sgt. Loomis), Michael Fox (The Doctor), Frank Ferguson (Dr. Morton), King Donovan (Dr. Ingersoll).

DEADLY CITY by Ivar Jorgenson filmed as

TARGET EARTH

(Allied Artists, 1954)

"You're all alone in a deserted city. You walk down an empty street, yearning for the sight of one living face—one moving figure. Then you see a man on a corner and you know your terror has only begun!"

So goes the original blurb in the March 1953 edition of If magazine for Ivar Jorgenson's "Deadly City." The intriguing story of a depopulated metropolis must have suitably impressed producer Herman Cohen, who subsequently bought the property and rushed it into theaters less than nine months later.

Cohen, who entered the camp-film Hall of Fame with his I Was a Teenage Werewolf in 1957, shot 'Target Earth in just seven days for the minuscule amount of $75,000.

"It was definitely a low-cost picture," he laughingly admits. "I wish we could have had more money. We could only afford one robot and we made him do double duty most of the time."

Yet even with the relatively low budget, Cohen resourcefully turned out a surprisingly compelling feature, one which adheres quite faithfully to the short story.

The tale begins as a small and diverse group of people awake one morning to find themselves alone in a deserted city. All at once the commonplace becomes as eerie as the most haunted of houses. A vacant street, an empty restaurant, a ghostly subway platform with not a train in sight—they all add up to a baffling mystery that seems insolvable.

"The audience had a lot of fun with the picture," recalls Cohen with pride. "Even though we played it straight, they sat in their seats with tongues-firmly-in-cheek. They knew exactly what was going to happen next.

The only thing I can hope to do with my audience is to let them have a good time and startle them now and again. When they're laughing the most, throw them off-balance and make them scream."

Cheap shocks notwithstanding, it is admittedly difficult to assess the motive behind an exploitation film like Target Earth. Is it cheaply produced in every way to cash in quickly on a craze, or is it the most esthetically acceptable product that can be done with minor resources?

The answer, of course, is purely academic if the picture is

entertaining ...

and Target Earth is definitely that.

DEADLY CITY

by Ivar Jorgenson

HE AWOKE slowly, like a man plodding knee-deep through the thick stuff of nightmares. There was no definite line between the dream-state and wakefulness. Only a dawning knowledge that he was finally conscious and would have to do something about it.

He opened his eyes, but this made no difference. The blackness remained.

The pain in his head brightened and he reached up and found the big lump they'd evidently put on his head for good measure—a margin of safety.

They must have been prudent people, because the bang on the head had hardly been necessary. The spiked drink which they had given him would have felled an ox. He remembered going down into the darkness after drinking it, and of knowing what it was. He remembered the helpless feeling.

It did not worry him now. He was a philosophical person, and the fact he was still alive cancelled out the drink and its result. He thought, with savor, of the chestnut-haired girl who had watched him take the drink. She had worn a very low bodice, and that was where his eyes had been at the last moment—on the beautiful, tanned breasts—until they'd wavered and puddled into a blur and then into nothing.

The chestnut-haired girl had been nice, but now she was gone and there were more pressing problems.

He sat up, his hands behind him at the ends of stiff arms clawing into long-undisturbed dust and filth. His movement stirred the dust and it rose into his nostrils.

He straightened and banged his head against a low ceiling. The pain made him sick for a minute and he sat down to regain his senses. He cursed the ceiling, as a matter of course, in an agonized whisper.

Ready to move again, he got onto his hands and knees and crawled cautiously forward, exploring as he went. His hand pushed through cobwebs and found a rough, cement wall. He went around and around. It was all cement—all solid.

Hell! They hadn't sealed him up in this place! There had been a way in so there had to be a way out. He went around again.

Then he tried the ceiling and found the opening—a wooden trap covering a four-by-four hole—covering it snugly. He pushed the trap away and daylight streamed in. He raised himself up until he was eye-level with a discarded shaving cream jar lying on the bricks of an alley. He could read the trade mark on the jar, and the slogan: "For the Meticulous Man."

He pulled himself up into the alley. As a result of an orderly childhood, he replaced the wooden trap and kicked the shaving cream jar against a garbage can. He rubbed his chin and looked up and down the alley.

It was high noon. l uncovered sun blazed down to tell him this.

And there was no one in sight.

He started walking toward the nearer mouth of the alley. He had been in that hole a long time, he decided. This conviction came from his hunger and the heavy growth of beard he'd sprouted. Twenty-four hours—maybe longer.

That mickey must have been a lulu.

He walked out into the CrOSS street. It was empty. No people-no cars parked at the curbs—only a cat washing its dirty face on a tenement stoop across the street. He looked up at the tenement windows. They stared back.

There was an empty, deserted look about them.

The cat flowed down the front steps of the tenement and away toward the rear and he was truly alone. He rubbed his harsh chin. Must be Sunday, he thought. Then he knew it could not be Sunday. He'd gone into the tavern on a Tuesday night. That would make it five days. Too long.

He had been walking and now he was at an intersection where he could look up and down a new street. There were no cars—no people. Not even a cat.

A sign overhanging the sidewalk said: Restaurant. He went in under the sign and tried the door. It was locked. There were no lights inside.

He turned away—grinning to reassure himself. Everything was all right. Just some kind of a holiday. In a big city like Chicago the people go away on hot summer holidays. They go to the beaches and the parks and sometimes you can't see a living soul on the streets. And of course you can't find any cars because the people use them to drive to the beaches and the parks and out into the country. He breathed a little easier and started walking again.

Sure—that was it. Now what the hell holiday was it? He tried to remember.

He couldn't think of what holiday it could be. Maybe they'd dreamed up a new one. He grinned at that, but the grin was a little tight and he had to force it. He forced it carefully until his teeth showed white.

Pretty soon he would come to a section where everybody hadn't gone to the beaches and the parks and a restaurant would be open and he'd get a good meal.

A meal? He fumbled toward his pockets. He dug into them and found a handkerchief and a button from

his cuff. He remembered that the button had hung loose so he'd pulled it off to keep from losing it. He hadn't lost the button, but everything else was gone. He scowled. The least they could have done was to leave a man eating money.

He turned another corner—into another street—and it was like the one before. No cars—no people—not even any cats.

Panic welled up. He stopped and whirled around to look behind him. No one was there. He walked in a tight circle, looking in all directions.

Windows stared back at him—eyes that didn't care where everybody had gone or when they would come back. The windows could wait. The windows were not hungry.

Their heads didn't ache. They weren't scared.

He began walking and his path veered outward from the sidewalk until he was in the exact center of the silent street. He walked down the worn white line. When he got to the next corner he noticed that the traffic signals were not working. Black, empty eyes.

His pace quickened. He walked faster—ever faster until he was trotting on the brittle pavement, his sharp steps echoing against the buildings. Faster. Another corner. And he was running, filled with panic, down the empty street.

The girl opened her eyes and stared at the ceiling. The ceiling was a blur but it began to clear as her mind cleared. The ceiling became a surface of dirty, cracked plaster and there was a feeling of dirt and squalor in her mind.

It was always like that at these times of awakening, but doubly bitter now, because she had never expected to awaken again. She reached down and pulled the wadded sheet from beneath her legs and spread it over them. She looked at the bottle on the shabby bedtable. There were three sleeping pills left in it. The girl's eyes clouded with resentment. You'd think seven pills would have done it. She reached down and took the sheet in both hands and drew it taut over her stomach. This was a gesture of frustration.

Seven hadn't been enough, and here she was again—awake in the world she'd wanted to leave. Awake with the necessary edge of determination gone.

She pulled the sheet into a wad and threw it at the wall. She got up and walked to the window and looked out. Bright daylight. She wondered how long she had slept. A long time, no doubt.

Her naked thigh pressed against the windowsill and her bare stomach touched the dirty pane. Naked in the window, but it didn't matter, because it gave onto an airshaft and other windows so caked with grime as to be of no value as windows.

But even aside from that, it didn't matter. It didn't matter in the least.

She went to the washstand, her bare feet making no sound on the worn rug.

She turned on the faucets, but no water came. No water, and she had a terrible thirst. She went to the door and had thrown the bolt before she remembered again that she was naked. She turned back and saw the half-empty Pepsi-Cola bottle on the floor beside the bedtable. Someone else had left it

there—how many nights ago?--but she drank it anyhow, and even though it was flat and warm it soothed her throat.

She bent over to pick up garments from the floor and dizziness came, forcing her to the edge of the bed. After a while it passed and she got her legs into one of the garments and pulled it on.

Taking cosmetics from her bag, she went again to the washstand and tried the taps. Still no water. She combed her hair, jerking the comb through the mats and gnarls with a satisfying viciousness. When the hair fell into its natural, blond curls, she applied powder and lipstick. She went back to the bed, picked up her brassiere and began putting it on as she walked to the cracked, full-length mirror in the closet door. With the brassiere in place, she stood looking at her slim image. She assayed herself with complete impersonality.

She shouldn't look as good as she did—not after the beating she'd taken.

Not after the long nights and the days and the years, even though the years did not add up to very many.

I could be someone's wife, she thought, with wry humor. I could be sending kids to school and going out to argue with the grocer about the tomatoes being too soft. I don't look bad at all.

She raised her eyes until they were staring into their own images in the glass and she spoke aloud in a low, wondering voice. She said, "Who the hell am I, anyway? Who am I? A body named Nora—that's who I am. No—that's what I am. A body's not a who—it's a what. One hundred and fourteen pounds of well-built blond body called Nora—model 1931--no fender dents—nice paint job. Come in and drive me away.

Price tag—" She bit into the lower lip she'd just finished reddening and turned quickly to walk to the bed and wriggle into her dress—a gray and green cotton—the only one she had. She picked up her bag and went to the door.

There she stopped to turn and thumb her nose at the three sleeping pills in the bottle before she went out and closed the door after herself.

The desk clerk was away from the cubbyhole from which he presided over the lobby, and there were no loungers to undress her as she walked toward the door.

Nor was there anyone out in the street. The girl looked north and south.

No cars in sight either. No buses waddling up to the curb to spew out passengers.

The girl went five doors north and tried to enter a place called Tim's Hamburger House. As the lock held and the door refused to open, she saw that there were no lights on inside—no one behind the counter.

The place was closed.

She walked on down the street followed only by the lonesome sound of her own clicking heels. All the stores were closed. All the lights were out.

All the people were gone.

He was a huge man, and the place of concealment of the Chicago Avenue police station was very small—merely an indentation low in the cement wall behind two steam pipes. The big man had lain in this niche for forty-eight hours. He had slugged a man over the turn of a card in a poolroom pinochle game, had been arrested in due course, and was awaiting the disposal of his case.

He was sorry he had slugged the man. He had not had any deep hatred for him, but rather a rage of the moment that demanded violence as its outlet.

Although he did not consider it a matter of any great importance, he did not look forward to the six months' jail sentence he would doubtless be given.

His opportunity to hide in the niche had come as accidentally and as suddenly as his opportunity to slug his card partner. It had come after the prisoners had been advised of the crisis and were being herded into vans for transportation elsewhere. He had snatched the opportunity without giving any consideration whatever to the crisis.

Probably because he did not have enough imagination to fear anything—however terrible—which might occur in the future. And because he treasured his freedom above all else.

Freedom for today, tomorrow could take care of itself.

Now, after forty-eight hours, he writhed and twisted his huge body out of the niche and onto the floor of the furnace room. His legs were numb and he found that he could not stand. He managed to sit up and was able to bend his back enough so his great hands could reach his legs and begin to massage life back into them.

So elementally brutal was this man that he pounded his legs until they were black and blue, before feeling returned to them. In a few minutes he was walking out of the furnace room through a jail house which should now be utterly deserted. But was it? He went slowly, gliding along close to the walls to reach the front door unchallenged.

He walked out into the street. It was daylight and the street was completely deserted. The man took a deep breath and grinned. "I'll be damned," he muttered. "I'll be double and triple damned. They're all gone.

Every damn one of them run off like rats and I'm the only one left.

I'll be damned!"

A tremendous sense of exultation seized him. He clenched his fists and laughed loud, his laugh echoing up the street. He was happier than he had ever been in his quick, violent life. And his joy was that of a child locked in a pantry with a huge chocolate cake.

He rubbed a hand across his mouth, looked up the street, began walking.

"I wonder if they took all the whisky with them," he said. Then he grinned; he was sure they had not.

He began walking in long strides toward Clark Street. In toward the still heart of the empty city.

He was a slim, pale-skinned little man, and very dangerous. He was also very clever. Eventually they would have found out, but he had been clever enough to deceive them and now they would never now.

There was great wealth in his family, and with the rest of them occupied with leaving the city and taking what valuables they could on such short notice, he had been put in the charge of one of the chauffeurs.

The chauffeur had been given the responsibility of getting the pale-skinned young man out of the city. But the young man had caused several delays until all the rest were gone. Then, meekly enough, he had accompanied the chauffeur to the garage. The chauffeur got behind the wheel of the last remaining car—a Cadillac sedan—and the young man had gotten into the rear seat.

But before the chauffeur could start the motor, the young man hit him on the head with a tire bar he had taken from a shelf as they had entered the garage.

The bar went deep into the chauffeur's skull with a solid sound, and thus the chauffeur found the death he was in the very act of fleeing.

The young man pulled the dead chauffeur from the car and laid him on the cement floor. He laid him down very carefully, so that he was in the exact center of a large square of outlined cement with his feet pointing straight north and his outstretched arms pointing south.

The young man placed the chauffeur's cap very carefully upon his chest, because neatness pleased him. Then he got into the car, started it, and headed east toward Lake Michigan and the downtown section.

After traveling three or four miles, he turned the car off the road and drove it into a telephone post. Then he walked until he came to some high weeds. He lay down in the weeds and waited.

He knew there would probably be a last vanguard of militia hunting for stragglers. If they saw a moving car they would investigate.

They would take him into custody and force him to leave the city.

This, he felt, they had no right to do. All his life he had been ordered about—told to do this and that and the other thing. Stupid orders from stupid people. Idiots who went so far as to claim the whole city would be destroyed, just to make people do as they said.

God! The ends to which stupid people would go in order to assert their wills over brilliant people.

The young man lay in the weeds and dozed off, his mind occupied with the pleasant memory of the tire iron settling into the skull of the chauffeur.

After a while he awoke and heard the cars of the last vanguard passing down the road. They stopped, inspected the Cadillac and found it serviceable. They took it with them, but they did not search the weeds along the road.

When they had disappeared toward the west, the young man came back to the road and began walking east, in toward the city.

Complete destruction in two days?

Preposterous.

The young man smiled.

The girl was afraid. For hours she had walked the streets of the empty city and the fear, strengthened by weariness, was now mounting toward terror. "One face," she whispered. "Just one person coming out of a house or walking across the street. That's all I ask. Somebody to tell me what this is all about. If I can find one person, I won't be afraid any more."

And the irony of it struck her. A few hours previously she had attempted suicide. Sick of herself and of all people, she had tried to end her own life. Therefore, by acknowledging death as the answer, she should now have no fear whatever of anything. Reconciled to crossing the bridge into death, no facet of life should have held terror for her.

But the empty city did hold terror. One face—one moving form was all she asked for.

Then, a second irony. When she saw the man at the corner of Washington and Wells, her terror increased. They saw each other at almost the same moment.

Both stopped and stared. Fingers of panic ran up the girl's spine.

The man raised a hand and the spell was broken. The girl turned and ran, and there was more terror in her than there had been before.

She knew how absurd this was, but still she ran blindly. What had she to fear? She knew all about men; all the things men could do they had already done to her. Murder was the ultimate, but she was fresh from a suicide attempt. Death should hold no terrors for her.

She thought of these things as the man's footsteps sounded behind her and she turned into a narrow alley seeking a hiding place. She found none and the man turned in after her.

She found a passageway, entered with the same blindness which had brought her into the alley. There was a steel door at the end and a brick lying by the sill. The door was locked. She picked up the brick and turned. The man skidded on the filthy alley surface as he turned into the areaway.

The girl raised the brick over her head. "Keep away! Stay away from me!"

"Wait a minute! Take it easy. I'm not going to hurt you!"

"Get away!"

Her arm moved downward. The man rushed in and caught her wrist. The brick went over his shoulder and the nails of her other hand raked his face. He seized her without regard for niceties and they went to the ground. She fought with everything she had and he methodically neutralized all her weapons—her hands, her legs, her teeth—until she could not move.

"Leave me alone. Please!"

"What's wrong with you? I'm not going to hurt you. But I'm not going to let you h;t me with a brick, either!"

"What do you want? Why did you chase me?"

"Look—I'm a peaceful guy, but I'm not going to let you get away. I spent all afternoon looking for somebody. I found you and you ran away. I came after you."

"I haven't done anything to you."

"That's silly talk. Come on—grow up! I said I'm not going to hurt you."

"Let me up."

"So you can run away again? Not for a while. I want to talk to you.

" "l—I won't run. I was scared. I don't know why. You're hurting

He got up—gingerly—and lifted her to her feet. He smiled, still holding both her hands. "I'm sorry. I guess it's natural for you to be scared. My name's Frank Brooks. I just want to find out what the hell happened to this town."

He let her withdraw her hands, but he still blocked her escape. She moved a pace backward and straightened her clothing. "I don't know what happened.

I was looking for someone too."

He smiled again. "And then you ran."

"I don't know why. I guess—" "What's your name."

"Nora—Nora Spade."

"You slept through it too?"

"Yes . . . yes. I slept through it and came out and they were all gone."

"Let's get out of this alley." He preceded her out, but he waited for her when there was room for them to walk side by side, and she did not try to run away. That phase was evidently over.

"I got slipped a mickey in a tavern," Frank Brooks said. "Then they slugged me and put me in a hole."

His eyes questioned. She felt their demand and said, "I was-asleep in my hotel room."

"They overlooked you?"

"I guess so."

"Then you don't know anything about it?"

"Nothing. Something terrible must have happened."

"Let's go down this way," Frank said, and they moved toward Madison Street. He had taken her arm and she did not pull away. Rather, she walked invitingly close to him.

She said, "It's so spooky. So . . . empty. I guess that's what scared me."

"It would scare anybody. There must have been an evacuation of some kind."

"Maybe the Russians are going to drop a bomb."

Frank shook his head. "That wouldn't explain it. I mean, the Russians wouldn't let us know ahead of time. Besides, the army would be here.

Everybody wouldn't be gone."

"There's been a lot of talk about germ warfare. Do you suppose the water, maybe, has been poisoned?"

He shook his head. "The same thing holds true. Even if they moved the people out, the army would be here."

"I don't know. It just doesn't make sense."

"It happened, so it has to make sense. It was something that came up all of a sudden. They didn't have much more than twenty-four hours."

He stopped suddenly and looked at her. "We've got to get out of here!"

Nora Spade smiled for the first time, but without humor. "How? I haven't seen one car. The buses aren't running."

His mind was elsewhere. They had started walking again. "Funny I didn't think of that before."

"Think of what?"

"That anybody left in this town is a dead pigeon. The only reason they'd clear out a city would be to get away from certain death. That would mean death is here for anybody that stays. Funny. I was so busy looking for somebody to talk to that I never thought of that."

"I did."

"Is that what you were scared of?"

"Not particularly. I'm not afraid to die. It was something else that scared me. The aloneness, I guess."

"We'd better start walking west—out of the city. Maybe we'll find a car or something."

"I don't think we'll find any cars."

He drew her to a halt and looked into her face. "You aren't afraid at all, are you?"

She thought for a moment. "No, I guess I'm not. Not of dying, that is.

Dying is a normal thing. But I was afraid of the empty streets—nobody around. That was weird."

"It isn't weird now?"

"Not—not as much."

"I wonder how much time we've got?"

Nora shrugged. "I don't know, but I'm hungry."

"We can fix that. I broke into a restaurant a few blocks back and got myself a sandwich. I think there's still food around. They couldn't take it all with them."

They were on Madison Street and they turned east on the south side of the street. Nora said, "I wonder if there are any other people still here—like us?"

"I think there must be. Not very many, but a few. They would have had to clean four million people out overnight. It stands to reason they must have missed a few. Did you ever try to empty a sack of sugar?

Really empty it?

It's impossible. Some of the grains always stick to the sack."

A few minutes later the wisdom of this observation was proven when they came to a restaurant with the front window broken out and saw a man and a woman sitting at one of the tables.

He was a huge man with a shock of black hair and a mouth slightly open showing a set of incredibly white teeth. He waved an arm and shouted, "Come on in! Come on in for crissake and sit down! We got beer and roast beef and the beer's still cold. Come on in and meet Minna."

This was different, Nora thought. Not eerie. Not weird, like seeing a man standing on a deserted street corner with no one else around. This seemed normal, natural, and even the smashed window didn't detract too much from the naturalness.

They went inside. There were chairs at the table and they sat down.

The big man did not get up. He waved a hand toward his companion and said, "This is Minna. Ain't she something? I found her sitting at an empty bar scared to death. We came to an understanding and I brought her along." He grinned at the woman and winked. "We came to a real understanding, didn't we, Minna?"

Minna was a completely colorless woman of perhaps thirty-five. Her skin was smooth and pale and she wore no makeup of any kind. Her hair was drawn straight back into a bun. The hair had no predominating color. It was somewhere between light brown and blond.

She smiled a little sadly, but the laugh did not cover her worn, tired look. It seemed more like a gesture of obedience than anything else.

"Yes.

We came to an understanding."

"I'm Jim Wilson," the big man boomed. "I was in the Chicago Avenue jug for slugging a guy in a card game. They kind of overlooked me when they cleaned the joint out." He winked again. "I kind of helped them overlook me. Then I found Minna." There was tremendous relish in his words.

Frank started introductions which Nora Spade cut in on. “Maybe you know what happened?” she asked.

Wilson shook his head. “I was in the jug and they didn’t tell us.

They just started cleaning out the joint. There was talk in the bullpen—invasion or something. Nobody knew for sure. Have some beer and meat.”

Nora turned to the quiet Minna. “Did you hear anything?”

“Naw,” Wilson said with a kind of affectionate contempt. “She don’t know anything about it. She lived in some attic dump and was down with a sore throat. She took some pills or something and when she woke up they were gone.”

“I went to work and—“ Minna began, but Wilson cut her off.

“She swabs out some joints on Chicago Avenue for a living and that was how she happened to be sitting in that tavern. It’s payday, and Minna was waiting for her dough!” He exploded into laughter and slapped the table with a huge hand. “Can you beat that? Waiting for her pay at a time like this.”

Frank Brooks set down his beer bottle. The beer was cold and it tasted good. “Have you met anybody else? There must be some other people around.”

“Uh-uh. Haven’t met anybody but Minna.” He turned his eyes on the woman again, then got to his feet. “Come on, Minna. You and I got to have a little conference. We got things to talk about.” Grinning, he walked toward the rear of the restaurant. Minna got up more slowly.

She followed him behind the counter and into the rear of the place.

Alone with Nora, Frank said, “You aren’t eating. Want me to look for something else?”

“No—I’m not very hungry. I was just wondering—“ “Wondering about what?”

“When it will happen. When whatever is going to happen—you know what I mean.”

“I’d rather know what’s going to happen. I hate puzzles. It’s hell to have to get killed and not know what killed you.”

“We aren’t being very sensible, are we?”

“How do you mean?”

“We should at least act normal.”

“I don’t get it.”

Nora frowned in slight annoyance. “Normal people would be trying to reach safety. They wouldn’t be sitting in a restaurant drinking beer.

We should be trying to get away. Even if it does mean walking. Normal people would be trying to get

away."

Frank stared at his bottle for a moment. "We should be scared stiff, shouldn't we?"

It was Nora's turn to ponder. "I'm not sure. Maybe not. I know I'm not fighting anything inside—fear, I mean. I just don't seem to care one way or another."

"I care," Frank replied. "I care. I don't want to die. But we're faced with a situation, and either way it's a gamble. We might be dead before I finish this bottle of beer. If that's true, why not sit here and be comfortable? Or we might have time to walk far enough to get out of range of whatever it is that chased everybody."

"Which way do you think it is?"

"I don't think we have time to get out of town. They cleaned it out too fast. We'd need at least four or five hours to get away. If we had that much time the army, or whoever did it, would still be around."

"Maybe they didn't know themselves when it's going to happen."

He made an impatient gesture. "What difference does it make? We're in a situation we didn't ask to get in. Our luck put us here and I'm damned if I'm going to kick a hole in the ceiling and yell for help."

Nora was going to reply, but at that moment Jim Wilson came striding out front. He wore his big grin and he carried another half-dozen bottles of beer. "Minna'll be out in a minute," he said. "Women are always slower than hell."

He dropped into a chair and snapped the cap off a beer bottle with his thumb. He held the bottle up and squinted through it, sighing gustily.

"Man! I ain't never had it so good." He tilted the bottle in salute, and drank.

The sun was lowering in the west now, and when Minna reappeared it seemed that she materialized from the shadows, so quietly did she move.

Jim Wilson opened another bottle and put it before her. "Here—have a drink, baby."

Obediently, she tilted the bottle and drank.

"What do you plan to do?" Frank asked.

"It'll be dark soon," Wilson said. "We ought to go out and try to scrounge some flashlights. I bet the power plants are dead. Probably aren't any flashlights either."

"Are you going to stay here?" Nora asked. "Here in the Loop?"

He seemed surprised. "Why not? A man'd be a fool to walk out on all this.

All he wants to eat and drink. No goddam cops around. The life of Riley and I should walk out?"

"Aren't you afraid of what's going to happen?"

"I don't give a good goddam what's going to happen. What the hell!

Something's always going to happen."

"They didn't evacuate the city for nothing," Frank said.

"You mean we can all get killed?" Jim Wilson laughed. "Sure we can.

We could have got killed last week too. We could of got batted in the can by a truck anytime we crossed the street." He emptied his bottle, threw it accurately at a mirror over the cash register. The crash was thunderous.

"Trouble with you people, you're worry warts," he said with an expansive grin. "Let's go get us some flashlights so we can find our way to bed in one of those fancy hotels."

He got to his feet and Minna arose also, a little tired, a little apprehensive, but entirely submissive. Jim Wilson said, "Come on, baby. I sure won't want to lose you." He grinned at the others. "You guys coming?"

Frank's eyes met Nora's. He shrugged. "Why not?" he said. "Unless you want to start walking."

"I'm too tired," Nora said.

As they stepped out through the smashed window, both Nora and Frank half-expected to see other forms moving up and down Madison Street.

But there was no one. Only the unreal desolation of the lonely pavement and the dark-windowed buildings.

"The biggest ghost town on earth," Frank muttered.

Nora's hand had slipped into Frank's. He squeezed it and neither of them seemed conscious of the contact.

"I wonder," Nora said. "Maybe this is only one of them. Maybe all the other big cities are evacuated too."

Jim Wilson and Minna were walking ahead. He turned. "If you two can't sleep without finding out what's up, it's plenty easy to do."

"You think we could find a battery radio in some store?" Frank asked.

"Hell no! They'll all be gone. But all you'd have to do is snoop around in some newspaper office. If you can read you can find out what happened."

It seemed strange to Frank that he had not thought of this. Then he realized he hadn't tried very hard to think of anything at all. He was surprised, also, at his lack of fear. He'd gone through life pretty much taking things as they came—as big a sucker as the next man—making more than his quota of mistakes and blunders. Finding himself completely alone in a deserted city for the first time in his life, he had naturally fallen prey to sudden fright. But that had gradually passed, and now he was able to accept the new reality fairly passively. He wondered if that wasn't pretty much the way of all people. New situations

brought a surge of whatever emotion fitted the picture. Then the emotion subsided and the new thing became the ordinary.

This, he decided, was the manner in which humanity survived. Humanity took things as they came. Pile on enough of anything and it becomes the ordinary.

Jim Wilson had picked up a garbage box and hurled it through the window of an electric shop. The glass came down with a crash that shuddered up the empty darkening street and grumbled off into silence. Jim Wilson went inside. "I'll see what I can find. You stay out here and watch for cops."

His laughter echoed out as he disappeared.

Minna stood waiting silently, unmoving, and somehow she reminded Frank of a dumb animal; an unreasoning creature with no mind of her own, waiting for a signal from her master. Strangely, he resented this, but at the same time could find no reason for his resentment, except the feeling that no one should appear as much a slave as Minna.

Jim Wilson reappeared in the window. He motioned to Minna. "Come on in, baby. You and me's got to have a little conference." His exaggerated wink was barely perceptible in the gloom as Minna stepped over the low sill into the store. "Won't be long, folks," Wilson said in high good humor, and the two of them vanished into the darkness beyond.

Frank Brooks glanced at Nora, but her face was turned away. He cursed softly under his breath. He said, "Wait a minute," and went into the store through the huge, jagged opening.

Inside, he could barely make out the counters. The place was larger than it had appeared from the outside. Wilson and Minna were nowhere about.

Frank found the counter he was looking for and pawed out several flashlights. They were only empty tubes, but he found a case of batteries in a panel compartment against the wall.

"Who's there?"

"Me. I came in for some flashlights."

"Couldn't you wait?"

"It's getting dark."

"You don't have to be so damn impatient." Jim Wilson's voice was hostile and surly.

Frank stifled his quick anger. "We'll be outside," he said. He found Nora waiting where he'd left her. He loaded batteries into four flashlights before Jim Wilson and Minna reappeared.

Wilson's good humor was back. "How about the Morrison or the Sherman," he said. "Or do you want to get real ritzy and walk up to the Drake?"

"My feet hurt," Minna said. The woman spoke so rarely, Frank Brooks was startled by her words.

"Morrison's the closest," Jim Wilson said. "Let's go." He took Minna by the arm and swung off up the street. Frank and Nora fell in behind.

Nora shivered. Frank, holding her arm, asked, "Cold?"

"No. It's just all—unreal again."

"I see what you mean."

"I never expected to see the Loop dark. I can't get used to it."

A vagrant, whispering wind picked up a scrap of paper and whirled it along the street. It caught against Nora's ankle. She jerked perceptibly and kicked the scrap away. The wind caught it again and spiralled it away into the darkness.

"I want to tell you something," she said.

"Tell away."

"I told you before that I slept through the—the evacuation, or whatever it was. That wasn't exactly true. I did sleep through it, but it was my fault. I put myself to sleep."

"I don't get it."

"I tried to kill myself. Sleeping tablets. Seven of them. They weren't enough."

Frank said nothing while they paced off ten steps through the dark canyon that was Madison Street. Nora wondered if he had heard.

"T tried to commit suicide."

"Why?"

"I was tired of life, I guess."

"What do you want—sympathy?"

The sudden harshness in his voice brought her eyes around, but his face was a white blur.

"No—no, I don't think so."

"Well, you won't get it from me. Suicide is silly. You can have troubles and all that—everybody has them—but suicide—why did you try it?"

A high, thin whine—a wordless vibration of eloquence—needled out of the darkness into their ears. The shock was like a sudden shower of ice water dashed over their bodies. Nora's fingers dug into Frank's arm, but he did not feel the cutting nails. "We're-there's someone out there in the street!"

Twenty-five feet ahead of where Frank and Nora stood frozen there burst the booming voice of Jim Wilson. "What the hell was that?" And the shock was dispelled. The white circle from Wilson's flash bit out across the blackness to outline movement on the far side of the street.

Then Frank Brooks' light, and Nora's, went exploring.

"There's somebody over there," Wilson bellowed. "Hey, you! Show your face!

Quit sneaking around!"

Frank's light swept an arc that clearly outlined the buildings across the street and then weakened as it swung westward. There was something or someone back there, but obscured by the dimness. He was swept by a sense of unreality again.

"Did you see them?"

Nora's light beam had dropped to her feet as though she feared to point it out into the darkness. "I thought I saw something."

Jim Wilson was swearing industriously. "There was a guy over there.

He ducked around the corner. Some damn fool out scrounging. Wish I had a gun."

Frank and Nora moved ahead and the four stood in a roup. "Put out your lights," Wilson said. "They make good targets if the jerk's got any weapons."

They stood in the darkness, Nora holding tightly to Frank's arm. Frank said, "That was the damnedest noise I ever heard."

"Like a siren?" Frank thought Jim Wilson spoke hopefully, as though wanting somebody to agree with him.

"Not like any I ever heard. Not like a whistle, either. More of a moan."

"Let's get into that goddam hotel and—" Jim Wilson's words were cut off by a new welling-up of the melancholy howling. It had a new pattern this time. It sounded from many places; not nearer, Frank thought, than Lake Street on the north, but spreading outward and backward and growing fainter until it died on the wind.

Nora was shivering, clinging to Frank without reserve.

Jim Wilson said, "I'll be damned if it doesn't sound like a signal of some kind."

"Maybe it's a language—a way of communication."

"But who the hell's communicating?"

"How would I know?"

"We best get to that hotel and bar a few doors. A man can't fight in the dark—and nothing to fight with."

They hurried up the street, but it was all different now. Gone was the

illusion of being alone; gone the sense of solitude. Around them the

ghost town had come suddenly alive. Sinister forces more frightening

than the previous solitude had now to be reckoned with. ! 1

"Something's happened—something in the last few minutes," Nora whispered.

Frank leaned close as they crossed the street to the dark silent pile that was the Morrison hotel. "I think I know what you mean."

"It's as though there was no one around and then, suddenly, they came."

"I think they came and went away again."

"Did you actually see anyone when you flashed your light?"

"No—I can't say positively that I did. But I got the impression there were figures out there—at least dozens of them—and that they moved back away from the light. Always just on the edge of it."

"I'm scared, Frank."

"So am I."

"Do you think it could all be imagination?"

"Those moans? Maybe the first one—I've heard of people imagining sounds.

But not the last ones. And besides, we all heard them." Jim Wilson, utterly oblivious of any subtle emanations in the air, boomed out in satisfaction: "We don't have to bust the joint open. The revolving door works."

"Then maybe we ought to be careful," Frank said. "Maybe somebody else is around here."

"Could be. We'll find out."

"Why are we afraid?" Nora whispered.

"It's natural, isn't it?" Frank melded the beam of his light with that of Jim Wilson. The white finger pierced the darkness inside. Nothing moved.

"I don't see why it should be. If there are people in there they must be as scared as we are."

Nora was very close to him as they entered.

The lobby seemed deserted. The flashlight beams scanned the empty chairs and couches. The glass of the deserted cages threw back reflections.

"The keys are in there," Frank said. He vaulted the desk and scanned the numbers under the pigeon holes.

"We'd better stay down low," Jim Wilson said. "Damned if I'm going to climb to the penthouse."

"How about the fourth floor?"

"That's plenty high enough."

Frank came out with a handful of keys. "Odd numbers," he said. "Four in a row."

"Well I'll be damned," Jim Wilson muttered. But he said no more and they climbed the stairs in silence. They passed the quiet dining rooms and banquet halls, and by the time they reached the fourth floor the doors giving off the corridors had assumed a uniformity.

"Here they are." He handed a key to Wilson. "That's the end one." He said nothing as he gave Minna her key, but Wilson grunted, "For crissake!" in a disgusted voice, took Minna's key and threw it on the floor.

Frank and Nora watched as Wilson unlocked his door. Wilson turned.

"Well, goodnight all. If you get goosed by any spooks, just yell."

Minna followed him without a word and the door closed.

Frank handed Nora her key. "Lock your door and you'll be safe. I'll check the room first." He unlocked the door and flashed his light inside. Nora was close behind him as he entered. He checked the bathroom. "Everything clear. Lock your door and you'll be safe."

"Frank."

"Yes?"

"I'm afraid to stay alone."

"You mean you want me to—" "There are two beds here."

His reply was slow in coming. Nora didn't wait for it. Her voice rose to the edge of hysteria. "Quit being so damned righteous. Things have changed!

Can't you realize that? What does it matter how or where we sleep?

Does the world care? Will it make a damn bit of difference to the world whether I strip stark naked in front of you?" A sob choked in her throat. "Or would that outrage your morality."

He moved toward her, stopped six inches away. "It isn't that. For God's sake! I'm no saint. It's just that I thought you—" "I'm plain scared, and I don't want to be alone. To me that's all that's important."

Her face was against his chest and his arms went around her. But her own hands were fists held together against him until he could feel her knuckles, hard, against his chest. She was crying.

"Sure," Frank said. "I'll stay with you. Now take it easy.

Everything's going to be all right."

Nora sniffled without bothering to reach for her handkerchief. "Stop Lying. You know it isn't going to

be all right."

Frank was at somewhat of a loss. This flareup of Nora's was entirely unexpected. He eased toward the place the flashlight had shown the bed to be. Her legs hit its edge and she sat down.

"You—you want me to sleep in the other one?" he asked.

"Of course," Nora replied with marked bitterness. "I'm afraid you wouldn't be very comfortable in with me."

There was a time of silence. Frank took off his jacket, shirt and trousers. It was funny, he thought. He'd spent his money, been drugged, beaten and robbed as a result of one objective—to get into a room alone with a girl. And a girl not nearly as nice as Nora at that.

Now, here he was alone with a real dream, and he was tongue-tied. It didn't make sense.

He shrugged. Life was crazy sometimes.

He heard the rustle of garments and wondered how much Nora was taking off.

Then he dropped his trousers, forgotten, to the floor. "Did you hear that?"

"Yes. It's that—" Frank went to the window, raised the sash. The moaning sound came in louder, but it was from far distance. "I think that's out around Evanston."

Frank felt a warmth on his cheek and he realized Nora was by his side, leaning forward. He put an arm around her and they stood unmoving in complete silence. Although their ears were straining for the sound coming down from the north, Frank could not be oblivious of the warm flesh under his hand.

Nora's breathing was soft against his cheek. She said, "Listen to how it rises and falls. It's almost as though they were using it to talk with. The inflection changes."

"I think that's what i is. It's coming from a lot of different

places.

It stops in some places and starts in others."

"It's so—weird."

"Spooky," Frank said, "but in a way it makes me feel better."

"I don't see how it could." Nora pressed closer to him.

"It does though, because of what I was afraid of. I had it figured out that the city was going to blow up—that a bomb had been planted that they couldn't find, or something like that. Now, I'm pretty sure it's something else. I'm willing to bet we'll be alive in the morning."

Nora thought that over in silence. "If that's the way it is—if some kind of invaders are coming down

from the north—isn't it stupid to stay here?

Even if we are tired we ought to be trying to get away from them."

"I was thinking the same thing. I'll go and talk to Wilson."

They crossed the room together and he left her by the bed and went on to the door. Then he remembered he was in his shorts and went back and got his trousers. After he'd put them on, he wondered why he'd bothered. He opened the door.

Something warned him—some instinct—or possibly his natural fear and caution coincided with the presence of danger. He heard the footsteps on the carpeting down the hall—soft, but unmistakably footsteps. He called, "Wilson—Wilson—that you?"

The creature outside threw caution to the winds. Frank sensed rather than heard a body hurtling toward the door. A shrill, mad laughter raked his ears and the weight of a body hit the door.

Frank drew strength from pure panic as he threw his weight against the panel, but perhaps an inch or two from the latch the door wavered from opposing strength. Through the narrow opening he could feel the hoarse breath of exertion in his face. Insane giggles and curses sounded through the black stillness.

Frank had the wild conviction he was losing the battle, and added strength came from somewhere. He heaved and there was a scream and he knew he had at least one finger caught between the door and the jamb.

He threw his weight against the door with frenzied effort and heard the squash of the finger.

The voice kited up to a shriek of agony, like that of a wounded animal.

Even with his life at stake, and the life of Nora, Frank could not deliberately slice the man's fingers off. Even as he fought the urge, and called himself a fool, he allowed the door to give slightly inward.

The hand was jerked to safety.

At that moment another door opened close by and Jim Wilson's voice boomed: "What the hell's going on out here?"

Simultaneous with this, racing footsteps receded down the hall and from the well of the stairway came a whining cry of pain.

"Jumping jees!" Wilson bellowed. "We got company. We ain't alone!"

"He tried to get into my room."

"You shouldn't have opened the door. Nora okay?"

"Yeah. She's all right."

"Tell her to stay in her room. And you do the same. We'd be crazy to go after that coot in the dark. He'll keep 'til morning."

Frank closed the door, double-locked it and went back to Nora's bed.

He could hear a soft sobbing. He reached down and pulled back the covers and the sobbing came louder. Then he was down on the bed and she was in his arms.

She cried until the panic subsided, while he held her and said nothing.

After a while she got control of herself. "Don't leave me, Frank," she begged. "Please don't leave me."

He stroked her shoulder. "I won't," he whispered.

They lay for a long time in utter silence, each seeking strength in the other's closeness. The silence was finally broken by Nora.

"Frank?"

"Yes."

"Do you want me?"

He did not answer.

"If you want me you can have me, Frank."

Frank said nothing.

"I told you today that I tried to commit suicide. Remember?"

"I remember."

"That was the truth. I did it because I was tired of everything.

Because I've made a terrible mess of things. I didn't want to go on living." He remained silent, holding her.

As she spoke again, her voice sharpened. "Can't you understand what I'm telling you? I'm no good! I'm just a bum! Other men have had me!

Why shouldn't you? Why should you be cheated out of what other men have had?"

He remained silent. After a few moments, Nora said, "For God's sake, talk!

Say something!"

"How do you feel about it now? Will you try again to kill yourself the next chance you get?"

"No—no, I don't think I'll ever try it again."

"Then things must look better."

"I don't know anything about that. I just don't want to do it now. " She did not urge him this time and he

was slow in speaking. "It's kind of funny. It really is. Don't get the idea I've got morals. I haven't. I've had my share of women. I was working on one the night they slipped me the mickey—the night before I woke up to this tomb of a city. But now—tonight—it's kind of different. I feel like I want to protect you. Is that strange?"

"No," she said quietly. "I guess not."

They lay there silently, their thoughts going off into the blackness of the sepulchral night. After a long while, Nora's even breathing told him she was asleep. He got up quietly, covered her, and went to the other bed.

But before he slept, the weird wailings from out Evanston way came again—rose and fell in that strange conversational cadence-then died away into nothing.

Frank awoke to the first fingers of daylight. Nora still slept. He dressed and stood for some moments with his hand on the door knob.

Then he threw the bolt and cautiously opened the door.

The hallway was deserted. At this point it came to him forcibly that he was not a brave man. All his life, he realized, he had avoided physical danger and had refused to recognize the true reason for so doing. He had classified himself as a man who dodged trouble through good sense; that the truly civilized person went out of his way to keep the peace.

He realized now that that attitude was merely salve for his ego. He faced the empty corridor and did not wish to proceed further. But stripped of the life-long alibi, he forced himself to walk through the doorway, close the door softly, and move toward the stairs.

He paused in front of the door behind which Jim Wilson and Minna were no doubt sleeping. He stared at it wistfully. It certainly would not be a mark of cowardice to get Jim Wilson up under circumstances such as these. In fact, he would be a fool not to do so.

Stubbornness forbade such a move, however. He walked softly toward the place where the hallway dead-ended and became a cross-corridor. He made the turn carefully, pressed against one wall. There was no one in sight. He got to the stairway and started down.

His muscles and nerves tightened with each step. When he reached the lobby he was ready to jump sky-high at the drop of a pin.

But no one dropped any pins, and he reached the modernistic glass doorway to the drugstore with only silence screaming in his ears. The door was unlocked. One hinge squeaked slightly as he pushed the door inward.

It was in the drugstore that Frank found signs of the fourth-floor intruder. An inside counter near the prescription department was red with blood. Bandages and first-aid supplies had been unboxed and thrown around with abandon. Here the man had no doubt administered to his smashed hand.

But where had he gone? Asleep, probably, in one of the rooms upstairs.

Frank wished fervently for a weapon. Beyond doubt there was not a gun left in the Loop.

A gun was not the only weapon ever created, though, and Frank searched the store and found a line of pocket knives still in neat boxes near the perfume counter.

He picked four of the largest and found, also, a wooden-handled, lead-tipped bludgeon, used evidently for cracking ice.

Thus armed, he went out through the revolving door. He walked through streets that were like death under the climbing sun. Through streets and canyons of dead buildings upon which the new daylight had failed to shed life or diminish the terror of the night past.

At Dearborn he found the door to the Tribune Public Service Building locked. He used the ice breaker to smash a glass door panel. The crash of the glass on the cement was an explosion in the screaming silence. He went inside. Here the sense of desolation was complete; brought sharply to focus, probably, by the pigeon holes filled with letters behind the want-ad counter. Answers to a thousand and one queries, waiting patiently for someone to come after them.

Before going to the basement and the back files of the Chicago Tribune, Frank climbed to the second floor and found what he thought might be there—a row of teletype machines with a fileboard hooked to the side of each machine.

Swiftly, he stripped the copy sheets off each board, made a bundle of them and went back downstairs. He covered the block back to the hotel at a dog-trot, filled with a sudden urge to get back to the fourth floor as soon as possible.

He stopped in the drugstore and filled his pockets with soap, a razor, shaving cream and face lotion. As an afterthought, he picked up a lavish cosmetic kit that retailed, according to the price tag, for thirty-eight dollars plus tax.

He let himself back into the room and closed the door softly. Nora rolled over, exposing a shoulder and one breast. The breast held his gaze for a full minute. Then a feeling of guilt swept him and he went into the bathroom and closed the door.

Luckily, a supply tank on the roof still contained water and Frank was able to shower and shave. Dressed again, he felt like a new man. But he regretted not hunting up a haberdashery shop and getting himself a clean shirt.

Nora had still not awakened when he came out of the bathroom. He went to the bed and stood looking down at her for some time. Then he touched her shoulder.

"Wake up. It's morning."

Nora stirred. Her eyes opened, but Frank got the impression she did not really awaken for several seconds. Her eyes went to his face, to the window, back to his face.

"What time is it?"

"I don't know. I think it's around eight o'clock."

Nora stretched both arms luxuriously. As she sat up, her slip fell back into place and Frank got the impression she hadn't even been aware of her partial nudity.

She stared up at him, clarity dawning in her eyes. "You're all cleaned up."

"I went downstairs and got some things."

"You went out—alone?"

"Why not. We can't stay in here all day. We've got to hit the road and get out of here. We've overshot our luck already."

"But that—that man in the hall last night! You shouldn't have taken a chance."

"I didn't bump into him. I found the place he fixed his hand, down in the drugstore."

Frank went to the table and came back with the cosmetic set. He put it in Nora's lap. "I brought this up for you."

Surprise and true pleasure were mixed in her expression. "That was very nice. I think I'd better get dressed."

Frank turned toward the window where he had left the bundle of teletype clips. "I've got a little reading to do."

As he sat down, he saw, from the corner of his eye, a flash of slim brown legs moving toward the bathroom. Just inside the door, Nora turned. "Are Jim Wilson and Minna up yet?"

"I don't think so."

Nora's eyes remained on him. "I think you were very brave to go downstairs alone. But it was a foolish thing to do. You should have waited for Jim Wilson."

"You're right about it being foolish. But I had to go."

"Why?"

"Because I'm not brave at all. Maybe that was the reason."

Nora left the bathroom door open about six inches and Frank heard the sound of the shower. He sat with the papers in his hand wondering about the water. When he had gone to the bathroom the thought had never occurred to him. It was natural that it should. Now he wondered about it. Why was it still running? After a while he considered the possibility of the supply tank on the roof.

Then he wondered about Nora. It was strange how he could think about her personally and impersonally at the same time. He remembered her words of the previous night. They made her—he shied from the term.

What was the old cliche? A woman of easy virtue.

What made a woman of that type, he wondered. Was it something inherent in their makeup? That partially opened door was symbolic somehow. He was sure that many wives closed the bathroom door upon their husbands; did it without thinking, instinctively. He was sure Nora had left it partially open without thinking. Could a behavior pattern be traced from such an insignificant thing?

He wondered about his own attitude toward Nora. He had drawn away from what she'd offered him during the night. And yet from no sense of disgust.

There was certainly far more about Nora to attract than to repel.

Morals, he realized dimly, were imposed—or at least functioned—for the protection of society. With society gone—vanished overnight—did the moral code still hold?

If and when they got back among masses of people, would his feelings toward Nora change? He thought not. He would marry her, he told himself firmly, as quick as he'd marry any other girl. He would not hold what she was against her. I guess I'm just fundamentally unmoral myself, he thought, and began reading the news clips.

There was a knock on the door accompanied by the booming voice of Jim Wilson. "You in there! Ready for breakfast?"

Frank got up and walked toward the door. As he did so, the door to the bathroom closed.

Jim Wilson wore a two-day growth of beard and it didn't seem to bother him at all. As he entered the room he rubbed his hands together in great gusto.

"Well, where'll we eat, folks? Let's pick the classiest restaurant in town.

Nothing but the best for Minna here."

He winked broadly as Minna, expressionless and silent, followed him in exactly as a shadow would have followed him and sat primly down in a straight-backed chair by the wall.

"We'd better start moving south," Frank said, "and not bother about breakfast."

"Getting scared?" Jim Wilson asked.

"You're damn right I'm scared—now. We're right in the middle of a big no-man's-land."

"I don't get you."

At that moment the bathroom door opened and Nora came out.

Jim Wilson forgot about the question he'd asked. He let forth a loud whistle of appreciation. Then he turned his eyes on Frank and his thought was crystal clear. He was envying Frank the night just passed.

A sudden irritation welled up in Frank Brooks, a distinct feeling of disgust. "Let's start worrying about important things—our lives. Or don't you consider your life very important?"

Jim Wilson seemed puzzled. "What the hell's got into you? Didn't you sleep good?"

"I went down the block this morning and found some teletype machines.

I've just been reading the reports."

"What about that guy that tried to get into your room last night?"

"I didn't see him. I didn't see anybody. But I know why the city's been cleaned out." Frank went back to the window and picked up the sheaf of clips he had gone through. Jim Wilson sat down on the edge of the bed, frowning. Nora followed Frank and perched on the edge of the chair he dropped into.

"The city going to blow up?" Wilson asked.

"No. We've been invaded by some form of alien life."

"Is that what the papers said?"

"It was the biggest and fastest mass evacuation ever attempted. I pieced the reports together. There was hell popping around here during the two days we—we waited it out."

"Where did they all go?" Nora asked.

"South. They've evacuated a forty-mile strip from the lake west. The first Terran defense line is set up in northern Indiana."

"What do you mean—Terra."

"It's a word that means Earth—this planet. The invaders came from some other planet, they think—at least from no place on Earth."

"That's the silliest damn thing I ever heard of," Wilson said.

"A lot of people probably thought the same thing," Frank replied.

"Flying saucers were pretty common. Nobody thought they were anything and nobody paid much attention. Then they hit-three days ago—and wiped out every living soul in three little southern Michigan towns.

From there they began spreading out. They—" Each of them heard the sound at the same time. A faint rumble, increasing swiftly into high thunder. They moved as one to the window and saw four jet planes, in formation, moving across the sky from the south.

"There they come," Frank said. "The fight's started. Up to now the army has been trying to get set, I suppose."

Nora said, "Is there any way we can hail them? Let them know—" Her words were cut off by the horror of what happened. As they watched, the planes skimmed low across the Loop. At a point, approximately over Lake Street, Frank estimated, the planes were annihilated. There was a flash of blue fire coming in like jagged lightning to form four balls of fire around the planes. The fire balls turned, almost instantly, into globes of white smoke that drifted lazily away.

And that was all. But the planes vanished completely.

"What happened?" Wilson muttered. "Where'd they go?"

"It was as if they hit a wall," Nora said, her voice hushed with awe.

"I think that was what happened," Frank said. "The invaders have some kind of a weapon that holds us helpless. Otherwise the army wouldn't have established this no-man's-land and pulled out. The reports said we have them surrounded on all sides with the help of the lake. We're trying to keep them isolated."

Jim Wilson snorted. "It looks like we've got them right where they want us."

"Anyhow, we're damn fools to stick around here. We'd better head south."

Wilson looked wistfully about the room. "I guess so, but it's a shame—walking away from all this."

Nora was staring out the window, a small frown on her face. "I wonder who they are and where they came from?"

"The teletype releases were pretty vague on that."

She turned quickly. "There's something peculiar about them. Something really strange."

"What do you mean?"

"Last night when we were walking up the street. It must have been these invaders we heard. They must have been across the street. But they didn't act like invaders. They seemed—well, scared. I got the feeling they ran from us in panic. And they haven't been back."

Wilson said, "They may not have been there at all. Probably our imaginations."

"I don't think so," Frank cut in. "They were there and then they were gone. I'm sure of it."

"Those wailing noises. They were certainly signalling to each other.

Do you suppose that's the only language they have?" Nora walked over and offered the silent Minna a cigarette. Minna refused with a shake of her head.

"I wish we knew what they looked like," Frank said. "But let's not sit here talking. Let's get going."

Jim Wilson was scowling. There was a marked sullenness in his manner.

"Not Minna and me. I've changed my mind. I'm sticking here."

Frank blinked in surprise. "Are you crazy? We've run our luck out already.

Did you see what happened to those planes?"

"The hell with the planes. We've got it good here. This I like. I like it a lot. We'll stay."

"Okay," Frank replied hotly, "but talk for yourself. You're not making Minna stay!"

Wilson's eyes narrowed. "I'm not? Look, buster—how about minding your own goddam business'?"

The vague feelings of disgust Frank had had now crystallized into words.

"I won't let you get away with it! You think I'm blind? Hauling her into the back room every ten minutes! Don't you think I know why?

You're nothing but a damn sex maniac! You've got her terrorized until she's afraid to open her mouth. She goes with us!"

Jim Wilson was on his feet. His face blazed with rage. The urge to kill was written in the crouch of his body and the twist of his mouth.

"You goddam nosey little squirt. I'll—" Wilson charged across the short, intervening distance. His arms went out in a clutching motion.

But Frank Brooks wasn't full of knockout drops this time, and with a clear head he was no pushover. Blinded with rage, Jim Wilson was a pushover.

Frank stepped in between his outstretched arms and slugged him squarely on top of the head with the telephone. Wilson went down like a felled steer.

The scream came from Minna as she sprang across the room. She had turned from a colorless rag doll into a tigress. She hit Frank square in the belly with small fists at the end of stiff, out stretched arms. The full force of her charge was behind the fists, and Frank went backward over the bed.

Minna did not follow up her attack. She dropped to the floor beside Jim Wilson and took his huge head in her lap. "You killed him," she sobbed.

"You—you murderer! You killed him! You had no right!"

Frank sat wide-eyed. "Minna! For God's sake! I was helping you. I did it for you!"

"Why don't you mind your business? I didn't ask you to protect me? I don't need any protection—not from Jim."

"You mean you didn't mind the way he's treated you—" "You've killed him—killed him—" Minna raised her head slowly. She looked at Frank as though she saw him for the first time. "You're a fool," she said dully. "A big fool. What right have you got to meddle with other people's affairs? Are you God or something, to run people's lives?"

"Minna—I—" It was as though he hadn't spoken. "Do you know what it's like to have nobody? All your life to go on and grow older without anybody? I didn't have no one and then Jim came along and wanted me."

Frank walked close to her and bent down. She reacted like a tiger.

"Leave him alone! Leave him alone! You've done enough!"

Nonplused, Frank backed away.

"People with big noses—always sticking them in. That's you. Was that any of your business what he wanted of me? Did I complain?"

"I'm sorry, Minna. I didn't know."

"I'd rather go into back rooms with him than stay in front rooms without nobody."

She began to cry now. Wordlessly—soundlessly, rocking back and forth with the huge man's bloody head in her lap. "Anytime," she crooned.

"Anytime I would—" The body in her arms stirred. She looked down through her tears and saw the small black eyes open. They were slightly crossed, unfocused as they were by the force of the blow.

They straightened and Jim mumbled, "What the hell—what the hell—" Minna's time for talking seemed over. She smiled—a smile hardly perceptible, as though it was for herself alone. "You're all right," she said. "That's good. You're all right."

Jim pushed her roughly away and staggered to his feet. He stood swaying for a moment, his head turning, for all the world like a bull blinded and tormented. Then his eyes focused on Frank.

"You hit me with the goddam phone."

"Yeah—I hit you."

"I'm gonna kill you."

"Look—I made a mistake." Frank picked up the phone and backed against the wall. "I hit you, but you were coming at me. I made a mistake and I'm sorry."

"I'll smash your goddam skull."

"Maybe you will," Frank said grimly. "But you'll work for it. It won't come easy."

A new voice bit across the room. "Cut it out. I'll do the killing.

That's what I like best. Everybody quiet down."

They turned and saw a slim, pale-skinned young man in the open doorway.

The door had opened quietly and no one had heard it. Now the pale young man was standing in the room with a small, nickel-plated revolver in his right hand.

The left hand was close down at his side. It was swathed generously in white bandage.

The young man chuckled. "The last four people in the world were in a room," he said, "and there was a knock on the door."

His chuckle deepened to one of pure merriment. "Only there wasn't a knock.

A man just walked in with a gun that made him boss."

No one moved. No one spoke. The man waited, then went on: "My name is Leroy Davis. I lived out west and I always had a keeper because they said I wasn't quite right. They wanted me to pull out with the rest of them, but I slugged my keeper and here I am."

"Put down the gun and we'll talk it over," Frank said. "We're all in this together."

"No, we aren't. I've got a gun, so that makes me top man. You're all in it together, but I'm not. I'm the boss, and which one of you tried to cut my hand off last night."

"You tried to break in here yelling and screaming like a madman. I held the door. What else could I do?"

"It's all right. I'm not mad. My type—we may be nuts, but we never hold a grudge. I can't remember much about last night. I found some whisky in a place down the street and whisky drives me nuts. I don't know what I'm doing when I drink whisky. They say once about five years ago I got drunk and killed a little kid, but I don't remember."

Nobody spoke.

"I got out of it. They got me out some way. High-priced lawyers got me out. Cost my dad a pile."

Hysteria had been piling up inside of Nora. She had held it back, but now a little of it spurted out from between her set teeth. "Do something, somebody. Isn't anybody going to do anything?"

Leroy Davis blinked at her. "There's nothing they can do, honey," he said in a kindly voice. "I've got the gun. They'd be crazy to try anything."

Nora's laugh was like the rattle of dry peas. She sat down on the bed and looked up at the ceiling and laughed. "It's crazy. It's all so crazy! We're sitting here in a doomed city with some kind of alien invaders all around us and we don't know what they look like. They haven't hurt us at all. We don't even know what they look like. We don't worry a bit about them because we're too busy trying to kill each other."

Frank Brooks took Nora by the arm. "Stop it! Quit laughing like that!"

Nora shook him off. "Maybe we need someone to take us over. It's all pretty crazy!"

"Stop it."

Nora's eyes dulled down as she looked at Frank. She dropped her head and seemed a little ashamed of herself. "I'm sorry. I'll be quiet."

Jim Wilson had been standing by the wall looking first at the newcomer, then back at Frank Brooks. Wilson seemed confused as to who his true enemy really was. Finally he took a step toward Leroy Davis.

Frank Brooks stopped him with a motion, but kept his eyes on Davis.

"Have you seen anybody else?"

Davis regarded Frank with long, careful consideration. His eyes were bright and birdlike. They reminded Frank of a squirrel's eyes. Davis said, "I bumped into an old man out on Halstead Street. He wanted to know where everybody had gone. He asked me, but I didn't know."

"What happened to the old man?" Nora asked. She asked the question as though dreading to do it; but as though some compulsion forced her to speak.

"I shot him," Davis said cheerfully. "It was a favor, really. Here was this old man staggering down the street with nothing but a lot of wasted years to show for his efforts. He was no good alive, and he didn't have the courage to die." Davis stopped and cocked his head brightly. "You know—I think that's what's been wrong with the world.

Too many people without the guts to die, and a law against killing them."

It had now dawned upon Jim Wilson that they were faced by a maniac.

His eyes met those of Frank Brooks and they were—on this point at least—in complete agreement. A working procedure sprang up, unworded, between them.

Jim Wilson took a slow, casual step toward the homicidal maniac.

"You didn't see anyone else?" Frank asked.

Davis ignored the question. "Look at it this way," he said. "In the old days they had Texas longhorns. Thin stringy cattle that gave up meat as tough as leather. Do we have cattle like that today? No.

Because we bred out the weak line."

Frank said, "There are some cigarettes on that table if you want one."

Jim Wilson took another slow step toward Davis.

Davis said, "We bred with intelligence, with a thought to what a steer was for and we produced a walking chunk of meat as wide as it is long."

"Uh-huh," Frank said.

"Get the point? See what I'm driving at? Humans are more important than cattle, but can we make them breed intelligently? Oh, no! That interferes with damn silly human liberties. You can't tell a man he can only have two kids. It's his God-given right to have twelve when the damn moron can't support three. Get what I mean?"

"Sure—sure, I get it."

"You better think it over, mister—and tell that fat bastard to quit sneaking up on me or I'll blow his brains all over the carpet!"

If the situation hadn't been so grim it would have appeared

ludicrous.

Jim Wilson, feeling success almost in his grasp, was balanced on tiptoe for a lunge. He teetered, almost lost his balance and fell back against the wall.

"Take it easy," Frank said.

"I'll take it easy," Davis replied. "I'll kill every goddam one of you—" he pointed the gun at Jim Wilson, "—starting with him."

"Now wait a minute," Frank said. "You're unreasonable. What right have you got to do that? What about the law of survival? You're standing there with a gun on us. You're going to kill us. Isn't it natural to try anything we can to save our own lives?"

A look of admiration brightened Davis' eyes. "Say! I like you.

You're all right. You're logical. A man can talk to you. If there's anything I like it's talking to a logical man."

"Thanks."

"Too bad I'm going to have to kill you. We could sit down and have some nice long talks together."

"Why do you want to kill us?" Minna asked. She had not spoken before.

In fact, she had spoken so seldom during the entire time they'd been together that her voice was a novelty to Frank. He was inclined to discount her tirade on the floor with Wilson's head in her lap. She had been a different person then. Now she had lapsed back into her old shell.

Davis regarded thoughtfully. "Must you have a reason?"

"You should have a reason to kill people."

Davis said, "All right, if it will make you any happier. I told you about killing my keeper when they tried to make me leave town. He got in the car, behind the wheel. I got into the back seat and split his skull with a tire iron."

"What's that got to do with us?"

"Just this. Tommy was a better person than any one of you or all of you put together. If he had to die, what right have you got to live?

Is that enough of a reason for you?"

"This is all too damn crazy," Jim Wilson roared. He was on the point of leaping at Davis and his gun.

At that moment, from the north, came a sudden crescendo of the weird invader wailings. It was louder than it had previously been but did not seem nearer.

The group froze, all ears trained upon the sound. "They're talking again," ora whispered.

"Uh-huh," Frank replied. "But it's different this time. As if—" "—as if they were getting ready for something," Nora said. "Do you suppose they're going to move south?"

Davis said, "I'm not going to kill you here. We're going down stairs."

The pivotal moment, hinged in Jim Wilson's mind, that could have changed the situation had come and

gone. The fine edge of additional madness that would make a man hurl himself at a loaded gun was dulled.

Leroy Davis motioned peremptorily toward Minna.

"You first—then the other babe. You walk side by side down the hall with the men behind you. Straight down to the lobby."

They complied without resistance. There was only Jim Wilson's scowl, Frank Brooks' clouded eyes, and the white, taut look of Nora.

Nora's mind was not on the gun. It was filled with thoughts of the pale maniac who held it. He was in command. Instinctively, she felt that maniacs in command have one of but two motivations—sex and murder. Her reaction to possible murder was secondary. But what if this man insisted upon laying his hands upon her. What if he forced her into the age old thing she had done so often? Nora shuddered. But it was also in her mind to question, and be surprised at the reason for her revulsion. She visualized the hands upon her body—the old familiar things—and the taste in her mouth was one of horror.

She had never experienced such shrinkings before. Why now? Had she herself changed? Had something happened during the night that made the past a time of shame? Or was it the madman himself? She did not know.

Nora returned from her musings to find herself standing in the empty lobby. Leroy Davis, speaking to Frank, was saying, "You look kind of tricky to me. Put your hands on your head. Lock your fingers together over your head and keep your hands there."

Jim Wilson was standing close to the mute Minna. She had followed all the orders without any show of anger, with no outward expression.

Always she had kept her eyes on Jim Wilson. Obviously, whatever Jim ordered, she would have done without question.

Wilson leaned his head down toward her. He said, "Listen, baby, there's something I keep meaning to ask but I always forget it. What's your last name?"

"Trumble—Minna Trumble. I thought I told you."

"Maybe you did. Maybe I didn't get it."

Nora felt the hysteria welling again. "How long are you going to keep doing this?" she asked.

Leroy Davis cocked his head as he looked at her. "Doing what?"

"Play cat and mouse like this. Holding us on a pin like flies in an exhibit."

Leroy Davis smiled brightly. "Like a butterfly in your case, honey. A big, beautiful butterfly."

"What are you going to do?" Frank Brooks snapped. "Whatever it is, let's get it over with."

"Can't you see what I'm doing?" Davis asked with genuine wonder. "Are you that stupid? I'm being the boss. I'm in command and I like it. I hold life and death over four people and I'm savoring the thrill of it.

You're pretty stupid, mister, and if you use that 'can't get away with it' line, I'll put a bullet into your left ear and watch it come out your right one."

Jim Wilson's fists were doubled. He was again approaching the reckless point. And again it was dulled by the gradually increasing sound of a motor—not in the air, but from the street level to the south.

It was a sane, cheerful sound and was resented instantly by the insane mind of Leroy Davis.

He tightened even to the point that his face grew more pale from the tension. He backed to a window, looked out quickly, and turned back.

"It's a jeep," he said. "They're going by the hotel. If anybody makes a move, or yells, they'll find four bodies in here and me gone. That's what I'm telling you and you know I'll do it."

They knew he would do it and they stood silent, trying to dredge up the nerve to make a move. The jeep's motor backfired a couple of times as it approached Madison Street. Each time, Leroy Davis' nerves reacted sharply and the four people kept their eyes trained on the gun in his hand.

The jeep came to the intersection and slowed down. There was a conference between its two occupants—helmeted soldiers in dark brown battle dress.

Then the jeep moved on up Clark Street toward Lake.

A choked sigh escaped from Nora's throat. Frank Brooks turned toward her.

"Take it easy," he said. "We're not dead yet. I don't think he wants to kill us."

The reply came from Minna. She spoke quietly. "I don't care. I can't stand any more of this. After all, we aren't animals. We're human beings and we have a right to live and die as we please."

Minna walked toward Leroy Davis. "I'm not afraid of your gun any more.

All you can do with it is kill me. Go ahead and do it."

Minna walked up to Leroy Davis. He gaped at her and said, "You're crazy!

Get back there. You're a crazy dame!"

He fired the gun twice and Minna died appreciating the incongruity of his words. She went out on a note of laughter and as she fell, Jim Wilson, with an echoing animal roar, lunged at Leroy Davis. His great hand closed completely over that of Davis, hiding the gun. There was a muffled explosion and the bullet cut unnoticed through Wilson's palm.

Wilson jerked the gun from Davis' weak grasp and hurled it away. Then he killed Davis.

He did it slowly, a surprising thing for Wilson. He lifted Davis by his neck and held him with his feet off

the floor. He squeezed Davis' neck, seeming to do it with great leisure as Davis made horrible noises and kicked his legs.

Nora turned her eyes away, buried them in Frank Brooks' shoulder, but she could not keep the sounds from reaching her ears. Frank held her close.

"Take it easy," he said. "Take it easy." And he was probably not conscious of saying it.

"Tell him to hurry," Nora whispered. "Tell him to get it over with.

It's like killing—killing an animal."

"That's what he is—an animal."

Frank Brooks stared in fascination at Leroy Davis' distorted, darkening face. It was beyond semblance of anything human now. The eyes bulged and the tongue came from his mouth as though frantically seeking relief.

The animal sounds quieted and died away. Nora heard the sound of the body falling to the floor—a limp, soft sound of finality. She turned and saw Jim Wilson with his hands still extended and cupped. The terrible hands from which the stench of a terrible life was drifting away into empty air.

Wilson looked down at his handiwork. "He's dead," Wilson said slowly.

He turned to face Frank and Nora. There was a great disappointment in his face. "That's all there is to it," he said, dully. "He's just—dead."

Without knowing it for what it was, Jim Wilson was full of the futile aftertaste of revenge.

He bent down to pick up Minna's body. There was a small blue hole in the right cheek and another one over the left eye. With a glance at Frank and Nora, Jim Wilson covered the wounds with his hand as though they were not decent. He picked her up in his arms and walked across the lobby and up the stairs with the slow, quiet tread of a weary man.

The sound of the jeep welled up again, but it was further away now.

Frank Brooks took Nora's hand and they hurried out into the street. As they crossed the sidewalk, the sound of the jeep was drowned by a sudden swelling of the wailings to the northward.

On still a new note, they rose and fell on the still air. A note of panic, of new knowledge, it seemed, but Frank and Nora were not paying close attention. The sounds of the jeep motor had come from the west and they got within sight of the Madison-Well intersection in time to see the jeep hurtle southward at its maximum speed.

Frank yelled and waved his arms, but he knew he had been neither seen nor heard. They were given little time for disappointment however, because a new center of interest appeared to the northward. From around the corner of Washington Street, into Clark, moved three strange figures.

There was a mixture of belligerence and distress in their actions.

They carried odd looking weapons and seemed interested in using them upon something or someone,

but they apparently lacked the energy to raise them although they appeared to be rather light.

The creatures themselves were humanoid, Frank thought. He tightened his grip on Nora's hand. "They've seen us."

"Let's not run," Nora said. "I'm tired of running. All it's gotten us is trouble. Let's just stand here."

"Don't be foolish."

"I'm not running. You can if you want to."

Frank turned his attention back to the three strange creatures. He allowed natural curiosity full rein. Thoughts of flight vanished from his mind.

"They're so thin—so fragile," Nora said.

"But their weapons aren't."

"It's hard to believe, even seeing them, that they're from another planet."

"How so? They certainly don't look much like us."

"I mean with the talk, for so long, about flying saucers and space flight and things like that. Here they are, but it doesn't seem possible."

"There's something wrong with them."

This was true. Two of the strange beings had fallen to the sidewalk.

The third came doggedly on, dragging one foot after the other until he went to his hands and knees. He remained motionless for a long time, his head hanging limply. Then he too, sank to the cement and lay still.

The wailings from the north now took on a tone of intense agony—great desperation. After that came a yawning silence.

"They defeated themselves," the military man said. "Or rather, natural forces defeated them. We certainly had little to do with it."

Nora, Frank, and Jim Wilson stood at the curb beside a motorcycle. The man on the cycle supported it with a leg propped against the curb as he talked.

"We saw three of them die up the street," Frank said.

"Our scouting party saw the same thing happen. That's why we moved in.

It's about over now. We'll know a lot more about them and where they came from in twenty-four hours."

They had nothing further to say. The military man regarded them thoughtfully. "I don't know about you three. If you ignored the evacuation through no fault of your own and can prove it—" "There were four of us," Jim Wilson said. "Then we met another man. He's inside on the floor. I killed him."

"Murder?" the military man said sharply.

"He killed a woman who was with us," Frank said. "He was a maniac.

When he's identified I'm pretty sure he'll have a past record."

"Where is the woman's body?"

"On a bed upstairs," Wilson said.

"I'll have to hold all of you. Martial law exists in this area.

You're in the hands of the army."

The streets were full of people now, going about their business, pushing and jostling, eating in the restaurants, making electricity for the lights, generating power for the telephones.

Nora, Frank, and Jim Wilson sat in a restaurant on Clark Street.

"We're all different people now," Nora said. "No one could go through what we've been through and be the same."

Jim Wilson took her statement listlessly. "Did they find out what it was about our atmosphere that killed them?"

"They're still working on that, I think." Frank Brooks stirred his coffee, raised a spoonful and let it drip back into the cup.

"I'm going up to the Chicago Avenue police station," Wilson said.

Frank and Nora looked up in surprise. Frank asked, "Why? The military court missed it—the fact you escaped from jail."

"They didn't miss it I don't think. I don't think they cared much.

I'm going back anyway."

"It won't be much of a rap."

"No, a pretty small one. I want to get it over with."

He got up from his chair. "So long. Maybe I'll see you around."

"So long."

"Goodbye."

Frank said, "I think I'll beat it too. I've got a job in a factory up north. Maybe they're operating again." He got to his feet and stood awkwardly by the table. "Besides—I've got some pay coming."

Nora didn't say anything.

Frank said, "Well—so long. Maybe I'll see you around."

"Maybe. Goodbye."

Frank Brooks walked north on Clark Street. He was glad to get away from the restaurant. Nora was a good kid but hell—you didn't take up with a hooker. A guy played around, but you didn't stick with them.

But it made a guy think. He was past the kid stage. It was time for him to find a girl and settle down. A guy didn't want to knock around all his life.

Nora walked west on Madison Street. Then she remembered the Halstead Street slums were in that direction and turned south on Wells. She had nine dollars in her bag and that worried her. You couldn't get along on nine dollars in Chicago very long.

There was a tavern on Jackson near Wells. Nora went inside. The barkeep didn't frown at her. That was good. She went to the bar and ordered a beer and was served.

After a while a man came in. A middle-aged man who might have just

come into Chicago—whose bags might still be at the

LaSalle Street Station down the block. The man looked at Nora, then away.

After a while he looked at her again. Nora smiled.

DEADLY CITY

TARGET EARTH Allied Artists 1954

75 minutes. Produced by Herman Cohen; directed by Sherman Rose; screenplay by William Raynor; screen treatment by Wyott Ordung; director of photography, Guy Roe, A.S.C.; art direction by James Sullivan; special effects by the Howard A. Anderson Company; music composed and conducted by Paul Dunlap; production manager, Clarence Eurist; sound by Earl Snyder; set decoration by Morris Hofman; assistant director, Jack Murphy; continuity by Dolores Rubin.

Cast Richard Denning (Frank Brooks), Virginia Grey (Nora King), Richard Reeves (Jim Wilson), Kathleen Crowley (Vicki Harris), Robert Roark (Mr. Davis), Arthur Space (General), Whit Bissel (The Scientist), House Peters, Jr. (A Technician).

THE ALIEN MACHINE

by Raymond F. Jones filmed as

THIS ISLAND EARTH

(Universal-International, 1955)

Harrowing laser battles in outer space, star systems split in deadly galactic combat, and an evil ruler who governs with an iron hand.

...

Sound familiar? Today's generation would, of course, be reminded of the all-time box office champ, Star Wars. But a quarter century ago, a different audience sat awestruck watching similar Technicolor thrills in the first interstellar space opera, This Island Earth.

Undoubtedly the most ambitious science fiction film mounted to that

date, the production was said to have cost close to one million dollars

an unheard-of sum at a time when most SF efforts were being shot for about one-tenth that amount. But thanks to investors firmly committed to the project, the special effects men were able to bring "a new reality" to the futuristic visions of author Raymond F. Jones.

A prominent name in the lamented SF pulp magazines of the 1940s and 1950s, Jones first introduced the This Island Earth characters in "The Alien Machine." Appearing in a 1947 issue of Thrilling Wonder Stories, the tale received so much reader acclaim that a pair of sequels were penned over the succeeding two years.

Finally, through an arrangement with a small publishing firm that specialized in fantasy, the three works were brought together and expanded into a spectacular novel that ultimately became the motion picture.

The author, who now lives with his family in the Midwest, recently admitted, "Though they made a few regrettable changes, I was still quite impressed with the remarkable effects. And although I was not consulted after the initial sale, the screenwriters did an admirable job of adapting my work."

One of the "regrettable changes" obviously refers to the huge eightfoot-tall mutated monster that thankfully did not appear in the novel.

Apparently it was thrown in to appease the "popcorn crowd," who producers felt couldnt survive without some sort of ravenous creature on the rampage.

Luckily, the rather childish elements were toned down in the editing room, and This Island Earth still emerged a colorful ray of hopeful light in the rather gloomy, black-and-white world of cinematic SF.

"The Alien Machine," reprinted here for the first time in over thirty years, easily stands alone on its own merits as a first-rate piece of speculative fiction.

THE ALIEN MACHINE by Raymond F. Jones

CHAPTER I

Unit 16

THE OFFICES of Joe Wilson, purchasing agent for Ryberg Instrument Corporation, looked out over the company's private landing field. He stood there by the window now, wishing that they didn't, because it was an eternal reminder that he'd once had hopes of becoming an engineer instead of an office flunky.

Through the window he saw the silver test ship of the radio lab level off at bullet speed, circle once and land. That would be Cal Meacham at the controls, Joe thought. Even the company pilots didn't dare bring a ship in that way. But Cal Meacham was the best man in the radio instrument business and getting canned was a meaningless penalty for him. He could get the same or higher salary from a dozen other places for the asking.

Joe chomped irritably on his cigar and turned away from the window.

Then he picked up a letter from his desk. It was in answer to an order he had placed for condensers for Cal's hot transmitter job—Cal's stuff was always hot, Joe thought. He'd already read the letter three times but he started on it for the fourth.

Dear Mr. Wilson:

We were pleased to receive your order of the 8thfor samples of our XC-109 condenser. However, we find that our present catalogue lists no such item nor did we ever carry it.

We are, therefore, substituting the AB-619 model, a high-voltage oil-filled transmitting-type condenser. As you specified, it is rated at 10,000 volts with 100% safety factor and has 4 mf. capacity.

We trust these will meet with your approval and that we may look forward to receiving your production order for these items. It is needless, of course, to remind you that we manufacture a complete line of electronic components. We would be glad to furnish samples of any items from our stock which might interest you.

Respectfully yours, A. G. Archnanter Electronic Service—Unit 16.

Joe Wilson put the letter down slowly and picked up the box of beads which had come with it. Complete and resigned disgust occupied his face.

He picked up a bead by one of the leads that stuck out of it. The bead was about a quarter of an inch in diameter and there seemed to be a smaller concentric shell inside it. Between the two appeared to be some reddish liquid. Another wire connected to the inner shell but for the life of him Joe couldn't see how that inner wire came through the outer shell.

There was something funny about it, as if it came directly from the inner without passing through the outer. He knew that was silly but it made him dizzy to try to concentrate on the spot where it came through.

The spot seemed to shift and move.

"Ten thousand volts!" he muttered. "Four mikes!"

He tossed the bead back into the box with disgust. Cal would be hotter than the transmitter job when he saw these.

Joe heard the door of his secretary's office open and glanced through the glass panel. Cal Meacham was coming in. He burst open the door with a breeze that ruffled the letters on Joe's desk.

"See that landing I made, Joe? Markus says I ought to be able to get my license to fly that crate in another week."

"I'll bet he added 'if you live that long.'"

"Just because you don't recognize a hot pilot when you see one—What are you so glum about, anyway? And what's happened to those condensers we ordered three days ago? This job's hot."

Joe held out the letter silently. Cal scanned the page swiftly and flipped it back onto the desk.

"Swell. We'll try them out. They're down in receiving, I suppose?

Give me an order- and I'll pick them up on my way to the lab."

"They aren't in receiving. They came in the envelope with the letter."

"What are you talking about? How could they send sixteen mikes of ten kw condensers in an envelope?"

Joe held up one of the beads by a wire—the one that passed through the outer shell without passing through it.

"This is what they sent. Guaranteed one hundred percent voltage safety factor."

Cal glanced at it. "Whose leg are you trying to pull?"

"I'm not kidding. That's what they sent."

"Well, what screwball's idea of a joke is this, then? Four mikes! Did you call receiving?"

Joe nodded. "I checked good. These beads are all that came."

Muttering, Cal grasped one by the lead wire and held it up to the light.

He saw the faintly appearing internal structure that Joe had puzzled over.

"It would be funny if that's what these things actually were, wouldn't it?" he said. "Aw—it's crazy!"

"You could just about build a fifty kw transmitter in a suitcase, provided you had other corresponding components to go along."

Cal picked up the rest of the beads and dropped them in his shirt pocket.

"Get another letter off right away. Better call them on the teletype instead. Tell them this job is plenty hot and we've got to have those condensers right away."

"Okay. What are you going to do with the beads?"

"I might put ten thousand volts across them and see how long it takes to melt them down. See if you can find out who pulled this gag."

Cal Meacham left for the transmitter lab. For the rest of the morning he checked over the ante a on his new set, which wasn't getting the soup out the way it should. He forgot about the glass beads completely until late in the afternoon.

As he bent his head down into the framework of the ground transmitter, one of the sharp leads of the alleged condensers struck him through his shirt.

He jerked sharply and bumped his head on the iron framework. Cursing the refractory transmitter, the missing condensers and the practical joker who had sent the beads, he grabbed the things out of his shirt pocket and was about to hurl them across the room.

But a quirk of curiosity halted his hand in midair. Slowly he lowered it and looked again at the beads that seemed to glare at him like eyes in the palm of his hand.

He called across the lab to a junior engineer. "Hey, Max, come here.

Put these things on voltage breakdown and see what happens."

"Sure."

The junior engineer rolled them over in his palm. "What are they?"

"Just some gadgets we got for test. I forgot about them until now."

He resumed checking the transmitter. Crazy notion, that—as if the beads actually were anything but glass beads. There was only one thing that kept him from forgetting the whole matter. It was the way that one wire seemed to slide around on the bead when you looked at it In about five minutes Max was back. "I shot one of your gadgets all to heck. It held up until thirty-three thousand volts—and not a microamp of leakage. Whatever they are they're good. Want to blow the rest?"

Cal turned slowly. He wondered if Max were in on the gag too. "A few hundred volts would jump right around the glass from wire to wire without bothering to go through. Those things are supposed to be condensers but they're not that good."

"That's what the meter read. Too bad they aren't big enough to have some capacity with a voltage breakdown like that."

"Come on," said Cal. "Let's check the capacity."

First he tried another on voltage test. He watched it behind the glass shield as he advanced the voltage in steps of five kv. The bead held at thirty—and vanished at thirty-five.

His lips compressed tightly, Cal took the third bead to a standard capacity bridge. He adjusted the plugs until it balanced—at just four microfarads.

Max's eyes were slightly popped. "Four mikes—they can't be!"

"No, they can't possibly be, can they?"

Back in the purchasing office he found Joe Wilson sitting morosely at the desk, staring at a yellow strip of teletype paper.

"Just the man I'm looking for," said Joe. "I called the Continental Electric and they said—" "I don't care what they said." Cal laid the remaining beads on the desk in front of Joe. "Those little dingwhizzits are four-mike condensers that don't break down until more than thirty thousand volts. They're everything Continental said they were and more. Where did they get them? Last time I was over there Simon Foreman was in charge of the condenser department. He never "Will you let me tell you?" Joe interrupted. "They didn't come from Continental—so Continental says. They said no order for condensers has been received from here in the last six weeks. I sent a reorder by TWX."

"I don't want their order then. I want more of these!" Cal held up the bead. "But where did they come from if not from Continental?"

"That's what I want to know."

"What do you mean, you want to know? What letterhead came with these?

Let's see that letter again."

"Here it is. It just says, 'Electronic Service—Unit Sixteen." I thought that was some subsection of Continental. There's no address on it."

Cal looked intently at the sheet of paper. What Joe said was true.

There was no address at all. "You're sure this came back in answer to an order you sent Continental?"

Wearily, Joe flipped over a file. "There's the duplicate of the order I sent."

"Continental always was a screwball outfit," said Cal, "but they must be trying to top themselves. Write them again. Refer to the reference on this letter. Order a gross of these condensers. While you're at it ask them for a new catalogue if ours is obsolete. I'd like to see what else they list besides these condensers."

"Okay," said Joe. "But I tell you Continental says they didn't even get our order."

"I suppose Santa Claus sent these condensers!"

Three days later Cal was still ironing the bugs out of his transmitter when Joe Wilson called again.

"Cal? Remember the Continental business? I just got the condensers—and the catalogue! For the love of Pete, get up here and take a look at it!"

"A whole gross of condensers? That's what I'm interested in."

"Yes—and billed to us for thirty cents apiece."

Cal hung up and walked out towards the Purchasing Office. Thirty cents apiece, he thought. If that outfit should go into the business of radio instruments they could probably sell a radio compass for five bucks at that rate.

He found Joe alone, an inch-thick manufacturer's catalogue open on the desk h front of him.

"Did this come from Continental?" said Cal.

Joe shook his head and turned over the front cover. It merely said, Electronic Service—Unit 16. No indication of address.

"We send letters to Continental and stuff comes back," said Cal.

"Somebody over there must know about this! What did you want? What's so exciting about the catalogue?"

Joe arched his eyebrows. "Ever hear of a catherimine tube? One with an endiom complex of plus four, which guarantees it to be the best of its kind on the market?"

"What kind of gibberish is that?"

"I dunno but this outfit sells them for sixteen dollars each." Joe tossed the catalogue across the desk. "This is absolutely the cockeyedest thing I ever saw. If you hadn't told me those beads were condensers I'd say somebody had gone to a lot of work to pull a pretty elaborate gag. But the condensers were real—and here's a hundred and forty-four more of them."

He picked up a little card with the beads neatly mounted in small holes.

"Somebody made these. A pretty doggoned smart somebody, I'd say—but I don't think it was Continental."

Cal was slowly thumbing through the book. Besides the gibberish describing unfamiliar pieces of electronic equipment there was something else gnawing at his mind. Then he grasped it. He rubbed a page of the catalogue between his fingers and thumb.

"Joe, this stuff isn't even paper."

"I know. Try to tear it."

Cal did. His fingers merely slipped away. "That's as tough as sheet iron!"

"That's what I found out. Whoever this Electronic Service outfit is, they've got some pretty bright engineers."

"Bright engineers! This thing reflects a whole electronic culture completely foreign to ours. If it had come from Mars it couldn't be any more foreign."

Cal thumbed over the pages, paused to read a description of a volterator incorporating an electron

sorter based on entirely new principles. The picture of the thing looked like a cross between a miniature hot air furnace and a backyard incinerator and it sold for six hundred dollars.

And then he came to the back of the book, which seemed to have a unity not possessed by the first half. He discovered this to be true when he came to an inner dividing cover in the center of the catalogue.

For the first time, the center cover announced, Electronic Service—Unit 16 offers a complete line of interocitor components. In the following pages you will find complete descriptions of components which reflect the most modern engineering advances known to interocitor engineers.

"Ever hear of an interocitor?" said Cal.

"Sounds like something a surgeon would use to remove gallstones."

"Maybe we should order a kit of parts and build one up," said Cal whimsically.

"That would be like a power engineer trying to build a high-power communications receiver from the ARRL Amateur's Handbook catalogue section."

"Maybe it could be done," said Cal thoughtfully. He stopped abruptly and stared down at the pages before him. "But good heavens, do you realize what this means—the extent of the knowledge and electronic culture behind this?

It exists right here around us somewhere."

"Maybe some little group of engineers in a small outfit that doesn't believe in mixing and exchanging information through the IRE and so on?

But are they over at Continental? If so why all the beating about the bush telling us they didn't get our order and so on?"

"It looks bigger than that," said Cal doubtfully. "Regardless, we know their mail goes through Continental."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Do? Why, I'm going to find out who they are, of course. If this is all it seems to be I'll hit them up for a job. Mind if I take this catalogue along? I'd like to use it at home tonight. I'll see you get it back in the morning. I'll probably want to order some more of this stuff just to see what happens."

"It's all right with me," said Joe. "I don't know what it's all about.

I'm no engineer—just a dumb purchasing agent around this joint."

"For some things you can be thankful," said Cal.

CHAPTER II

The Tumbling BarRel

THE SUBURB of Mason was a small outlying place, a moderately concentrated industrial center.

Besides Ryberg Instrument there were Eastern Tool and Machine Company, the Metalcrafters, a small die-making plant and a stapling-machine factory.

This concentration of small industry in the suburb made for an equally concentrated social order of engineers and their families. Most of them did have families but Cal Meacham was not yet among these.

He had been a bachelor for all of his thirty-five years and it looked as if he were going to stay that way. He admitted that he got lonesome sometimes but considered it well worth it when he heard Frank Staley up at two a.m. in the apartment above his, coaxing the new baby into something resembling silence.

Cal enjoyed his engineering work with an intensity that more than compensated for any of the joys of family life he might be missing.

He ate at the company cafeteria and went home to ponder the incredible catalogue that Joe Wilson had obtained. The more he thought about the things listed and described there, the more inflamed his imagination became.

He couldn't understand how such engineering developments could have been kept quiet. And now, why were they being so prosaically announced in an ordinary manufacturer's catalogue? It made absolutely no sense whatever.

He settled down in his easy chair with the catalogue propped on his lap.

The section on interocitor components held the greatest fascination for him. All the rest of the catalogue listed merely isolated components and nowhere was any other device besides the interocitor mentioned.

But there was not a single clue as to what the interocitor was, its function or its purpose. To judge from the list of components, however, and some of the sub-assemblies that were shown, it was a terrifically complex piece of equipment.

He wondered momentarily if it were some war-born apparatus that hadn't come out until now.

He picked up the latest copy of the Amateur's Handbook and thumbed through the catalogue section. Joe had been about right in comparing the job assembling an interocitor to that of a power engineer trying to build a radio from the ARRL catalogue. How much indication would there be to a power engineer as to the purposes of the radio components in the catalogue?

Practically none. He couldn't hope to figure out the interocitor with no more clues than a components catalogue. He gave up the speculation.

He had already made up his mind to go to Continental and find out what this was all about—and maybe put in his application for a job there.

He had to know more about this stuff.

At seven there was a knock on his door. He found Frank Staley and two other engineers from upstairs standing in the hall.

"The wives are having a gabfest," said Frank. "How about a little poker?"

"Sure, I could use a little spending money this week. But are you guys sure you can stand the loss?"

"Ha, loss, he says," said Frank. He turned to the others. "Shall we tell him how hot we are tonight, boys?"

"Let him find out the hard way," said Edmunds, one of Eastern's top mechanical engineers.

By nine-thirty Cal had found out the hard way. Even at the diminutive stakes they allowed themselves he was forty-five dollars in the hole.

He threw in his final hand. "That's all for me for tonight. You can afford to lose your lunch money for a couple of months but nobody will make mine up at home if I can't buy it at the plant."

Edmunds leaned back in his chair and laughed. "I told you we were hot tonight. You look about as glum as Peters, our purchasing agent, did today.

I had him order some special gears from some outfit for me a while back and they sent him two perfectly smooth wheels.

"He was about ready to hit the ceiling and then he discovered that one wheel rolled against the other would drive it. He couldn't figure it out.

Neither could I when I saw it. So I mounted them on shafts and put a motor on one and a pony brake on the other.

"Believe it or not those things would transfer any horsepower I could use and I had up to three hundred and fifty. There was perfect transfer without measurable slippage or backlash, yet you could remove the keys and take the wheels off the shafts just as if there was nothing holding them together.

The craziest thing you ever saw."

Like some familiar song in another language Edmunds' story sent a wave of almost frightening recognition through Cal. While Staley and Larsen, the third engineer, listened with polite disbelief, Cal sat in utter stillness, knowing it was all true. He thought of the strange catalogue over in his bookcase.

"Did you ever find out where the gears came from?" he asked.

"No, but we sure intend to. Believe me, if we can find out the secret of those wheels it's going to revolutionize the entire science of mechanical engineering. They didn't come from the place we ordered them from. We know that much. They came from some place called merely 'Mechanical Service—Unit Eight." No address. Whoever they are they must be geniuses besides screwball business people."

Electronic Service—Unit 16, Mechanical Service—Unit 8--they must be bigger than he had supposed, Cal thought.

He went out to the little kitchenette to mix up some drinks. From the other room he heard Larsen calling Edmunds a triple-dyed liar. Two perfectly smooth wheels couldn't transmit power of that order merely by friction.

"I didn't say it was friction," Edmunds was saying. "It was something else—we don't know what."

Something else, Cal thought. Couldn't Edmunds see the significance of such wheels? They were as evident of a foreign kind of mechanical culture as the condensers were evidence of a foreign electronic culture.

He went up to the Continental plant the next day, his hopes of finding the solution there considerably dimmed. His old friend, Simon Foreman, was still in charge of the condenser development.

He showed Simon the bead and Simon said, "What kind of a gadget is that?"

"A four-mike condenser. You sent it to us. I want to know more about it."

Cal watched the engineer's face closely.

Simon shook his head as he took the bead. "You're crazy! A four-mike condenser—we never sent you anything like this!"

He knew Simon was telling the truth.

It was Edmunds' story of the toothless gears that made it easier for Cal to accept the fact that the condensers and catalogue had not come from Continental. This he decided during the train ride home.

But where were the engineers responsible for this stuff? Why was it impossible to locate them? Mail reached Electronic Service through Continental. He wondered about Mechanical Service. Had Eastern received a catalogue of foreign mechanical components?

But his visit to Continental had thrown him up against a blank wall.

No one admitted receiving the condenser orders and Cal knew none of Simon Foreman's men were capable of such development.

And that catalogue! It wasn't enough that it should list scores of unfamiliar components. It had to be printed on some unknown substance that resembled paper only superficially.

That was one more item that spoke not merely of isolated engineering advances but of a whole culture unfamiliar to him. And that was utterly impossible. Where could such a culture exist?

Regardless of the fantastic nature of the task, he had made up his mind to do what he had suggested only as a joke at first. He was going to attempt the construction of an interocitor. Somehow he felt that there would be clues to the origin of this fantastic engineering.

But could it be done? He'd previously dismissed it as impossible but now that it was a determined course the problem had to be analyzed further. In the catalogue were one hundred and six separate components but he knew it was not simply a matter of ordering one of each and putting them together.

That would be like ordering one tuning condenser, one coil, one tube and so on and expecting to build a super-het from them. In the interocitor there would be multiples of some parts, and different electrical values.

And, finally, if he ever got the thing working how would he know if it were performing properly or not?

He quit debating the pros and cons. He had known from the moment he first looked through the catalogue that he was going to try.

He went directly to the Purchasing Office instead of his lab the next morning. Through the glass panels of the outer room he could see Joe Wilson sitting at his desk with his face over a shoe box, staring with an intent and agonized frown.

Cal grinned to himself. It was hard to tell when Joe's mugging was real or not but he couldn't imagine him sitting there doing it without an audience.

Cal opened the door quietly, and then he caught a glimpse of the contents of the box. It was wriggling. He scowled, too.

"What have you got now? An earthworm farm?"

Joe looked up, his face still wearing a bewildered and distant expression.

"Oh, hello, Cal. This is a tumbling barrel."

Cal stared at the contents of the box. It looked like a mass of tiny black worms in perpetual erratic motion. "What's the gag this time?

That box of worms doesn't look much like a tumbling barrel ."

"It would—if they were metallic worms and just walked around the metal parts that needed tumbling."' "This isn't another Electronic Service--16 product, is it?"

"No. Metalcrafters sent over this sample. Wanted to know if they could sell us any for our mechanical department. The idea is that you just dump whatever needs tumbling into a box of this compound, strain it out in a few minutes and your polishing job is done."

"What makes the stuff wiggle?"

"That's the secret that Metalcrafters won't tell."

"Order five hundred pounds of it," said Cal suddenly. "Call them on the phone and tell them we can use it this afternoon."

"What's the big idea? You can't use it."

"Try it."

Dubiously, Joe lifted the phone and contacted the order department of Metalcrafters. He placed the order. After a moment he hung up. "They say that due to unexpected technological difficulties in production they are not accepting orders for earlier than thirty-day delivery."

"The crazy dopes! They won't get it in thirty days or thirty months."

"What are you talking about?"

"Where do you think they got this stuff? They didn't discover it.

They got it the same way we got these condensers and they're hoping to cash in on it before they even know what it is. As if they could figure it out in thirty days!"

Then he told Joe about the gears of Edmunds.

"This begins to look like more than accident," said Joe.

Cal nodded slowly. "Sample of products of an incredible technology were apparently mis-sent to three of the industrial plants here in Mason. But I wonder how many times it has happened in other places.

It almost looks like a deliberate pattern of some sort."

"But who's sending it all and how and why? Who developed this stuff?

It couldn't be done on a shoestring, you know. That stuff smells of big money spent in development labs. Those condensers must have cost a half million, I'll bet."

"Make out an order for me," said Cal. "Charge it to my project.

There's enough surplus to stand it. I'll take the rap if anybody snoops."

"What do you want?"

"Send it to Continental as before. Just say you want one complete set of components as required for the construction of a single interocitor model.

That may get me the right number of duplicate parts unless I get crossed up by something I'm not thinking of."

Joe's eyebrows shot up. "You're going to try to build one by the Chinese method?"

"The Chinese method would be simple," Cal grunted. "They take a finished cake and reconstruct it. If I had a finished interocitor I'd gladly tackle that. This is going to be built by the Cal Meacham original catalogue method."

He worked overtime for the next couple of days to beat out the bugs in the airline ground transmitter and finally turned it over to the production department for processing. There'd still be a lot of work on it because production wouldn't like some of the complex sub-assemblies he'd been forced to design—but he'd have time for the interocitor stuff if and when it showed up.

After two weeks he was almost certain that something had gone wrong and they had lost contact with the mysterious supplier. His disappointment vanished when the receiving clerk called him and said that fourteen crates had just been received for him.

Fourteen crates seemed a reasonable number but he hadn't been prepared for the size of them. They stood seven feet high and were no smaller than four by five feet in cross section.

Cal groaned as he saw them standing on the receiving platform. He visioned cost sheets with

astronomical figures on them. What had he got himself into?

He cleared out one of his screen rooms and ordered the stuff brought in.

Then he began the job of unpacking the crates as they were slowly dollied in. He noted with some degree of relief that approximately one half the volume of the crates was taken up by packing materials—but that still left an enormous volume of components.

In some attempt to classify them he laid the like units together upon the benches around the room. There were plumbing units of seemingly senseless configuration, glass envelopes with innards that looked like nothing he had ever seen in a vacuum tube before. There were boxes containing hundreds of small parts which he supposed must be resistances or condensers—though his memory concerning the glass beads made him cautious about jumping to conclusions regarding anything.

After three hours, the last of the crates had been unpacked and the rubbish carted away. Cal Meacham was left alone in the midst of four thousand, eight hundred and ninety-six—he'd kept a tally of them—unfamiliar gadgets of unknown purposes and characteristics. And he hoped to assemble them into a complete whole-of equally unknown purposes.

He sat down on a lab stool and regarded the stacks of components glumly.

In his lap rested the single guide through this impossible maze—the catalogue.

CHAPTER III

Assembly Problem

AT QUITTING TIME he went out for dinner at the plant cafeteria, then returned to the now empty lab and walked around the piles, sizing up the job he'd let himself in for. It would take all his nights for months to come.

He hoped there wouldn't be too much curiosity about his project but he could see little chance of keeping it entirely under cover. Most of all he was concerned with keeping Billingsworth, the chief engineer, from complaining about it. Not that he and Billingsworth weren't on good terms but his was big for a sideline project.

It was obvious that certain parts of the miscellaneous collection constituted a framework for the assembly to be mounted on. He gathered these together and set them up tentatively to see if he could get some idea of the size and shape of the finished assembly.

One thing stood out at once. On the bench was a cube of glass, sixteen inches on a side, filled with a complex mass of elements. Twenty-three terminals led from the elements to the outside of the cube. One side of it was coated as if it were some kind of screen. And within one of the framework panels there was an opening exactly the right size to accommodate the face of the cube.

That narrowed the utility of the device, Cal thought. It provided an observer with some kind of intelligence which was viewed in graphic or pictorial form as with a cathode-ray tube.

But the complexity of the cube's elements and the multiple leads indicated another necessity. He would have to order duplicates of many parts because these would have to be dissected to destruction in order to determine some possible electrical function.

Nearly all the tubes fell into this classification and he began listing these parts so that Joe could reorder.

He then turned to familiarizing himself with the catalogue name of each part and establishing possible functions from the descriptions and specifications given.

Slowly through the early morning hours the clues increased. Pieces were fitted together as if the whole thing were a majestic jigsaw puzzle designed by some super-brain.

At three a.m. Cal locked the screen room and went home for a few hours' sleep. He felt elated by the slight success he'd had, the few clues that he seemed to have discovered.

He was in at eight again and went to Joe's office. As always Joe was there. Cal sometimes wondered if he slept in the place.

"I see your stuff came," said Joe. "I wanted to come down, but I thought you'd like to work it out alone for a while."

"I wish you had," Cal said. He understood Joe's frustrations. "Come on down anytime. There's something I'd like you to do. On the crates the stuff came in there was an address of a warehouse in Philadelphia.

I wrote it down here. Could you get one of the salesmen to see what kind of a place it is when he's through there? I'd rather not have him know I'm interested.

This may be a lead."

"Sure. I think the Sales Office has a regular trip through there next week. I'll see who's on it. What have you found out?"

"Not too much. The thing has a screen for viewing but no clue as to what might be viewed. There's a piece of equipment referred to as a planetary generator that seems to be a sort of central unit, something like the oscillator of a transmitter, perhaps. It was mounted in a support that seems to call for mounting on the main frame members.

"This gives me an important dimension so I can finish the framework.

But there's about four hundred and ninety terminals-more or less—on that planetary generator. That's what's got me buffaloed but good.

These parts seem to be interchangeable in different circuits, otherwise they might be marked for wiring.

"The catalogue refers to various elements, which are named, and gives electrical values for them—but I can't find out which elements are which without tearing into sealed units. So here's a reorder on all the parts I may have to open up."

Joe glanced at it. "Know what that first shipment cost?"

"Don't tell me it cleaned my project out?"

"They billed us this morning for twenty-eight hundred dollars."

Cal whistled softly. "If that stuff had been produced by any of the technological methods I know anything about they would have sent a bill nearer twenty-eight thousand."

"Say, Cal, why can't we track this outfit down through the patent office.

There must be patents on the stuff."

"There's not a patent number on anything. I've already looked."

"Then let's ask them to send us either the number or copies of the patents on some of these things. They wouldn't distribute unpatented items like this, surely. They'd be worth a fortune."

"All right. Put it in the letter with your reorder. I don't think it will do much good."

Cal returned to the lab and worked impatiently through the morning on consultations with the production department regarding his transmitter.

After lunch he returned to the interocitor. He decided against opening any of the tubes. If anything should happen to their precarious contact with the supplier before they located him He began work on identification of the tube elements. Fortunately the catalogue writers had put in all voltage and current data. But there were new units that made no sense to Cal—albion factors, inverse reduction index, scattering efficiency.

Slowly he went ahead. Filaments were easy but some of the tubes had nothing resembling filaments or cathodes. When he applied test voltages he didn't know whether anything was happening or not.

Gradually he found out. There was one casual sketch showing a catherimine tube inside a field-generating coil. That gave him a clue to a whole new principle of operation.

After six days he was able to connect proper voltages to more than half his tubes and get the correct responses as indicated by catalogue specifications. With that much information available he was able to go ahead and construct the entire power supply of the interocitor.

Then Joe called him one afternoon. "Hey, Cal! Have you busted any of those tubes yet?"

"No. Why?"

"Don't! They're getting mad or something. They aren't going to send the reorder we asked for and they say there are no patents on the stuff. Besides, that address in Philadelphia turned out to be a dud.

"Cramer, the salesman who looked it up, says there's nothing there but an old warehouse that hasn't been used for years. Cal, who can these guys be?

I'm beginning to not like the smell of this business."

"Read me their letter."

"'Dear Mr. Wilson,' they say, 'We cannot understand the necessity of the large amount of reorder which you have submitted to us. We trust that the equipment was not broken or damaged in transit. However, if this is the case please return the damaged parts and we will gladly order replacements for

you. Otherwise we fear that, due to the present shortage of interocitor equipment, it will be necessary to return your order unfilled.

"'We do not understand your reference to patents. There is nothing of such a nature in connection with the equipment. Please feel free to call upon us at any time. If you find it possible to function under present circumstances will you please contact us by interocitor at your earliest convenience and we will discuss the matter further.'" "What was that last line?" Cal asked.

"—'contact us by interocitor—"'

"That's the one! That shows us what the apparatus is—a communication device."

"But from where to where and from whom to whom?"

"That's what I intend to find out. Believe me I do—now as never before!"

They weren't going to let him open up the tubes or other sealed parts, that was obvious. Cal arranged for an X-ray and fluoroscope equipment and began to obtain some notion of the interior construction of the tubes he could not otherwise analyze. He could trace the terminals back to their internal connections and be fairly sure of not burning things up with improper voltages to the elements.

Besides the power supply the entire framework with the planetary generator was erected and a bank of eighteen catherimine tubes was fed by it. The output of these went to a nightmare arrangement of plumbing that included unbelievable flares and spirals. Again he found prealigned mounting holes that enabled him to fit most of the plumbing together with only casual reference to the catalogue.

Growing within him was the feeling that the whole thing was some incredible intricately designed puzzle and that clues were deliberately placed there for anyone who would look.

Then one of the catherimine tubes rolled off a table and shattered on the floor. Cal thought afterwards that he must have stood staring at the shards of glass for a full five minutes before he moved. He wondered if the whole project were Lying there in that shattered heap.

Gently, with tweezers, he picked out the complex tube elements and laid them gently on a bed of dustless packing material. Then he called Joe.

"Get off another letter to Continental—airmail," he said. "Ask if we can get a catherimine replacement. I just dropped one."

"Aren't you going to send the pieces along as they asked?"

"No. I'm not taking any chances with what I've got. Tell them the remains will be forwarded immediately if they can send a replacement."

"O.K. Mind if I come down tonight and look things over?"

"Not at all. Come on down."

It was a little before five when Joe Wilson finally entered the screen room. He looked around and whistled softly. "Looks like you're making something out of this after all."

A neat row of panels nearly fifteen feet long stretched along the center of the room. In the framework behind was a nightmarish assemblage of gadgets and leads. Joe took in the significance of the hundreds of leads that were in place.

"You're really figuring it out!"

"I think so," said Cal casually. "It's pretty tricky."

Joe scanned the mass of equipment once more. "You know, manufacturers' catalogues are my line," he said. "I see hundreds of them every year.

I get so I can almost tell the inside layout just by the cover.

"Catalogue writers aren't very smart, you know. They're mostly forty-fifty-dollar-a-week kids that come out of college with a smattering of journalism but are too dumb to do much about it. So they end up writing catalogues.

"And no catalogue I ever saw would enable you to do this!"

Cal shrugged. "You never saw a catalogue like this before."

"I don't think it's a catalogue."

"What do you think it is?"

"An instruction book. Somebody wanted you to put this together."

Cal laughed heartily. "You must read too much science fiction on your days off. Why would anyone deliberately plant this stuff so that I would assemble it?"

"Do you think it's just a catalogue?"

Cal stopped laughing. "All right, you win. I'll admit it but I still think it's crazy. There are things in it that wouldn't be quite necessary if it were only a catalogue. For instance, look at this catherimine tube listing.

"It says that with the deflector grid in a four-thousand-gauss field the accelerator plate current will be forty mils. Well, it doesn't matter whether it's in a field or not. That's normal for the element under any conditions.

"But that's the only place in the whole book that indicates the normal operation of the tube is in this particular field. There were a bunch of coils with no designation except that they are static field coils.

"On the basis of that one clue I put the tubes and coils together and found an explanation of the unknown 'albion factor' that I've been looking for. It's that way all along. It can't be merely accidental.

You're right about catalogue and technical writers in general but the guy that cooked this one up was a genius.

"Yet I still can't quite force myself to the conclusion that I was supposed to put this thing together, that I was deliberately led into it."

"Couldn't it be some sort of Trojan Horse gadget?"

"I don't see how it could be. What could it do? As a radiation weapon it wouldn't have a very wide range—I hope."

Joe turned toward the door. "Maybe it's just as well that you broke that tube."

The pile of components whose places in the assembly still were to be determined was astonishingly small, Cal thought, as he left the lab shortly after midnight.

Many of the circuits were complete and had been tested, with a response that might or might not be adequate for their design. At least nothing blew up.

The following afternoon, Joe called again "We've lost our connection.

I just got a TWX from Continental. They want to know what the devil we're talking about in our letter of yesterday—the one asking for a replacement."

There was only a long silence.

"Cal—you still there?"

"Yes, I'm here. Get hold of Oceanic Tube Company for me. Ask them to send one of their best engineers down here—Jerry Lanier if he's in the plant now. We'll see if they can rebuild the tube for us."

"That is going to cost money."

"I'll pay it out of my own pocket if I have to. This thing is almost finished."

Why had they cut their connection, Cal wondered? Had they discovered that their contact had been a mistake? And what would happen if he did finish the interocitor? He wondered if there would be anyone to communicate with even if he did complete it.

It was so close to completion now that he was beginning to suer from the customary engineer's jitters that come when a harebrained scheme is finally about to be tested. Only this was about a thousand times worse because he didn't even know that he would recognize the correct operation of the interocitor if he saw it.

It was ninety-eight-percent complete and he still could detect no coherency in the thing. It seemed to turn completely in upon itself.

True, there was a massive source of radiation but it seemed to be entirely dissipated within the instrument. There was no part that could conceivably act as an antenna to radiate or collect radiation and so provide means of communication.

Cal went over his circuit deductions again and again but the more he tracked down the available clues, the more certain it seemed that he had built correctly. There was no ambiguity whatever in the cleverly buried clues.

Jerry Lanier finally showed up. Cal gave him only the broken catherimine tube and allowed him to see none of the rest of the equipment.

Jerry scowled at the tube. "Since when did they put squirrel cages in glass envelopes? What is this thing?"

"Top hush-hush," said Cal. "All I want to know is can you duplicate it?"

"Sure. Where did you get it?"

"Military secret."

"It looks simple enough. We could probably duplicate it in three weeks or so."

"Look, Jerry, I want that bottle in three days."

"Cal, you know we can't—" "Oceanic isn't the only tube maker in the business. This might turn out to be pretty hot stuff."

"All right, you horse trader. Guarantee it by air express in five days."

"Good enough."

For two straight nights Cal didn't go home. He grabbed a half hour's snooze on a lab bench in the early morning. And on the second day he was almost caught by the first lab technician who arrived.

But the interocitor was finished.

The realization seemed more like a dream than reality but every one of the nearly five thousand parts had at last been incorporated into the assembly behind the panels—except the broken tube.

He knew it was right. With a nearly obsessive conviction he felt sure that he had constructed the interocitor just as the unknown engineers had designed it.

He locked the screen room and left word with Joe to call him if Jerry sent the tube, then went home to sleep the clock around.

When he finally went back to the lab a dozen production problems on the airline transmitter had turned up and for once he was thankful for them.

They helped reduce the tension of waiting to find out what the assembly of alien parts would do when he finally turned on the power to the whole unit.

He was still working on the job of breaking down one of the transmitter sub-assemblies when quitting time came. It was only because Nell Joy, the receptionist in the front hall, was waiting for her boy friend that he received the package at all.

She called him at twenty after five.

"Mr. Meacham? I didn't know whether you'd still be here or not.

There's a special-delivery boy here with a package for you. It looks important. Do you want it tonight?"

"I'll say I do!"

He was out by her desk, signing for the package, almost before she had hung up. He tore off the wrappings on the way back to the lab.

CHAPTER IV

Contact!

THERE IT WAS!

As beautiful a job of duplication as he could have wished for. Cal could have sworn there was no visual difference between it and the original. But the electrical test would tell the story.

In the lab he put the duplicate tube in the tester he'd devised and checked the albion. That was the critical factor.

He frowned as the meter indicated ten percent deviation, but two of the originals had tolerances that great. It would do.

His hand didn't seem quite steady as he put the tube in its socket. He stood back a moment, viewing the completed instrument.

Then he plunged the master switch on the power panel.

He watched anxiously the flickering hands of two-score meters as he advanced along the panels, energizing the circuits one by one.

Intricate adjustments on the panel controls brought the meter readings into line with the catalogue specifications which he had practically memorized by now—but which were written by the meters for safety.

Then, slowly, the grayish screen of the cubical viewing tube brightened.

Waves of polychrome hue washed over it. It seemed as if an image were trying to form but it remained out of focus, only a wash of color.

"Turn up the intensifier knob," a masculine voice said suddenly. "That will clear your screen."

To Cal it was like words coming suddenly at midnight in a ghost-ridden house. The sound had come out of the utter unknown into which the interocitor reached—but it was human.

He stepped back to the panel and adjusted the knob. The shapeless color flowed to solid lines, congealed to an image. And Cal stared.

He didn't know what he had expected. But the prosaic colorimage of the man who watched him from the plate was too ordinary after the weeks-long effort expended on the interocitor.

Yet there was something of the unknown in the man's eyes too

something akin to the unknown of the interocitor. Cal drew slowly nearer the plate, his eyes unable to

leave that face, his breath hard and fast.

"Who are you?" he said almost inaudibly. "What have I built?"

For a moment the man made no answer as if he hadn't heard. His image was stately and he appeared of uncertain late middle age. He was of large proportions and ruggedly attractive of feature. But it was his eyes that held Cal with such intense force-eyes which seemed to hold an awareness of responsibility to all the people in the world.

"Who are you?" Cal repeated softly.

"We'd about given you up," the man said at last. "But you've passed.

And rather well too."

"Who are you? What is this—this interocitor I've constructed?"

"The interocitor is simply an instrument of communication.

Constructing it was a good deal more. You'll follow my meaning in a moment. Your first question is more difficult to answer but that is my purpose.

"I am the employment representative of a group—a certain group who are urgently in need of men, expert technologists. We have a good many stringent requirements for prospective employees. So we require them to take an aptitude test to measure some of those qualifications we desire.

"You have passed that test!"

For a moment Cal stared uncomprehendingly. "What do you mean? This makes no sense. I have made no application to work with your—your employers."

A faint trace of a smile crossed the man's face. "No. No one does that. We pick our own applicants and test them, quite without their awareness they are being tested. You are to be congratulated on your showing."

"What makes you think I'd be interested in working for your employers?

I don't even know who they are, let alone what work they require done."

"You would not have come this far unless you were interested in the job we have to offer."

"I don't understand."

"You have seen the type of technology in our possession. No matter who or what we are, having come this far you would pursue us to the ends of the Earth to find out how we came by that technology and to learn its mastery for yourself. Is it not so?"

The arrogant truth of the man's statement was like a physical blow that rocked Cal back on his heels. There was no uncertainty in the man's voice.

He -new what Cal was going to do more surely than Cal had known himself up to this moment.

"You seem pretty certain of that." Cal found it hard to keep an impulsive hostility out of his voice.

"I am. We pick our applicants quite carefully. We make offers only to those we are certain will accept. Now, since you are about to join us, I will relieve your mind of some unnecessary tensions.

"It has undoubtedly occurred to you, as to all thinking people of your day, that the scientists have done a particularly abominable job of dispensing the tools they have devised. Like careless and indifferent workmen they have tossed the products of their craft to gibbering apes and baboons. The results have been disastrous to say the least.

"Not all scientists, however, have been quite so indifferent. There are a group of us who have formed an organization for the purpoSe of obtaining better and more conservative distribution of these tools. We call ourselves, somewhat dramatically perhaps, but none the less truthfully, Peace Engineers. Our motives are sure to encompass whatever implications you can honestly make of the term.

"But we need men—technicians, men of imagination, men of good will, men of superb engineering abilities—and our method has to be somewhat less than direct. Hence, our approach to you. It involved simply an interception of mail in a manner you would not yet understand.

"You passed your aptitude test and so were more successful than some of your fellow engineers in this community."

Cal thought instantly of Edmunds and the toothless gears and the tumbling barrel compound.

"Those other things—" he said. "They would have led to the same solution?"

"Yes. In a somewhat different way, of course. But that is all the information I can give you at this time. The next consideration is your coming here."

"Where? Where are you? How do I come?"

The readiness with which his mind accepted the fact of his going shocked and chilled him. Was there no other alternative that he should consider?

For what reasons should he ally himself with this unknown band who called themselves Peace Engineers? He fought for rational reasons why he should not.

There were few that he could muster up. None, actually. He was alone, without family or obligations. He had no particular professional ties to prevent him from leaving.

As for any potential personal threat that might lie in alliance with the Peace Engineers—well, he wasn't much afraid of anything that could happen to him personally.

But in reality none of these factors had any influence. There was only one thing that concerned him. He had to know more about that fantastic technology they possessed.

And they had known that was the one factor capable of drawing him.

The interviewer paused as if sensing what was in Cal's mind. "You will learn the answers to all your questions in proper order," he said.

"Can you be ready tomorrow?"

"I'm ready now," Cal said.

"Tomorrow will be soon enough. Our plane will land on your airfield exactly at noon. It will remain fifteen minutes. lt will take off without you if you are not in it by that time. You will know it by its color. A black ship with a single horizontal orange stripe, an Army BT-13 type.

"That is all for now. Congratulations and good luck to you. I'll be looking forward to seeing you personally.

"Stand back now. When I cut off, the interocitor will be destroyed.

Stand back!"

Cal backed sharply to the far side of the room. He saw the man's head nod, his face smiling a pleasant good-by, then the image vanished from the screen.

Almost instantly there came the hiss of burning insulation, the crack of heat-shattered glass. From the framework of the interocitor rose a blooming bubble of smoke that slowly filled the room as wires melted and insulation became molten and ran.

Cal burst from the screen room and grasped a nearby fire extinguisher, which he played intO the blinding smoke pouring from the room. He emptied that one and ran for another.

Slowly the heat and smoke dispelled. He moved back into the room and knew then that the interocitor could never be analyzed or duplicated from that ruin. Its destruction had been thorough.

It was useless trying to sleep that night. He sat in the park until after midnight when a suspicious cop chased him off. After that he simply walked the streets until dawn, trying to fathom the implications of what he'd seen and heard.

Peace Engineers What did the term mean? It could imply a thousand things, a secret group with dictatorial ambitions in possession of a powerful technology—a bunch of crackpots with strange access to genius—or it could be what the term literally implied.

But there was no guarantee that their purposes were altruistic. With his past knowledge of human nature he was more inclined to credit the possibility that he was being led into some Sax Rohmer melodrama.

At dawn he turned toward his apartment. There he cleaned up and had breakfast and left the rent and a note instructing the landlord to dispose of his belongings as he wished. He went to the plant in midmorning and resigned amidst a storm of protests from Billingsworth and a forty-percent salary increase offer.

That done, it was nearly noon and he went up to see Joe Wilson .

"I wondered what happened to you this morning," said Joe. "I tried to call you for a couple of hours."

"I slept late," said Cal. "I just came in to resign."

"Resign?" Joe Wilson stared incredulously. "What for? What about the interocitor?"

"it blew up in my face. The whole thing's gone."

"I hoped you would make it," Joe said a little sadly. "I wonder if we will ever find out where that stuff came from."

"Sure," said Cal carelessly. "It was just some shipping mixup. We'll find out about it someday."

"Cal—" Joe Wilson was looking directly into his face. "You found out, didn't you?"

Cal hesitated a moment. He had been put under no bond of secrecy.

What could it matter? He understood something of the fascination the problem held for a frustrated engineer turned into a technical purchasing agent.

"Yes," he said. "I found out."

Joe smiled wryly. "I was hoping you would. Can you tell me about it?"

"There's nothing to tell. I don't know where they are. All I know is that I talked to someone. They offered me a job."

There it was. He saw it coming in low and fast, a black and orange ship.

Wing flaps down, it slowed and touched the runway. Already it was like the symbol of a vast and important future that had swept him up.

Already the familiar surroundings of Ryberg's were something out of a dim and unimportant past.

"I wish we could have learned more about the interocitor," said Joe.

Cal's eyes were still straining toward the ship as it taxied around on the field. Then he shook hands solemnly with Joe. "You and me both," he said.

"Believe me—" Joe Wilson stood by the window and as Cal went out toward the ship he knew he'd been correct in that glimpse he'd got of the cockpit canopy silhouetted against the sky.

The ship was pilotless.

Another whispering clue to a mighty, alien technology.

He knew Cal must have seen it too but Cal's steps were steady as he walked toward it.

THIS ISLAND EARTH Universal-International 1955

86 minutes. Produced by William Alland; directed by Joseph Newman;

screenplay by Franklin Coen and Edward G. O'Callaghan; director of

photography, Clifford Stine, A.S.C.; art directors, Alexander Golitzen

and Richard H. Riedel; special effects by Clifford Stine and

THE COSMIC FRAME

by Paul W. Fairman filmed as

INVASION OF THE SAUCERMEN

(American-International, 1957)

The year is 1957. Danny and The Juniors are singing "At the Hop" over countless jalopy radios, drive-in movies remain the most popular form of youth-oriented entertainment, and the successful orbiting of Russia's Sputnik satellite sparks new interest in the mysteries of outer space. What better opportunity to bring together two of the most currently viable elements at the box office: science fiction and teenagers.

Invasion of the Saucermen and its notorious co-feature l Was a Teenage Werewolf were the vanguard in a tidal wave of "hip" horror movies that made millions for quick-buck production studios such as Allied Artists and American-International. Yet for all their shoddiness, many of the features allowed burgeoning talent to develop into the top stars of today. TV's Michael Landon got his first big break in the aforementioned wolfman flick, Steve McQueen showed promise in The Blob, Jack Nicholson triumphed in The Terror, and actor-comedian Frank Gorshin brought his inimitable comic touch to Saucermen.

Perhaps this is one reason why the motion picture differs so vastly from the short dramatic tale by Paul Fairman. Although both movie and story deal with the concept of teenagers confronting alien beings, "The Cosmic Frame" is primarily concerned with stunning readers with its unexpected O'Henry-esque twist ending.

Saucermen's producers also started out aiming for shocks, but veteran director Edward L. Cahn figured the kids would surely jeer at the ridiculous-looking monster makeups. Studio heads agreed, and the film went out as the first teenage SF send up.

It was far from the last—many more hideous creatures would threaten unsuspecting teenyboppers in the years to come. The Giant Gila Monster, released just months afterward, capitalized on a showdown between hot-rodding delinquents and a monstrous man-eating lizard.

Teenage CaVeman, a 1958 entry, starred TvS "Man from UNCLE" Robert Vaughn as a prehistoric James Dean-type searching for the meaning of life amid sinister proceedings. And, of course, the most exploitive picture of all had to be the infamous Ghost of Dragstrip Hollow, which included music, monsters, and lots of leather-jacketed mayhem.

Fortunately, none of these elements play a part in the following yarn

.

.

. a story that answers the intriguing question: How can there be a case of highway manslaughter when the unwary victim isn't even human?

THE COSMIC FRAME

by Paul W. Fairman THE BLUE LIGHT flashed out beyond Pelham Woods. It was seen by several of the boys lounging in front of the barber shop on the main street of Kensington Corners. "Now what in the nation was that?" one of them asked.

"Low lightning. What else?"

"Didn't look like lightning. Held too long. Besides, there's no clouds over there."

"Might be some low ones you can't see for the trees."

Sam Carter, fresh from a late-afternoon shave, came out of the barber shop and said, "What are you fellows arguing about?"

"Just saw a flying saucer."

Sam grinned. "Only one? Nobody's got a right to brag these days unless they see at least six. And they've all got to spout at least five colors."

"This one was blue."

"Always preferred the yellow ones myself." The boys grinned lazily and Sam looked across the street and called, "Lee! Hold up. I'm walking your way."

Lee Hayden, a big, sour-faced man, stopped and waited and when Sam Carter came abreast, asked, "What are those no-good loafers jabbering about today?"

"Flying saucers. A blue one this time."

"Uh-huh. Good a way as any to kill valuable time."

"Oh, they're all right, Lee. Say—it looks as though things might be getting serious between our kids."

Lee Hayden snorted. "Darn fool kids. Don't know their own minds.

It's a sign of the times."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that. My Johnny's pretty serious about life. I've got a hunch Joan will be good for him."

Lee scowled. "Kids these days never have a thought about tomorrow—where the next dollar's coming

from. All they think about is getting hitched—making more trouble for themselves—going into debt."

"It always seems to work out, though. Nothing wrong with either of them that marriage won't cure." Sam Carter was one of the few men in Kensington Corners who liked Lee Hayden. Most people resented his sour outlook on life and his money-grubbing instincts. Sam understood the man, however, and this was fortunate for the sake of Johnny and Joan.

Sam said, "Looks like their date tonight's a pretty important one.

Johnny asked me for the Packard.

Doesn't want to propose to his girl, I guess, in that stripped-down hot rod of his."

"They're too young to get married."

"Well, maybe it won't happen for a while," Sam said, easily. "See you later, Lee." Sam turned in at his gate and Lee Hayden went on down the street, scowling as usual.

While, out beyond Pelham Woods, the space ship with the blue exhaust settled on the surface of Nelson's Pond and sank from sight.

Sam Carter's phone rang sharply. He awoke and shook the sleep from his eyes. He snapped on the light and noted that it was one-thirty as he picked up the phone. "Hello?"

"Hello—Dad! Are you awake? Listen to me. Please—" "Johnny! What in the devil's wrong? You in trouble?"

"Bad trouble, Dad!"

Sam's feet were on the floor. "An accident? Anybody hurt? Damn it, boy!

You should have been home a long time ago."

"Don't lecture me, Dad. Just listen!"

"Where are you? Tell me about it."

"I took Joan to the dance at Storm Lake and we were on the way home when—" "When what? Talk, boy!"

"We hit—" "You killed somebody?"

"Yes—well, no—we—" "For heaven's sake, Johnny! Calm down and tell me. Either you did or you didn't. Don't tell me you ran away from an accident ! " "No—listen, Dad, will you just hang up and get out here as fast as you can? I need help. l need help bad. Just get out here!"

"Okay, son, I'll try and make that hot rod of yours go—" "It's shot, Dad—it won't run. Call Mr. Hayden. Use his car."

"All right. Where are you?"

"I'm calling from a farmhouse on Garner Road—Frank Williams' place.

He's a farmer. You know that back road where--?"

"I know. Where did you have the trouble? Where's the car?"

"At the bend about two miles from Storm Lake. That's where it—it happened. Joan and I'll go back there and wait."

"Stay where you are—we'll pick you up."

"No Dad! I didn't tell these people what happened. We'll wait near the car."

"All right, anything you say. I'll make it as fast as I can."

Ten minutes later, Sam Carter was sitting beside Lee Hayden as the latter pointed his Chevrolet toward Storm Lake. "Damn fool kids!" Lee muttered.

"Why didn't you find out what happened? They may have killed somebody.

Probably did. The least he could have done was tell you."

"Let's just get there and find out," Sam said with tightness in his voice.

They went into Garner Road from the south end and Lee drove slowly along the ruts and chuckholes. "Why in tarnation did they pick a road like this?"

"It probably looked pretty good to them."

"I wonder how good it looks now?"

"Can't you drive a little faster?"

"And break a spring? I'm doing the best I can."

Sam held his impatience in check until the headlights picked out the

rear end of the Packard. It stood squarely in the middle of the road

.

"Doesn't look as though there's any damage," Lee said.

"We can't see the front end yet."

Lee pulled up fifty feet back and the two men got out. There was a flash of white and the two young people appeared from some bushes by the roadside. Joan, a pretty little brunette, looked ethereal in her white party dress—out of place in spike-heel pumps on this lonely country road.

Johnny Carter's handsome young face was drawn and pale.

"What were you two hiding from?" Lee demanded.

Sam asked, "What's wrong here? There's no other car."

"It wasn't a crackup, Dad. It's around in front. Come on. Joany—you stay here."

"I—I feel a little weak. I'll get into the Chevy."

Johnny helped her in and closed the door. Then he turned and said, "Come on." As they walked around the Packard, he added, "Now brace yourselves.

You're going to see something you never saw before in your lives."

They rounded the car and stood for a moment. Then Johnny snapped on the Packard's headlights and Lee Hayden croaked, "Great God in heaven!

Is it real?"

Sam Carter felt a chill run both ways from the center of his spine, freezing his legs and rendering him mute.

Johnny said, "We were driving along and I wasn't negligent—I swear it.

Maybe not too alert, but who'd expect anyone—anything—to appear on this road without lights? Anyhow, I saw a flash of it and hit the brakes, but it was too late. I thought it was a man at first and I got out and—and actually picked it up before I realized—" He took an unconscious step backward and rubbed the sleeves of his coat as though they were covered with filth.

Still frozen, Sam Carter tried to find thoughts to describe the horrible thing. It was not more than four feet long and had a head far too large for the thin body. Its skin was green, the shades varying from deep to very pale. It had thin legs and two spiderlike arms ending in hands with thin delicate fingers and a thumb on either side.

Its eyes were lidless and sunk into bony pockets in the round, pale green skull. There was a network of dark veins all over the body and the feet were shapeless pads with neither toes nor heels.

There was a full minute of complete silence. Then Lee Hayden got out a few words. "Is—is it dead?"

"It's dead all right," Johnny said. "When I first came around the car—after I hit it—the big veins were pulsing—you could see its blood—or whatever's in there, moving through. Then they got slower and stopped altogether."

"That blue light the boys saw," Sam muttered. "It was a space ship this time."

Lee Hayden, though his face was still filled with loathing, seemed to have recovered somewhat. "This one must have wandered away. Never saw a car before. Didn't know there was any danger."

"Probably attracted by the headlights—held like a moth."

Johnny said, “It’s ugly right enough, but it looks kind of pathetic, too—lying there dead. Never knew what hit it.”

Sam came out of his shock. “ne of us had better go for the sheriff.

You go, Johnny. Take the Chevy and drop Joan off at home.”

“Okay.” The boy turned away.

Lee Hayden had been staring at the hideous thing and a calculating light was now dawning in his eyes. “Wait a minute, Johnny.” Lee raised his eyes to Sam Carter. “You realize what this means?”

“I realize that—“ “This is something from outer space, man! An—an extraterrestrial, they call it, that came down to earth in a ship and—and here it is.”

Sam was puzzled. “I can see it.”

“Right. And you and I—the four of us—are the only ones on earth who know about it.”

“Joany doesn’t,” Johnny said. “I don’t think she saw it when we hit it, and after I looked I wouldn’t let her go near the front end. I was afraid it would make her sick.”

Lee Hayden’s eyes glowed. “Good. Smart boy! Then there’s just the three of us who know.”

Sam Carter frowned at his friend. “What are you driving at, Lee?”

“Just this—there’s money in this thing, Sam! Loads of money! If it’s handled right. But we can’t go off half-cocked.”

“I’m afraid I don’t get you—“ “Use your head! If we call the sheriff and everybody finds out, then we’ve lost it. There’ll be photographers and reporters and the knowledge will be public property.”

“You mean keep it quiet?” Johnny asked. “Unless we bury it somewhere and forget about it, the public’s bound to find out.”

“Of course—we want them to. But in the right way. Not until we’ve thought it over and figured the best way to exploit it. Get what I mean? How would a showman handle this? How would Barnum have done it?

Call in the police and give it to the public in exchange for a lot of publicity and no money?

Use your heads-both of you!”

Sam said, “No, Lee! We’ve got no right! This is serious. This may be an invasion of some kind. We’ve got to be public-spirited and the hell with the money.”

Johnny said, “If we knew Russia was going to attack us tomorrow would we have any right to sell the information to Washington?”

“The boy’s right, Lee. We can’t fool around with a thing as big as this.”

"The hell we can't. This is no invasion and you both know it. It's a chance to make more money than any of us ever saw."

"It's not right, Lee."

"Why not? We aren't going to withhold anything. I say, just take it easy and don't rush into anything with our mouths wide open and spouting information. Twenty-four hours is all we'll need. I'll go to Sioux City and get the thing lined up right. Get a contract with the people who know how to exploit a thing like this if we can't figure out how to do it ourselves."

"But in the meantime, what if--?"

"Twenty-four hours won't make any difference, I tell you! And in that length of time we can arrange a setup to make fortunes. Sam—don't you want the kids to start out life with a real bankroll? Do you want them to struggle along the way you and I had to? In one day, we can set them up for life—and ourselves too—and without hurting a soul. It's your obligation, Sam. Can't you see it?"

Lee Hayden argued on. After a while, Johnny Carter stopped voicing objections and watched his father, evidently ready to go in either direction Sam decided. The father looked at the son and misinterpreted his manner and expression. He thought, will the boy hold it against me if I deprive him of this opportunity? Do I have a right to deprive him? Possibly Lee is right. Either way, the country will know—the government will be alerted. He turned to Lee Hayden and asked, "How do you think we should go about it?"

Hayden's eyes brightened. "I knew you'd see it my way. Now, I'll tell you what we'll do. You and Johnny take the thing home and hide it in your basement. Yours is best because there are only the two of you. I couldn't hide a fly speck in my place that my wife wouldn't find."

"What about Joan?" Johnny asked. "She didn't see this thing but she knows something happened. She'll ask questions."

"You leave my daughter to me. Joan will do as I say—for a while at least.

Now, let's get going."

Johnny went back to Hayden's Chevrolet, turned it laboriously around and headed for home with Joan beside him. Gripping the wheel, he grimly staved off her questions, stopping them finally, with, "Ask your father when he gets home. He'll tell you about it."

Joan Hayden crouched miserably in her seat. A fine end, this was, to a romantic date.

After the Chevrolet disappeared, Lee Hayden said, "Well, we might as well get it over with. You take the arms—I'll grab the feet here, and we'll drop it in the back seat."

Sam Carter shuddered. "I'll open the trunk. I wouldn't Want to drive back with this thing in the seat behind me—even if it is dead." He went back and opened the trunk and returned to lift his share of the burden. There was a loathsome, cold, damp softness to the skin that made him shudder as he gripped the arms. There was little weight, however, and they soon had the monstrosity locked in the trunk.

As Sam drove, quiet and sober, Lee Hayden sat staring ahead, leaning tensely forward, as though already reaching for the money that would soon be his. He said, "Look, Sam—this thing is big-real big."

"You said that before."

"But now I get to thinking and I realize the potential. The hell with stopping at Sioux City. I'll head straight to Chicago. And we don't have to ring anyone else in on it."

"Letter be careful. We don't know anything about exploitation."

"The newspaper men take care of that after they see the thing. They'll give us all the publicity we need. We'll rent a theater in Chicago and do some advertising—" "They'll laugh at us. They'll think it's a racket."

"Of course they will—until they see it. Until the newspaper men see it.

Then we'll have to rent the stadium."

"I hope we don't get into any trouble with the government over this thing."

"How can we? We aren't violating any law. And who can blame us for trying to make a dollar? When they ask us about it we'll tell them."

"They'll nail us for not reporting an accident," Sam said, smiling weakly.

Lee Hayden laughed and slapped his friend on the shoulder. "Good man!

I knew you'd be smart and see it my way. What right have we got to turn down money?"

Johnny was home and waiting when they got there. Sam drove straight into the garage. Johnny said, "I was trying to figure what we'd do with the thing, Dad, so I emptied the deep freeze in the basement. I put everything I could into the refrigerator in the kitchen and just left the rest of the stuff out."

"Good boy," Lee said heartily. "That's using your head. What's a little spoiled food when we're on the cash end of a deal like this?"

They carried the feather-light, green body to the basement under cover of the darkness and laid it to rest in the freezer. Then they went up into the kitchen where Sam made coffee and they sat planning their strategy.

"Don't think we ought to rush into this thing," Lee Hayden said.

"We've got to be kind of careful."

This surprised Sam Carter. "How come? You were in such an all-fired hurry—" "But there's angles. It's practically morning, and if I go kiting off to Chicago after being out all night, the wife's going to start wondering.

There'll be rumors all over town. I've got to talk to that girl of mine, too. Keep her quiet until we get this thing rolling."

Lee Hayden had changed. With something to get his teeth into, he'd assumed leadership in an impressive manner. Sam said, "All right.

Whatever you say, but I'm still a little nervous about—" "Now take it easy! I tell you everything's going to be all right. You two get some sleep and I'll give you a ring."

Sam Carter went to bed, but sleep would not come. He lay staring at the ceiling, thinking of the horror that rested in the deep freeze in the basement. The fact that the thing was dead brought little comfort.

He had been lying wide-eyed for perhaps an hour, when he heard the noise. He stiffened, strained his ears. The sound came again. No doubt now. From the basement. He got up and clawed for the lamp at his bedside when the door opened. The light snapped on to reveal Johnny's pale, frightened face.

They stared at each other for a long moment. Then Johnny whispered, "Did you hear it, Dad? From downstairs. It—" "Lee, I'll bet. He couldn't sleep and came back for another look. Let's go see."

"He wouldn't do that. You know what I think? It wasn't dead! The thing was still alive and now it's come to and it's prowling the basement. What are we going to do, Dad? We don't know anything about it. Maybe it's dangerous—deadly—" "Now don't get excited. I'm sure it's Lee." Sam picked up the phone and dialed. They waited tensely as another of the rattling sounds came from the basement. Then Lee Hayden's voice. "Hello."

"Lee—Lee, for God's sake. Get over here! There's trouble. The thing's come alive."

Lee Hayden didn't even bother to answer. Sam heard the phone slammed down.

He pulled on his pants and had just finished with his shoes when the front gate slammed and there were running footsteps on the walk. They met Lee as he came in the front door. "What's wrong?" he snapped.

"What's happened?"

"There's someone down there," Johnny said. "We thought maybe it was you—" "What would I be doing down there? Why didn't you go find out?"

"Then maybe—maybe the thing came alive."

"And you didn't check? Do you realize what it would cost us if it got away?"

"But it may be dangerous."

"Nonsense, but if it did come to, it's ten times more valuable." Lee was already at the basement door. He went fearlessly down the steps, Sam and Johnny Carter following behind with more caution.

At the foot of the stairs, Lee stopped dead. He pointed. The freezer cover was lifted back. Lee rushed across and looked in. "It's empty," he moaned.

"It got away."

He turned toward the open door leading into the backyard. "Come on—we've got to catch it—got to get it back!" He dived out into the darkness. Sam, following, snatched a flashlight off its hook by the door.

In the yard, he bumped hard into Lee Hayden, who had stopped suddenly.

"The garage," Lee whispered hoarsely. "The side door. It's open!"

Sam flashed the light and the three of them walked softly forward.

"Maybe somebody's just trying to steal it," Johnny whispered.

Then Sam snapped on the garage light and no one did any more talking.

There were six of the things present. Two of them were carrying the body from the freezer. The other four carried peculiar tubes in their hands, somewhat smaller than Sam's flashlight. And if the creatures were repulsive when dead, they were bone-chilling when alive and functioning. Their cold, lidless eyes bored into the three men and Sam muttered, "We're done for!"

The creatures regarded them with no fear whatever. There appeared to be contempt in the leering faces, and the tone of the odd, birdlike chirping with which they apparently communicated with each other, heightened Sam's feeling that they were voicing this same contempt.

But something told him they were deadly. Sam breathed, "Don't move!

For God's sake, stand where you are! Don't antagonize them!" He had the same feeling he'd have had at facing a den of rattle-snakes; the feeling that one false move would bring out striking fangs.

The creatures seemed to discuss the three among themselves, and Sam was sure the weird squeaking that punctuated the chirpings was their form of laughter. But they made no move to kill, and Sam began to hope they were harmless.

Then he was speedily disabused of the idea. In a concerted move, they turned their small tubes on the front of the Packard. There was no sound, no heat as from a high-frequency ray, only the soft sound of metal being bent and twisted by a hand gloved in velvet. And the three men stared as the front end of the Packard twisted and writhed itself into the same disorder that would have resulted from smashing headlong into a brick wall.

Then the truth dawned on Sam—or what appeared to be the truth. "They aren't mad at us. They think the Packard did it; they're punishing the car for killing their comrade. Don't you get it?"

The creature paid no attention to the words. That emboldened Lee. He said, "I think you're right. It's incredible! How can they be smart enough to invent and use space ships, and yet not know the car isn't responsible for the killing?"

"I don't know. Shall we back out of here? Make a break for it?"

"I think we'd better stay just as we are," Lee said promptly.

This last proved good advice because, after demolishing the front end of the car to their satisfaction, the creatures squealed and chirped for a while, evidently voicing their satisfaction, and then trooped out into the darkness. As they moved past, each of them leered at the frozen three, squeaked a nerve-wracking farewell, and the troop was gone, carrying its dead with it.

An explosive sigh from Lee Hayden broke the silence. "I've got a hunch we were damn lucky," he said. "Damn lucky to still be alive."

"How do you think they found the house?" Johnny asked.

Sam said, "I don't know and I don't care. I'm just glad they're gone."

"We've got to do something about this," Lee Hayden said with virtuous indignation. "Alert the police. The village—the whole nation may be in danger. It's up to us to do something about it!"

Sam didn't bother to call Lee's attention to his sudden reversal. It didn't seem important now. The only important thing was to spread the word.

They left the garage and headed for the house. But, halfway up the walk, the sound of an approaching car stopped them. The car pulled up in front of the house and two uniformed men got out.

"It's the State Troopers," Johnny shouted. "They must have got wind of it already!"

The troopers approached swiftly. Lee began, "Officers—" but one of them cut him off.

"We're looking for a Mr. Sam Carter. We got this address and—" "I'm Mr. Carter," Sam said. "There's something—" "I'll do the talking.

You have a son?"

"Of course. This is my son—John Carter—" "You have a Packard roadster?"

"Yes."

"Was your son driving it on Garner Road last night? Near the farm of Frank Williams?"

"Why, yes. He took his girl to a dance at Storm Lake and—" "We know all about that. How do you suppose we traced you down?"

"But why--?"

The trooper scowled. "Did you think the body would not be found?"

"But you couldn't have—what body--?"

The second trooper snorted in disgust. "Frank Williams' body. Where a car smashed him into a tree and killed him. From what we can find out, no one used that road last night except your son."

Johnny stepped forward. "You mean Frank Williams was found killed on the road?"

"That's right. Now we may be wrong of course. But the car that hit him will be pretty well smashed up. If you'd let us take a thorough look at your car—" Sam Carter said, "But this is absurd, officer.

There was—there was—" "Look, all we have to do is check your car. If it's not damaged—" It dawned on Sam, now, what the green intruders had been up to—what they'd accomplished. They'd killed Williams—set the scene—arranged the colossal frame-up. He looked at Lee Hayden and said, "We thought they were mad at the car! We thought—" The trooper said, "What are you talking about, mister?"

"Well, there was this little green man from Mars or somewhere, and Johnny hit him when—" Sam stopped talking when he saw the look on the trooper's face. Then he knew how foolish it would sound—how utterly unbelievable. He looked back at Lee Hayden and began to laugh. But there was no mirth in the sound. Only fear—and hopelessness.

INVASION OF THE SAUCERMEN American-International 1957

69 minutes. Executive producer, Samuel Z. Arkoft; produced by James H.

Nicholson and Robert Gurney, Jr.; directed by Edward L. Cahn; screenplay by Al Martin, with additional dialogue by Robert Gurney, Jr.; director of photography, Frederick E. West; art director, Don Ament; music composed and conducted by Ronald Sinclair; production manager, sart Carre; edited by Charles Gross, Jr.; special makeup by Paul slaisdell; special photographic effects by Howard A. Anderson; costumes by Marge Corso; sound by Phil Mitchell.

Cast Steve Terrell (Johnny Carter), Gloria Castillo (Jean Hayden), Frank Gorshin (Joe Gruen), Lyn Osborn (Art Burns), Raymond Hatton (Farmer Larkin), Russ sender (The Doctor), Douglas Henderson (Lt. Wilkins), Sam Buffington (Army Officer), Bob Einer (Soda Jerk), Jason Johnson (The Detective).

THE FLY by George Langelaan filmed as THE FLY (Twentieth Century-Fox, 1958)

This terrifying mixture of science fiction and horror was an unprecedented hit with readers when it first appeared in the June 1957 issue of Playboy.

It won that magazine's Best Fiction Award and went on to be selected for inclusion in The Annual of the Year's Best SF. It's no wonder that "The Fly" was immediately snapped up by Twentieth Century-Fox and made into a very successful same-name movie.

Director Kurt Neumann, who had previously helmed one of the first big SF hits, Rocketship X-M, infused the film with just the right balance of terror and black humor. Thanks to credible acting and superior makeup and effects, suspension of belief is easy when scientist Andre Delambre reveals and enters his homemade matter teleporter.

Unfortunately he fails to notice the tiny insect which has flown into the chamber with him. And therein hangs a tale....

Langelaan's horrific vision hit the cinemascope screens in blazing color just about a year after its initial magazine appearance. Outside theaters, on posters and marquees, the producers offered the sum of one hundred dollars to anyone who could prove "it couldn't really happen."

Considering that other concurrent genre efforts such as it: The Terror from Beyond Space and 4-D Man were prepared to pay fifty thousand and one million respectively for the same reason, this seems quite a meager amount. But no matter—not one moviegoer ever collected a dime on any exploitation picture during the 1950s.

Yet audiences didn't mind, as long as the film delivered the right dosage of fright and excitement. The Fly was a winner on both counts.

The New York Tines called it "the most originally suggestive hair-raiser since 'The Thing."

“ Variety labeled it “unusually believable.”

Even the author, the late newsman George Langelaan, was quite pleased with the translation from printed page to silver screen. For once, not one fact in the story was altered to suit the whim of a producer, star or director.

Even the original character names—right down to the house cat, Dandelo—were retained in the superior screenplay by James Clavell (Tai Pan, Shogun) .

Unfortunately, the momentum was lost in two sadly inferior sequels, Return of the Fly (1959) and Curse of the Fly (1965), both of which were pale rehashes of what had come before. The power and impact of the original remains unequaled to this day. Read it and see.

THE FLY

by George Langelaan TELEPHONES and telephone bells have always made me uneasy. Years ago, when they were mostly wall fixtures, I disliked them, but nowadays, when they are planted in every nook and corner, they are a downright intrusion. We have a saying in France that a coalman is master in his own house; with the telephone that is no longer true, and I suspect that even the Englishman is no longer king in his own castle.

At the office, the sudden ringing of the telephone annoys me. It means that, no matter what I am doing, in spite of the switchboard operator, in spite of my secretary, in spite of doors and walls, some unknown person is coming into the room and onto my desk to talk right into my very ear, confidentially—whether I like it or not. At home, the feeling is still more disagreeable, but the worst is when the telephone rings in the dead of night. If anyone could see me turn on the light and get up blinking to answer it, I suppose I would look like any other sleepy man annoyed at being disturbed. The truth in such a case, however, is that I am struggling against panic, fighting down a feeling that a stranger has broken into the house and is in my bedroom. By the time I manage to grab the receiver and say: “Ici Monsieur Delambre. Je vous ecoute,” I am outwardly calm, but I only get back to a more normal state when I recognize the voice at the other end and when I know what is wanted of me.

This effort at dominating a purely animal reaction and fear had become so effective that when my sister-in-law called me at two in the morning, asking me to come over, but first to warn the police that she had just killed my brother, I quietly asked her how and why she had killed Andre.

“But, Francois! ... I can’t explain all that over the telephone.

Please call the police and come quickly.”

“Maybe I had better see you first, Helene?”

“No, you’d better call the police first; otherwise they will start asking you all sorts of awkward questions. They’ll have enough trouble as it is to believe that I did it alone ... And, by the way, I suppose you ought to tell them that Andre ... Andre’s body, is down at the factory. They may want to go there first.”

“Did you say that Andre is at the factory?”

“Yes ... under the steam-hammer.”

"Under the what!"

"The steam-hammer! But don't ask so many questions. Please come quickly Francois! Please understand that I'm afraid ... that my nerves won't stand it much longer!"

Have you ever tried to explain to a sleepy police officer that your sister-in-law has just phoned to say that she has killed your brother with a steam-hammer? I repeated my explanation, but he would not let me.

"Oui, monsiellr, oui, I hear ... but who are you? What is your name?

Where do you live? I said, where do you live!"

It was then that Commissaire Charas took over the line and the whole business. He at least seemed to understand everything. Would I wait for him? Yes, he would pick me up and take me over to my brother's house. When?

In five or ten minutes.

I had just managed to pull on my trousers, wriggle into a sweater and grab a hat and coat, when a black Citroen, headlights blazing, pulled up at the door.

"I assume you have a night watchman at your factory, Monsieur Delambre.

Has he called you?" asked Commissaire Charas, letting in the clutch as I sat down beside him and slammed the door of the car.

"No, he hasn't. Though of course my brother could have entered the factory through his laboratory where he often works late at night ...

all night sometimes."

"Is Professor Delambre's work connected with your business?"

"No, my brother is, or was, doing research work for the Minis tere de l'Air. As he wanted to be away from Paris and yet within reach of where skilled workmen could fix up or make gadgets big and small for his experiments, I offered him one of the old workshops of the factory and he came to live in the first house built by our grandfather on the top of the hill at the back of the factory."

"Yes, I see. Did he talk about his work? What sort of research work?"

"He rarely talked about it, you know; I suppose the Air Ministry could tell you. I only know that he was about to carry out a number of experiments he had been preparing for some months, something to do with the disintegration of matter, he told me."

Barely slowing down, the Commissaire swung the car off the road, slid it through the open factory gate and pulled up sharp by a policeman apparently expecting him.

I did not need to hear the policeman's confirmation. I knew now that my brother was dead, it seemed that I had been told years ago. Shaking like a leaf, I scrambled out after the Commissaire.

Another policeman stepped out of a doorway and led us towards one of the shops where all the lights had been turned 011. More policemen were standing by the hammer, watching two men setting up a camera. It was tilted downwards, and I made an effort to look.

It was far less horrid than I had expected. Though I had never seen my brother drunk, he looked just as if he were sleeping off a terrific binge, flat on his stomach across the narrow line on which the white-hot slabs of metal were rolled up to the hammer. I saw at a glance that his head and arm could only be a flattened mess, but that seemed quite impossible; it looked as if he had somehow pushed his head and arms right into the metallic mass of the hammer.

Having talked to his colleagues, the Commissaire turned towards me:

"How can we raise the hammer, Monsieur Delambre?"

"I'll raise it for you."

"Would you like us to get one of your men over?"

"No, I'll be all right. Look, here is the switchboard. It was originally a steam-hammer, but everything is worked electrically here now. Look, Commissaire, the hammer has been set at fifty tons and its impact at zero."

"At zero ... ?"

"Yes, level with the ground if you prefer. It is also set for single strokes, which means that it has to be raised after each blow. I don't know what Helem, my sister-in-law, will have to say about all this, but one thing I am sure of: she certainly did not know how to set and operate the hammer."

"Perhaps it was set that way last night when work stopped?"

"Certainly not. The drop is never set at zero, Monsieur le

Commissaire."

"I see. Can it be raised gently?"

"No. The speed of the upstroke cannot be regulated. But in any case it is not very fast when the hammer is set for single strokes."

"light. Will you show me what to do? It won't be very nice to watch, you know."

"No, no, Monsieur le Commissaire. I'll be all right."

"All set?" asked the Commissaire of the others. "All right then, Monsieur Delambre. Whenever you like."

Watching my brother's back, I slowly but firmly pushed the upstroke button.

The unusual silence of the factory was broken by the sigh of compressed air rushing into the cylinders, a

sigh that always makes me think of a giant taking a deep breath before solemnly socking another giant, and the steel mass of the hammer shuddered and then rose swiftly. I also heard the sucking sound as it left the metal base and thought I was going to panic when I saw Andre's body heave forward as a sickly gush of blood poured all over the ghastly mess bared by the hammer.

"No danger of it coming down again, Monsieur Delambre?"

"No, none whatever," I mumbled as I threw the safety switch and, turning around, I was violently sick in front of a young green-faced policeman.

For weeks after, Commissaire Charas worked on the case, listening, questioning, running all over the place, making out reports, telegraphing and telephoning right and left. Later, we became quite friendly and he owned that he had for a long time considered me as suspect number one, but had finally given up that idea because, not only was there no clue of any sort, but not even a motive .

Helene, my sister-in-law, was so calm throughout the whole business that the doctors finally confirmed what I had long considered the only possible solution: that she was mad. That being the case, there was of course no trial.

My brother's wife never tried to defend herself in any way and even got quite annoyed when she realized that people thought her mad, and this of course was considered proof that she was indeed mad. he owned up to the murder of her husband and proved easily that she knew how to handle the hammer; but she would never say why, exactly how, or under what circumstances she had killed my brother. The great mystery was how and why had my brother so obligingly stuck his head under the hammer, the only possible explanation for his part in the drama.

The night watchman had heard the hammer all right; he had even heard it twice, he claimed. This was very strange, and the stroke-counter which was always set back to nought after a job, seemed to prove him right, since it marked the figure two. Also, the foreman in charge of the hammer confirmed that after cleaning up the day before the murder, he had as usual turned the stroke-counter back to nought. In spite of this, Helene maintained that she had only used the hammer once, and this seemed just another proof of her insanity.

Commissaire Charas, who had been put in charge of the case, at first wondered if the victim were really my brother. But of that there was no possible doubt, if only because of the great scar running from his knee to his thigh, the result of a shell that had landed within a few feet of him during the retreat in 1940; and there were also the fingerprints of his left hand which corresponded to those found all over his laboratory and his personal belongings up at the house.

A guard had been put on his laboratory and the next day half-a-dozen officials came down from the Air Ministry. They went through all his papers and took away some of his instruments, but before leaving, they told the Commissaire that the most interesting documents and instruments had been destroyed.

The Lyons police laboratory, one of the most famous in the world, reported that Andre's head had been wrapped up in a piece of velvet when it was crushed by the hammer, and one day Commissaire Charas showed me a tattered drapery which I immediately recognized as the brown velvet cloth l had seen on a table in my brother's laboratory, the one on which his meals were served when he could not leave his work.

After only a very few days in prison, Helene had been transferred to a nearby asylum, one of the three in France where insane criminals are taken care of. My nephew Henri, a boy of six, the very image of his

father, was entrusted to me, and eventually all legal arrangements were made for me to become his guardian and tutor.

Helene, one of the quietest patients of the asylum, was allowed visitors and I went to see her on Sundays. Once or twice the Commissaire had accompanied me and, later, I learned that he had also visited Helene alone.

But we were never able to obtain any information from my sister-in-law, who seemed to have become utterly indifferent. She rarely answered my questions and hardly ever those of the Commissaire. She spent a lot of her time sewing, but her favorite pastime seemed to be catching flies, which she invariably released unharmed after having examined them carefully.

Helene only had one fit of raving—more like a nervous breakdown than a fit, said the doctor who had administered morphia to quieten her—the day she saw a nurse swatting flies.

The day after Helene's one and only fit, Commissaire Charas came to see me.

"I have a strange feeling that there lies the key to the whole business, Monsieur Delambre," he said.

I did not ask him how it was that he already knew all about Helene's fit.

"I do not follow you, Commissaire. Poor Madame Delambre could have shown an exceptional interest for anything else, really. Don't you think that Flies just happen to be the border-subject of her tendency to raving?"

"Do you believe she is really mad?" he asked.

"My dear Commissaire, I don't see how there can be any doubt. Do you doubt it?"

"I don't know. In spite of all the doctors say, I have the impression that Madame Delambre has a very clear brain ... even when catching flies."

"Supposing you were right, how would you explain her attitude with regard to her little boy? She never seems to consider him as her own child."

"You know, Monsieur Delambre, I have thought about that also. She may be trying to protect him. Perhaps she fears the boy or, for all we know, hates him?"

"I'm afraid I don't understand, my dear Commissaire."

"Have you noticed, for instance, that she never catches flies when the boy is there?"

"No. But come to think of it, you are quite right. Yes, that is strange.... Still, I fail to understand."

"So do I, Monsieur Delambre. And I'm very much afraid that we shall never understand, unless perhaps your sister-in-law should get better."

"The doctors seem to think that there is no hope of any sort you know."

"Yes. Do you know if your brother ever experimented with flies?"

"I really don't know, but I shouldn't think so. Have you asked the Air Ministry people? They knew all about the work."

"Yes, and they laughed at me."

"I can understand that."

"You are very fortunate to understand anything, Monsieur Delambre. I do not ... but I hope to some day."

"Tell me, Uncle, do flies live a long time?"

We were just finishing our lunch and, following an established tradition between us, I was just pouring some wine into Henri's glass for him to dip a biscuit in.

Had Henri not been staring at his glass gradually being filled to the brim, something in my look might have frightened him.

This was the first time that he had ever mentioned flies, and I shuddered at the thought that Commissaire Charas might quite easily have been present. I could imagine the glint in his eye as he would have answered my nephew's question with another question. I could almost hear him saying: "I don't know, Henri. Why do you ask?"

"Because I have again seen the fly that Maman was looking for."

And it was only after drinking off Henri's own glass of wine that I realized that he had answered my spoken thought.

"I did not know that your mother was looking for a fly."

"Yes, she was. It has grown quite a lot, but I recognized it all right."

"Where did you see this fly, Henri, and ... how did you recognize it?"

"This morning on your desk, Uncle Francois. Its head is white instead of black, and it has a funny sort of leg."

Feeling more and more like Commissaire Charas, but trying to look unconcerned, I went on: "And when did you see this fly for the first time?"

"The day that Papa went away. I had caught it, but Maman made me let it go. And then after, she wanted me to find it again. She'd changed her mind," and shrugging his shoulders just as my brother used to, he added, "You know what women are."

"I think that fly must have died long ago, and you must be mistaken, Henri," I said, getting up and walking to the door.

But as soon as I was out of the dining room, I ran up the stairs to my study. There was no fly anywhere to be seen.

I was bothered, far more than I cared to even think about. Henri had just proved that Charas was really

closer to a clue than had seemed when he told me about his thoughts concerning Helene's pastime.

For the first time I wondered if Charas did not really know much more than he let on. For the first time also, I wondered about Helene. Was she really insane? A strange, horrid feeling was growing on me, and the more I thought about it, the more I felt that, somehow, Charas was right: Helene was getting away with it!

What could possibly have been the reason for such a monstrous crime?

What had led up to it? Just what had happened?

I thought of all the hundreds of questions that Charas had put to Helene, sometimes gently like a nurse trying to soothe, sometimes stern and cold, sometimes barking them furiously. Helene had answered very few, always in a calm quiet voice and never seeming to pay any attention to the way in which the question had been put. Though dazed, she had seemed perfectly sane then.

Refined, well-bred and well-read, Charas was more than just an intelligent police official. He was a keen psychologist and had an amazing way of smelling out a fib or an erroneous statement even before it was uttered. I knew that he had accepted as true the few answers she had given him. But then there had been all those questions which she had never answered: the most direct and important ones. From the very beginning, Helene had adopted a very simple system. "I cannot answer that question," she would say in her low quiet voice. And that was that! The repetition of the same question never seemed to annoy her. In all the hours of questioning that she underwent, Helene did not once point out to the Commissaire that he had already asked her this or that. She would simply say, "I cannot answer that question," as though it was the very first time that that particular question had been asked and the very first time she had made that answer.

This cliche had become the formidable barrier beyond which Commissaire Charas could not even get a glimpse, an idea of what Helene might be thinking. She had very willingly answered all questions about her life with my brother—which seemed a happy and uneventful one—up to the time of his end. About his death, however, all that she would say was that she had killed him with the steam-hammer, but she refused to say why, what had led up to the drama and how she got my brother to put his head under it. She never actually refused outright; she would just go blank and, with no apparent emotion, would switch over to, "I cannot answer that question for you."

Helene, as I have said, had shown the Commissaire that she knew how to set and operate the steam-hammer.

Charas could only find one single fact which did not coincide with Helene's declarations, the fact that the hammer had been used twice.

Charas was no longer willing to attribute this to insanity. That evident flaw in Helene's stonewall defense seemed a crack which the Commissaire might possibly enlarge. But my sister-in-law finally cemented it by acknowledging:

"All right, I lied to you. I did use the hammer twice. But do not ask me why, because I cannot tell you."

"Is that your only ... misstatement, Madame Delambre?" had asked the Commissaire, trying to follow up what looked at last like an advantage.

"It is ... and you know it, Monsieur le Commissaire."

And, annoyed, Charas had seen that Helene could read him like an open book.

I had thought of calling on the Commissaire, but the knowledge that he would inevitably start questioning Henri made me hesitate. Another reason also made me hesitate, a vague sort of fear that he would look for and find the fly Henri had talked of. And that annoyed me a good deal because I could find no satisfactory explanation for that particular fear.

Andre was definitely not the absent-minded sort of professor who walks about in pouring rain with a rolled umbrella under his arm. He was human, had a keen sense of humor, loved children and animals and could not bear to see anyone suffer. I had often seen him drop his work to watch a parade of the local fire brigade, or see the Tour de France cyclists go by, or even follow a circus parade all around the village.

He liked games of logic and precision, such as billiards and tennis, bridge and chess.

How was it then possible to explain his death? What could have made him put his head under that hammer? It could hardly have been the result of some stupid bet or a test of his courage. He hated betting and had no patience with those who indulged in it. Whenever he heard a bet proposed, he would invariably remind all present that, after all, a bet was but a contract between a fool and a swindler, even if it turned out to be a toss-up as to which was which.

It seemed there were only two possible explanations to Andre's death.

Either he had gone mad, or else he had a reason for letting his wife kill him in such a strange and terrible way. And just what could have been his wife's role in all this? They surely could not have been both insane?

Having finally decided not to tell Charas about my nephew's innocent revelations, I thought I myself would try to question Helene.

She seemed to have been expecting my visit for she came into the parlor almost as soon as I had made myself known to the matron and been allowed inside.

"I wanted to show you my garden," explained Helene as I looked at the coat slung over her shoulders.

As one of the "reasonable" inmates, she was allowed to go into the garden during certain hours of the day. She had asked for and obtained the right to a little patch of ground where she could grow flowers, and I had sent her seeds and some rosebushes out of my garden.

She took me straight to a rustic wooden bench which had been in the men's workshop and only just set up under a tree close to her little patch of ground.

Searching for the right way to broach the subject of Andre's death, I sat for a while tracing vague designs on the ground with the end of my umbrella.

"Francois, I want to ask you something," said Helene after a while.

"Anything I can do for you, Helene?"

"No, just something I want to know. Do flies live very long?"

Staring at her, T was about to say that her boy had asked the very same question a few hours earlier when I suddenly realized that here was the opening I had been searching for and perhaps even the possibility of striking a great blow, a blow perhaps powerful enough to shatter her stonewall defense, be it sane or insane.

Watching her carefully, I replied:

"I don't really know, Helene; but the fly you were looking for was in my study this morning."

No doubt about it I had struck a shattering blow. She swung her head round with such force that I heard the bones crack in her neck. She opened her mouth, but said not a word; only her eyes seemed to be screaming with fear.

Yes, it was evident that I had crashed through something, but what?

Undoubtedly, the Commissaire would have known what to do with such an advantage; I did not. All I knew was that he would never have given her time to think, to recuperate, but all I could do, and even that was a strain, was to maintain my best poker-face, hoping against hope that Helene's defenses would go on crumbling.

She must have been quite a while without breathing? because she suddenly gasped and put both her hands over her still open mouth.

"Francois ... did you kill it?" she whispered, her eyes no longer fixed, but searching every inch of my face.

"No."

"You have it then.... You have it on you! Give it to me'" she almost shouted, touching me with both her hands, and I knew that had she felt strong enough, she would have tried to search me.

"No, Helene, I haven't got it."

"But you know now.... You have guessed, haven't you?"

"No, Helene. I only know one thing. and that is that you are nol insane.

But I mean to know all, Helene, and, somehow, I am going to find out.

You can choose: either you tell me everything and I'll see what is to be done, or ..."

"Or what? Say it!"

"I was going to say it, Helene ... or I assure you that your friend the Commissaire will have that fly first thing tomorrow morning." She remained quite still, looking down at the palms of her hands on her lap and, although it was getting chilly, her forehead and hands were moist.

Without even brushing aside a wisp of long brown hair blown across her mouth by the breeze, she murmured:

"If I tell you ... will you promise to destroy that fly before doing anything else?"

"No, Helene. I can make no such promise before knowing."

"But, Francois, you must understand. I promised Andre that fly would be destroyed. That promise must be kept and I can say nothing until it is."

I could sense the deadlock ahead. I was not yet losing ground, but I was losing the initiative. I tried a shot in the dark:

"Helene, of course you understand that as soon as the police examine that fly, they will know that you are not insane, and then ..."

"Francois, no! For Henri's sake! Don't you see? I was expecting that fly; I was hoping it would find me here but it couldn't know what had become of me. What else could it do but go to others it loves, to Henri, to you ...

you who might know and understand what was to be done!"

Was she really mad, or was she simulating again? But mad or not, she was cornered. Wondering how to follow up and how to land the knockout blow without running the risk of seeing her slip away out of reach, I said very quietly: "Tell me all, Helene. I can then protect your boy."

"Protect my boy from what? Don't you understand that if I am here, it is merely so that Henri won't be the son of a woman who WaS guillotined for having murdered his father? Don't you understand that I would by far prefer the guillotine to the living death of this lunatic asylum?"

"I understand, Helene, and I'll do my best for the boy whether you tell me or not. If you refuse to tell me, I'll still do the best I can to protect Henri, but you must understand that the game will be out of my hands, because Commissaire Charas will have the fly."

"But why must you know?" said, rather than asked, my sister-in-law, struggling to control her temper.

"Because I must and will know how and why my brother died, Helene."

"All right. Take me back to the ... house. I'll give you what your Commissaire would call my 'Confession.'" "Do you mean to say that you have written it!"

"Yes. It was not really meant for you, but more likely for your friend, the Commissaire. I had foreseen that, sooner or later, he would get too close to the truth."

"You then have no objection to his reading it?"

"You will act as you think fit, Francois. Wait for me a minute."

Leaving me at the door of the parlor, Helene ran upstairs to her room.

In less than a minute she was back with a large brown envelope.

"Listen, Francois; you are not nearly as bright as was your poor brother, but you are not unintelligent. All I ask is that you read this alone. After that, you may do as you wish."

"That I promise you, Helene," I said, taking the precious envelope.

"I'll read it tonight and although tomorrow is not a visiting day, I'll come down to see you."

"Just as you like," said my sister-in-law without even saying good-bye as she went back upstairs.

It was only on reaching home, as I walked from the garage to the house, that I read the inscription on the envelope:

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

(Probably Commissaire Charas)

Having told the servants that I would have only a light supper to be served immediately in my study and that I was not to be disturbed after, I ran upstairs, threw Helene's envelope on my desk and made another careful search of the room before closing the shutters and drawing the curtains.

All I could find was a long since dead mosquito stuck to the wall near the ceiling.

Having motioned to the servant to put her tray down on a table by the fireplace, I poured myself a glass of wine and locked the door behind her.

I then disconnected the telephone—I always did this now at night—and turned out all the lights but the lamp on my desk.

Slitting open Helene's fat envelope, I extracted a thick wad of closely written pages. I read the following lines neatly centered in the middle of the top page:

This is not a confession because, although I killed my husband, I am not a murderess. I simply and very faithfully carried out his last wish by crushing his head and right arm under the steam-hammer of his brother's factory.

Without even touching the glass of wine by my elbow, I turned the page and started reading.

For very nearly a year before his death (the manuscript began), my husband had told me of some of his experiments. He knew full well that his colleagues of the Air Ministry would have forbidden some of them as too dangerous, but he was keen on obtaining positive results before reporting his discovery.

Whereas only sound and pictures had been, so far, transmitted through space by radio and television, Andre claimed to have discovered a way of transmitting matter. Matter, any solid object, placed in his "transmitter" was instantly disintegrated and reintegrated in a special receiving set.

Andre considered his discovery as perhaps the most important since that of the wheel sawn off the end of a tree trunk. He reckoned that the transmission of matter by instantaneous "disintegration-reintegration" would completely change life as we had known it so far. It would mean the end of all means of transport, not only of goods including food, but also of human beings. Andre, the practical scientist who never allowed theories or daydreams to get the better of him, already foresaw the time when there would no longer be any airplanes, ships, trains or cars and, therefore, no longer any roads or railway lines, ports, airports or stations. All that would be replaced by matter-transmitting and receiving stations throughout the world.

Travelers and goods would be placed in special cabins and, at a given signal, would simply disappear and reappear almost immediately at the chosen receiving station.

Andre's receiving set was only a few feet away from his transmitter, in an adjoining room of his laboratory, and he at just ran into all sorts of snags. His first successful experiment was carried out with an ash tray taken from his desk, a souvenir we had brought back from a trip to London.

That was the first time he told me about his experiments and I had no idea of what he was talking about the day he came dashing into the house and threw the ash tray in my lap.

"Helene, look! For a fraction of a second, a bare ten-millionth of a second, that ash tray had been completely disintegrated. For one little moment it no longer existed! Gone! Nothing left, absolutely nothing! Only atoms traveling through space at the speed of light!

And the moment after, the atoms were once more gathered together in the shape of an ash tray!"

"Andre, please ... please! What on earth are you raving about?"

He started sketching all over a letter I had been writing. He laughed at my wry face, swept all my letters off the table and said:

"You don't understand? Right. Let's start all over again. Helene, do you remember I once read you an article about the mysterious flying stones that seem to come from nowhere in particular, and which are said to occasionally fall in certain houses in India? They come flying in as though thrown from outside and that, in spite of closed doors and windows."

"Yes, I remember. I also remember that Professor Augier, your friend of the College de France, who had come down for a few days, remarked that if there was no trickery about it, the only possible explanation was that the stones had been disintegrated after having been thrown from outside, come through the walls, and then been reintegrated before hitting the floor or the opposite walls."

"That's right. And I added that there was, of course, one other possibility, namely the momentary and partial disintegration of the walls as the stone or stones came through."

"Yes, Andre. I remember all that, and I suppose you also remember that I failed to understand, and that you got quite annoyed. Well, I still do not understand why and how, even disintegrated, stones should be able to come through a wall or a closed door."

"But it is possible, Helene, because the atoms that go to make up matter are not close together like the bricks of a wall. They are separated by relative immensities of space."

"Do you mean to say that you have disintegrated that ash tray, and then put it together again after pushing it through something?"

"Precisely, Helene. I projected it through the wall that separates my transmitter from my receiving set."

"And would it be foolish to ask how humanity is to benefit from ash trays that can go through walls?"

Andre seemed quite offended, but he soon saw that I was only teasing, and again waxing enthusiastic, he told me of some of the possibilities of his discovery.

"Isn't it wonderful, Helene?" he finally gasped, out of breath.

"Yes, Andre. But I hope you won't ever transmit me; I'd be too much afraid of coming out at the other end like your ash tray."

"What do you mean?"

"Do you remember what was written under that ash tray?"

Yes, of course: MADE IN JAPAN. That was the great joke of our typically British souvenir."

"The words are still there, Andre; but ... look!"

He took the ash tray out of my hands, frowned, and walked over to the window. Then he went quite pale, and I knew that he had seen what had proved to me that he had indeed carried out a strange experiment.

The three words were still there, but reversed and reading:

AqAI. AAM

Without a word, having completely forgotten me, Andre rushed off to his laboratory. I only saw him the next morning, tired and unshaven after a whole night's work.

A few days later, Andre had a new reverse which put him out of sorts and made him fussy and grumpy for several weeks. I stood it patiently enough for a while, but being myself bad tempered one evening, we had a silly row over some futile thing, and I reproached him for his moroseness.

"I'm sorry, cherie. I've been working my way through a maze of problems and have given you all a very rough time. You see, my very first experiment with a live animal proved a complete fiasco."

"Andre! You tried that experiment with Dandelo, didn't you?"

"Yes. How did you know?" he answered sheepishly. "He disintegrated perfectly, but he never reappeared in the receiving set."

"Oh, Andre! What became of him then?"

"Nothing ... there is just no more Dandelo; only the dispersed atoms of a cat wandering, God knows where, in the universe."

Dandelo was a small white cat the cook had found one morning in the garden and which we had promptly adopted. Now I knew how it had disappeared and was quite angry about the whole thing, but my husband was so miserable over it all that I said nothing.

I saw little of my husband during the next few weeks. He had most of his meals sent down to the laboratory. I would often wake up in the morning and find his bed unslept in. Sometimes, if he had come in very late, I would find that storm-swept appearance which only a man can give a bedroom by getting up very early and fumbling around in the dark.

One evening he came home to dinner all smiles, and I knew that his troubles were over. His face dropped, however, when he saw I was dressed for going out.

"Oh. Were you going out, Helene?"

"Yes, the Drillons invited me for a game of bridge, but I can easily phone them and put it off."

"No, it's all right."

"It isn't all right. Out with it, dear!"

"Well, I've at last got everything perfect and I wanted you to be the first to see the miracle."

"Magnifique, Andre! Of course I'll be delighted."

Having telephoned our neighbors to say how sorry I was and so forth, I ran down to the kitchen and told the cook that she had exactly ten minutes in which to prepare a "celebration dinner."

"An excellent idea, Helene," said my husband when the maid appeared with the champagne after our candlelight dinner. "We'll celebrate with reintegrated champagne!" and taking the tray from the maid's hands, he led the way down to the laboratory.

"Do you think it will be as good as before its disintegration?" I asked, holding the tray while he opened the door and switched on the lights.

"Have no fear. You'll see! Just bring it here, will you," he said, opening the door of a telephone call-box he had bought and which had been transformed into what he called a transmitter. "Put it down on that now," he added, putting a stool inside the box.

Having carefully closed the door, he took me to the other end of the room and handed me a pair of very dark sun glasses. He put on another pair and walked back to a switchboard by the transmitter.

"Ready, Helene?" said my husband, turning out all the lights. "Don't remove your glasses till I give the word."

"I won't budge, Andre, go on," I told him, my eyes fixed on the tray which I could just see in a greenish shimmering light through the glass-paneled door of the telephone booth.

"Right," said Andre, throwing a switch.

The whole room was brilliantly illuminated by an orange flash. Inside the cabin I had seen a crackling ball of fire and felt its heat on my face, neck and hands. The whole thing lasted but the fraction of a second, and I found myself blinking at green-edged black holes like those one sees after having stared at the sun.

"Et voila! You can take off your glasses, Helene."

A little theatrically perhaps, my husband opened the door of the cabin.

Though Andre had told me what to expect, I was astonished to find that the champagne, glasses, tray and stool were no longer there.

Andre ceremoniously led me by the hand into the next room, in a corner of which stood a second telephone booth. Opening the door wide, he triumphantly lifted the champagne tray off the stool.

Feeling somewhat like the good-natured kind-member-of-the-audience that has been dragged onto the music hall stage by the magician, I repressed from saying, "All done with mirrors," which I knew would have annoyed my husband.

"Sure it's not dangerous to drink?" I asked as the cork popped.

"Absolutely sure, Helene," he said, handing me a glass. "But that was nothing. Drink this off and I'll show you something much more astounding."

We went back into the other room.

"Oh, Andre! Remember poor Dandelo!"

"This is only a guinea pig, Helene. But I'm positive it will go through all right."

He set the furry little beast down on the green enameled floor of the booth and quickly closed the door. I again put on my dark glasses and saw and felt the vivid crackling flash.

Without waiting for Andre to open the door, I rushed into the next room where the lights were still on and looked into the receiving booth.

"Oh, Andre! Chri! He's there all right!" I shouted excitedly, watching the little animal trotting round and round. "It's wonderful, Andre. It works!

You've succeeded!"

"I hope so, but I must be patient. I'll know for sure in a few weeks' time."

"What do you mean? Look! He's as full of life as when you put him in the other cabin."

"Yes, so he seems. But we'll have to see if all his organs are intact, and that will take some time. If that little beast is still full of life in a month's time, we then consider the experiment a success."

I begged Andre to let me take care of the guinea pig.

"All right, but don't kill it by over-feeding," he agreed with a grin for my enthusiasm.

Though not allowed to take Hop the name I had given the guinea pig—out of its box in the laboratory, I had tied a pink ribbon round its neck and was allowed to feed it twice a day.

Hop-la soon got used to its pink ribbon and became quite a tame little pet, but that month of waiting seemed a year.

And then one day, Andre put Miquette, our cocker spaniel, into his "transmitter." He had not told me beforehand, knowing full well that I would never have agreed to such an experiment with our dog. But when he did tell me, Miquette had been successfully transmitted half-a-dozen times and seemed to be enjoying the operation thoroughly; no sooner was she let out of the "reintegrator" than she dashed madly into the next room, scratching at the "transmitter" door to have "another go," as Andre called it.

I now expected that my husband would invite some of his colleagues and Air Ministry specialists to come down. He usually did this when he had finished a research job and, before handing them long detailed reports which he always typed himself, he would carry out an experiment or two before them.

But this time, he just went on working. One morning I finally asked him when he intended throwing his usual "surprise party," as we called it.

"No, Helene; not for a long while yet. This discovery is much too important. I have an awful lot of work to do on it still. Do you realize that there are some parts of the transmission proper which I do not yet myself fully understand? It works all right, but you see, I Can't just say to all these eminent professors that I do this and that and, poof, it works! I must be able to explain how and why it works.

And what is even more important, I must he ready and able to refute every destructive argument they will not fail to trot out, as they usually do when faced with anything really good."

I was occasionally invited down to the laboratory to witness some new experiment, but I never went unless Andre invited me, and only talked about his work if he broached the subject first. Of course it never occurred to me that he would, at that stage at least, have tried an experiment with a human being; though, had I thought about it—knowing Andre—it would have been obvious that he would never have allowed anyone into the "transmitter" before he had been through to test it first. It was only after the accident that I discovered he had duplicated all his switches inside the disintegration booth, so that he could try it out by himself.

The morning Andre tried this terrible experiment, he did not show up for lunch. I sent the maid down with a tray, but she brought it back with a note she had found pinned outside the laboratory door: "Do not disturb me, I am working."

He did occasionally pin such notes on his door and, though I noticed it, I paid no particular attention to the unusually large handwriting of his note.

It was just after that, as I was drinking my coffee, that Henri came bouncing into the room to say that he had caught a funny fly, and would I like to see it. Refusing even to look at his closed fist, I ordered him to release it immediately.

"But, Maman, it has such a funny white head!"

Marching the boy over to the open window, I told him to release the fly immediately, which he did. I knew that Henri had caught the fly merely because he thought it looked curious or different from other flies, but I also knew that his father would never stand for any form of cruelty to animals, and that there would he a fuss should he discover that our son had put a fly in a box or a bottle.

At dinner time that evening, Andre had still not shown up and, a little worried, I ran down to the laboratory and knocked at the door.

He did not answer my knock, but I heard him moving around and a moment later he slipped a note under the door. It Was typewritten:

HELENE, I AM HAVING TROUBLE. PUT THE BOY TO BED AND COME BACK IN AN HOUR S TIME. A.

Frightened, I knocked and called, but Andre did not seem to pay any attention and, vaguely reassured by the familiar noise of his typewriter, I went hack to the house.

Having put Henri to bed, I returned to the laboratory, where I found another note slipped under the door. My hand shook as I picked it up because I knew by then that something must be radically wrong. I read:

HELENE, FIRST OF ALL I COUNT ON YOU NOT TO LOSE YOUR NERVE OR Do ANYTHING RASH BECAUSE YOU ALONE CAN HELP ME. I HAVe HAD A SERIoUS ACCIDENT. I AM NOT IN ANY PARTICULAR DANGER FOR THE TIME BEING THOUGH IT is A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH. IT IS USELESS CALLING TO ME OR SAYING ANYTHING. I CANNOT ANSWER, I CANNOT SPEAK. I WANT YOU TO DO EXACTLY AND VERY CAREFULLY ALL THAT I ASK.

AFTER HAVING KNOCKED THREE TIMES TO SHOW THAT YOU UNDERSTAND AND AGREE,

FETCH ME A BOWL OF MILK LACED WITH RUM. I HAVE HAD NOTHING ALL DAY AND

CAN DO WITH IT.

Shaking with fear, not knowing what to think and repressing a furious desire to call Andre and hang away until he opened, I knocked three times as requested and ran all the way home to fetch what he wanted.

In less than five minutes I was hack. Another note had been slipped under the door:

HELENE, FOLLOW THESE INSTRUCTIONS CAREFULLY. WHEN YOU KNOCK I'LL OPEN

THE DOOR. YOU ARE TO WALK OVER TO MY DESK AND PUT DOWN THE BOWL OF MILK. YOU WILL THEN GO INTO THE OTHER ROOM WHERE THE RECEIVER IS.

LOOK CAREFULLY AND TRY TO FIND A FLY WHICH OUGHT TO BE THERE BUT WHICH

I AM UNABLE TO FIND.

UNFORTUNATELY I CANNOT SEE SMALL THINGS VERY EASILY.

BEFORE YoU COME IN YOU MUST PROMISE TO OBEY ME IMPLICITLY. DO NOT LOOK

AT ME AND REMEMBER THAT TALKING IS QUITE USELESS. I CANNOT ANSWER.

KNOCK AGAIN THREE TIMES AND THAT WILL MEAN I HAVE YOUR PROMISE. MY

LIFE DEPENDS ENTIRELY ON THE HELP You CAN GIVE ME.

I had to wait a while to pull myself together, and then I knocked slowly threE times.

I heard Andre shuffling behind the door, then his hand fumbling with the lock, and the door opened.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw that he was standing behind the door, but without looking round, I carried the bowl of milk to his desk. He was evidently watching me and I must at all costs appear calm and collected.

"Cheri, you can count on me," I said gently, and putting the bowl down under his desk lamp, the only one alight, I walked into the next room where all the lights were blazing.

My first impression was that some sort of hurricane must have blown out of the receiving booth. Papers were scattered in every direction, a whole row of test tubes lay smashed in a corner, chairs and stools were upset and one of the window curtains hung half torn from its bent rod.

In a large enamel basin on the floor a heap of burned documents was still smoldering.

I knew that I would not find the fly Andre wanted me to look for.

Women know things that men only suppose by reasoniNG and dedUcTion; it is a form of knowledge very rarely accessible to them and which they disparagingly call intuition. I already knew that the fly Andre wanted was the one which Henri had caught and which I lad made him release.

I heard Andre shuffling around ;n the next room, and then a strange gurgling and sucking as though he had trouble in drinking his milk.

"Andre, there is no fly here. Can you give me any sort of indication that might help? If you can't speak, rap or something ... you know: once for yes, twice for no."

I had tried to control my voice and speak as though perfectly calm, but I had to choke down a sob of desperation when he rapped twice for "no."

"May I come to you, Andre? I don't know what can have happened, but whatever it is, I'll be courageous, dear."

After a moment of silent hesitation, he tapped once on his desk.

At the door I stopped aghast at the sight of Andre standing with his head and shoulders covered by the brown velvet cloth he had taken from a table by his desk, the table on which he usually ate when he did not want to leave his work. Suppressing a laugh that might easily have turned to sobbing, I said:

"Andre, we'll search thoroughly tomorrow, by daylight. Why don't you go to bed? I'll lead you to the guest room if you like, and won't let anyone else see you."

His left hand tapped the desk twice.

"Do you need a doctor, Andre?"

"No," he rapped.

"Would you like me to call up Professor Augier? He might be of more help ..."

Twice he rapped "no" sharply. I did not know what to do or say. And then I told him:

"Henri caught a fly this morning which he wanted to show me, but I made him release it. Could it have been the one you are looking for? I didn't see it, but the boy said its head was white."

Andre emitted a strange metallic sigh, and I just had time to bite my fingers fiercely in order not to scream. He had let his right arm drop, and instead of his long-fingered muscular hand, a gray stick with little buds on it like the branch of a tree, hung out of his sleeve almost down to his knee.

"Andre, mon cheri, tell me what happened. I might be of more help to you if I knew. Andre ... oh, it's terrible!" I sobbed, unable to control myself.

Having rapped once for yes, he pointed to the door with his left hand.

I stepped out and sank down crying as he locked the door behind me. He was typing again and I waited. At last he shuffled to the door and slid a sheet of paper under it.

HELENE, COME BACK IN THE MORNING. I MuST THINK AND WILL HAVE TYPED OUT

AN EXPLANATION FOR You. TAKE ONE OF MY SLEEPING TABLETS AND GO STRAIGHT TO BED. I NEED YOU FRESH AND STRONG TOMORROW, MA PAUVRE CHERIE. A.

"Do you want anything for the night, Andre?" I shouted through the door.

He knocked twice for no, and a little later I heard the typewriter again.

The sun full on my face woke me up with a start. I had set the alarm-clock for five but had not heard it, probably because of the sleeping tablets. I had indeed slept like a log, without a dream. Now I was back in my living nightmare and crying like a child I sprang out of bed. It was just on seven!

Rushing into the kitchen, without a word for the startled servants, I rapidly prepared a trayload of coffee, bread and butter with which I ran down to the laboratory.

Andre opened the door as soon as I knocked and closed it again as I carried the tray to his desk. His head was still covered, but I saw from his crumpled suit and his open camp-bed that he must have at least tried to rest.

On his desk lay a typewritten sheet for me which I picked up. Andre opened the other door, and taking this to mean that he wanted to be left alone, I walked into the next room. He pushed the door to and I heard him pouring out the coffee as I read:

DO YOU REMEMBER THE ASH TRAY EXPERIMENT? I HAVE HAD A SIMILAR ACCIDENT. I TRANSMITTED MYSELF SUCCESSFULLY THE NIGHT BEFORE LAST.

DURING A SECOND EXPERIMENT YESTERDAY A FLY WHICH I DID NOT SEE MUST HAVE GOT INTO THE DISINTEGRATOR." MY ONLY HOPE IS TO FIND THAT FLY Al'."D GO THROUGH AGAIN WITH IT, PLEASE SEARCH FOR IT CAREFULLY SINCE, IF IT IS NOT FOUND, I SHALL HAVE TO FIND A WAY OF PUTTING AN END TO ALL THIS.

If only Andre had been more explicit! I shuddered at the thought that he must be terribly disfigured and then cried softly as I imagined his face inside-out, or perhaps his eyes in place of his ears, or his mouth at

the back of his neck, or worse!

Andre must be saved! For that, the fly must be found!

Pulling myself together, I said: "Andre, may I come in?"

He opened the door.

"Andre, don't despair; I am going to find that fly. It is no longer in the laboratory, but it cannot be very far. I suppose you're disfigured, perhaps terribly so, but there can be no question of putting an end to all this, as you say in your note; that I will never stand for. If necessary, if you do not wish to be seen, I'll make you a mask or a cowl so that you can go on with your work until you get well again. If you cannot work, I'll call Professor Augier, and he and all your other friends will save you, Andre."

Again I heard that curious metallic sigh as he rapped violently on his desk.

"Andre, don't be annoyed; please be calm. I won't do anything without first consulting you, but you must rely on me, have faith in me and let me help you as best I can. Are you terribly disfigured, dear? Can't you let me see your face? I won't be afraid ... I am your wife, you know."

But my husband again rapped a decisive "no" and pointed to the door.

"All right. I am going to search for the fly now, but promise me you won't do anything foolish; promise you won't do anything rash or dangerous without first letting me know all about it!"

He extended his left hand, and I knew I had his promise.

I will never forget that ceaseless day-long hunt for a fly. Back home, I turned the house inside-out and made all the servants join in the search. I told them that a fly had escaped from the Professor's laboratory and that it must be captured alive, but it was evident they already thought me crazy. They said so to the police later, and that day's hunt for a fly most probably saved me from the guillotine later.

I questioned Henri and as he failed to understand right away what I was talking about, I shook him and slapped him, and made him cry in front of the round-eyed maids. Realizing that I must not let myself go, I kissed and petted the poor boy and at last made him understand what I wanted of him.

Yes, he remembered, he had found the fly just by the kitchen window; yes, he had released it immediately as told to.

Even in summer time we had very few flies because our house is on the top of a hill and the slightest breeze coming across the valley blows round it.

In spite of that, I managed to catch dozens of flies that day. On all the window sills and all over the garden I had put saucers of milk, sugar, jam, meat—all the things likely to attract flies. Of all those we caught, and many others which we failed to catch but which I saw, none resembled the one Henri had caught the day before. One by one, with a magnifying glass, I examined every unusual fly, but none had anything like a white head.

At lunch time, I ran down to Andre with some milk and mashed potatoes.

I also took some of the flies we had caught, but he gave me to understand that they could be of no

possible use to him.

"If that fly has not been found tonight, Andre, we'll have to see what is to be done. And this is what I propose: I'll sit in the next room.

When you can't answer by the yes-no method of rapping, you'll type out whatever you want to say and then slip it under the door. Agreed?"

"Yes," rapped Andre.

By nightfall we had still not found the fly. At dinner time, as I prepared Andre's tray, I broke down and sobbed in the kitchen in front of the silent servants. My maid thought that I had had a row with my husband, probably about the mislaid fly, but I learned later that the cook was already quite sure that I was out of my mind.

Without a word, I picked up the tray and then put it down again as I stopped by the telephone. That this was really a matter of life and death for Andre, I had no doubt. Neither did I doubt that he fully intended committing suicide, unless I could make him change his mind, or at least put off such a drastic decision. Would I be strong enough?

He would never forgive me for not keeping a promise, but under the circumstances, did that really matter? To the devil with promises and honor! At all costs Andre must be saved! And having thus made up my mind, I looked up and dialed Professor Augier's number.

"The Professor is away and will not be back before the end of the week," said a polite neutral voice at the other end of the line.

That was that! I would have to fight alone and fight I would. I would save Andre come what may.

All my nervousness had disappeared as Andre let me in and, after putting the tray of food down on his desk, I went into the other room, as agreed.

"The first thing I want to know," I said as he closed the door behind me, "is what happened exactly. Can you please tell me, Andre?"

I waited patiently while he typed an answer which he pushed under the door a little later.

HELENE, I WOULD RATHER NOT TELL YOU, SINCE GO I MUST, I WOULD RATHER

YOU REMEMBER ME AS I WAS BEFORE. I MUST DESTROY MYSELF IN SUCH A WAY

THAT NONE CAN POSSIBLY KNOW WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO ME. I HAVE OF COURSE

THOUGHT OF SIMPLY DISINTEGRATING MYSELF IN MY TRANSMITTER, BUT I HAD BETTER NOT BECAUSE, SOONER OR LATER, I MIGHT FIND MYSELF REINTEGRATED.

SOME DAY, SOMEWHERE, SOME SCIENTIST IS SURE TO MAKE THE SAME DISCOVERY.

I HAVE THEREFORE THOUGHT OF A WAY WHICH IS NEITHER SIMPLE NOR EASY, BUT

YOU CAN AND WILL HELP ME.

For several minutes I wondered if Andre had not simply gone stark raving mad.

"Andre," I said at last, "whatever you may have chosen or thought of, I cannot and will never accept such a cowardly solution. No matter how awful the result of your experiment or accident, you are alive, you are a man, a brain ... and you have a soul. You have no right to destroy yourself! You know that!"

The answer was soon typed and pushed under the door.

I AM ALIVE ALL RIGHT, BUT I AM ALREADY NO LONGER A MAN. AS TO MY BRAIN OR INTELLIGENCE, IT MAY DISAPPEAR AT ANY MOMENT. AS IT IS, IT IS NO LONGER INTACT. AND THERE CAN BE NO SOUL WITHOUT INTELLIGENCE ... AND YOU KNOW THAT!

"Then you must tell the other scientists about your discovery. They will help you and save you, Andre!"

I staggered back frightened as he angrily thumped the door twice.

"Andre ... why? Why do you refuse the aid you know they would give you with all their hearts?"

A dozen furious knocks shook the door and made me understand that my husband would never accept such a solution. I had to find other arguments.

For hours, it seemed, I talked to him about our boy, about me, about his family, about his duty to us and to the rest of humanity. He made no reply of any sort. At last I cried: "Andre ... do you hear me?"

"Yes," he knocked very gently.

"Well, listen then. I have another idea. You remember your first experiment with the ash tray? ... Well, do you think that if you had put it through again a second time, it might possibly have come out with the letters turned back the right way?"

Before I had finished speaking, Andre was busily typing and a moment later I read his answer:

I HAVE ALREADY THOUGHT OF THAT. AND THAT WAS WHY I NEEDED THE FLY. IT HAS GOT TO GO THROUGH WITH ME. THERE IS NO HOPE OTHERWISE.

"Try all the same, Andre. You never know!"

I HAVE TRIED SEVEN TIMES ALREADY

was the typewritten reply I got to that.

"Andre! Try again, please!"

The answer this time gave me a flutter of hope, because no woman has ever understood, or will ever understand, how a man about to die can possibly consider anything funny.

I DEEPLY ADMIRE YOUR DELICIOUS FEMININE LOGIC. WE COULD GO ON DOING

THIS EXPERIMENT UNTIL DOOMSDAY. HOWEVER, JUST TO GIVE YOU THAT

PLEASURE, PROBABLY THE VERY LAST I SHALL EVER BE ABLE TO GIVE YOU, I

WILL TRY ONCE MORE. IF YOU CANNOT FIND THE DARK GLASSES, TURN YOUR

BACK TO THE MACHINE AND PRESS YOUR HANDS OVER YOUR EYES. LET ME KNOW

WHEN YOU ARE READY.

"Ready, Andre!" I shouted without even looking for the glasses and following his instructions.

I heard him moving around and then open and close the door of his "disintegrator." After what seemed a very long wait, but probably was not more than a minute or so, I heard a violent crackling noise and perceived a bright flash through my eyelids and fingers.

I turned around as the cabin door opened.

His head and shoulders still covered with the brown velvet carpet, Andre was gingerly stepping out of it.

"How do you feel, Andre? Any difference?" I asked touching his arm.

He tried to step away from me and caught his foot in one of the stools which I had not troubled to pick up. He made a violent effort to regain his balance, and the velvet carpet slowly slid off his shoulders and head as he fell heavily backwards.

The horror was too much for me, too unexpected. As a matter of fact, I am sure that, even had I known, the horror-impact could hardly have been less powerful. Trying to push both hands into my mouth to stifle my screams and although my fingers were bleeding, I screamed again and again. I could not take my eyes off him, I could not even close them, and yet I knew that if I looked at the horror much longer, I would go on screaming for the rest of my life.

Slowly, the monster, the thing that had been my husband, covered its head, got up and groped its way to the door and passed it. Though still screaming, I was able to close my eyes.

I who had ever been a true Catholic, who believed in God and another, better life hereafter, have today but one hope: that when I die, I really die, and that there may be no afterlife of any sort because, if there is, then I shall never forget! Day and night, awake or asleep, I see it, and I know that I am condemned to see it forever, even perhaps into oblivion!

Until I am totally extinct, nothing can, nothing will ever make me forget that dreadful white hairy head with its low flat skull and its two pointed ears. Pink and moist, the nose was also that of a cat, a huge cat. But the eyes! Or rather, where the eyes should have been were two brown bumps the size of saucers. Instead of a mouth, animal or human, was a long hairy vertical slit from which hung a black quivering trunk that widened at the end, trumpet-like, and from which saliva kept dripping.

I must have fainted, because I found myself flat on my stomach on the cold cement floor of the laboratory, staring at the closed door behind which I could hear the noise of Andre's typewriter.

Numb, numb and empty, I must have looked as people do immediately after a terrible accident, before they fully understand what has happened. I could only think of a man I had once seen on the platform of a railway station, quite conscious, and looking stupidly at his leg still on the line where the train had just passed.

My throat was aching terribly, and that made me wonder if my vocal chords had not perhaps been torn, and whether I would ever be able to speak again.

The noise of the typewriter suddenly stopped and I felt I was going to scream again as something touched the door and a sheet of paper slid from under it.

Shivering with fear and disgust, I crawled over to where I could read it without touching it:

NOW YOU UNDERSTAND. THAT LAST EXPERIMENT WAS A NEW DISASTER, MY POOR

HELENE. I SUPPOSE YOU RECOGNIZED PART OF DANDELO'S HEAD. WHEN I WENT

INTO THE DISINTEGRATOR JUST NOW, MY HEAD WAS ONLY THAT OF A FLY. I NOW

ONLY HAVE ITS EYES AND MOUTH LEFT. THE REST HAS BEEN REPLACED BY PARTS

OF THE CAT'S HEAD. POOR DANDELO WHOSE ATOMS HAD NEVER COME TOGETHER.

YOU SEE NOW THAT THERE CAN ONLY BE ONE POSSIBLE SOLUTION, DON'T YOU? I MUST DISAPPEAR. KNOCK ON THE DOOR WHEN YOU ARE READY AND I SHALL EXPLAIN WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO. A.

Of course he was right, and it had been wrong and cruel of me to insist on a new experiment. And I knew that there was now no possible hope, that any further experiments could only bring about worse results.

Getting up dazed, I went to the door and tried to speak, but no sound came out of my throat ... so I knocked once!

You can of course guess the rest. He explained his plan in short typewritten notes, and I agreed, I agreed to everything!

My head on fire, but shivering with cold, like an automaton, I followed him into the silent factory. In my hand was a full page of explanations: what I had to know about the steam-hammer.

Without stopping or looking back, he pointed to the switchboard that controlled the steam-hammer as he passed it. I went no further and watched him come to a halt before the terrible instrument.

He knelt down, carefully wrapped the carpet round his head, and then stretched out flat on the ground.

It was not difficult. I was not killing my husband. Andre, poor Andre, had gone long ago, years ago it

seemed. I was merely carrying out his last wish ... and mine.

Without hesitating, my eyes on the long still body, I firmly pushed the "stroke" button right in. The great metallic mass seemed to drop slowly. It was not so much the resounding clang of the hammer that made me jump as the sharp cracking which I had distinctly heard at the same time. My hus ...

the thing's body shook a second and then lay still.

It was then I noticed that he had forgotten to put his right arm, his fly-leg, under the hammer. The police would never understand but the scientists would, and they must not! That had been Andre's last wish, also!

I had to do it and quickly, too; the night watchman must have heard the hammer and would be round any moment. I pushed the other button and the hammer slowly rose. Seeing but trying not to look, I ran up, leaned down, lifted and moved forward the right arm which seemed terribly light. Back at the switchboard, again I pushed the red button, and down came the hammer a second time. Then I ran all the way home.

You know the rest and can now do whatever you think right.

So ended Helene's manuscript.

The following day I telephoned Commissaire Charas to invite him to dinner.

"With pleasure, Monsieur Delambre. Allow me, however, to ask: is it the Commissaire you are inviting or just Monsieur Charas?"

"ave you any preference?"

"No, not at the present moment."

"Well then, make it whichever you like. Will eight o'clock suit you?"

Although it was raining, the Commissaire arrived on foot that evening.

"Since you did not come tearing up to the door in your black Citroen, I take it you have opted for Monsieur Charas, off duty?"

"I left the car up a side-street," mumbled the Commissaire with a grin as the maid staggered under the weight of his raincoat.

"Merci," he said a minute later as I handed him a glass of Pernod into which he tipped a few drops of water, watching it turn the golden amber liquid to pale blue milk.

"You heard about my poor sister-in-law?"

"Yes, shortly after you telephoned me this morning. I am sorry, but perhaps it was all for the best. Being already in charge of your brother's case, the inquiry automatically comes to me."

"I suppose it was suicide."

"Without a doubt. Cyanide, the doctors say quite rightly; I found a second tablet in the unstitched hem of her dress."

"Monsieur est servi," announced the maid.

"I would like to show you a very curious document afterwards, Charas."

"Ah, yes. I heard that Madame Delambre had been writing a lot, but we could find nothing beyond the short note informing us that she was committing suicide."

During our tete-a-tete dinner, we talked politics, books and films, and the local football club of which the Commissaire was a keen supporter.

After dinner, I took him up to my study, where a bright fire—a habit I had picked up in England during the war—was burning.

Without even asking him, I handed him his brandy and mixed myself what he called "crushed-bug juice in soda water"—his appreciation of whiskey.

"I would like you to read this, Charas; first, because it was partly intended for you and, secondly, because it will interest you. If you think Commissaire Charas has no objection, I would like to burn it after."

Without a word, he took the wad of sheets Helene had given me the day before and settled down to read them.

"What do you think of it all?" I asked some twenty minutes later as he carefully folded Helene's manuscript, slipped it into the brown envelope, and put it into the fire.

Charas watched the flames licking the envelope, from which wisps of gray smoke were escaping, and it was only when it burst into flames that he said, slowly raising his eyes to mine: "I think it proves very definitely that Madame Delambre was quite insane."

For a long while we watched the fire eating up Helene's "confession."

"A funny thing happened to me this morning, Charas. I went to the cemetery, where my brother is buried. It was quite empty and I was alone."

"Not quite, Monsieur Delambre. I was there, but I did not want to disturb you."

"Then you saw me ..."

"Yes. I saw you bury a matchbox."

"Do you know what was in it?"

"A fly, I suppose."

“Yes. I had found it early this morning, caught in a spider’s web in the garden.”

“Was it dead?”

“No, not quite. I ... crushed it ... between two stones. Its head was

...

white ... all white.”

THE FLY Twentieth Century-Fox 1958

94 minutes. Produced and directed by Kurt Neumann; screenplay by James Clavell; director of photography, Karl Strauss; music composed and conducted by Paul Sawtell; edited by Merrill G. White; set decorations by Walter M. Scott and Eli Benneche; special photographic effects by L.

B.

Abbott; wardrobe design by Charles LeMaire; makeup by Ben Nye; hairstyles by Helen Turpin; costumes by Adele Salkan; sound by Eugene Grossman and Harry M. Leonard; color consultant, Leonard Doss.

Cast Vincent Price (Francois Delambre), Al “David” Hedison (Andre Delambre), Patricia Owens (Helene Delambre), Herbert :Marshall (Inspector Charas), Charles Herbert (Philippe Delambre), Kathleen Freeman (Emma, the Maid), Eugene Dorden (Dr. Ejoute), Torben Meyer (Gaston), Betty Lou Gerson (Nurse Anderson).

THE SEVENTH VICTIM

by Robert Sheckley filmed as

THE TENTH VICTIM

(Avco Embassy, 1965)

Experience “La Dolce Vita, 1999.” This easily could have been the alternate title for the Italian motion picture adaptation of “The Seventh Victim,” inexplicably retitled to include three more corpses.

A far cry from their usual fare of spaghetti Westerns and muscleman epics, European filmmakers finally let imagination run wild when they put Robert Sheckley’s outlandish tale before the cameras in 1965.

Set the day after tomorrow, the feature opens on a world where war has been outlawed, and only select individuals now participate in a deadly game called the Big Hunt. Watched by millions around the globe on giant TV monitors, the violent spectacle is presented as a sort of catharsis for anxiety and aggression. The bullets, bombs and beatings are all for real, and each hunt is carried out until either stalker or prey meet their demise.

Noted director Elio Petri, who had never before tackled a work of science fiction, did a remarkable job

of bringing an apocalyptic vision to his unusual feature. The Monthly Film Bulletin agrees: "On the whole the world of The Big Hunt is convincingly futuristic, maintaining a cunning balance between synthetic sets and unchanged ancient monuments." One of the more subtle touches comes during a library sequence where a Flash Gordon first edition is elevated to million-dollar status.

Also contributing to the picture's overall charm are the two international costars, Ursula Andress and Marcello Mastroianni—as the hunter and the hunted, respectively. Through the course of the film, the stunning heroine employs everything from poison lipstick to a killer bra attempting to eliminate her foe. Eventually she finds herself falling more and more in love with her prey after each succeeding murderous encounter.

The surprising and unexpected final confrontation won't be spoiled here in the introduction. That particular denouement must be told as only Robert Sheckley can do it. Forward....

THE SEVENTH VICTIM

by Robert Sheckley STANTON FRELAINE sat at his desk, trying to look as busy as an executive should at nine-thirty in the morning. It was impossible. He couldn't concentrate on the advertisement he had written the previous night, couldn't think about business. All he could do was wait until the mail came.

He had been expecting his notification for two weeks now. The government was behind schedule, as usual.

The glass door of his office was marked Morger and Frelaine, Clothiers.

It opened, and E. J. Morger walked in, limping slightly from his old gunshot wound. His shoulders were bent; but at the age of seventy-three, he wasn't worrying much about his posture.

"Well, Stan?" Morger asked. "What about that ad?"

Frelaine had joined Morger sixteen years ago, when he was twenty-seven.

Together they had built Protec-Clothes into a million-dollar concern.

"I suppose you can run it," Frelaine said, handing the slip of paper to Morger. If only the mail would come earlier, he thought.

"'Do you own a Protec-Suit?'" Morger read aloud, holding the paper close to his eyes. "'The finest tailoring in the world has gone into Morger and Frelaine's Protec-Suit, to make it the leader in men's fashions.'"

Morger cleared his throat and glanced at Frelaine. He smiled and read on.

"'Protec-Suit is the safest as well as the smartest. Every Protec-Suit comes with special built-in gun pocket, guaranteed not to bulge. No one will know you are carrying a gun—except you. The gun pocket is exceptionally easy to get at, permitting fast, unhindered draw. Choice of hip or breast pocket." Very nice," Morger commented.

Frelaine nodded morosely.

“’The Protec-Suit Special has the fling-out gun pocket, the greatest modern advance in personal protection. A touch of the concealed button throws the gun into your hand, cocked, safeties off. Why not drop into the Protec-Store nearest you? Why not be safe?”

“That’s fine,” Morger said. “That’s a very nice, dignified ad.” He thought for a moment, fingering his white mustache. “Shouldn’t you mention that Protec-Suits come in a variety of styles, single and double-breasted, oneand two-button rolls, deep and shallow flares?”

“Right. I forgot.”

Frelaine took back the sheet and jotted a note on the edge of it. Then he stood up, smoothing his jacket over his prominent stomach. Frelaine was forty-three, a little overweight, a little bald on top. He was an amiable-looking man with cold eyes.

“Relax,” Morger said. “It’ll come in today’s mail.”

Frelaine forced himself to smile. He felt like pacing the floor, but instead sat on the edge of the desk.

“You’d think it was my first kill,” he said, with a deprecating smile.

“I know how it is,” Morger said. “Before I hung up my gun, I couldn’t sleep for a month, waiting for a notification. I know.”

The two men waited. Just as the silence was becoming unbearable, the door opened. A clerk walked in and deposited the mail on Frelaine’s desk.

Frelaine swung around and gathered up the letters. He thumbed through them rapidly and found what he had been waiting for—the long white envelope from ECB, with the official government seal on it.

“That’s it!” Frelaine said, and broke into a grin. “That’s the baby!”

“Fine.” Morger eyed the envelope with interest, but didn’t ask Frelaine to open it. It would be a breach of etiquette, as well as a violation in the eyes of the law. No one was supposed to know a Victim’s name except his Hunter. “Have a good hunt.”

“I expect to,” Frelaine replied confidently. His desk was in order—had been for a week. He picked up his briefcase.

“A good kill will do you a world of good,” Morger said, putting his hand lightly on Frelaine’s padded shoulder. “You’ve been keyed up.”

“I know,” Frelaine grinned again and shook Morger’s hand.

“Wish I was a kid again,” Morger said, glancing down at his crippled leg with wryly humorous eyes. “Makes me want to pick up a gun again.”

The old man had been quite a Hunter in his day. Ten successful hunts had qualified him for the exclusive Tens Club. And, of course, for each hunt Morger had had to act as Victim, so he had twenty kills to his credit.

“I sure hope my Victim isn’t anyone like you,” Frelaine said, half in jest.

"Don't worry about it. What number will this be?"

"The seventh."

"Lucky seven. Go to it," Morger said. "We'll get you into the Tens yet."

Frelaine waved his hand and started out the door.

"Just don't get careless," warned Morger. "All it takes is a single slip and I'll need a new partner. If you don't mind, I like the one I've got now."

"I'll be careful," Frelaine promised.

Instead of taking a bus, Frelaine walked to his apartment. He wanted time to cool oœf. There was no sense in acting like a kid on his first kill.

As he walked, Frelaine kept his eyes strictly to the front. Staring at anyone was practically asking for a bullet, if the man happened to be serving as Victim. Some Victims shot if you just glanced at them.

Nervous fellows. Frelaine prudently looked above the heads of the people he passed.

Ahead of him was a huge billboard, offering J. F. O'Donovan's services to the public.

"Victims!" the sign proclaimed in huge red letters. "Why take chances? Use an O'Donovan accredited Spotter. Let us locate your assigned killer. Pay after you get him!"

The sign reminded Frelaine. He would call Ed Morrow as soon as he reached his apartment.

He crossed the street, quickening his stride. He could hardly wait to get home now, to open the envelope and discover who his victim was.

Would he be clever or stupid? Rich, like Frelaine's fourth Victim, or poor, like the first and second? Would he have an organized spotter service, or try to go it on his own?

The excitement of the chase was wonderful, coursing through his veins, quickening his heartbeat. From a block or so away, he heard gunfire.

Two quick shots, and then a final one.

Somebody got his man, Frelaine thought. Good for him.

It was a superb feeling, he told himself. He was alive again.

At his one-room apartment, the first thing Frelaine did was call Ed Morrow, his spotter. The man worked as a garage attendant between calls.

"Hello, Ed? Frelaine."

"Oh, hi, Mr. Frelaine." He could see the man's thin, grease-stained face, grinning flat-lipped at the telephone.

"I'm going out on one, Ed."

"Good luck, Mr. Frelaine," Ed Morrow said. "I suppose you'll want me to stand by?"

"That's right. I don't expect to be gone more than a week or two.

I'll probably get my notification of Victim Status within three months of the kill."

"I'll be standing by. Good hunting, Mr. Frelaine."

"Thanks. So long." He hung up. It was a wise safety measure to reserve a first-class spotter. After his kill, it would be Frelaine's turn as Victim.

Then, once again, Ed Morrow would be his life insurance.

And what a marvelous spotter Morrow was! Uneducated-stupid, really.

But what an eye for people! Morrow was a natural. His pale eyes could tell an out-of-towner at a glance. He was diabolically clever at rigging an ambush.

An indispensable man.

Frelaine took out the envelope, chuckling to himself, remembering some of the tricks Morrow had turned for the Hunters. Still smiling, he glanced at the data inside the envelope.

Janet-Marie Patzig.

His Victim was a female!

Frelaine stood up and paced for a few moments. Then he read the letter again. Janet-Marie Patzig. No mistake. A girl. Three photographs were enclosed, her address, and the usual descriptive data.

Frelaine frowned. He had never killed a female.

He hesitated for a moment, then picked up the telephone and dialed ECB.

"Emotional Catharsis Bureau, Information Section," a man's voice answered.

"Say, look," Frelaine said. "I just got my notification and I pulled a girl. Is that in order?" He gave the clerk the girl's name.

"It's all in order, sir," the clerk replied after a minute of checking micro-files. "The girl registered with the board under her own free will.

The law says she has the same rights and privileges as a man."

"Could you tell me how many kills she has?"

"I'm sorry, sir. The only information you're allowed is the Victim's legal status and the descriptive data you have received."

"I see." Frelaine paused. "Could I draw another?"

"You can refuse the hunt, of course. That is your legal right. But you will not be allowed another Victim until you have served. Do you wish to refuse?"

"Oh, no," Frelaine said hastily. "I was just wondering. Thank you."

He hung up and sat down in his largest armchair, loosening his belt.

This required some thought.

Damn women, he grumbled to himself, always trying to horn in on a man's game. Why can't they stay home?

But they were free citizens, he reminded himself. Still, it just didn't seem feminine.

He knew that, historically speaking, the Emotional Catharsis Board had been established for men and men only. The board had been formed at the end of the fourth world war—or sixth, as some historians counted it.

At that time there had been a driving need for permanent, lasting peace.

The reason was practical, as were the men who engineered it.

Simply—annihilation was just around the corner.

In the world wars, weapons increased in magnitude, efficiency and exterminating power. Soldiers became accustomed to them, less and less reluctant to use them.

But the saturation point had been reached. Another war would truly be the war to end all wars. There would be no one left to start another.

So this peace had to last for all time, but the men who engineered it were practical. They recognized the tensions and dislocations still present, the cauldrons in which wars are brewed. They asked themselves why peace had never lasted in the past.

"Because men like to fight," was their answer.

"Oh, no!" screamed the idealists.

But the men who engineered the peace were forced to postulate, regretfully, the presence of a need for violence in a large percentage of mankind.

Men aren't angels. They aren't fiends, either. They are just very human beings, with a high degree of combativeness.

With the scientific knowledge and the power they had at that moment, the practical men could have gone a long way toward breeding this trait out of the race. any thought this was the answer.

The practical men didn't. They recognized the validity of competition, love of battle, courage in the face

of overwhelming odds. These, they felt, were admirable traits for a race, and insurance toward its perpetuity.

Without them, the race would be bound to retrogress.

The tendency toward violence, they found, was inexplicably linked with ingenuity, flexibility, drive.

The problem, then: To arrange a peace that would last after they were gone. To stop the race from destroying itself, without removing the responsible traits.

The way to do this, they decided, was to rechannel Man's violence.

Provide him with an outlet, an expression.

The first big step was the legalization of gladiatorial events, complete with blood and thunder. But more was needed. Sublimations worked only up to a point. Then people demanded the real thing.

There is no substitute for murder.

So murder was legalized, on a strictly individual basis, and only for those who wanted it. The governments were directed to create Emotional Catharsis Boards.

After a period of experimentation, uniform rules were adopted.

Anyone who wanted to murder could sign up at the ECB. Giving certain data and assurances, he would be granted a Victim.

Anyone who signed up to murder, under the government rules, had to take his turn a few months later as Victim—if he survived.

That, in essence, was the setup. The individual could commit as many murders as he wanted. But between each, he had to be a Victim. If he successfully killed his Hunter, he could stop, or sign up for another murder.

At the end of ten years, an estimated third of the world's civilized population had applied for at least one murder. The number slid to a fourth, and stayed there.

Philosophers shook their heads, but the practical men were satisfied.

War was where it belonged—in the hands of the individual.

Of course, there were ramifications to the game, and elaborations.

Once its existence had been accepted it became big business. There were services for Victim and Hunter alike.

The Emotional Catharsis Board picked the Victims' names at random. A Hunter was allowed two weeks in which to make his kill. This had to be done by his own ingenuity, unaided. He was given the name of his Victim, address and description, and allowed to use a standard-caliber pistol. He could wear no armor of any sort.

The Victim was notified a week before the Hunter. He was told only that he was a Victim. He did not know the name of his Hunter. He was allowed his choice of armor. He could hire spotters. A spotter couldn't kill; only Victim and Hunter could do that. But he could detect a stranger in town, or ferret out a nervous gunman.

The Victim could arrange any kind of ambush in his power to kill the Hunter.

There were stiff penalties for killing or wounding the wrong man, for no other murder was allowed. Grudge killings and gain killings were punishable by death.

The beauty of the system was that the people who wanted to kill could do so. Those who didn't—the bulk of the population-didn't have to.

At least, there weren't any more big wars. Not even the imminence of one.

Just hundreds of thousands of small ones.

Frelaine didn't especially like the idea of killing a woman; but she had signed up. It wasn't his fault. And he wasn't going to lose out on his seventh hunt.

He spent the rest of the morning memorizing the data on his Victim, then filed the letter.

Janet Patzig lived in New York. That was good. He enjoyed hunting in a big city, and he had always wanted to see New York. Her age wasn't given, but to judge from her photographs, she was in her early twenties.

Frelaine phoned for his jet reservations to New York, then took a shower.

He dressed with care in a new Protec-Suit Special made for the occasion.

From his collection he selected a gun, cleaned and oiled it, and fitted it into the fling-out pocket of the suit. Then he packed his suitcase.

A pulse of excitement was pounding in his veins. Strange, he thought, how each killing was a new thrill. It was something you just didn't tire of, the way you did of French pastry or women or drinking or anything else. It was always new and different.

Finally, he looked over his books to see which he would take.

His library contained all the good books on the subject. He wouldn't need any of his Victim books, like L. Fred Tracy's Tactics for the Victim, with its insistence on a rigidly controlled environment, or Dr. Frisch's Don't Think like a Victim!

He would be very interested in those in a few months, when he was a Victim again. Now he wanted hunting books.

Tactics for Hunting Humans was the standard and definitive work, but he had it almost memorized. Development of the Ambush was not adapted to his present needs.

He chose Hunting in Cities, by Mitwell and Clark, Spotting the Spotter, by Algreen, and The Victim's In-group, by the same author.

Everything was in order. He left a note for the milkman, locked his apartment and took a cab to the airport.

In New York, he checked into a hotel in the midtown area, not too far from his Victim's address. The clerks were smiling and attentive, which bothered Frelaine. He didn't like to be recognized so easily as an out-of-town killer.

The first thing he saw in his room was a pamphlet on his bedtable. How to Get the Most Out of Your Emotional Catharsis, it was called, with the compliments of the management. Frelaine smiled and thumbed through it.

Since it was his first visit to New York, he spent the afternoon just walking the streets in his Victim's neighborhood. After that, he wandered through a few stores.

Martinson and Black was a fascinating place. He went through their Hunter-Hunted room. There were lightweight bullet-proof vests for Victims, and Richard Arlington hats, with bulletproof crowns .

On one side was a large display of a new .38 caliber sidearm.

"Use the Malvern Strait-shot!" the ad proclaimed. "ECB-approved.

Carries a load of twelve shots. Tested deviation less than .001 inches per 1000 feet.

Don't miss your Victim! Don't risk your life without the best! Be safe with Malvern!"

Frelaine smiled. The ad was good, and the small black weapon looked ultimately efficient. But he was satisfied with the one he had.

There was a special sale on trick canes, with concealed four-shot magazine, promising safety and concealment. As a young man, Frelaine had gone in heavily for novelties. But now he knew that the old-fashioned ways were usually best.

Outside the store, four men from the Department of Sanitation were carting away a freshly killed corpse. Frelaine regretted missing the take.

He ate dinner in a good restaurant and went to bed early.

Tomorrow he had a lot to do.

The next day, with the face of his Victim before him, Frelaine walked through her neighborhood. He didn't look closely at anyone. Instead, he moved rapidly, as though he were really going somewhere, the way an old Hunter should walk.

He passed several bars and dropped into one for a drink. Then he went on, down a side street off Lexington Avenue.

There was a pleasant sidewalk cafe there. Frelaine walked past it.

And there she was! He could never mistake the face. It was Janet Patzig, seated at a table, staring into a drink. She didn't look up as he passed.

Frelaine walked to the end of the block. He turned the corner and stopped, hands trembling.

Was the girl crazy, exposing herself in the open? Did she think she had a charmed life?

He hailed a taxi and had the man drive around the block. Sure enough, she was just sitting there. Frelaine took a careful look.

She seemed younger than her pictures, but he couldn't be sure. He would guess her to be not much over twenty. Her dark hair was parted in the middle and combed above her ears, giving her a nunlike appearance. Her expression, as far as Frelaine could tell, was one of resigned sadness.

Wasn't she even going to make an attempt to defend herself?

Frelaine paid the driver and hurried to a drugstore. Finding a vacant telephone booth, he called ECB.

"Are you sure that a Victim named Janet-Marie Patzig has been notified?"

"Hold on, sir." Frelaine tapped on the door while the clerk looked up the information. "Yes, sir. We have her personal confirmation. Is there anything wrong, sir?"

"No," Frelaine said. "Just wanted to check."

After all, it was no one's business if the girl didn't want to defend herself.

He was still entitled to kill her.

It was his turn.

He postponed it for that day however, and went to a movie. After dinner, he returned to his room and read the ECB pamphlet. Then he lay on his bed and glared at the ceiling.

All he had to do was pump a bullet into her. Just ride by in a cab and kill her.

She was being a very bad sport about it, he decided resentfully, and went to sleep.

The next afternoon, Frelaine walked by the cafe again. The girl was back, sitting at the same table. Frelaine caught a cab.

"Drive around the block very slowly," he told the driver.

"Sure," the driver said, grinning with sardonic wisdom.

From the cab, Frelaine watched for spotters. As far as he could tell, the girl had none. Both her hands were in sight upon the table.

An easy, stationary target.

Frelaine touched the button of his double-breasted jacket. A fold flew open and the gun was in his hand. He broke it open and checked the cartridges, then closed it with a snap.

"Slowly, now," he told the driver.

The taxi crawled by the cafe. Frelaine took careful aim, centering the girl in his sights. His finger tightened on the trigger.

"Damn it!" he said.

A waiter had passed by the girl. He didn't want to chance winging someone else.

"Around the block again," he told the driver.

The man gave him another grin and hunched down in his seat. Frelaine wondered if the driver would feel so happy if he knew that Frelaine was gunning for a woman.

This time there was no waiter around. The girl was lighting a cigarette, her mournful face intent on her lighter. Frelaine centered her in his sights, squarely above the eyes, and held his breath.

Then he shook his head and put the gun back in his pocket.

The idiotic girl was robbing him of the full benefit of his

catharsis.

He paid the driver and started to walk.

It's too easy, he told himself. He was used to a real chase. Most of the other six kills had been quite difficult. The Victims had tried every dodge. One had hired at least a dozen spotters. But Frelaine had reached them all by altering his tactics to meet the situation .

Once he had dressed as a milkman, another time as a bill collector.

The sixth Victim he had had to chase through the Sierra Nevadas. The man had clipped him, too. But Frelaine had done better.

How could he be proud of this one? What would the Tens Club say?

That brought Frelaine up with a start. He wanted to get into the club.

Even if he passed up this girl he would have to defend himself against a Hunter. If he survived, he would still be four hunts away from membership.

At that rate, he might never get in.

He began to pass the cafe again, then, on impulse, stopped abruptly.

"Hello," he said.

Janet Patzig looked at him out of sad blue eyes, but said nothing.

"Say, look," he said, sitting down. "If I'm being fresh, just tell me and I'll go. I'm an out-of-towner. Here on a convention. And I'd just like someone feminine to talk to. If you'd rather I didn't—" "I don't care," Janet Patzig said tonelessly.

"A brandy," Frelaine told the waiter. Janet Patzig's glass was still half full.

Frelaine looked at the girl and he could feel his heart throbbing against his ribs. This was more like it—having a drink with your Victim!

"My name's Stanton Frelaine," he said, knowing it didn't matter.

"Janet."

"Janet what?"

"Janet Patzig."

"Nice to know you," Frelaine said, in a perfectly natural voice. "Are you doing anything tonight, Janet?"

"I'm probably being killed tonight," she said quietly.

Frelaine looked at her carefully. Did she realize who he was? For all he knew, she had a gun leveled at him under the table.

He kept his hand close to the fling-out button.

"Are you a Victim?" he asked.

"You guessed it," she said sardonically. "If I were you, I'd stay out of the way. No sense getting hit by mistake."

Frelaine couldn't understand the girl's calm. Was she a suicide?

Perhaps she just didn't care. Perhaps she wanted to die.

"Haven't you got any spotters?" he asked, with the right expression of amazement.

"No." She looked at him, full in the face, and Frelaine saw something he hadn't noticed before.

She was very lovely.

"I am a bad, bad girl," she said lightly. "I got the idea I'd like to commit a murder, so I signed for EB. Then—I couldn't do it."

Frelaine shook his head, sympathizing with her.

"But I'm still in, of course. Even if I didn't shoot, I still have to be a Victim."

"But why don't you hire some spotters?" he asked.

"I couldn't kill anyone," she said. "I just couldn't. I don't even have a gun."

"You've got a lot of courage," Frelaine said, "coming out in the open this way." Secretly, he was amazed at her stupidity.

"What can I do?" she asked listlessly. "You can't hide from a Hunter.

Not a real one. And I don't have enough money to make a good disappearance."

"Since it's in your own defense, I should think—" Frelaine began, but she interrupted.

"No. I've made up my mind on that. This whole thing is wrong, the whole system. When I had my Victim in the sights—when I saw how easily I could—I could—" She pulled herself together quickly.

"Oh, let's forget it," she said and smiled.

Frelaine found her smile dazzling.

After that, they talked of other things. Frelaine told her of his business, and she told him about New York. She was twenty-two, an unsuccessful actress.

They had supper together. When she accepted Frelaine's invitation to go to the Gladiatorials, he felt absurdly elated.

He called a cab—he seemed to be spending his entire time in New York in cabs—and opened the door for her. She started in. Frelaine hesitated. He could have pumped a shot into her at that moment. It would have been very easy.

But he held back. Just for the moment, he told himself.

The Gladiatorials were about the same as those held anywhere else, except that the talent was a little better. There were the usual historical events, swordsmen and netmen, duels with saber and foil.

Most of these, naturally, were fought to the death.

Then bull fighting, lion fighting and rhino fighting, followed by the more modern events. Fights from behind barricades with bow and arrow.

Dueling on a high wire.

The evening passed pleasantly.

Frelaine escorted the girl home, the palms of his hands sticky with sweat.

He had never found a woman he liked better. And yet she was his legitimate kill.

He didn't know what he was going to do.

She invited him in and they sat together on the couch. The girl lighted a cigarette for herself with a large lighter, then settled back.

"Are you leaving soon?" she asked him.

"I suppose so," Frelaine said. "The convention is only lasting another day."

She was silent for a moment. "I'll be sorry to see you go."

They were quiet for a while. Then Janet went to fix him a drink.

Frelaine eyed her retreating back. Now was the time. He placed his hand near the button.

But the moment had passed for him, irrevocably. He wasn't going to kill her. You don't kill the girl you love.

The realization that he loved her was shocking. He'd come to kill, not to find a wife.

She came back with the drink and sat down opposite him, staring at emptiness.

"Janet," he said. "I love you."

She sat, just looking at him. There were tears in her eyes.

"You can't," she protested. "I'm a Victim. I won't live long enough to—" "You won't be killed. I'm your Hunter."

She stared at him a moment, then laughed uncertainly.

"Are you going to kill me?" she asked.

"Don't be ridiculous," he said. "I'm going to marry you."

Suddenly she was in his arms.

"Oh, Lord!" she gasped. "The waiting—I've been so frightened—" "It's all over," he told her. "Think what a story it'll make for our kids.

How I came to murder you and left marrying you."

She kissed him, then sat back and lighted another cigarette.

"Let's start packing," Frelaine said. "I want—" "Wait," Janet interrupted. "You haven't asked if I love you."

"What?"

She was still smiling and the cigarette lighter was pointed at him. In the bottom of it was a black hole. A hole just large enough for a .3 caliber bullet.

"Don't kid around," he objected, getting to his feet.

"I'm not being funny, darling," she said.

In a fraction of a second, Frelaine had time to wonder how he could ever have thought she was not much over twenty. Looking at her now—really looking at her—he knew she couldn't be much less than thirty. Every minute of her strained, tense existence showed on her face.

"I don't love you, Stanton," she said very softly, the cigarette lighter poised.

Frelaine struggled for breath. One part of him was able to realize detachedly what a marvelous actress she really was. She must have known all along.

Frelaine pushed the button, and the gun was in his hand, cocked and ready.

The blow that struck him in the chest knocked him over a coffee table.

The gun fell out of his hand. Gasping, half-conscious, he watched her take careful aim for the coup de grace.

"Now I can join the Tens," he heard her say elatedly as she squeezed the trigger.

THE TENTH VICTIM Avco Embassy 1965

92 minutes. Executive producer and presenter, Joseph E. Levine; produced by Carlo Ponti; directed by Elio Petri; screenplay by Elio Petri, Ennio Flaiano and Tonino Guerra; director of photography, Giamli di Venanzo; music composed and conducted by Piero Piccioni; edited by Ruggiero Mastroianni; sound by Ennio Sensi; costumes by Giulio Coltellacci.

Cast Marcello Mastroianni (Marcello Polletti), Ursula Andress (Caroline Meredith), Elsa Martinelli (Olivia), Massimo Scrato (Lawyer), Salvo Randone (The Professor),Mick ey Knox (Chet), Richard Armstrong (Cole), Walter Williams (Martin), Evi Rigano (victim), Milo Quesada (Rudi), Luce Bonifassy (Lidia), Anita Sanders (Relaxatorium Girl), George Wang (Chinese Assistant).

THE SENTINEL by Arthur C. Clarke filmed as

2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY

(Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1968)

When Arthur C. Clarke wrote "The Sentinel" for a pulp magazine in 1950, it never entered his mind that fifteen years later the tale would form the basis for a cinematic science fiction epic. But in 1965 noted director Stanley Kubrick (Dr. Strangelove, A Clockwork Orange) bought rights to the piece and worked closely with the author in expanding the thought-provoking story into both a majestic novel and a monumental screenplay.

Three years and eleven million dollars later, 2001: A Space Odyssey became one of the most controversial motion pictures ever released.

Loved by some, hated by others, misunderstood by most, the film nevertheless racked up a long list of important accolades and awards, including an Oscar for Best Special Visual Effects.

Saturday Review declared 2001 "the motion picture of the decade," Newsday labeled it "one of the most bizarre movies ever made," and squire critic Wilfrid Sheed was "haunted by the total experience."

At last, here was a science fiction movie that went beyond the ray guns and monsters into heretofore unexplored areas of speculation. High interest in 2001 was also reflected in the enormous sales of Clarke's novelization.

Over one million copies of the paperback edition were in print within one year after publication. The Washington Post said, "The book does something that the Kubrick movie cannot: It leaves the vision to the reader's imagination—and an awesome vision it is."

Arthur Clarke, speaking on the film, claims that "2001: A Space Odyssey is about man's past and future life in space. It's about concern with man's hierarchy in the universe, which is probably pretty low. And it's about the reaction of humanity to the discovery of a higher intelligence in the universe."

Like the novel and motion picture, "The Sentinel" also takes a grandiose view of Earthman's place in the galaxy. In its own way, the tale is perhaps the most impressive of the three versions—as it was written during a time when "moon walks" and extraterrestrial encounters were foreign to everyone but the Flash Gordon set. Today, thanks to Clarke and myriad other talented authors, yesterday's pulp fantasies have become today's highly regarded extrapolations.

THE SENTINEL

by Arthur C. Clarke

THE NEXT TIME YOU see the full moon high in the South, look carefully at its right-hand edge and let your eye travel upwards along the curve of the disc. Round about 2 o'clock you will notice a small, dark oval: anyone with normal eyesight can find it quite easily. It is the great walled plain, one of the finest on the Moon, known as the Mare Crisium—the Sea of Crises.

Three hundred miles in diameter, and almost completely surrounded by a ring of magnificent mountains, it had never been explored until we entered it in the late summer of 1996.

Our expedition was a large one. We had two heavy freighters which had flown our supplies and equipment from the main lunar base in the Mare Serenitatis, five hundred miles away. There were also three small rockets which were intended for short-range transport over regions which our surface vehicles couldn't cross. Luckily, most of the Mare Crisium is very flat. There are none of the great crevasses so common and so dangerous elsewhere, and very few craters or mountains of any size. As far as we could tell, our powerful caterpillar tractors would have no difficulty in taking us wherever we wished.

I was geologist—or selenologist, if you want to be pedantic—in charge of the group exploring the southern region of the Mare. We had crossed a hundred miles of it in a week, skirting the foothills of the mountains along the shore of what was once the ancient sea, some thousand million years before. When life was beginning on Earth, it was already dying here. The waters were retreating down the banks of those stupendous cliffs, retreating into the empty heart of the Moon.

Over the land which we were crossing, the tideless ocean had once been half a mile deep, and now the only trace of moisture was the hoarfrost one could sometimes find in caves which the searing sunlight never penetrated.

We had begun our journey early in the slow lunar dawn, and still had almost a week of Earth-time before nightfall. Half a dozen times a day we would leave our vehicle and go outside in the spacesuits to hunt for interesting minerals, or to place markers for the guidance of future travellers. It was an uneventful routine. There is nothing hazardous or even particularly exciting about lunar exploration. We could live comfortably for a month in our pressurized tractors, and if we ran into trouble we could always radio for help and sit tight until one of the spaceships came to our rescue. When that happened there was always a frightful outcry about the waste of rocket fuel, so a tractor sent out an SOS only in a real emergency.

I said just now that there was nothing exciting about lunar exploration, but of course that isn't true. One could never grow tired of those incredible mountains, so much steeper and more rugged than the gentle hills of Earth. We never knew, as we rounded the capes and promontories of that vanished sea, what new splendors would be revealed to us. The whole southern curve of the Mare Crisium is a vast delta where a score of rivers had once found their way into the ocean, fed perhaps by the torrential rains that must have lashed the mountains in the brief volcanic age when the Moon was young. Each of these ancient valleys was an invitation, challenging us to climb into the unknown uplands beyond. But we had a hundred miles still to cover, and could only look longingly at the heights which others must scale.

We kept Earth-time aboard the tractor, and precisely at 22.00 hours the final radio message would be sent out to Base and we would close down for the day. Outside, the rocks would still be burning beneath the almost vertical sun, but to us it was night until we awoke again eight hours later. Then one of us would prepare breakfast, there would be a great buzzing of electric shavers, and someone would switch on the short-wave radio from Earth. Indeed, when the smell of frying bacon began to fill the cabin, it was sometimes hard to believe that we were not back on our own world—everything was so normal and homey, apart from the feeling of decreased weight and the unnatural slowness with which objects fell.

It was my turn to prepare breakfast in the corner of the main cabin that served as a galley. I can remember that moment quite vividly after all these years, for the radio had just played one of my favorite melodies, the old Welsh air David of the White Roc. Our driver was already outside in his spacesuit, inspecting our caterpillar treads.

My assistant, Louis Garnett, was up forward in the control position, making some belated entries in yesterday's log.

As I stood by the frying pan, waiting, like any terrestrial housewife, for the sausages to brown, I let my gaze wander idly over the mountain walls which covered the whole of the southern horizon, marching out of sight to east and west below the curve of the Moon. They seemed only a mile or two from the tractor, but I knew that the nearest was twenty miles away. On the Moon, of course, there is no loss of detail with distance—none of that almost imperceptible haziness which softens and sometimes transfigures all far-off things on Earth.

Those mountains were ten thousand feet high, and they climbed steeply out of the plain as if ages ago some subterranean eruption had smashed them skywards through the molten crust. The base of even the nearest was hidden from sight by the steeply curving surface of the plain, for the Moon is a very little world, and from where I was standing the optical horizon was only two miles away.

I lifted my eyes towards the peaks which no man had ever climbed, the peaks which, before the coming of terrestrial life, had watched the retreating oceans sink sullenly into their graves, taking with them the hope and the morning promise of a world. The sunlight was beating against those ramparts with a glare that hurt the eyes, yet only a little way above them the stars were shining steadily in a sky blacker than a winter midnight on Earth.

I was turning away when my eye caught a metallic glitter high on the ridge of a great promontory thrusting out into the sea thirty miles to the west.

It was a dimensionless point of light, as if a star had been clawed from the sky by one of those cruel peaks, and I imagined that some smooth rock surface ùvas catching the sunlight and heliographing it straight into my eyes. Such things were not uncommon. When the Moon is in her second quarter, observers on Earth can sometimes see the great ranges in the Oceanus Procellarum burning with a blue-white iridescence as the sunlight flashes from their slopes and leaps again from world to world. But I was curious to know what kind of rock could be shining so brightly up there, and I climbed into the observation turret and swung our four-inch telescope round to the west.

I could see just enough to tantalize me. Clear and sharp in the field of vision, the mountain peaks seemed only half a mile away, but whatever was catching the sunlight was still too small to be resolved.

Yet it seemed to have an elusive symmetry, and the summit upon which it rested was curiously flat. I stared for a long time at that glittering enigma, straining my eyes into space, until presently a smell of burning from the galley told me that our breakfast sausages had made their quarter-million-mile journey in vain.

All that morning we argued our way across the Mare Crisium while the western mountains reared higher in the sky. Even when we were out prospecting in the spacesuits, the discussion would continue over the radio. It was absolutely certain, my companions argued, that there had never been any form of intelligent life on the Moon. The only living things that had ever existed there were a few primitive plants and their slightly less degenerate ancestors. I knew that as well as anyone, but there are times when a scientist must not be afraid to make a fool of himself.

"Listen," I said at last, "I'm going up there, if only for my own peace of mind. That mountain's less than twelve thousand feet high—that's only two thousand under Earth gravity—and I can make the trip in twenty hours at the outside. I've always wanted to go up into those hills, anyway, and this gives me an excellent excuse."

"If you don't break your neck," said Garnett, "you'll be the laughingstock of the expedition when we get back to Base. That mountain will probably be called Wilson's Folly from now on."

"I won't break my neck," I said firmly. "Who was the first man to climb Pico and Helicon?"

"But weren't you rather younger in those days?" asked Louis gently.

"That," I said with great dignity, "is as good a reason as any for going."

We went to bed early that night, after driving the tractor to within half a mile of the promontory. Garnett was coming with me in the morning; he was a good climber, and had often been with me on such exploits before. Our driver was only too glad to be left in charge of the machine.

At first sight, those cliffs seemed completely unscalable, but to anyone with a good head for heights, climbing is easy on a world where all weights are only a sixth of their normal value. The real danger in lunar mountaineering lies in overconfidence; a six-hundred-foot drop on the Moon can kill you just as thoroughly as a hundred-foot fall on Earth.

We made our first halt on a wide ledge about four thousand feet above the plain. Climbing had not been very difficult, but my limbs were stiff with the unaccustomed effort, and I was glad of the rest. We could

still see the tractor as a tiny metal insect far down at the foot of the cliff, and we reported our progress to the driver before starting on the next ascent.

Hour by hour the horizon widened and more and more of the great plain came into sight. Now we could look for fifty miles out across the Mare, and could even see the peaks of the mountains on the opposite coast more than a hundred miles away. Few of the great lunar plains are as smooth as the Mare Crisium, and we could almost imagine that a sea of water and not of rock was lying there two miles below. Only a group of crater-pits low down on the skyline spoilt the illusion.

Our goal was still invisible over the crest of the mountain, and we were steering by maps, using the Earth as a guide. Almost due east of us, that great silver crescent hung low over the plain, already well into its first quarter. The sun and the stars would make their slow march across the sky and would sink presently from sight, but Earth would always be there, never moving from her appointed place, waxing and waning as the years and seasons passed. In ten days' time she would be a blinding disc bathing these rocks with her midnight radiance, fifty-fold brighter than the full moon. But we must be out of the mountains long before night, or else we would remain among them forever.

Inside our suits it was comfortably cook, for the refrigeration units were fighting the fierce Sun and carrying away the body-heat of our exertions.

We seldom spoke to each other, except to pass climbing instructions and to discuss OUI best plan of ascent. I do not know what Garnett was thinking, probably that this was the craziest goose-chase he had ever embarked UpOn. I more than half agreed with him, but the joy of climbing, the knowledge that no man had ever gone this way before and the exhilaration of the steadily widening landscape gave me all the reward I needed.

I don't think I was particularly excited when I saw in front of us the wall of rock I had first inspected through the telescope from thirty miles away. It would level off about fifty feet above our heads, and there on the plateau would be the thing that had lured me over these barren wastes. It was, almost certainly, nothing more than a boulder splintered ages ago by a falling meteor, and with its cleavage planes still fresh and bright in this incorruptible unchanging silence.

There were no hand-holds on the rock face, and we had to use a grapnel.

My tired arms seemed to gain new strength as I swung the three-pronged metal anchor round my head and sent it sailing up towards the stars.

The first time, it broke loose and came falling slowly back when we pulled the rope.

On the third attempt, the prongs gripped firmly and our combined weights could not shift it.

Garnett looked at me anxiously. I could tell that he wanted to go first, but I smiled back at him through the glass of my helmet and shook my head.

Slowly, taking my time, I began the final ascent.

Even with my spacesuit, I weighed only forty pounds here, so I pulled myself up hand over hand without bothering to use my feet. At the rim I paused and waved to my companion, then I scrambled over the edge and stood upright, staring ahead of me.

You must understand that until this very moment I had been almost completely convinced that there

could be nothing strange or unusual for me to find here. Almost, but not quite; it was that haunting doubt that had driven me forwards. Well, it was a doubt no longer, but the haunting had scarcely begun.

I was standing on a plateau perhaps a hundred feet across. It had once been smooth—too smooth to be natural—but falling meteors had pitted and scored its surface through immeasurable aeons. It had been levelled to support a glittering, roughly pyramidal structure, twice as high as a man, that vas set in the rock like a gigantic, many-faceted jewel.

Probably no emotion at all filled my mind in those first few seconds.

Then I felt a great lifting of my heart, and a strange, inexpressible joy. For I loved the Moon, and now I knew that the creeping moss of Aristarchus and Eratosthenes was not the only life she had brought forth in her youth. The old, discredited dream of the first explorers was true. There had, after all, been a lunar civilization—and I was the first to find it. That I had come perhaps a hundred million years too late did not distress me; it was enough to have come at all.

My mind was beginning to function normally, to analyze and to ask questions. Was this a building, a shrine—or something for which my language had no name? If a building, then why was it erected in so uniquely inaccessible a spot? I wondered if it might be a temple, and I could picture the adepts of some strange priesthood calling on their gods to preserve them as the life of the Moon ebbed with the dying oceans, and calling on their gods in vain.

I took a dozen steps forward to examine the thing more closely, but some sense of caution kept me from going too near. I knew a little of archaeology, and tried to guess the cultural level of the civilization that must have smoothed this mountain and raised the glittering mirror surfaces that still dazzled my eyes.

The Egyptians could have done it, I thought, if their workmen had possessed whatever strange materials these far more ancient architects had used. Because of the thing's smallness, it did not occur to me that I might be looking at the handiwork of a race more advanced than my own. The idea that the Moon had possessed intelligence at all was still almost too tremendous to grasp, and my pride would not let me take the final, humiliating plunge.

And then I noticed something that set the scalp crawling at the back of my neck—something so trivial and so innocent that many would never have noticed it at all. I have said that the plateau was scarred by meteors; it was also coated inches deep with the cosmic dust that is always filtering down upon the surface of any world where there are no winds to disturb it.

Yet the dust and the meteor scratches ended quite abruptly in a wide circle enclosing the little pyramid, as though an invisible wall was protecting it from the ravages of time and the slow but ceaseless bombardment from space.

There was someone shouting in my earphones, and I realized that Garnett had been calling me for some time. I walked unsteadily to the edge of the cliff and signalled him to join me, not trusting myself to speak. Then I went back towards that circle in the dust. I picked up a fragment of splintered rock and tossed it gently towards the shining enigma. If the pebble had vanished at that invisible barrier I should not have been surprised, but it seemed to hit a smooth, hemispherical surface and slid gently to the ground.

I knew then that I was looking at nothing that could be matched in the antiquity of my own race. This was not a building, but a machine, protecting itself with forces that had challenged Eternity. Those forces, whatever they might be, were still operating, and perhaps I had already come too close. I thought of all the radiations man had trapped and tamed in the past century. For all I knew, I might be as irrevocably

doomed as if 1 had stepped into the deadly, silent aura of an unshielded atomic pile.

I remember turning then towards Garnett, who had joined me and was now standing motionless at my side. He seemed quite oblivious to me, so I did not disturb him but walked to the edge of the cliff in an effort to marshal my thoughts. There below me lay the Mare Crisium—Sea of Crises, indeed—strange and weird to most men, but reassuringly familiar to me. I lifted my eyes towards the crescent Earth, lying in her cradle of stars, and I wondered what her clouds had covered when these unknown builders had finished their work. Was it the steaming jungle of the Carboniferous, the bleak shoreline over which the first amphibians must crawl to conquer the land—or, earlier still, the long loneliness before the coming of life?

Do not ask me why I did not guess the truth sooner—the truth that seems so obvious now. In the first excitement of my discovery, I had assumed without question that this crystalline apparition had been built by some race belonging to the Moon's remote past, but suddenly, and with overwhelming force, the belief came to me that it was as alien to the Moon as I myself.

In twenty years we had found no trace of life but a few degenerate plants.

No lunar civilization, whatever its doom, could have left but a single token of its existence.

I looked at the shining pyramid again, and the more remote it seemed from anything that had to do with the Moon. And suddenly I felt myself shaking with a foolish, hysterical laughter, brought on by excitement and over-exertion: for I had imagined that the little pyramid was speaking to me and was saying: "Sorry, I'm a stranger here myself."

It has taken us twenty years to crack that invisible shield and to reach the machine inside those crystal walls. What we could not understand, we broke at last with the savage might of atomic power and now I have seen the fragments of the lovely, glittering thing I found up there on the mountain.

They are meaningless. The mechanisms—if indeed they are mechanisms—of the pyramid belong to a technology that lies far beyond our horizon, perhaps to the technology of para-physical forces.

The mystery haunts us all the more now that the other planets have been reached and we know that only Earth has ever been the home of intelligent life. Nor could any lost civilization of our own world have built that machine, for the thickness of the meteoric dust on the plateau has enabled us to measure its age. It was set there upon its mountain before life had emerged from the seas of Earth.

When our world was half its present age, something from the stars swept through the Solar System, left this token of its passage, and went again upon its way. Until we destroyed it, that machine was still fulfilling the purpose of its builders; and as to that purpose, here is my guess.

Nearly a hundred thousand million stars are turning in the circle of the Milky Way, and long ago other races on the worlds of other suns must have scaled and passed the heights that we have reached. Think of such civilizations, far back in time against the fading afterglow of Creation, masters of a universe so young that life as yet had come only to a handful of worlds. Theirs would have been a loneliness we cannot imagine, the loneliness of gods looking out across infinity and finding none to share their thoughts.

They must have searched the star-clusters as we have searched the planets.

Everywhere there would be worlds, but they would be empty or peopled with crawling, mindless things. Such was our own Earth, the smoke of the great volcanoes still staining its skies, when that first ship of

the peoples of the dawn came sliding in from the abyss beyond Pluto.

It passed the frozen outer worlds, knowing that life could play no part in their destinies. It came to rest among the inner planets, warming themselves around the fire of the Sun and waiting for their stories to begin.

Those wanderers must have looked on Earth, circling safely in the narrow zone between fire and ice, and must have guessed that it was the favorite of the Sun's children. Here, in the distant future, would be intelligence; but there were countless stars before them still, and they might never come this way again.

So they left a sentinel, one of millions they have scattered throughout the universe, watching over all worlds with the promise of life. It was a beacon that down the ages has been patiently signalling that fact that no one had discovered it.

Perhaps you understand now why that crystal pyramid was set upon the Moon instead of on the Earth. Its builders were not concerned with races still struggling up from savagery. They would be interested in our civilization only if we proved our fitness to survive—by crossing space and so escaping from the Earth, our cradle. That is the challenge that all intelligent races must meet, sooner or later. It is a double challenge, for it depends in turn upon the conquest of atomic energy and the last choice between life and death.

Once we had passed that crisis, it was only a matter of time before we found the pyramid and forced it open. Now its signals have ceased, and those whose duty it is will be turning their minds upon Earth. Perhaps they wish to help our infant civilization. But they must be very, very old, and the old are often insanely jealous of the young.

I can never look now at the Milky Way without wondering from which of those banked clouds of stars the emissaries are coming. If you will pardon so commonplace a simile, we have broken the glass of the fire-alarm and have nothing to do but to wait.

I do not think we will have to wait for long.

2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY Metro-GoldwyM-Mayer 1968

141 minutes. Produced and directed by Stanley Kubrick: director of photography, Geofrey Unsworth, B.S.C.; additional photography, John Alcott; production designed by Tony Masters, Harry Lange and Ernest Archer; special effects supervisors, Wally Veevers, Douglas Trumbull, Con Pederson and Tom Howard; associate producer, Victor Lyndon, art direction by John Hoesli; edited by Ray Lovejoy wardrobe by Hardy Amics, makeup by Stuart Freeborn; music by Richard Strauss, Johann Strauss, Gyorgy Ligeti, Aram Khachaturian, et al.; scientific consultant, Frederick l. Ordway III; production artists, Roy Naisbit and John Rose. Filmed in Todd-AO 70mill.

Cast Keir Dullea (Mission Commander David Bowman), Gary Lockwood (Commander Frank Poole), William Sylvester (Dr. Heywood Floyd), Douglas Rain (Voice of Hal 9000 Computer), Daniel Richter (First Apeman), Leonard Rossiter (Prof.

Andrei Smyslov), Frank Miller (Mission Control Head), Alan Giirord (Poole's Father), Vivian Kubrick (Floyd's Daughter).

THE RACER by Ib Melchior filmed as

DEATH RACE 2000

(New World Pictures, 1975)

It's the year 2000 and the population of the United States has been emotionally dulled by the horrors of countless wars and the lingering effects of the Great Depression of 1991. Only the Annual Transcontinental Death Race—where every pedestrian is fair game and the winner is determined by the highest body count—can create more than a ripple of excitement. Five drivers compete in the bizarre elimination, each behind the wheel of a vehicle embellished with a variety of claws, steer horns, bayonets and even machine guns.

So begins one of the strangest and most satirical SF films ever conceived.

The original story first appeared around 1956 in a long-forgotten men's magazine called Escapade; and, thus, has escaped the attention of most readers and anthologists. Its author, Ib Melchior, went on to become a successful Hollywood scenarist (The Angry Red Planet, Robinson Crusoe on Mars) and today is best known for his riveting war novels that are partially based on his own fascinating experiences overseas.

"I first got the idea for 'The Racer,'" recalls Melchior, "one afternoon at a local speedtrack. Hearing the crowd roar with enthusiasm after a particularly grisly smash-up, I realized the omlookers weren't there to see who won ... but who died. After that disconcerting experience, the story just seemed to pour out of me."

The biting tale obviously affected independent producer Roger Corman enough to put the work up on the screen with stars David Carradine and a pre-Rocky Sylvester Stallone. "It was a pretty violent movie," claims Carradine, but he hastens to add that "it's hardly a one-note film. The script had everything—comedy, drama and a good deal of revolutionary thinking.'"

After the premiere screening, Melchior was more than a bit perturbed by the liberties taken with his concept. Screenwriters Robert Thom and Charles Griffith had injected their treatment with an abundance of comedy and a much greater sense of the absurd. Talking in retrospect, however, the author admits that "cinematically, they did just the right thing and I now enjoy watching the picture very much."

But whether you've seen this little gem of a picture or not, its basis, "The Racer," will nevertheless be an unforgettable reading experience.

THE RACER

by Ib Melchior WILLIE FELT the familiar intoxicating excitement. His mouth was dry; his heart beat faster, all his senses seemed more aware than ever. It was a few minutes before 000 hours—his time to start.

This was the day. From all the Long Island Starting Fields the Racers were taking off at 15-minute intervals. The sputter and roar of cars warming up were everywhere. The smell of oil and fuel fumes permeated the air. The hubbub of the great crowd was a steady dim This was the biggest race of the year—New York to Los Angeles--100,000 bucks to the winner! Willie was determined to better his winning record of last year: 33 hours, 27 minutes, 12 seconds in Time. And although it was becoming increasingly difficult he'd do his damnedest to better his Score too!

He took a last walk of inspection around his car. Sleek, lowslung, dark brown, the practically

indestructible plastiglass top looking deceptively fragile, like a soap bubble. Not bad for an old-fashioned diesel job. He kicked the solid plastirubber tires in the time-honored fashion of all drivers. Hank was giving a last-minute shine to the needle-sharp durasteel horns protruding from the front fenders.

Willie's car wasn't nicknamed "The Bull" without reason. The front of the car was built like a streamlined bull's head complete with bloodshot, evil-looking eyes, iron ring through flaring nostrils—and the horns. Although most of the racing cars were built to look like tigers, or sharks, or eagles, there were a few bulls—but Willie's horns were unequalled.

"Car 79 ready for Start in five minutes," the loudspeaker blared. "Car 79. Willie Connors, driver. Hank Morowski, mechanic. Ready your car for Start in five minutes."

Willie and Hank took their places in "The Bull." At a touch by Willie on the starter the powerful diesel engine began a low purr. They drove slowly to the starting line.

"Last Check!" said Willie.

"Right," came Hank's answer.

"Oil and Fuel?"

"40 hours."

"Cooling Fluid?"

"Sealed."

"No-Sleeps?"

"Check."

"Energene Tabs?"

"Check."

"Thermo Drink?"

"Check."

The Starter held the checkered flag high over his head. The crowds packing the grandstands were on their feet. Hushed.

Waiting.

"Here we go!" whispered Willie.

The flag fell. A tremendous cry rose from the crowd. But Willie hardly heard it. Accelerating furiously he

pushed his car to its top speed of 190 miles an hour within seconds—shooting like a bullet along the straightaway toward Manhattan. He was elated; exhilarated. He was a Racer. And full of tricks!

Willie shot through the Tunnel directly to Jersey.

"Well?" grumbled Hank. "Can you tell me now?"

"Toledo," said Willie. "Toledo, Ohio. On the Thruway. We should make it in under three hours."

He felt a slight annoyance with Hank. There was no reason for the man to be touchy. He knew a driver didn't tell anyone the racing route he'd selected. News like that had a habit of getting around. It could cost a Racer his Score.

"There's not much chance of anything coming up until after we hit Toledo," Willie said, "but keep your eyes peeled. You never know."

Hank merely grunted.

It was exactly 1048 hours when "The Bull" streaked into the deserted streets of Toledo.

"O.K.—what now?" asked Hank.

"Grand Rapids, Michigan," said Willie laconically.

"Grand Rapids! But that's—that's an easy 300 miles detour!"

"I know."

"Are you crazy? It'll cost us a couple of hours."

"So Grand Rapids is all the way up between the Lakes. So who'll be expecting us up there?"

"Oh! Oh, yeah, I see," said Hank.

"The Time isn't everything, my friend. Whoever said the shortest distance between two points is a straight line? The Score counts too.

And here's where we pick up our Score!"

The first Tragi-Acc never even knew the Racer had arrived. "The Bull" struck him squarely, threw him up in the air and let him slide off its plastiglass back, leaving a red smear behind and somewhat to the left of Willie—all in a split second....

Near Calvin College an imprudent coed found herself too far from cover when the Racer suddenly came streaking down the campus. Frantically she sprinted for safety, but she didn't have a chance with a driver like Willie behind the wheel. The razor sharp horn on the right fender sliced through her spine so cleanly that the jar wasn't even felt inside the car.

Leaving town the Racer was in luck again. .n elderly woman had left the sanctuary of her stone-walled garden to rescue a straying cat. She was so easy to hit that Willie felt a little cheated.

At 1232 hours they were on the speedway headed for Kansas City.

Hank looked in awe at Willie. "Three!" he murmured dreamily, "a Score of three already. And all of them Kills—for sure. You really know how to drive!"

Hank settled back contentedly as if he could already feel his 25,000 dollar cut in his pocket. He began to whistle "The Racers Are Roaring" off key.

Even after his good Score it annoyed Willie. And for some reason he kept remembering the belatedly pleading look in the old woman's eyes as he struck her. Funny that should stay with him .

He estimated they'd hit Kansas City at around 1815 hours, CST. Hank turned on the radio. Peoria, Illinois, was warning its citizens of the approach of a Racer. All spectators should watch from safety places.

Willie grinned.

That would be him. Well—he wasn't looking for any Score in Peoria.

Dayton, Ohio, told of a Racer having made a Tragic Accident Score of one, and Fort Wayne, Indiana, was crowing over the fact that three Racers had passed through without scoring once. From what he heard it seemed to Willie he had a comfortable lead, both in Time and Score.

They were receiving Kansas City now. An oily-voiced announcer was filling in the time between Racing Scores with what appeared to be a brief history of Racing.

"... and the most popular spectator sports of the latter half of the 20thCentury were such mildly exciting pursuits as boxing and wrestling. Of course the spectators enjoyed seeing the combatants trying to maim each other, and there was always the chance of the hoped-for fatal accident.

"Motor Racing, however, gave a much greater opportunity for the Tragic Accidents so exciting to the spectator. One of the most famed old speedways, Indianapolis, where many drivers and spectators alike ended as bloody Tragi-Accs, is today the nation's racing shrine. Motor Racing was already then held all over the world, sometimes with Scores reaching the hundred mark, and long-distance races were popular.

"The modern Race makes it possible for the entire population to . ù Willie switched off the radio. Why did they always have to stress the Score? Time was important too. The speed—and the endurance. That was part of an Ace Racer as well as his scoring ability. He took an Energene Tab.

They were entering Kansas City.

The check point officials told Willie that there were three Racers with better Time than he, and one had tied his Score. "The Bull" stayed just long enough in the check point pit for Hank to make a quick engine inspection—then they took off again. It was 1818 hours, CST, when they left the city limits behind. They'd been driving over nine hours.

About 50 miles along the Thruway to Denver, just after passing through a little town called Lawrence, Willie suddenly slowed down. Hank, who'd been dozing, sat up in alarm.

"What's the matter?" he cried, "what's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong," Willie said irritably. "Relax. You seem to be good at that."

"But why are you slowing down?"

"You heard the check point record. Our Score's already been tied.

We've got to better it," Willie answered grimly.

The plastirubber tires screeched on the concrete speedway as Willie turned down an exit leading to a Class II road.

"Why down here?" asked Hank. "You can only go about 80 MPH."

A large lumi-sign appeared on the side of the road ahead

LONE STAR

11 Miles it announced.

Willie pointed. "That's why," he said curtly.

In a few minutes Lone Star came into view. It was a small village.

Willie was traveling as fast as he could on the secondary road. He plowed through a flock of chickens, hurtled over a little mongrel dog, which crawled yelping towards the safety of a house and the waiting arms of a little girl, and managed to graze the leg of a husky youth who vaulted a high wooden fence—then they were through Lone Star.

Hank activated the little dashboard screen which gave them a rear view.

"That's not going to do much for our Score," he remarked sourly .

"Oh, shut up!" Willie explode;., surprising both himself and Hank .

What was the matter with him? He couldn't be getting tired already.

He swallowed a No-Sleep. That'd help.

Hank was quiet as they sped through Topeka and took the Thruway to Oklahoma City, but out of the corner of his eyes he was looking speculatively at Willie, hunched over the wheel.

It was getting dusk. Willie switched on his powerful headbeams. They had a faint reddish tint because of the coloring of "The Bull's" eyes.

They had just whizzed through a little burg named Perry, when there was a series of sharp cracks. Willie started.

"There they go again!" chortled Hank. "Those dumb hinterland hicks will never learn they can't hurt us with their fly-poppers."

He knocked the plastiglass dome affectionately. “Takes atomic pellets to get through this baby.”

Of course! He must be on edge to be taken by surprise like that. He’d run into the Anti-racers before. Just a handful of malcontents. The Racing Commission had already declared them illegal. Still—at every race they took pot shots at the Racers; a sort of pathetic defiance.

Why should anyone want to do away with Racing?

They were entering the outskirts of Oklahoma City. Willie killed his headbeams. No need to advertise.

Suddenly Hank grabbed his arm. Wordlessly he pointed. There—garish and gaudy—gleamed the neon sign of a theater....

Willie slowed to a crawl. He pulled over to the curb and the dark car melted into the shadows. He glanced at the clock. 2203 hours.

Perhaps ...

Down the street a man cautiously stuck his head out from the theater entrance. Warily he emerged completely, looking up and don the street carefully. He did not see “The Bull.” Presently he ventured out into the center of the roadway. He stood still listening for a moment.

Then he turned and beckoned towards the theater. Immediately a small group of people emerged at a run.

Now!

The acceleration slammed the Racers back in their seats. “The Bull” shot forward and bore down on the little knot of petrified people with appalling speed.

This time there was no mistaking the hits. A quick succession of pars had Willie calling upon all his driving skill to keep from losing control. Hank pressed the Clean-Spray button to wash the blood off the front of the dome.

He sat with eyes glued to the rear view screen.

“Man, oh man,” he murmured. “What a record! What a Score!” He turned to Willie. “Please,” he said, “please stop. Let’s get out. I know it’s against regulations, but I’ve just gotta see how we did. It won’t take long. We can afford a couple of minutes’ Time now!”

Suddenly Willie felt he had to get out too. This was the biggest Tragi-Acc he’d ever had. He had a vague feeling there was something he wanted to do.

He brought the car to a stop. They stepped out.

Within seconds the deserted street was swarming with people. Now the Racers were out of their car they felt safe. And curious. A few of them pressed forward to take a look at Willie. Naturally he was recognized. His photo had been seen in one way or another by everyone.

Willie was gratified by this obvious adulation. He looked about him.

There were many people in the street now. But—but they were not all fawning and beaming upon him. Willie frowned. Most of them looked grim—even hostile.

Why? What was wrong? Wasn't he one of their greatest Racers? And hadn't he just made a record Score? Given them a Tragi-Acc they wouldn't soon forget?

What was the matter with those hicks?

Suddenly the crowd parted. Slowly a young girl walked up to Willie.

She was beautiful—even with the terrible anger burning on her face.

In her arms she held the still body of a child. She looked straight at Willie with loathing in her eyes. Her voice was low but steady when she said: "Butcher!"

Someone in the crowd called: "Careful, Muriel!" but she paid no heed.

Turning from him she walked on through the crowd, parting for her.

Willie was stunned.

"Come on, let's get out of here," Hank said anxiously.

Willie didn't answer. He was looking back through the crowd to the scene of his Tragi-Acc. Never before had he stopped. Never before had he been this close. He could hear the moaning and sobbing of the Maims over the low murmur of the crowd. It made him uneasy. Back there they worked hurriedly to get the Tragi-Accs off the street. There were so many of them ...

Butcher... ?

All at once he was conscious of Hank pulling at him.

"Let's get roaring! Let's go!"

Quickly he turned and entered the car. Almost at once the street was empty. He turned on his headbeams and started up. Faster—and faster.

The street was dead—empty....

No! There! Someone! Holding a ...

It was butcher—no, Muriel. She stood rooted to the spot in the middle of the street holding the child in her arms. In the glaring headlights her face was white, her eyes terrible, burning, dark ...

Willie did not let up. The car hurtled down upon the lone figure—and passed ...

They'd lost 13 minutes. Now they were on their way to El Paso, Texas.

The nagging headache Willie'd suffered the whole week of planning before the race had returned. He reached for a No-Sleep, hesitated a second, then took another.

Hank glanced at him, worriedly. “Easy, boy!”

Willie didn’t answer.

“That Anti-Racer get under your skin?” Hank suggested. “Don’t let it bother you.”

“Butcher,” she’d said. “Butcher!”

Willie was staring through the plastiglass dome at the racing pool of light from the headbeams. “The Bull” was tearing along the Thruway at almost 180 MPH.

What was that? There—in the light? It was a face—terrible, dark eyes—getting larger—larger—Muriel! It was butcher—no, Muriel!

No—it was a Racer—a Racing Car with Muriel’s face, shrieking down upon him—closer—closer ...

He threw his arms in front of his face. Dimly he heard Hank shout “Willie!” He felt the car lurch. Automatically he tightened his grip on the wheel. They had careened close to the shoulder of the speedway.

Willie sat up. Ahead of him the road was clear—and empty.

It was still dark when they hit El Paso. The radio told them their Oklahoma Score. Five and eight. Five Kills—eight Maims! Hank was delighted. They were close to setting a record. He’d already begun to spend his $25,000.

Willie was uneasy. His headache was worse. His hands were clammy. He kept hearing Muriel’s voice saying: “Butcher”-“Butcher”—“Butcher!”

.

But he was not a butcher. He was a Racer! He’d show them. He’d win this race.

El Paso was a disappointment. Not a soul in sight. Phoenix next.

The clock said 0658 hours, MST, when they roared into Phoenix. The streets were clear. Willie had to slow down to take a corner. As he sped into the new street he saw her. She was running to cross the roadway. Hank whooped.

“Go, Willie! Go!”

The girl looked up an instant in terror.

Her face!

It was the old woman with the cat! No!--it was Muriel. Muriel with thebig, dark eyes . .

In the last split second Willie touched the power steering. “The Bull” responded immediately, and shot past the girl as she scampered to safety.

“What the hell is the matter with you?” Hank roared at Willie. “You could’ve scored! Are you out of your head?”

“We don’t need her. We’ll win without her. I—I—“ Yes, why hadn’t he scored? It wasn’t Muriel. Muriel was back in butcher—in—Oklahoma City. Damn this headache!

“Maybe so,” said Hank angrily. “But I wanna be sure. And what about the bonus for setting a record? Ten thousand apiece. And we’re close.” He looked slyly at Willie. “Or—maybe you’ve lost your nerve.

Wonder what the Commission will say to that?”

“I’ve got plenty of nerve,” Willie snapped.

“Prove it!” said Hank quickly. He pointed to the dashboard map slowly tracing their progress. “There. See that village? With the screwy name?

Wikieup! Off the Thruway. Let’s see you score there!”

Willie said nothing. He hadn’t lost his nerve, he knew that. He was the best of the Racers. No one could drive like he could; constant top speed, and the stamina it took, the split-second timing, the unerring judgment “Well?”

“All right,” Willie agreed.

They hadn’t even reached Wikieup when they spotted the farmer. He didn’t have a chance. “The Bull” came charging down upon him. But in the last moment the car veered slightly. One of the horns ripped the man’s hip open.

In the rear view screen Willie saw him get up and hobble off the road.

“You could’ve made it a ill,” Hank growled accusingly. “Why didn’t you?”

“Bad road,” Willie said. “The wheel slipped on a stone.”

That’s what must have happened, he thought. He didn’t consciously veer away from the man. He was a good Racer. He couldn’t help a bad road.

Needles was left behind at 1045 hours, PST. No one had been out. Hank turned on the radio to a Needles station:

“... has just left the city going West. No other Racer is reported

within twenty minutes of the city. We repeat: A Racer has just left

...”

Hank clicked it off. “Hear that?” he said excitedly. “Twenty 318

THEY CAME FROM OUTER SPACE minutes. They don’t expect anyone for twenty minutes!” He took hold of Willie’s arm. “Turn around! Here’s where we can get ourselves that Record Score. Turn around, Willie!”

“We don’t need it.”

“I do! I want that bonus!”

Willie made no answer.

“Listen to me, you two-bit Racer!” Hank’s tone was menacing. “You or nobody else is going to cheat me out of that bonus. You’ve been acting mighty peculiar. More like an Anti-Racer! Ever since you stopped at that Tragi-Acc back there. Yeah! That girl—that Anti-Racer who called you a—a butcher. Listen! You get that Record Score, or I’ll report you to the Commission for having snooped around a Tragi-Acc.

You’ll never race again!”

Never race again! Willie’s brain was whirling. But he was a Racer.

Not a butcher. A Racer. Record Score? Yes—that’s what he had to do.

Set a record. Be the best damned Racer of them all.

Without a word he turned the car. In minutes they were back at the Needles suburbs. That building. A school house. And there-marching orderly in two rows with their teacher, a class, a whole class of children ...

“The Bull” came charging down the street. Only a couple of hundred feet now to that Record Score ...

But what was that—it was ... they were Muriel—they were all Muriel.

Terrible, dark eyes. No!--they were children—the child in Muriel’s arms.

They were all he child in Muriel’s arms! Were they already moaning and screaming? Butcher! Butcher! No! He couldn’t butcher them—he was a Racer—not a butcher. Not a butcher! Deliberately he swung the car to the empty side of the street.

Suddenly he felt Hank’s hands up on the wheel.

“You—dirty-lousy—Anti-Racer!” the mechanic snarled as he struggled for the wheel.

The car lurched. The two men fought savagely for control. They were only yards from the fleeing children.

With a violent wrench Willie turned the wheel sharply. The car was going 165 miles an hour when it struck the school house and crashed through the wall into the empty building.

The voices came to Willie through thick wads of cotton—and they kept fading in and out.

"... dead instantaneously. But the Racer is still ..."

It sounded like the voice of Muriel. Muriel ...

"... keeps calling for ..."

Willie tried to open his eyes. Everything was milky white. Why was there so much fog? A face was bending over him. Muriel? No—it was not Muriel. He lost consciousness again.

When he opened his eyes once more he knew he was not alone. He turned his head. A girl was sitting at his bedside. Muriel ...

It was Muriel.

He tried to sit up.

"It's you! But—but, how ... ?"

The girl put her hand on his arm.

"The radio. They said you kept calling for 'Muriel." I knew. Never mind that now."

She looked steadily at him. Her eyes were not terrible—not burning—only dark, and puzzled.

"Why did you call for me?" she asked earnestly.

Willie struggled to sit up.

"I wanted to tell you," he said, "to tell you—I—I am not a butcher!

" The girl looked at him for a long moment. Then she leaned down and whispered to him: "Nor a Racer!"

DEATH RACE 2000 New World Pictures 1975

79 minutes. Produced by Roger Corman; directed by Paul Bartel; screenplay by Robert Thom and Charles Griffith; music by Paul Chihara; director of photography, Tak Fujimoto; edited by Tina Hirsch; assistant director, Dennis Jones; makeup by Pat Hutchence; costumes by Jane Rum; art direction by Robinson Royce and B. B. Neel; special effects by Richard MacLean; special optical effects by Jack Rabin Associates; cars designed by James Powers; cars constructed by Dean Jefferies.

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Cast

THEY CAME FROM OUTER SPACE

David Carradine (Frankenstein), Simone Griffeth (Annie), Sylvester Stallone (Machine Gun Joe

Viterbo), Mary Woronov (Calamity Jane), Roberta Collins (Mathilda the Hun), Martin Cove (Nero), Louisa Moritz (Myra), Don Steele (Junior Bruce), Joyce Jameson (Grace Pander), Fred Grandy (Herman the German), John Landis (The Mechanic), Wendy Bartel (Laurie), Chuck Cirino (Fbl Agent).

A BOY AND HIS DOG

by Harlan Ellison filmed as

A BOY AND HIS DOG

(LQ Jaf Films, I 1975)

Welcome to the aftermath of World War IV ... a barren, violent land suited only for the quick and the cunning. Two such survivors are the young man Vic and his canine telepath, Blood, who together roam the dangerous radioactive deserts with more dignity than most.

Undoubtedly one of Harlan Ellison's most brilliantly conceived stories, "A Boy and His Dog" received unanimous critical acclaim on its initial appearance and won the coveted Nebula Award in 1969. As might be expected, that meant nothing to the head honchos at the major Hollywood studios, who wanted to twist the highly relevant material into a futuristic version of "Mr. Ed." Naturally, the unflinching author told them all to take a collective hike.

Viewers familiar with the irrepressible Mr. Ellison, from his appearances on NBC's "Tomorrow Show" and other TV interviews, know that compromise is hardly one of his favorite words. It was therefore no surprise that "A Boy and His Dog" remained in cinematic limbo for close to four years.

Then in 1973, thanks to independent actor-producer L. Q. Jones, the motion picture version—done the Ellison way—finally went into preproduction.

Unfortunately, an unforeseen writers' strike was declared shortly thereafter, preventing the author from working on the screenplay himself.

That chore ultimately fell on the shoulders of producer Jones, who, while still adhering closely to the concept, managed to slip into some horrendously exploitive pitfalls.

Shot under the working title of "Rover Blood" during a hectic twenty-seven-day schedule in Barstow, California, the completed, fully edited version premiered one year later at 1974's World Science Fiction Convention in Washington, D.C. Having seen the picture long before the packed-house audience, Ellison was 95 percent pleased with the adaptation. It was the other 5 percent, however, that kept this acknowledged perfectionist awake nights. For interspersed in the dialogue were debasingly sexist lines that cheapened the entire experience.

What could be done? There was always the option of taking the soundtrack back to the editing room and relooping new dialogue. But the producer had flatly told the disgruntled author that there were absolutely no funds left for further postproduction.

That's when the legendary charismatic charm of Harlan Ellison came straight to the fore. Right before leaving for the convention, he tossed a small reel of outtake clips from the film into his suitcase; then later held a special auction for falls gathered at the ala event in the nations capital. In the short span of just a few hours, a paper bag full of one-, five- and ten-dollar bills was close to overflowing.

Needless to say, it was more than enough to go back and clean up the unwanted material.

In retrospect, Ellison's only major gripe about the final release print is the last unchanged line, where Blood uncharacteristically says, "She didn't have very good judgment, but she certainly had good taste."

It's a sly, off-the-cut remark that almost single-handedly negates all that has come before it!

Without revealing its meaning, it will suffice to say that Ellison's wry but upbeat conclusion was bastardized into nothing but a cruel and dirty joke.

A BOY

AND HIS DC

CHAPTER I

I WAS OuT with Blood, my dog. It was his week for annoying me; he kept calling me Albert. He thought that was pretty damned funny. Payson Terhune: ha. I'd caught a couple of water rats for him, the big green and ochre ones, and someone's manicured poodle, lost off a leash in one of the downunders; he'd eaten pretty good, but he was cranky. "Come on, sonofabitch," I demanded, "find me a piece of ass."

Blood just chuckled, deep in his dog-throat. "You're funny when you get horny," he said.

Maybe funny enough to kick him upside his sphincter asshole, that refugee from a dingo-heap.

"Find! I ain't kidding!"

"For shame, Albert. After all I've taught you. Not 'I ain't

kidding."

I'm not kidding."

He knew I'd reached the edge of my patience. Sullenly, he started casting.

He sat down on the crumbled remains of the curb, and his eyelids flickered and closed, and his hairy body tensed. After a while he settled down on his front paws, and scraped them forward till he was Lying fiat, his shaggy head on the outstretched paws. The tenseness left him and he began trembling, almost the way he trembled just preparatory to scratching a flea. It went on that way for almost a quarter of an hour, and finally he rolled over and lay on his back, his naked belly toward the night sky, his front paws folded mantis-like, his hind legs extended and open. "I'm sorry," he said. "There's nothing."

I could have gotten mad and booted him, but I knew he had tried. I wasn't happy about it, I really wanted to get laid, but what could I do? "Okay," I said, with resignation, "forget it."

He kicked himself onto his side and quickly got up.

"What do you want to do?" he asked.

"Not much we can do, is there?" I was more than a little sarcastic.

He sat down again, at my feet, insolently humble.

I leaned against the melted stub of a lamppost, and thought about girls.

It was painful. "We can always go to a show," I said. Blood looked around the street, at the pools of shadow Lying in the weed-overgrown craters, and didn't say anything. The whelp was waiting for me to say okay, let's go. He liked movies as much as I did.

"Okay, let's go." e got up and followed me, his tongue hanging,

panting with happiness. Go ahead and laugh, you egg-sucker. No

popcorn for

Our Gang was a roverpak that had never been able to cut it simply foraging, so they'd opted for comfort and gone a smart way to getting it.

They were movie-oriented kids, and they'd taken over the turf where the Metropole Theater was located. No one tried to bust their turf, because we all needed the movies, and as long as Our Gang had access to films, and did a better job of keeping the films going, they provided a service, even for solos like me and Blood. Especially for solos like us.

They made me check my .45 and the Browning .22 long at the door. There was a little alcove right beside the ticket booth. I bought my tickets first; it cost me a can of Oscar Mayer Philadelphia Scrapple for me, and a tin of sardines for Blood. Then the Our Gang guards with the bren guns motioned me over to the alcove and I checked my heat. I saw water leaking from a broken pipe in the ceiling and I told the checker, a kid with big leathery warts all over his face and lips, to move my weapons where it was dry. He ignored me. "Hey you! Motherfuckin' toad, move my stuff over the other side ... it goes to rust fast ...

an' it picks up any spots, man, I'll break your bones!"

He started to give me jaw about it, looked at the guards with the brens, knew if they tossed me out I'd lose my price of admission whether I went in or not, but they weren't looking for any action, probably understrength, and gave him the nod to let it pass, to do what I said. So the toad moved my Browning to the other end of the gun rack, and pegged my .45 under it.

Blood and me went into the theater.

"I want popcorn."

"Forget it."

"Come on, Albert. Buy me popcorn."

"I'm tapped out. You can live without popcorn."

"You're just being a shit."

I shrugged: sue me.

We went in. The place was jammed. I was glad the guards hadn't tried to take anything but guns. My spike and knife felt reassuring, lying-up in their oiled sheaths at the back of my neck. Blood found two together, and we moved into the row, stepping on feet. Someone cursed and I ignored him.

A Doberman growled. Blood's fur stirred, but he let it pass. There was always some hardcase on the muscle, even in neutral ground like the Metropole.

(I heard once about a get-it-on they'd had at the old Loew's Granada, on the South Side. Wound up with ten or twelve rovers and their mutts dead, the theater burned down and a couple of good Cagney films lost in the fire.

After that was when the roverpaks had got up the agreement that movie houses were sanctuaries. It was better now, but there was always somebody too messed in the mind to come soft.)

It was a triple feature. Raw Deal with Dennis O'Keefe, Claire Trevor, Raymond Burr and Marsha Hunt was the oldest of the three. It'd been made in 1948, seventy-six years ago, God only knows how the damn thing'd hung together all that time; it slipped sprockets and they had to stop the movie all the time to re-thread it. But it was a good movie. About this solo who'd been japped by his roverpak and was out to get revenge. Gangsters, mobs, a lot of punching and fighting. Real good.

The middle flick was a thing made during the Third War, in '82, twenty-seven years before I was even born, thing called Smell of a Chink.

It was mostly gut-spilling and some nice hand-to-hand. Beautiful scene of skirmisher greyhounds equipped with napalm throwers, jellyburning a Chink town. Blood dug it, even though we'd seen this flick before.

He had some kind of phony shuck going that these were ancestors of his, and he knew and I knew he was making it up.

"Wanna burn a baby, hero?" I whispered to him. He got the barb and just shifted in his seat, didn't say a thing, kept looking pleased as the dogs worked their way through the town. I was bored stiff.

I was waiting for the main feature.

Finally it came on. It was a beauty, a beaver flick made in the late 1970's. It was called Big Black Leather Splits. Started right out very good. These two blondes in black leather corsets and boots laced all the way up to their crotches, with whips and masks, got this skinny guy down and one of the chicks sat on his face while the other one went down on him.

It got really hairy after that.

All around me there were solos playing with themselves. I was about to jog it a little myself when Blood leaned across and said, real soft, the way he does when he's onto something unusually smelly, "There's a chick in here."

"You're nuts," I said.

"I tell you I smell her. She's in here, man."

Without being conspicuous, I looked around. Almost every seat in the theater was taken with solos or their dogs. If a chick had slipped in there'd have been a riot. She'd have been ripped to pieces before any single guy could have gotten into her. "Where?" I asked, softly. All around me, the solos were beating-off, moaning as the blondes took off their masks and one of them worked the skinny guy with a big wooden ram strapped around her hips.

"Give me a minute," Blood said. He was really concentrating. His body was tense as a wire. His eyes were closed, his muzzle quivering. I let him work.

It was possible. Just maybe possible. I knew that they made really dumb flicks in the downunders, the kind of crap they'd made back in the 1930's and '40's, real clean stuff with even married people sleeping in twin beds.

Myrna Loy and George Brent kind of flicks. And I knew that once in a while a chick from one of the really strict middle-class downunders would cumup, to see what a hairy flick was like. I'd heard about it, but it'd never happened in any theater I'd ever been in.

And the chances of it happening in the Metropole, particularly, were slim.

There was a lot of twisty trade came to the Metropole. Now, understand, I'm not specially prejudiced against guys corning one another ... hell, I can understand it. There just aren't enough chicks anywhere. But I can't cut the jockey-and-boxer scene because it gets some weak little boxer hanging on you, getting jealous, you have to hunt for him and all he thinks he has to do is bare his ass to get all the work done for him. It's as bad as having a chick dragging along behind. Made for a lot of bad blood and fights in the bigger roverpaks, too. So I just never swung that way. Well, not never, but not for a long time.

So with all the twisties in the Metropole, I didn't think a chick would chance it. Be a toss-up who'd tear her apart first: the boxers or the straights.

And if she was here, why couldn't any of the other dogs smell her...

?"

"Third row in front of us," Blood said. "Aisle seat. Dressed like a solo."

"How's come you can whiff her and no other dog's caught her?"

"You forget who I am, Albert."

"I didn't forget, I just don't believe it."

Actually, bottom-line, I guess I did believe it. When you'd been as dumb as I'd been and a dog like Blood'd taught me so much, a guy came to believe everything he said. You don't argue with your teacher.

Not when he'd taught you how to read and write and add and subtract and everything else they used to

know that meant you were smart (but doesn't mean much of anything now, except it's good to know it, I guess).

(The reading's a pretty good thing. It comes in handy when you can find some canned goods someplace, like in a bombed-out supermarket; makes it easier to pick out stuff you like when the pictures are gone off the labels. Couple of times the reading stopped me from taking canned beets.

Shit, I hate beets!)

So I guess I did believe why he could whiff a maybe chick in there, and no other mutt could. He'd told me all about that a million times. It was his favorite story. History he called it. Christ, I'm not that dumb! I knew what history was. That was all the stuff that happened before now.

But I liked hearing history straight from Blood, instead of him 328

THEY CAME FROM OUTER SPACE making me read one of those crummy books he was always dragging in. And that particular history was all about him, so he laid it on me over and over, till I knew it by heart ... no, the word was rote. Not wrote, like writing, that was something else. I knew it by rote, like it means you got it word-for-word.

And when a mutt teaches you everything you know, and he tells you something rote, I guess finally you do believe it. Except I'd never let that leg-lifter know it.

CHAPTER II

WHAT HE D TOLD me rote was:

Over fifty years ago, in Los Angeles, before the Third War even got going completely, there was a man named Buesing who lived in Cerritos.

He raised dogs as watchmen and sentries and attackers. Dobermans, Danes, schnauzers and Japanese akitas. He had one four-year-old German shepherd bitch named Ginger. She worked for the Los Angeles Police Department's narcotics division. She could smell out marijuana. No matter how well it was hidden.

They ran a test on her: there were 25,000 boxes in an auto parts warehouse.

Five of them had been planted with marijuana that had been sealed in

cellophane, wrapped in tin foil and heavy brown paper, and finally

hidden in three separate sealed cartons. Within seven minutes Ginger

found all five packages. At the same time that Ginger was working,

ninety-two miles further north, in Santa Barbara, cetologists had drawn

and amplified dolphin spinal fluid and injected it into chacma baboons

and dogs. Altering surgery and grafting had been done. The first

successful product of this cetacean experimentation had been a

two-year-old male puli named Ahbhu, who had communicated

sense-impressions telepathically. Cross-breeding and continued

experimentation had produced the first skirmisher dogs, just in time

for the Third War. Telepathic over short distances, easily trained,

able to track gasoline or troops or poison gas or radiation when linked

with their human controllers, they had become the shock commandos of a

new kind of war. The selective traits had bred

true. Dobermans, greyhounds, akitas, pulis and schnauzers had steadily become more telepathic.

Ginger and Ahbhu had been Blood's ancestors.

He had told me so, a thousand times. Had told me the story just that way, in just those words, a thousand times, as it had been told to him.

I'd never believed him till now.

Maybe the little bastard was special.

I checked out the solo scrunched down in the aisle seat three rows ahead of me. I couldn't tell a damned thing. The solo had his (her?) cap pulled way down, fleece jacket pulled way up.

"Are you sure?"

"As sure as I can be. It's a girl."

"If it is, she's playing with herself just like a guy."

Blood snickered. "Surprise," he said sarcastically.

The mystery solo sat through Raw Deal again. It made sense, if that was a girl. Most of the solos and all of the members of roverpaks left after the beaver flick. The theater didn't fill up much more, it gave the streets time to empty, he/she could make his/her way back to wherever he/she had come from. I sat through Raw Deal again myself.

Blood went to sleep.

When the mystery solo got up, I gave him/her time to get weapons if any'd been checked, and start away. Then I pulled Blood's big shaggy ear and said, "Let's do it." He slouched after me, up the aisle.

I got my guns and checked the street. Empty.

"Okay, nose," I said, "where'd he go?"

"Her. To the right."

I started off, loading the Browning from my bandolier. I still didn't see anyone moving among the bombed-out shells of the buildings. This section of city was crummy, really bad shape. But then, with Our Gang running the Metropole, they didn't have to repair anything else to get their livelihood. It was ironic; the Dragons had to keep an entire power plant going to get tribute from the other roverpaks; Ted's Bunch had to mind the reservoir; the Bastinados worked like fieldhands in the marijuana gardens; the Barbados Blacks lost a couple of dozen members every year cleaning out the radiation pits all over the city; and Our Gang only had to run that movie house.

Whoever their leader had been, however many years ago it had been that the roverpaks had started forming out of foraging 330 THEY AME FROM OUTER SPACE solos, I had to give it to him: he'd been a flinty sharp mother. He knew what services to deal in.

"She turned off here," Blood said.

I followed him as he began loping, toward the edge of the city and the bluish-green radiation that still flickered from the hills. I knew he was right, then. The only thing out here was the access dropshaft to the downunder. It was a girl, all right.

The cheeks of my ass tightened as I thought about it. I was going to get laid. It had been almost a month, since Blood had whiffed that solo chick in the basement of the Market Basket. She'd been filthy, and I'd gotten the crabs from her, but she'd been a woman, all right, and once I'd tied her down and clubbed her a couple of times she'd been pretty good. She'd liked it, too, even if she did spit on me and tell me she'd kill me if she ever got loose. I left her tied up, just to be sure. She wasn't there when I went back to look, week before last.

"Watch out," Blood said, dodging around a crater almost invisible against the surrounding shadows. Something stirred in the crater.

Trekking across the nomansland I realized why it was that all but a handful of solos or members of roverpaks were guys. The War had killed off most of the girls, and that was the way it always was in wars ...

at least that's what Blood told me. The things getting born were seldom male or female, and had to be smashed against a wall as soon as they were pulled out of the mother.

The few chicks who hadn't gone downunder with the middle-classers were hard, solitary bitches like the one in the Market Basket; tough and stringy and just as likely to cut off your meat with a razor blade once they let you get in. Scuffling for a piece of ass had gotten harder and harder, the older I'd gotten.

But every once in a while a chick got tired of being roverpak property, or a raid was got-up by five or six roverpaks and some unsuspecting downunder was taken, or—like this time, yeah—some middle-class chick from a downunder got hot pants to find out what a beaver flick looked like, and cumup.

I was going to get laid. Oh boy, I couldn't wait!

CHAPTER III

OUT ThERE it was nothing but empty corpses of blasted buildings. One entire block had been stomped flat, like a steel press had come down from Heaven and given one solid wham! and everything was powder under it. The chick was scared and skittish, I could see that. She moved erratically, looking back over her shoulder and to either side. She knew she was in dangerous country. Man, if she'd only known how dangerous.

There was one building standing all alone at the end of the smash-flat block, like it had been missed and chance let it stay. She ducked inside, and a minute later I saw a bobbing light. Flashlight?

Maybe.

Blood and I crossed the street and came up into the blackness surrounding the building. It was what was left of a YMCA.

That meant "Young Men's Christian Association" Blood taught me to read.

So what the hell was a young men's Christian association? Sometimes being able to read makes more questions than if you were stupid.

I didn't want her getting out; inside there was as good a place to screw her as any, so I put Blood on guard right beside the steps leading up into the shell, and I went around the back. All the doors and windows had been blown out, of course. It wasn't no big trick getting in. I pulled myself up to the ledge of a window, and dropped down inside. Dark inside. No noise, except the sound of her, moving around on the other side of the old YMCA. I didn't know if she was heeled or not, and I wasn't about to take any chances. I bowslung the Browning and took out the .45 automatic. I didn't have to snap back the action—there was always a slug in the chamber.

I started moving carefully through the room. It was a locker room of some kind. There was glass and debris all over the floor, and one entire row of metal lockers had the paint blistered off their surfaces; the flash blast had caught them through the win dows, a lot of years ago. My sneakers didn't make a sound coming through the room.

The door was hanging on one hinge, and I stepped over-through the inverted triangle. I was in the swimming pool area. The big pool was empty, with tiles buckled down at the shallow end. It stunk bad in there; no wonder, there were dead guys, or what was left of them, along one wall. Some lousy cleaner-up had stacked them, but hadn't buried them. I pulled my bandana up around my nose and mouth, and kept moving.

Out the other side of the pool place, and through a little passage with popped light bulbs in the ceiling, I didn't have any trouble seeing.

There was moonlight coming through busted windows and a chunk was out of the ceiling. I could hear her real plain now, just on the other side of the door at the end of the passage. I hung close to the wall, and stepped down to the door. It was open a crack, but blocked by a fall of lath and plaster from the wall. It would make noise when I went to pull it open, that was for certain. I had to wait for the right moment.

Flattened against the wall, I checked out what she WaS doing in there.

It was a gymnasium, big one, with climbing ropes hanging down from the ceiling. She had a big square eight-cell flashlight sitting up on the croup of a vaulting horse. There were parallel bars and a horizontal bar about eight feet high, the high-tempered steel all rusty now.

There were swinging rings and a trampoline and a big wooden balancing beam. Over to one side there were wall-bars and balancing benches, horizontal and oblique ladders, and a couple of stacks of vaulting boxes. I made a note to remember this joint. It was better for working-out than the jerry-rigged gym I'd set up in an old auto wrecking yard. A guy has to keep in shape, if he's going to be a solo.

She was out of her disguise. Standing there in the skin, shivering.

Yeah, it was chilly, and I could see a pattern of chicken-skin all over her. She was maybe five six or seven, with nice tits and kind of skinny legs. She was brushing out her hair. It hung way down the back. The flashlight didn't make it clear enough to tell if she had red hair or chestnut, but it wasn't blonde, which was good, and that was because I dug redheads. She had nice tits, though. I couldn't see her face, the hair was hanging down all smooth and wavy and cut off her profile.

The crap she'd been wearing was thrown around on the floor,

and what she was going to put on was up on the vaulting horse. She was standing in little shoes with a kind of a funny heel on them.

I couldn't move. I suddenly realized I couldn't move. She was nice, really nice. I was getting a real big kick out of just standing there and seeing the way her waist fell inward and her hips fell outward, the way the muscles at the side of her tits pulled up when she reached to the top of her head to brush all that hair down. It was really weird, the kick I was getting out of standing and just staring at a chick do that. Kind of very, well, woman stuff. I liked it a lot.

I'd never ever stopped and just looked at a chick like that. All the ones I'd ever seen had been scumbags that Blood had smelled out for me, and I'd snatch-'n'-grabbed them. Or the big chicks in the beaver flicks. Not like this one, kind of soft and very smooth, even with the goose bumps. I could of watched her all night.

She put down the brush, and reached over and took a pair of panties off the pile of clothes, and wriggled into them. Then she got her bra and put it on. I never knew the way chicks did it. She put it on backwards, around her waist, and it had a hook on it. Then she slid it around till the cups were in front, and kind of pulled it up under and scooped herself into it, first one, then the other; then she pulled the straps over her shoulder.

She reached for her dress, and I nudged some of the lath and plaster aside, and grabbed the door to give it a yank.

She had the dress up over her head, and her arms up inside the material, and when she stuck her head in, and was all tangled there for a second, I yanked the door and there was a crash as chunks of wood and plaster fell out of the way, and a heavy scraping, and I jumped inside and was on her before she could get out of the dress.

She started to scream, and I pulled the dress off her with a ripping sound, and it all happened for her before she knew what that crash and scrape was all about.

Her face was wild. Just wild. Big eyes: I couldn't tell what color they were because they were in shadow. Real fine features, a wide mouth, little nose, cheekbones just like mine, real high and prominent and a dimple in her right cheek. She stared at me really scared.

And then ... and this is really weird ... I felt like I should say something to her. I don't know what. Just something. It made me uncomfortable, to see her scared, but what the hell could I do about that, I mean, I was going to rape her, after all, and I couldn't very well tell her not to be shrinky about it. She was the one cumup, after all. But even so, I wanted to say hey, don't be scared, I just want to lay you. (That never happened before. I never wanted to say anything to a chick, just get in, and that was that.)

But it passed, and I put my leg behind hers and tripped her back, and she went down in a pile. I leveled the .45 at her, and her mouth kind of opened in a little o shape. "Now I'm gonna go over there and get one of them wrestling mats, so it'll be better, comfortable, uh-huh?

You make a move off that floor and I shoot a leg out from under you, and you'll get screwed just the same, except you'll be without a leg."

I waited for her to let me know she was onto what I was saying, and she finally nodded real slow, so I kept the automatic on her, and went over to the big dusty stack of mats, and pulled one off.

I dragged it over to her, and flipped it so the cleaner side was up, and used the muzzle of the .45 to maneuver her onto it. She just sat there on the mat, with her hands behind her, and her knees bent, and stared at me.

I unzipped my pants and started pulling them down off one side, when I caught her looking at me real funny. I stopped with the jeans.

"What're you lookin' at?"

I was mad. I didn't know why I was mad, but I was.

"What's your name?" she asked. Her voice was very soft, and kind of furry, like it came up through her throat that was all lined with fur or something.

She kept looking at me, waiting for me to answer.

"Vic," I said. She looked like she was waiting for more.

"Vic what?"

I didn't know what she meant for a minute, then I did. "Vic. Just Vic.

That's all."

"Well, what're your mother and father's names?"

Then I started laughing, and working my jeans down again. "Boy, are you a dumb bitch," I said, and laughed some more. She looked hurt. It made me mad again. "Stop lookin' like that, or I'll bust out your teeth!"

She folded her hands in her lap.

I got the pants down around my ankles. They wouldn't come off over the sneakers. I had to balance on one foot and scuff the sneaker off the other foot. It was tricky, keeping the .45 on her and getting the sneaker off at the same time. But I did it.

I was standing there buck-naked from the waist down and she had sat forward a little, her legs crossed, hands still in her lap. "Get that stuff off," I said.

She didn't move for a second, and I thought she was going to give me trouble. But then she reached around behind and undid the bra. Then she tipped back and slid the panties off her ass.

Suddenly, she didn't look scared any more. She was watching me very close and I could see her eyes were blue now. Now this is the really weird thing ...

I couldn't do it. I mean, not exactly. I mean, I wanted to fuck her, see, but she was all soft and pretty and she kept looking at me, and no solo I ever met would believe me, but I heard myself talking to her, still standing there like some kind of wetbrain, one sneaker off and jeans down around my ankle. "What's your name?"

"Quilla June Holmes."

"That's a weird name."

"My mother says it's not that uncommon, back in Oklahoma."

"That where your folks come from?"

She nodded. "Before the Third War."

"They must be pretty old by now."

"They are, but they're okay. I guess."

We were just frozen there, talking to each other. I could tell she was cold, because she was shivering. "Well," I said, sort of getting ready to drop down beside her, "I guess we better—" Damn it! That damned Blood! Right at that moment he came crashing in from outside. Came skidding through the lath, and plaster, raising dust, slid along on his ass till he got to us. "Now what?" I demanded.

"Who're you talking to?" the girl asked.

"Him. Blood."

"The dog!.!"

Blood stared at her and then ignored her. He started to say something, but the girl interrupted him, "Then it's true what they say ... you can all talk to animals ..."

"You going to listen to her all night, or do you want to hear why I came in?"

"Okay, why're you here?"

“You’re in trouble, Albert.”

“Come on, forget the mickey-mouse. What’s up?”

Blood twisted his head toward the front door of the YMCA “Roverpak.

Got the building surrounded. I make it fifteen or twenty, maybe more.”

“How the hell’d they know we was here?”

Blood looked chagrined. He drooped his head “Well?”

“Some other mutt must’ve smelled her in the theater.”

“Now what?”

“Now we stand ‘em off, that’s what. You got any better suggestions?”

“Just one.”

I waited. He grinned.

“Pull your pants up.”

CHAPTER IV

THE GIRL, this Quilla June, was pretty safe. I made her a kind of a shelter out of wrestling mats, maybe a dozen of them. She wouldn’t get hit by a stray bullet, and if they didn’t go right for her, they wouldn’t find her.

I climbed one of the ropes hanging down from the girders and laid out up there with the Browning and a couple of handfuls of reloads. I wished to God rd had an automatic, a bren or a Thompson. I checked the .45, made sure it was full, with one in the chamber, and set the extra clips down on the girder. I had a clear line-of-fire all around the gym.

Blood was lying in shadow right near the front door. He’d suggested I try and pick off any dogs with the roverpak first, if I could. That would allow him to operate freely.

That was the least of my worries.

‘ I’d wanted to hole up in another room, one with only a single entrance, but I had no way of knowing if the rovers were already in the building, so I did the best I could with what I had.

Everything was quiet. Even that Quilla June. It’d taken me valuable minutes to convince her she’d damned well better hole up and not make any noise, she was better off with me than with twenty of them. “If you ever wanna see your mommy and daddy again,” I warned her. After that she didn’t give me no trouble, packing her in with mats.

Quiet

Then I heard two things, both at the same time. From back in the swimming pool I heard boots crunching plaster. Very soft. And from one side of the front door I heard a tinkle of metal striking wood. So they were going to try a yoke. Well, I was ready.

Quiet again.

I sighted the Browning on the door to the pool room. It was still open from when I'd come through. Figure him at maybe five-ten, and drop the sights a foot and a half, and I'd catch him in the chest. I'd learned long ago you don't try for the head. Go for the widest part of the body: the chest and stomach. The trunk.

Suddenly, outside, I heard a dog bark, and part of the darkness near the front door detached itself and moved inside the gym. Directly opposite Blood. I didn't move the Browning.

The rover at the front door moved a step along the wall, away from Blood.

Then he cocked back his arm and threw something—a rock, a piece of metal, something—across the room, to draw fire. I didn't move the Browning.

When the thing he'd thrown hit the floor, two rovers jumped out of the swimming pool door, one on either side of it, rifles down, ready to spray.

Before they could open up, I'd squeezed off the first shot, tracked across and put a second shot into the other one. They both went down.

Dead hits, right in the heart. Bang, they were down, neither one moved.

The mother by the door turned to split, and Blood was on him. Just like that, out of the darkness, riiiip!

Blood leaped, right over the crossbar of the guy's rifle held at ready, and sank his fangs into the rover's throat. The guy screamed, and Blood dropped, carrying a piece of the guy with him. The guy was making awful bubbling sounds and went down on one knee. I put a slug into his head, and he fell forward.

It went quiet again.

Not bad. Not bad atall atall. Three takeouts and they still didn't know our positions. Blood had fallen back into the murk by the entrance. He didn't say a thing, but I knew what he was thinking; d maybe that was three out of seventeen, or three out of twenty, or twenty-two. No way of knowing; we could be faced-off in here for a week and never know if we'd gotten them all, or some, or none They could go and get poured full again, and I'd find myself run d out of slugs and no food and that girl, that Quilla June, crying and making me divide my attention, and daylight—and they'd be still laying out there, waiting till we got hungry enough to do some- d thing dumb, or till we ran out of slugs, and then they'd cloud up and rain all over us.

A rover came dashing straight through the front door at top speed, took a leap, hit on his shoulders, rolled, came up going in a different direction and snapped off three rounds into different corners of the room before I could track him with the Browning. By that time he was close enough under me where I didn't have to waste a .22 slug. I picked up the .45 without a sound and blew the back off his head. Slug went in neat, came out and took most of his hair with it. He fell right down.

"Blood! The rifle!"

Came out of the shadows, grabbed it up in his mouth and dragged it over to the pile of wrestling mats in the far corner. I saw an arm poke out from the mass of mats, and a hand grabbed the rifle, dragged it inside.

Well, it was at least safe there, till I needed it. Brave little bastard: he scuttled over to the dead rover and started worrying the ammo bandolier off his body. It took him a while; he could have been picked off from the doorway or outside one of the windows, but he did it. Brave little bastard.

I had to remember to get him something good to eat, when we got out of this. I smiled, up there in the darkness: if we get out of this, I wouldn't have to worry about getting him something tender. It was lying all over the floor of that gymnasium.

Just as Blood was dragging the bandolier back into the shadows, two of them tried it with their dogs. They came through a ground floor window, one after another, hitting and rolling and going in opposite directions, as the dogs—a mother-ugly akita, big as a house, and a Doberman bitch the color of a turd—shot through the front door and split in the unoccupied two directions. I caught one of the dogs, the akita, with the .45 and it went down thrashing. The Doberman was all over Blood.

But firing, I'd given away my position. One of the rovers fired from the hip and .30-06 soft-nosed slugs spanged off the girders around me.

I dropped the automatic, and it started to slip off the girder as I reached for the Browning. I made a grab for the .4 and that was the only thing saved me. I fell forward to clutch at it, it slipped away and hit the gym floor with a crash, and the rover fired at where I'd been. But I was flat on the girder, arm dangling, and the crash startled him. He fired at the sound, and right at that instant I heard another shot, from a Winchester, and the other rover, who'd made it safe into the shadows, fell forward holding a big pumping hole in his chest.

That Quilla June had shot him, from behind the mats.

I didn't even have time to figure out what the fuck was happening ...

Blood was rolling around with the Doberman and the sounds they were making were awful ... the rover with the .306 chipped off another shot and hit the muzzle of the Browning protruding over the side of the girder, and wham it was gone, falling down. I was naked up there without clout, and the sonofabitch was hanging back in shadow waiting for me.

Another shot from the Winchester, and the rover fired right into the mats.

She ducked back behind, and I knew I couldn't count on her for anything more. But I didn't need it; in that second, while he was focused on her, I grabbed the climbing rope, flipped myself over the girder, and howling like a burnpit-screamer, went sliding down, feeling the rope cutting my palms. I got down far enough to swing, and kicked off. I swung back and forth, whipping my body three different ways each time, swinging out and over, way over, each time. The sonofabitch kept firing, trying to track a trajectory, but I kept spinning out of his line of fire. Then he was empty, and I kicked back as hard as I could, and came zooming in toward his corner of shadows, and let loose all at once and went ass-over-end into the corner, and there he was, and I went right into him and he spanged off the wall, and I was on top of him, digging my thumbs into his eye-sockets. He was screaming and the dogs were screaming and that girl was screaming, and I pounded the motherfucker's head against the floor till he stopped moving, then I grabbed up the empty .306 and whipped his head till I knew he wasn't gonna give me no more

aggravation.

Then I found the .45 and shot the Doberman

Blood got up and shook himself off. He was cut up bad. “Thanks,” he mumbled, and went over and lay down in the shadows to lick himself off.

I went and found that Quilla June, and she was crying. About all the guys we’d killed. Mostly about the one she’d killed. I couldn’t get her to stop bawling, so I cracked her across the face, and told her she’d saved my life, and that helped some.

Blood came dragassing over. “How’re we going to get out of this, Albert?”

“Let me think.”

I thought and knew it was hopeless. No matter how many we got, there’d be more. And it was a matter of macho now. Their honor.

“How about a fire?” Blood suggested.

“Get away while it’s burning?” I shook my head. “They’ll have the place staked-out all around. No good.”

“What if we don’t leave? What if we burn up with it?”

I looked at him. Brave ... and smart as hell.

CHAPTER V

WE GAThERED all the lumber and mats and scaling ladders and vaulting boxes and benches and anything else that would burn, and piled the garbage against a wooden divider at one end of the gym. Quilla June found a can of kerosene in a storeroom, and we set fire to the whole damn pile. Then we followed Blood to the place he’d found for us. The boiler room way down under the YMCA. We all climbed into the empty boiler, and dogged down the door, leaving a release vent open for air.

We had one mat in there with us, and all the ammo we could carry, and the extra rifles and sidearms the rovers’d had on them.

“Can you catch anything?” I asked Blood.

“A little. Not much. I’m reading one guy. The building’s burning good.”

“You be able to tell when they split?”

“Maybe. If they split.”

I settled back. Quilla June was shaking from all that had happened.

“Just take it easy,” I told her. “By morning the place’ll be down around our ears and they’ll go through the rubble and find a lot of dead meat and maybe they won’t look too hard for a chick’s body. And everything’ll be all right ... if we don’t get choked off in here.”

She smiled, very thin, and tried to look brave. She was okay, that one.

She closed her eyes and settled back on the mat and tried to sleep. I was beat. I closed my eyes, too.

"Can you handle it?" I asked Blood.

"I suppose. You better sleep."

I nodded, eyes still closed, and fell on my side. I was out before I could think about it.

When I came back, I found the girl, that Quilla June, snuggled up under my armpit, her arm around my waist, dead asleep. I could hardly breathe. It was like a furnace; hell, it was a furnace. I reached out a hand and the wall of the boiler was so damned hot I couldn't touch it. Blood was up on the mattress with us. That mat had been the only thing'd kept us from being singed good. He was asleep, head buried in his paws. She was asleep, still naked.

I put a hand on her tit. It was warm. She stirred and cuddled into me closer. I got a hard on.

Managed to get my pants off, and rolled on top of her. She woke up fast when she felt me pry her legs apart, but it was too late by then.

"Don't ... stop ... what are you doing ... no, don't ..."

But she was half-asleep, and weak, and I don't think she really wanted to fight me anyhow.

She cried when I broke her, of course, but after that it was okay.

There was blood all over the wrestling mat. And Blood just kept sleeping.

It was really different. Usually, when I'd get Blood to track something down for me, it'd be grab it and punch it and get away fast before something bad could happen. But when she came, she rose up off the mat, and hugged me around the back so hard I thought she'd crack my ribs, and then she settled back down slow slow slow, like I do when I'm doing leg-lifts in the makeshift gym I rigged in the auto wrecking yard. And her eyes were closed, and she was relaxed-looking. And happy. I could tell.

We did it a lot of times, and after a while it was her idea, but I didn't say no. And then we lay out side-by-side and talked.

She asked me about how it was with Blood, and I told her how the skirmisher dogs had gotten telepathic, and how they'd lost the ability to hunt food for themselves, so the solos and roverpaks had to do it for them, and how dogs like Blood were good at finding chicks for solos like me. She didn't say anything to that I asked her about what it was like where she lived, in one of the downunders.

"It's nice. But it's always very quiet. Everyone is very polite to everyone else. It's just a small town."

"Which one you live in?"

"Topeka. It's real close to here."

"Yeah, I know. The access dropshaft is only about half a mile from here. I went out there once, to take a look around."

"Have you ever been in a downunder?"

"No. But I don't guess I want to be, either."

"Why? It's very nice. You'd like it."

"Shit."

"That's very crude."

"I'm very crude."

"Not all the time."

I was getting mad. "Listen, you ass, what's the matter with you? I grabbed you and pushed you around, I raped you half a dozen times, so what's so good about me, huh? What's the matter with you, don't you even have enough smarts to know when somebldy's—" She was smiling at me. "I didn't mind. I liked doing it. Want to do it again?"

I was really shocked. I moved away from her. "What the hell is wrong with you? Don't you know that a chick from a downunder like you can be really mauled by solos? Don't you know chicks get warnings from their parents in the downunders, 'Don't cumup you'll get snagged by them dirty, hairy, slobbering solos!" Don't you know that?"

She put her hand on my leg and started moving it up, the fingertips just brushing my thigh. I got another hard on. "My parents never said that about solos," she said. Then she pulled me over her again, and kissed me and I couldn't stop from getting in her again.

God, it just went on like that for hours. After a while Blood turned around and said, "I'm not going to keep pretending I'm asleep. I'm hungry.

And I'm hurt."

I tossed her off me—she was on top by this time—and examined him.

The Doberman had taken a good chunk out of his right ear, and there was a rip right down his muzzle, and blood-matted fur on one side. He was a mess.

"Jesus, man, you're a mess," I said.

"You're no savory rose garden yourself, Albert!" he snapped. I pulled my hand back.

"Can we get out of here?" I asked him.

He cast around, and then shook his head. "I can't get any readings.

Must be a pile of rubble on top of this boiler. I'll have to go out and scout."

We kicked that around for a while, and finally decided if the building was razed, and had cooled a little, the roverpak would have gone through the ashes by now. The fact that they hadn't tried the boiler indicated that we were probably buried pretty good. Either that, or the building was still smoldering overhead. In which case, they'd still be out there, waiting to sift the remains.

"Think you can handle it, the condition you're in?"

"I guess I'll have to, won't I?" Blood said. He was really surly. "I mean, what with you busy coitusing your brains out, there won't be much left for staying alive, will there?"

I sensed real trouble with him. He didn't like Quilla June. I moved around him and undogged the boiler hatch. It wouldn't open. So I braced my back against the side, and jacked my legs up, and gave it a slow, steady shove.

Whatever had fallen against it from outside, resisted for a minute, then started to give, then tumbled away with a crash. I pushed the door open all the way, and looked out. The upper floors had fallen in on the basement, but by the time they'd given, they'd been mostly cinder and lightweight rubble. Everything was smoking out there. I could see daylight through the smoke.

I slipped out, burning my hands on the outside lip of the hatch. Blood followed. He started to pick his way through the debris. I could see that the boiler had been almost completely covered by the gunk- that had dropped from above. Chances were good the roverpak had taken a fast look, figured we'd been fried, and moved on. But I wanted Blood to run a recon, anyway.

He started off, but I called him back. He came. "What is it?"

I looked down at him. "I'll tell you what it is, man. You're acting very shitty."

"Sue me."

"Goddamit, dog, what's got your ass up?"

"Her. That nit chick you've got in there."

"So what? Big deal ... I've had chicks before."

"Yeah, but never any that hung on like this one. I warn you, Albert, she's going to make trouble."

"Don't be dumb!" He didn't reply. Just looked at me with anger, and then scampered off to check out the scene. I crawled back inside and dogged the hatch. She wanted to make it again. I said I didn't want to; Blood had brought me down. I was bugged. And I didn't know which one to be pissed off at.

But God she was pretty.

She kind of pouted, and settled back with her arms wrapped around her.

"Tell me some more about the downunder," I said.

At first she was cranky, wouldn't say much, but after a while she opened up and started talking freely. I was learning a lot. I figured I could use it some time, maybe.

There were only a couple of hundred downunders in what was left of the United States and Canada. They'd been sunk on the sites of wells or mines or other kinds of deep holes. Some of them out in the west, were in natural cave formations. They went way down, maybe two to five miles. They were like big caissons, stood on end. And the people who'd settled them were squares of the worst kind. Southern Baptists, fundamentalists, lawanorder goofs, real middle-class squares with no taste for the wild life. And they'd gone back to a kind of life that hadn't existed for a hundred and fifty years. They'd gotten the last of the scientists to do the work, invent the how and why, and then they'd run them out. They didn't want any progress, they didn't want any dissent, they didn't want anything that would make waves. They'd had enough of that. The best time in the world had been just before the First War, and they figured if they could keep it like that, they could live quiet lives and survive. Shit! I'd go nuts in one of the downunders.

Quilla June smiled, and snuggled up again, and this time I didn't turn her off. She started touching me again, down there and all over, and then she said, "Vic?"

"Uh-huh."

"Have you ever been in love?"

"What?"

"In love. Have you ever been in love with a girl?"

"Well, I damn well guess I haven't!"

"Do you know what love is?"

"Sure. I guess I do."

"But if you've never been in love ... ?"

"Don't be dumb. I mean, I've never had a bullet in the head, and I know I wouldn't like it."

"You don't know what love is, I'll bet."

"Well, if it means living in a downunder, I guess I just don't wanna find out." We didn't go on with the conversation much after that. She pulled me down and we did it again. And when it was over, I heard Blood scratching at the boiler. I opened the hatch and he was standing out there. "All clear," he said.

"You sure?"

"Yeah, yeah, I'm sure. Put your pants on," he said it with a sneer in the tone, "and come on out here. We have to talk some stuff."

I looked at him, and he wasn't kidding. I got my jeans and sneakers on, and climbed down out of the boiler.

He trotted ahead of me, away from the boiler, over some blacksoot beams, and outside the gym. It was down. Looked like a rotted stump tooth.

"Now what's lumbering you?" I asked him.

He scampered up on a chunk of concrete till he was almost nose-level with me.

"You're going dumb on me, Vic."

I knew he was serious. No Albert shit, straight Vic. "How so?"

"Last night, man. We could have cut out of there and left her for them.

That would have been smart."

"I wanted her."

"Yeah, I know. That's what I'm talking about. It's today now, not last night. You've had her about a half a hundred times. Why're we hanging around?"

"I want some more."

Then he got angry. "Yeah, well, listen, chum ... I want a few things myself. I want something to eat, and I want to get rid of this pain in my side, and I want away from this turf. Maybe they don't give up this easily."

"Take it easy. We can handle all that. Don't mean she can't go with us."

"Doesn't mean," he corrected me. "And so that's the new story. Now we travel three, is that right?"

I was getting tres uptight myself. "You're starting to sound like a damn poodle!"

"And you're starting to sound like a boxer."

I hauled back to crack him one. He didn't move. I dropped the hand.

I'd never hit Blood. I didn't want to start now.

"Sorry," he said, softly.

"That's okay."

But we weren't looking at each other.

"Vic, man, you've got a responsibility to me, you know."

"You don't have to tell me that."

"Well, I guess maybe I do. Maybe I have to remind you of some stuff.

Like the time that burnpit-screamer came up out of the street and made a grab for you."

I shuddered. The motherfucker'd been green. Righteous stone green, glowing like fungus. My gut

heaved, just thinking.

"And I went for him, right?"

I nodded. Right, mutt, right.

"And I could have been burned bad, and died, and that would've been all of it for me, right or wrong, isn't that true?" I nodded again. I was getting pissed off proper. I didn't like being made to feel guilty.

It was a fifty-fifty with Blood and me. He knew that. "But I did it, right?" I remembered the way the green thing had screamed. Christ, it was like ooze and eyelashes.

"Okay, okay, don't hanger me."

"Harangue, not hanger."

"Well WHATEVER!" I shouted. "Just knock off the crap, or we can forget the whole fucking arrangement!"

Then Blood blew. "Well, maybe we should, you simple dumb putz!"

"What's a putz, you little turd . . . is that something bad . . .

yeah, it must be . . . you watch your fucking mouth, sonofabitch, I'll kick your ass!"

We sat there and didn't talk for fifteen minutes. Neither one of us knew which way to go.

Finally, I backed off a little. I talked soft and I talked slow. I was about up to here with him, but told him I was going to do right by him, like I always had, and he threatened me, saying I'd damned well better because there were a couple of very hip solos making it around the city, and they'd be delighted to have a sharp tail-scent like him.

I told him I didn't like being threatened, and he'd better watch his fucking step or I'd break his leg. He got furious and stalked off. I said screw you and went back to the boiler to take it out on that Quilla June again.

But when I stuck my head inside the boiler, she was waiting, with a pistol one of the dead rovers had supplied. She hit me good and solid over the right eye with it, and I fell straight forward across the hatch, and was out cold.

CHAPTER VI

"I TOLD YOU she was no good." He watched me as I swabbed out the cut with disinfectant from my kit, and painted the gash with iodine. He smirked when I flinched.

I put away the stuff, and rummaged around in the boiler, gathering up all the spare ammo I could carry, and ditching the Browning in favor of the heavier .30-06. Then I found something that must've slipped out of her clothes.

It was a little metal plate, about three inches long and an inchand-a-half high. It had a whole string of numbers on it, and there were holes in it, in random patterns. "What's this?" I asked Blood.

He looked at it, sniffed it.

"Must be an identity card of some kind. Maybe it's what she used to get out of the downunder."

That made my mind up.

I jammed it in a pocket and started out. Toward the access

dropshaft.

"Where the hell are you going?" Blood yelled after me. "Come on back, you'll get killed out there!

"I'm hungry, dammit! I'm wounded!

"Albert, you simpleton! Come back here!"

I kept right on walking. I was gonna find that bitch and brain her.

Even if I had to go downunder to find her.

It took me an hour to walk to the access downshaft leading down to Topeka.

I thought I saw Blood following, but hanging back a ways. I didn't give a damn. I was mad.

Then, there it was. A tall, straight, featureless pillar of shining black metal. It was maybe twenty feet in diameter, perfectly flat on top, disappearing straight into the ground. It was a cap, that was all. I walked straight up to it, and fished around in the pocket for that metal card.

Then something was tugging at my right pants leg.

"Listen, you moron, you can't go down there!"

I kicked him off, but he came right back.

"Listen to me!"

I turned around and stared at him.

Blood sat down; the powder puffed up around him. "Albert . . ."

"My name is Vic, you little e=g-sucker."

"Okay, okay, no fooling around. Vic." His tone softened. "Vic. Come on, man." He was trying to get through to me. 1 was really boiling, but he was trying to make sense. I shrugged, and crouched down beside him.

"Listen, man," Blood said, "this chick has bent you way out of shape.

You know you can't go down there. It's all square and settled and they know everyone; they hate solos. Enough roverpaks have raided downunders and raped their broads, and stolen their food, they'll have defenses set up.

They'll kill you, man!"

"What the hell do you care? You're always saying you'd be better off without me." He sagged at that.

"Vic, we've been together almost three years. Good and bad. But this can be the worst. I'm scared, man. Scared you won't come back. And I'm hungry, and I'll have to go find some dude who'll take me on . .

.

and you know most solos are in paks now, I'll be low mutt. I'm not that young anymore.

And I'm hurt."

I could dig it. He was talking sense. But all I could think of was how that bitch, that Quilla June, had rapped me. And then there were images of her soft tits, and the way she made little sounds when I was in her, and I shook my head, and knew I had to go get her.

"I got to do it, Blood. I got to."

He breathed deep, and sagged a little more. He knew it was useless.

"You don't even see what she's done to you, Vic."

I got up. "I'll try to get back quick. Will you wait . . . ?"

He was silent a long while, and I waited. Finally, he said, "For a while.

Maybe I'll be here, maybe not."

I understood. I turned around and started walking around the pillar of black metal. Finally, I found a slot in the pillar, and slipped the metal card into it. There was a soft humming sound, then a section of the pillar dilated. I hadn't even seen the lines of the sections. A circle opened and I took a step through. I turned and there was Blood, watching me. We looked at each other, all the while that pillar was humming.

"So long, Vic."

"Take care of yourself, Blood."

"Hurry back."

"Do my best."

"Yeah. Right."

Then I turned around and stepped inside. The access portal irised closed behind me.

CHAPTER VII

I ShOULD have known. I should have suspected. Sure, every once in a while a chick came up to see what it was like on the surface, what had happened to the cities; sure, it happened. Why I'd believed her when she'd told me, cuddled up beside me in that steaming boiler, that she'd wanted to see what it was like when a girl did it with a man, that all the flicks she'd seen in Topeka were sweet and solid and dull, and the girls in her school'd talked about beaver flicks, and one of them had a little eight-page comic book and she'd read it with wide eyes . . .

sure. I'd believed her. It was logical. I should have suspected something when she left that metal i.d.

plate behind. It was too easy. Blood'd tried to tell me. Dumb?

Yeah!

The second that access iris swirled closed behind me, the humming got louder, and some cool light grew in the walls. Wall. It was a circular compartment with only two sides to the wall: inside and outside. The wall pulsed up light and the humming got louder, and then the floor I was standing on dilated just the way the outside port had done. But I was standing there, like a mouse in a cartoon, and as long as I didn't look down I was cool, I wouldn't fall.

Then I started settling. Dropped through the floor, the iris closed overhead, I was dropping down the tube, picking up speed but not too much, just dropping steadily. Now I knew what a dropshaft was.

Down and down I went and every once in a while I'd see something like

10

LEV or ANTIPOLL 55 or BREEDER-CON or PUMP SE 6 on the wall, faintly I could make out the sectioning of an iris . . . but I never stopped dropping.

Finally, I dropped all the way to the bottom and there was TOPEKA CITY LIMITS POP. 22,860 on the wall, and I settled down without any strain, bending a little from the knees to cushion the impact, but even that wasn't much.

I used the metal plate again, and the iris—a much bigger one this time—swirled open, and I got my first look at a downunder.

It stretched away in front of me, twenty miles to the dim shinin horizon of tin can metal where the wall behind me curved and curved and curved till it made one smooth, encircling circuit and came back around around around to where I stood, staring at it. I was down at the bottom of a big metal tube that stretched up to a ceiling an eighth of a mile overhead, twenty miles across. And in the bottom of that tin can, someone had built a town that looked for all the world like a photo out of one of the water-logged books in the library on the surface. I'd seen a town like this in the books. Just like this.

Neat little houses, and curvy little streets, and trimmed lawns, and a business section and everything else that a Topeka would have.

Except a sun, except birds, except clouds, except rain, except snow, except cold, except wind, except ants, except dirt, except mountains, except oceans, except big fields of grain, except stars, except the moon, except forests, except animals running wild, except ...

Except freedom.

They were canned down here, like dead fish. Canned.

I felt my throat tighten up. I wanted to get out. Out! I started to tremble, my hands were cold and there was sweat on my forehead. This had been insane, coming down here. I had to get out. Out!

I turned around, to get back in the dropshaft, and then it grabbed me.

That bitch Quilla June! I shoulda suspected!

The thing was low, and green, and boxlike, and had cables with mittens on the ends instead of arms, and it rolled on tracks, and it grabbed me.

It hoisted me up on its square flat top, holding me with them mittens on the cables, and I couldn't move, except to try kicking at the big glass eye in the front, but it didn't do any good. It didn't bust.

The thing was only about four feet high, and my sneakers almost reached the ground, but not quite, and it started moving off into Topeka, hauling me along with it.

People were all over the place. Sitting in rockers on their front porches, raking their lawns, hanging around the gas station, sticking pennies in gumball machines, painting a white stripe down the middle of the road, selling newspapers on a corner, listening to an oompah band on a shell in a park, playing hopscotch and pussy-in-the-corner, polishing a fire engine, sitting on benches, reading, washing windows, pruning bushes, tipping hats to ladies, collecting milk bottles in wire carrying racks, grooming horses, throwing a stick for a dog to retrieve, diving into a communal swimming pool, chalking vegetable prices on a slate outside a grocery, walking hand-in-hand with a girl, all of them watching me go past on that metal motherfucker.

I could hear Blood speaking, saying just what he'd said before I'd entered the dropshaft: It's all square and settled and they know everyone; they hate solos. Enough roverpaks have raided downunders and raped their broads, and stolen their food, they'll have defenses set up. They'll kill you, man!

Thanks, mutt.

Goodbye.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GREEN BOX tracked through the business section and turned in at a shopfront with the words BETTER BUSINESS BUREAU on the window. It rolled right inside the open door, and there were half a dozen men and old men and very old men in there, waiting for me. Also a couple of women. The green box stopped.

One of them came over and took the metal plate out of my hand. He looked at it, then turned around and gave it to the oldest of the old men, a withered cat wearing baggy pants and a green eyeshade and garters that held up the sleeves of his striped shirt. "Quilla June, Lew," the guy said to the old man. Lew

took the metal plate and put it in the top left drawer of a rolltop desk. ‘i “Better take his guns, Aaron,” the old coot said. And the guy who’d taken the plate cleaned me.

“Let him loose, Aaron,” Lew said.

Aaron stepped around the back of the green box and something clicked, and the cable-mittens sucked back inside the box, and I got down off the thing.

My arms were numb where the box had held me. I rubbed one, then the other, and I glared at him.

“Now, boy . . .” Lew started.

“Suck wind, asshole!”

The women blanched. The men tightened their faces.

“I told you it wouldn’t work,” another of the old men said to Lew.

“Bad business, this,” said one of the younger ones.

Lew leaned forward in his straight-back chair and pointed a crumbled finger at me. “Boy, you better be nice.”

“I hope all your fuckin’ children are harelipped!”

“This is no good, Lew!” another man said.

“Guttersnipe,” a woman with a beak snapped.

Lew stared at me. His mouth was a nasty little black line. I knew the sonofabitch didn’t have a tooth in his crummy head that wasn’t rotten and smelly. He stared at me with vicious little eyes, God he was ugly, like a bird ready to pick meat off my bones. He was getting set to say something I wouldn’t like. “Aaron, maybe you’d better put the sentry back on him.”

Aaron moved to the green box.

“Okay, hold it,” I said, holding up my hand.

Aaron stopped, looked at Lew, who nodded. Then Lew leaned forward again, and aimed that bird-claw at me. “You ready to behave yourself, son?”

“Yeah, I guess.”

“You’d better be dang sure.”

“Okay. I’m dang sure. Also fuckin’ sure!”

“And you’ll watch your mouth.”

I didn’t reply. Old coot.

"You're a bit of an experiment for us, boy. We tried to get one of you down here other ways. Sent up some good folks to capture one of you little scuts, but they never came back. Figgered it was best to lure you down to us."

I sneered. That Quilla June. I'd take care of her!

One of the women, a little younger than Bird-Beak, came forward and looked into my face. "Lew, you'll never get this one to cow-tow. He's a filthy little killer. Look at those eyes."

"How'd you like the barrel of a rifle jammed up your ass, bitch?" She jumped back. Lew was angry again. "Sorry," I said, "I don't like bein' called names. Macho, y'know?"

He settled back and snapped at the woman. "Mez, leave him alone. I'm tryin' to talk a bit of sense here. You're only making it worse."

Mez went back and sat with the others. Some Better Business Bureau these creeps were!

"As I was saying, boy: you're an experiment for us. We've been down here in Topeka close to twenty years. It's nice down here. Quiet, orderly, nice people, who respect each other, no crime, respect for the elders, and just all around a good place to live. We're growin' and we're prosperin'."

I waited.

"But, well, we find now that some of our folks can't have no more babies, and the women that do, they have mostly girls. We need some men. Certain special kind of men."

I started laughing. This was too good to be true. They wanted me for stud service. I couldn't stop laughing.

"Crude!" one of the women said, scowling.

"This's awkward enough for us, boy, don't make it no harder." Lew was embarrassed.

Here I'd spent most of Blood's and my time aboveground hunting up tail, and down here they wanted me to service the local ladyfolk. I sat down on the floor and laughed till tears ran down my cheeks.

Finally, I got up and said, "Sure. Okay. But if I do, there's a couple of things I want."

Lew looked at me close.

"The first thing I want is that Quilla June. I'm gonna fuck her blind, and then I'm gonna bang her on the head the way she did me!"

They huddled for a while, then came out and Lew said, "We can't tolerate any violence down here, but I s'pose Quilla June's as good a place to start as any. She's capable, isn't she, Ira?"

A skinny, yellow-skinned man nodded. He didn't look happy about it.

Quilla June's old man, I bet.

"Well, let's get started," I said. "Line 'em up." I started to unzip my jeans.

The women screamed, the men grabbed me, and they hustled me off to a boarding house where they gave me a room, and they said I should get to know Topeka a little bit before I went to work, because it was, uh, er, well, awkward, and they had to get the folks in town to accept what was going to have to be done . . . on the assumption, I suppose, that if I worked out okay, they'd import a few more young bulls from aboveground, and turn us loose.

So I spent some time in Topeka, getting to know the folks, seeing what they did, how they lived. It was nice, real nice. They rocked in rockers on the front porches, they raked their lawns, they hung around the gas station, they stuck pennies in gumball machines, they painted white stripes down the middle of the road, they sold newspapers on the corners, they listened to oompah bands on a shell in the park, they played hopscotch and pussy-in-the-corner, they polished fire engines, they sat on benches reading, they washed windows and pruned bushes, they tipped their hats to ladies, they collected milk bottles in wire carrying racks, they groomed horses and threw sticks for their dogs to retrieve, they dove into the communal swimming pool, they chalked vegetable prices on a slate outside the grocery, they walked hand-in-hand with some of the ugliest chicks I've ever seen, and they bored the ass øoff of me.

Inside a week I was ready to scream.

I could feel that tin can closing in on me.

I could feel the weight of the earth over me.

They ate artificial shit: artificial peas and fake meat and make-believe chicken and ersatz corn and bogus bread and it all tasted like chalk and dust to me.

Polite? Christ, you could puke from the lying, hypocritical crap they called civility. Hello Mr. This and Hello Mrs. That. And how are you? And how is little Janie? And how is business? And are you going to the sodality meeting Thursday? And I started gibbering in my room at the boarding house.

The clean, sweet, neat, lovely way they lived was enough to kill a guy.

No wonder the men couldn't get it up and make babies that had balls instead of slots.

The first few days, everyone watched me like I was about to explode and cover their nice whitewashed fences with shit. But after a while, they got used to seeing me. Lew took me over to the mercantile, and got me fitted out with a pair of bib overalls and a shirt that any solo could've spotted a mile away. That Mez, that dippy bitch who'd called me a killer, she started hangin,, around, finally said she wanted to cut my hair, make me look civilized. But I was hip to where she was at. Wasn't a bit of the mother in her.

"What's'a'matter, cunt," I pinned her. "Your old man isn't taking care of you?"

She tried to stick her fist in her mouth, and I laughed like a loon.

"Go cut off his balls, baby. My hair stays the way it is." She cut and run.

Went like she had a diesel tailpipe.

It went on like that for a while. Me just walking around, them coming and feeding me, keeping all their young meat out of my way till they got the town stacked-away for what was coming with me.

Jugged like that, my mind wasn't right for a while. I got all claustrophobed, clutched, went and sat under the porch in the dark, at the rooming-house. Then that passed, and I got piss-mean, snapped at them, then surly, then quiet, then just mud dull. Quiet.

Finally, I started getting hip to the possibilities of getting out of there. It began with me remembering the poodle I'd fed Blood one time.

It had to of come from a downunder. And it couldn't of got up through the dropshaft. So that meant there were other ways out.

They gave me pretty much the run of the town, as long as I kept my manner around me and didn't try anything sudden. That green sentry box was always somewhere nearby.

So I found the way out. Nothing so spectacular; it just had to be there, and I found it.

Then I found out where they kept my weapons, and I was ready.

Almost.

CHAPTER IX

IT WAS a week to the day when Aaron and Lew and Ira came to get me. I was pretty goofy by that time. I was sitting out on the back porch of the boarding house, smoking a corncob pipe with my shirt off, catching some sun. Except there wasn't no sun. Goofy.

They came around the house. "Mornin', Vic," Lew greeted me. He was hobbling along with a cane, the old fart. Aaron gave me a big smile.

The kind you'd give a big black bull about to stuff his meat into a good breed cow. Ira had a look that you could chip off and use in your furnace.

"Well, howdy, Lew. Mornin', Aaron, Ira."

Lew seemed right pleased by that.

Oh, you lousy bastards, just you wait!

"You bout ready to go meet your first lady?"

"Ready as I'll ever be, Lew," I said, and got up.

"Cool smoke, isn't it?" Aaron said.

I took the corncob out of my mouth. "Pure dee-light." I smiled. I hadn't even lit the fucking thing.

They walked me over to Marigold Street and as we came up on a little house with yellow shutters and a white picket fence, Lew said, "This's Ira's house. Quilla June is his daughter."

"Well, land sakes," I said, wide-eyed.

Ira's lean jaw muscles jumped. We went inside.

Quilla June was sitting on the settee with her mother, an older version of her, pulled thin as a withered muscle "Miz Holmes," I said, and made a little curtsy. She smiled. Strained, but smiled.

Quilla June sat with her feet right together, and her hands folded in her lap. There was a ribbon in her hair. It was blue.

Matched her eyes.

Something went thump in my gut.

"Quilla June," I said.

She looked up. "Mornin', Vic."

Then everyone sort of stood around looking awkward, and finally Ira began yapping and yipping about get in the bedroom and get this unnatural filth over with so they could go to Church and pray the Good Lord wouldn't Strike All Of Them Dead with a bolt of lightning in the ass, or some crap like that.

So I put out my hand, and Quilla June reached for it without looking up, and we went in the back, into a small bedroom, and she stood there with her head down.

"You didn't tell 'em, did you?" I asked.

She shook her head.

And suddenly, I didn't want to kill her at all. I wanted to hold her.

Very tight. So I did. And she was crying into my chest, and making little fists beating on my back, and then she was looking up at me and running her words all together: "Oh, Vic, I'm sorry, so sorry, I didn't mean to, I had to, I was sent out to, I was so scared, and I love you and now they've got you down here, and it isn't dirty, is it, it isn't the way my Poppa says it is, is it?"

I held her and kissed her and told her it was okay, and then I asked her if she wanted to come away with me, and she said yes yes yes she really did. So I told her I might have to hurt her Poppa to get away, and she got a look in her eyes that I knew real well.

For all her propriety, Quilla June Holmes didn't much like her prayer-shouting Poppa.

I asked her if she had anything heavy, like a candlestick or a club, and she said no. So I went rummaging around in that back bedroom, and found a pair of her Poppa's socks, in a bureau drawer. I pulled the big brass balls off the headboard of the bed, and dropped them into the sock. I hefted it.

Oh. Yeah.

She stared at me with big eyes. "What're you going to do?"

"You want to get out of here?"

She nodded.

"Then just stand back behind the door. No, wait a minute, I got a better idea. Get on the bed."

She lay down on the bed. "Okay," I said, "now pull up your skirt, pull off your pants, and spread out." She gave me a look of pure horror.

"Do it," I said. "If you want out."

So she did it, and r rearranged her so her knees were bent and her legs open at the thighs, and I stood to one side of the door, and whispered to her, "Call your Poppa. Just him."

She hesitated a long moment, then she called out, in a voice she didn't have to fake, "Poppa! Poppa, come here, please!" Then she clammed her eyes shut tight.

Ira Holmes came through the door, took one look at his secret desire, his mouth dropped open, I kicked the door closed behind him and walloped him as hard as I could. He squished a little, and spattered the bedspread, and went very down.

She opened her eyes when she heard the thunk! and when the stuff spattered her legs she leaned over and puked on the floor. I knew she wouldn't be much good to me in getting Aaron into the room, so I opened the door, stuck my head around, looked worried, and said, "Aaron, would you come here a minute, please?" He looked at Lew, who was rapping with Mrs. Holmes about what was going on in the back bedroom, and when Lew nodded him on, he came into the room. He took a look at Quilla June's naked bush, at the blood on the wall and bedspread, at Ira on the floor, and opened his mouth to yell, just as I whacked him. It took two more to get him down, and then I had to kick him in the chest to put him away. Quilla June was still puking.

I grabbed her by the arm and swung her up off the bed. At least she was being quiet about it, but man did she stink.

"Come on!"

She tried to pull back, but I held on, and opened the bedroom door. As I pulled her out, Lew stood up, leaning on his cane. I kicked the cane out from under the old fart and down he went in a heap. Mrs. Holmes was staring at us, wondering where her old man was: "He's back in there," I said, heading for the front door. "The Good Lord got him in the head."

Then we were out in the street, Quilla June stinking along behind me, dry-heaving and bawling and probably wondering what had happened to her underpants.

They kept my weapons in a locked case at the Better Business Bureau, and we detoured around by my boarding house where I pulled the crowbar I'd swiped from the gas station out from under the back porch. Then we cut across behind the Grange and into the business section, and straight into the BBB. There was a clerk who tried to stop me, and I split his gourd with the crowbar. Then I pried the latch off the cabinet in Lew's office, and got the .30-06 and my .45 and all the ammo, and my spike, and my knife, and my kit, and loaded up. By that time Quilla June was able to make some sense.

"Where we gonna go, where we gonna go, oh Poppa Poppa Poppa. . . !"

"Hey, listen, Quilla June, Poppa me no Poppas. You said you wanted to be with me . . . well, I'm goin' up, baby, and if you wanna go with, you better stick close."

She was too scared to object.

I stepped out the front of the shopfront, and there was that green box sentry, coming on like a whippet. It had its cables out, and the mittens were gone. It had hooks.

I dropped to one knee, wrapped the sling of the .30-06 around my forearm, sighted clean, and fired dead at the big eye in the front.

One shot, spang!

Hit that eye, the thing exploded in a shower of sparks, and the green box swerved and went through the front window of The Mill End Shoppe, screeching and crying and showering the place with flames and sparks.

Nice.

I turned around to grab Quilla June, but she was gone. I looked off down the street, and here came all the vigilantes, Lew hobbling along with his cane like some kind of weird grasshopper.

And right then the shots started. Big, booming sounds. The .45 I'd given Quilla June. I looked up, and on the porch around the second floor, there she was, the automatic down on the railing like a pro, sighting into that mob and snapping off shots like maybe Wild Bill Elliott in a 40's Republic flick.

But dumb! Mother, dumb! Wasting time on that, when we had to get away.

I found the outside staircase going up there, and took it three steps at a time. She was smiling and laughing, and every time she'd pick one of those boobs out of the pack her little tongue-tip would peek out of the corner of her mouth, and her eyes would get all slick and wet and wham! down the boob would go.

She was really into it.

Just as I reached her, she sighted down on her scrawny mother. I slammed the back of her head and she missed the shot, and the old lady did a little dance-step and kept coming. Quilla June whipped her head around at me, and there was kill in her eyes. "You made me miss." The voice gave me a chill.

I took the .45 away from her. Dumb. Wasting ammunition like that.

Dragging her behind me, I circled the building, found a shed out back, dropped down onto it and had her follow. She was scared at first, but I said, "Chick can shoot her old lady as easy as you do shouldn't be worried about a drop this small." She got out on the ledge, other side of the railing and held on. "Don't worry," I said, "you won't wet your pants. You haven't got any."

She laughed, like a bird, and dropped. I caught her, we slid down the shed door, and took a second to see if that mob was hard on us.

Nowhere in sight.

I grabbed Quilla June by the arm and started o toward the south end of Topeka. It was the closest exit I'd found in my wandering, and we made it in about fifteen minutes, panting and weak as kittens.

And there it was.

A big air-intake duct.

I pried off the clamps with the crowbar, and we climbed up inside.

There were ladders going up. There had to be. It figured. Repairs.

Keep it clean.

Had to be. We started climbing.

It took a long, long time.

Quilla June kept asking me, from down behind me, whenever she got too tired to climb, "Vic, do you love me?" I kept saying yes. Not only because I meant it. It helped her keep climbing.

CHAPTER X

WE CAME UP a mile from the access dropshaft. I shot off the filter covers and the hatch bolts, and we climbed out. They should have known better down there. You don't fuck around with Jimmy Cagney.

They never had a chance.

Quilla June was exhausted. I didn't blame her. But I didn't want to spend the night out in the open; there were things out there I didn't like to think about meeting even in daylight. It was getting on toward dusk.

We walked toward the access dropshaft.

Blood was waiting.

He looked weak. But he'd waited.

I stooped down and lifted his head. He opened his eyes, and very softly he said, "Hey."

I smiled at him. Jesus, it was good to see him. "We made it back, man."

He tried to get up, but he couldn't. The wounds on him were rn ugly shape.

"Have you eaten?" I asked.

"No. Grabbed a lizard yesterday . . . or maybe it was day before.

I'm hungry, Vic."

Quilla June came up then, and Blood saw her. He closed his eyes.

"We'd better hurry, Vic," she said. "Please. They might come up from the dropshaft."

I tried to lift Blood. He was dead weight. "Listen, Blood, I'll leg it into the city and get some food. I'll come back quick. You just wait here."

"Don't go in there, Vic," he said. "I did a recon the day after you went down. They found out we weren't fried in that gym. I don't know how. Maybe mutts smelled our track. I've been keeping watch, and they haven't tried to come out after us. I don't blame them. You don't know what it's like out here at night, man . . . you don't know . .

."

He shivered.

"Take it easy, Blood."

"But they've got us marked lousy in the city, Vic. We can't go back there.

We'll have to make it someplace else."

That put it on a different stick. We couldn't go back, and with Blood in that condition we couldn't go forward. And I knew, good as I was solo, I couldn't make it without him. And there wasn't anything out here to eat. He had to have food, at once, and some medical care. I had to do something.

Something good, something fast.

"Vic," Quilla June's voice was high and whining, "come on! Leave him.

He'll be all right. We have to hurry."

I looked up at her. The sun was going down. Blood trembled in my arms.

She got a pouty look on her face. "If you love me, you'll come on!"

I couldn't make it alone out there without him. I knew it. If I loved her.

She asked me, in the boiler, do you know what love is?

It was a small fire, not nearly big enough for any roverpak to spot from the outskirts of the city. No smoke. And after Blood had eaten his fill, I carried him to the air-duct a mile away, and we spent the night inside, on a little ledge. I held him all night. He slept good.

In the morning, I fixed him up pretty good. He'd make it; he was strong.

He ate again. There was plenty left from the night before. I didn't eat. I wasn't hungry.

We started off across the blast wasteland that morning. We'd find another city, and make it.

We had to move slow, because Blood was still limping. It took a long time before I stopped hearing her calling in my head. Asking me, asking me: do you know what love is?

Sure I know.

A boy loves his dog.

A BOY AND HIS DOG

LQ Jaf Films 1975

90 minutes. Produced by Alvy Moore; associate producer, Tom Conners; directed by L. Q. Jones; screenplay by L. Q. Jones; based on an award-winning novella by Harlan Ellison; music composed and conducted by Tim McIntire; "Topeka" music by Jaime Mendoza Nava; production designer, Ray Boyle; wardrobe by Carolyn Moore and Steve MeQueen; stunt coordinator, Bill Eurten; special effects by Frank Rowe; edited by Scott Conrad; photography by John Arthur Morrill.

Cast Don Johnson (Vic), Suzanne Benton (Quilla June), Tim McIntire (Blood's Voice), Alvy Moore (Dr. Moore), Jason Robards, Jr. (Lew), Helen Winston (Mez) Challcs MCGraw (The Preacher), Hal Baylor (Michael), Ron Feinberg (Fellini), Mike Rupert (Gary), Don Carter (Ken), Michael Hershman (Richard), Tiger (Blood the Dog).

The End