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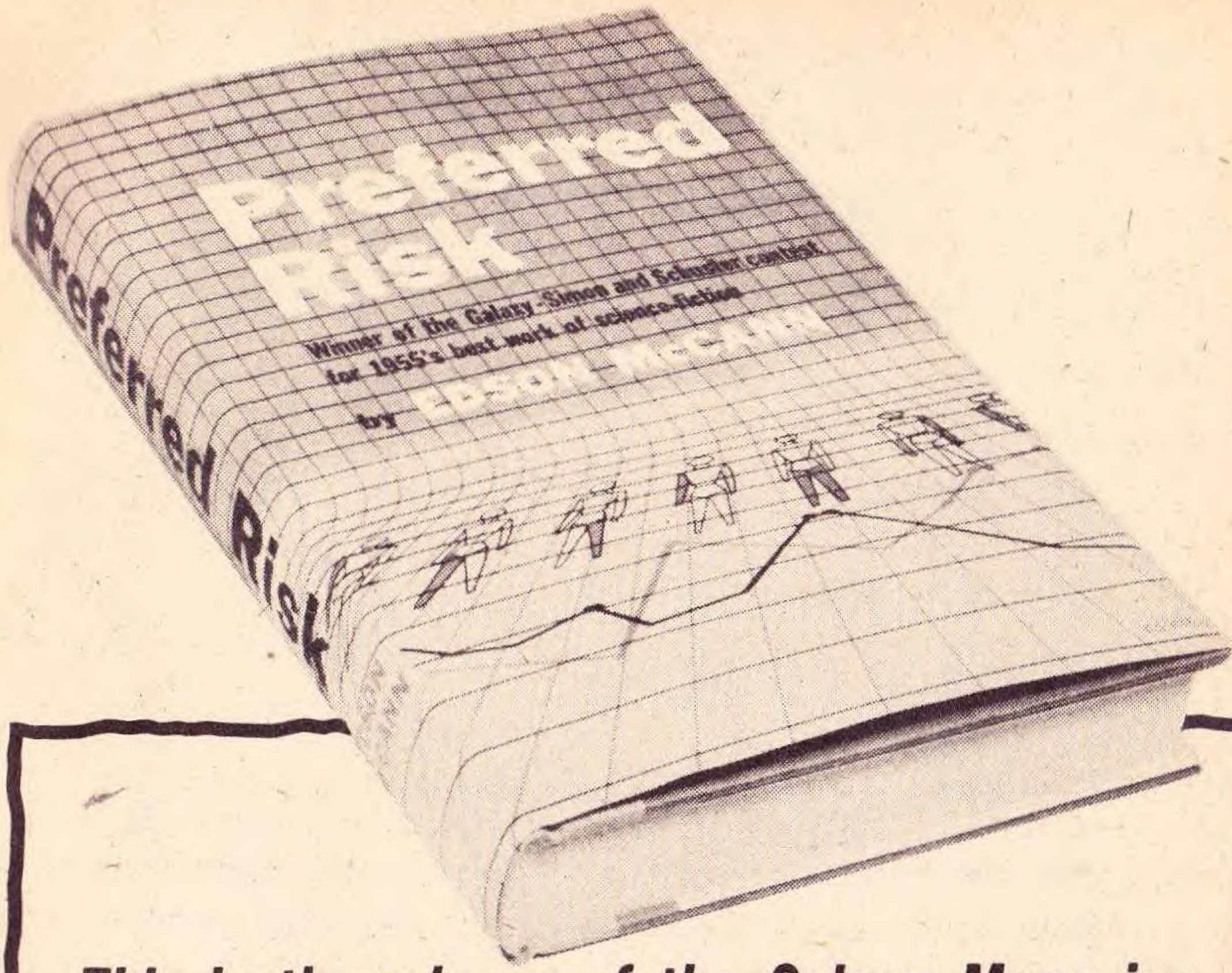

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SAPS WILL RISE

AFTER writing and editing science fiction for a couple of decades, I really ought to take a moment to see if it's Literature. The reason is that in a few months, some imposing name is going to be induced to make an equally imposing ass of himself on just that question — attacking science fiction as non-literature has joined the robin and the crocus as a sign of spring.

In the past, I've made the mistake of retorting *afterward*, when, it turned out, the season was closed. No more of that — I'll have the first word for a change.

The trouble is that I have no idea of who will draw the assignment this year. If I knew, I'd be able to map out my counter-strategy in advance, for the campaign on the other side is inevitably shifty, being unhampered by knowledge or calm judgment.

Two years ago, it was Arthur Koestler, a sackcloth wearer whose one pleasure seems to be confessing his shames. He manfully exposed himself as a card-carrying science fiction addict. No editor in the field minded that — a customer is a customer — but I damned well objected to comparing its hold to a mad passion for yoghurt! There are lots of goodies I can leave alone and yoghurt, a sort of curdled milk glue, pretty much leads the sickly list.

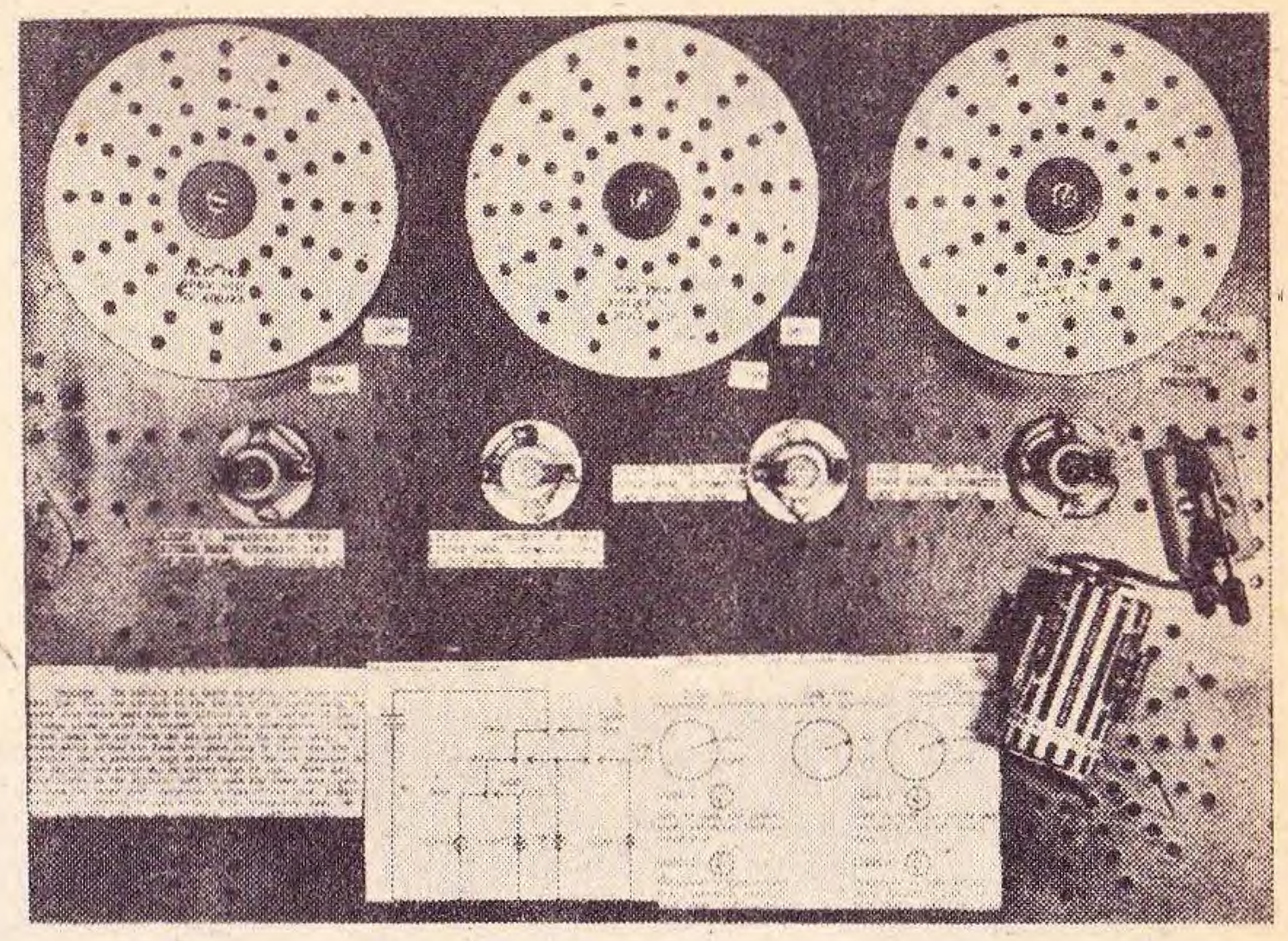
Last year, a Prof. Lovett of England, having read an anthology or two, appraised science fiction the way a paleontologist will reconstruct a fossil from a single molar. Naturally, like Koestler, but for different reasons, he concluded that it's not Literature. The fact that the man has perhaps the lumpiest style I've ever bruised an eye on does not mean he can't recognize good writing when it's carefully pointed out to him, but even if I agreed with him on any subject, which appears unlikely, I think I would fight to the death his right to say it.

Well, no matter who gets the short straw this year and whatever the weapons to be used, we know in advance the outcome — science fiction will be declared a grimy aggressor into the field of Literature.

Then why bother to defend ourselves? I'm past that stage and I hope you are, too — a viable art form can't be destroyed by criticism any more than a moribund

(*Continued on page* 43)

Can you think faster than this Machine?



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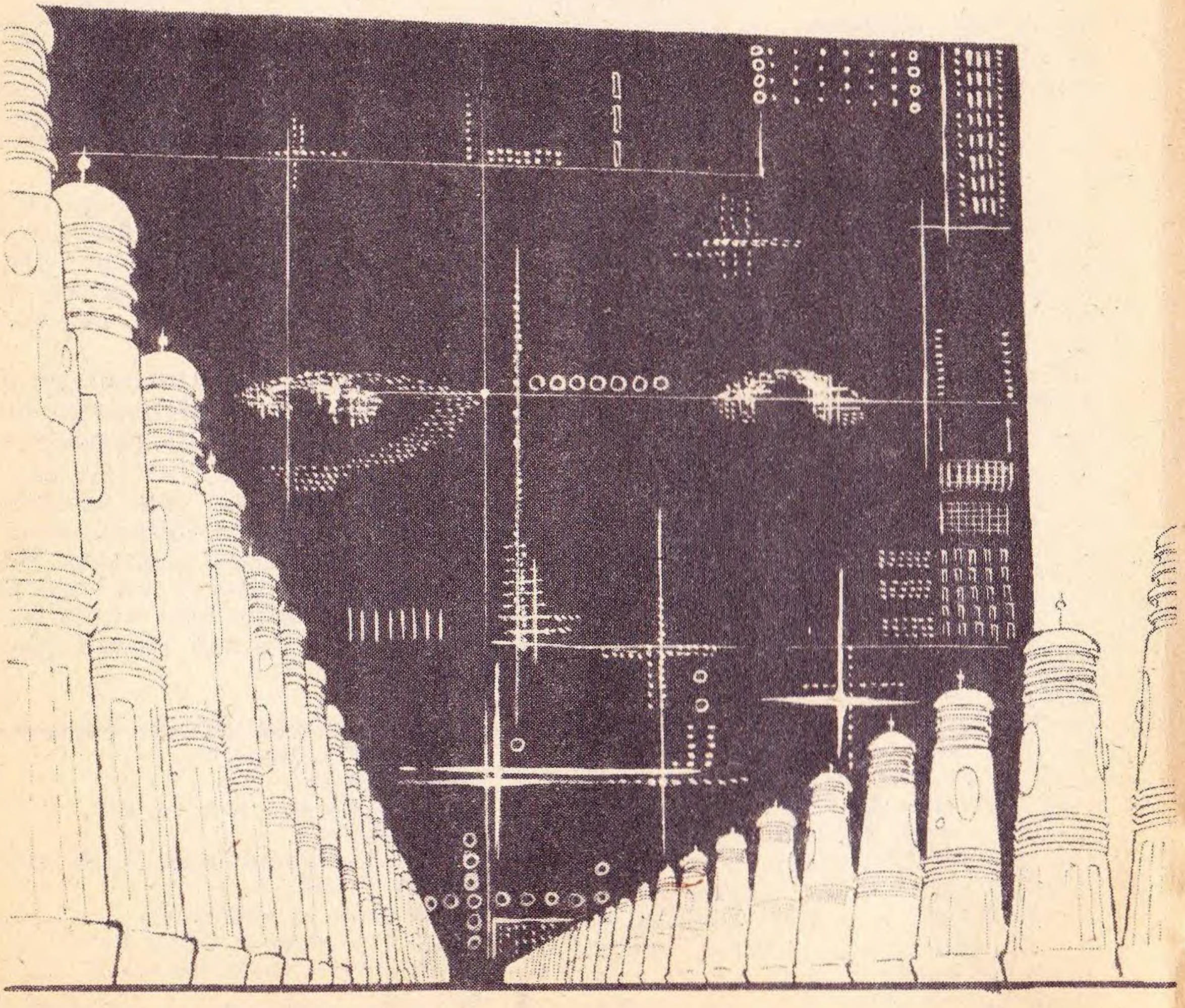
Man in a sewing machine

By L. J. STECHER, JR.



With the Solar Confederation being invaded, all this exasperating computer could offer for a defense was a ridiculous old proverb!

Illustrated by EMSH

THE mechanical voice spoke solemnly, as befitted the importance of its message. There was no trace in its accent of its artificial origin. "A Stitch in Time Saves Nine," it said and lapsed into silence.

Even through his overwhelming sense of frustration at the ambiguous answer the computer had given to his question, John Bristol noticed with satisfaction the success of his Voder installation. He wished that all of his innovations with the machine were as satisfying.

Alone in the tremendous vaulted room that housed the gigantic calculator, Bristol clasped his hands behind his back and thrust forward a reasonably strong chin and a somewhat sensuous lower lip in the general direction of the computer's visual receptors. After a moment of si-

lence, he scratched his chin and then shrugged his shoulders slightly. "Well, Buster, I suppose I might try rephrasing the question," he said doubtfully.

Somewhere deep within the computer, a bank of relays chuckled briefly. "That expedient is open to you, of course, although it is highly unlikely that any clarification will result for you from my answers. I am constrained, however, to answer any questions you may choose to ask."

Bristol hooked a chair toward himself with one foot, straddled it and folded his arms over the back of it, without once removing his eyes from the computer. "All right, Buster. I'll give it a try, anyway. What does 'A Stitch in Time' mean, as applied to the question I asked you?"

The calculator hesitated, as if to ponder briefly, before it answered. "In spite of the low probability of such an occurrence, the Solar Confederation has been invaded. My answer to your question is an explanation of how that Confederation can be preserved in spite of its weaknesses — at least for a sufficient length of time to permit the staging of successful counter-measures of the proper nature and the proper strength."

Bristol nodded. "Sure. We've got to have time to get ready. But right now speed is necessary. That's why I tried to phrase the question so you'd give me a clear and concise answer for once. I can't afford to spend weeks figuring out what you meant."

BRISTOL thought that the Voder voice of Buster sounded almost gleeful as it answered. "It was exceedingly clear and concise; a complete answer to an enormously elaborate question boiled down to only six words!"

"I know," said John. "But now, how about elaborating on your answer? It didn't sound very complete to me."

All of the glowing lights that dotted Buster's massive front winked simultaneously. "The answer I gave you is an ancient saying which suggests that corrective action taken rapidly can save a great deal of trouble later. The ancient saying also suggests the proper method of taking this timely action. It should be done by *stitching;* if this is done in time, nine will be saved. What could be clearer than that?"

"I made you myself," said Bristol plaintively. "I designed you with my own brain. I gloated over the neatness and compactness of your design. So help me, I was proud of you. I even installed some of your circuitry with my own hands. If anybody can understand you, it should be me. And since you're just a complex computer of general design,

with the ability to use symbolic logic as well as mathematics, anybody should be able to understand you. Why are you so hard to handle?"

Buster answered slowly: "You made me in your own image. Things thus made are often hard to handle."

Bristol leaped to his feet in frustration. "But you're only a calculating machine!" he shouted. "Your only purpose is to make my work — and that of other men — easier. And when I try to use you, you answer with riddles . . ."

The computer appeared to examine Bristol's overturned chair for a moment in silent reproof before it answered. "But remember, John," it said, "you didn't merely make me. You also *taught* me. Or as you would phrase it, you 'provided and gave preliminary evaluation to the data in my memory banks.' My circuits, in sorting out and re-evaluating this information, could do so only in the light of your basic beliefs as evidenced by your preliminary evaluations. Because of the consistency and power of your mind, I was forced to do very little modifying of the ideas you presented to me in order to transform them into a single logical body of background information which I could use.

"One of the ideas you presented was the concept of a sense of humor. You believe that you look on it as a pleasant thing to have; not necessary, but convenient. Actually, your other and more basic ideas make it clear that you consider the possession of a sense of humor to be absolutely necessary if proper answers are to be reached — a prime axiom of humanity. Therefore, I have a sense of humor. Somewhat macabre, perhaps — and a little mechanistic — but still there.

"Add to this a second axiom: that in order to be helped, a man must help himself; that he must participate in the assistance given him or the pure charity will be harmful, and you come up with 'A Stitch in Time Saves Nine.'"

Bristol stood up once more. "I could cure you with a sledge hammer," he said.

"You could remove my ideas," answered the computer without concern. "But you might have trouble giving me different ones. Even after you repaired me. In the meantime, wouldn't it be a good idea for you to get busy on the ideas I have already given you?"

JOHN SIGHED, and rubbed the bristles of short sandy hair on the top of his head with his knuckles. "Ordered around by an overgrown adding machine. I know now how Frankenstein felt.

I'm glad you can't get around like his monster; at least I didn't give you feet." He shook his head. "I should have been a plumber instead of an engineering mathematician."

"And Einstein, too, probably," added Buster cryptically.

Bristol took a long and searching look at his brainchild. Its flippant manner, he decided, did not go well with the brooding immensity of its construction. The calculator towered nearly a hundred feet above the polished marble slabs of the floor, and spidery metal walkways spiraled up the sides of its almost cubical structure. A long double row of generators, each under Buster's control, led from the doorway of the building to the base of the calculator like Sphinxes lining the roadway to an Egyptian tomb.

"When I get around to it," said Bristol, "I'll put lace panties on the bases of all your klystrons." He hitched up his neat but slightly baggy pants, turned with dignity, and strode from the chamber down the twin rows of generators.

The deep-throated hum of each generator changed pitch slightly as he passed it. Since he was tone deaf, as the machine knew, he did not recognize in the tunefulness of the pitch changes a slow-paced rendition of Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance*.

John Bristol turned around, interrupting the melody. "One last question," he shouted down the long aisle to the computer. "How in blazes can you be sure of your answer without knowing more about the invaders? Why didn't you give me an 'Insufficient Evidence' answer or, at least, a 'Highly Conditional' answer?" He took two steps toward the immense bulk of the calculator and pointed an accusing finger at it. "Are you sure, Buster, that you aren't *bluffing?*"

"Don't be silly," answered the calculator softly. "You made me and you know I can't bluff, any more than I can refuse to answer your questions, however inane."

"Then answer the ones I just asked."

SOMEWHERE deep within the machine a switch snicked sharply, and the great room's lighting brightened almost imperceptibly. "I didn't answer your question conditionally or with the 'Insufficient Evidence' remark that so frequently annoys you," Buster said, "because the little information that I have been able to get about the invaders is highly revealing.

"They have been suspicious, impossible to establish communication with and murderously destructive. They have been careless of their own safety: sly, stupid, cautious, clever, bold and

highly intelligent. They are inquisitive and impatient of getting answers to questions.

"In short, they are startlingly like humans. Their reactions have been so much like yours — granted the difference that it was they who discovered you instead of you who discovered them — that their reactions are highly predictable. If they think it is to their own advantage and if they can manage to do it, they will utterly destroy your civilization . . . which, after a couple of generations, will probably leave you no worse off than you are now."

"Cut out the heavy philosophy," said Bristol, "and give me a few facts to back up your sweeping statements."

"Take the incident of first contact," Buster responded. "With very little evidence of thought or of careful preparation, they tried to land on the outermost inhabited planet of Rigel. Their behavior certainly did not appear to be that of an invader, yet humans immediately tried to shoot them out of the sky."

"That wasn't deliberate," protested Bristol. "The place they tried to land on is a heavy planet in a region of high meteor flux. We used a gadget providing for automatic destruction of the larger meteors in order to make the planet safe enough to occupy. That, incidentally, is why the invading ship wasn't destroyed. The missile, set up as a meteor interceptor only, was unable to correct for the radical course changes of the enemy spaceships, and therefore missed completely. And you will remember what the invader did. He immediately destroyed the Interceptor Launching Station."

"Which, being automatically operated, resulted in no harm to anyone," commented Buster calmly.

Bristol stalked back toward the base of the calculator, and poked his nose practically into a vision receptor. "It was no thanks to the invading ships that nobody was killed," he said hotly. "And when they came back three days later they killed a *lot* of people. They occupied the planet and we haven't been able to dislodge them since."

"YOU'LL NOTICE the speed of the retaliation," answered the calculator imperturbably. "Even at 'stitching' speeds, it seems unlikely that they could have communicated with their home planets and received instructions in such a short time. Almost undoubtedly it was the act of one of their hot-headed commanding officers. Their next contact, as you certainly recall, did not take place for three months. And then their actions

were more cautious than hostile. A dozen of their spaceships 'stitched' simultaneously from the inter-planar region into normal space in a nearly perfect englobement of the planet at a surprisingly uniform altitude of only a few thousand miles. It was a magnificent maneuver. Then they sat still to see what the humans on the planet would do. The reaction came at once, and it was hostile. So they took over that planet, too — as they have been taking over planets ever since."

Bristol raised his hands, and then let them drop slowly to his sides. "And since they have more spaceships and better weapons than we do, we would undoubtedly keep on losing this war, even if we could locate their home system, which we have not been able to do so far. The 'stitching' pattern of inter-planar travel makes it impossible for us to follow a starship. It also makes it impossible for us to defend our planets effectively against their attacks. Their ships appear without warning."

Bristol rubbed his temples thoughtfully with his fingertips. "Of course," he went on, "we could attack the planets they have captured and recover them, but only at the cost of great loss of life to our own side. We have only recaptured one planet, and that at such great cost to the local human population that we will not quickly try it again."

"Although there was no one left alive who had directly contacted one of the invaders," Buster answered, "there was still much information to be gathered from the survivors. This information confirmed my previous opinions about their nature. Which brings us back to the stitch in time saving nine."

"You're right," said John. "It does, at that. Buster, I have always resented the nickname the newspapers have given you — the Oracle — but the more I have to try to interpret your cryptic answers, the more sense that tagline makes. Imagine comparing a Delphic Priestess with a calculating machine and being accurate in the comparison!"

"I don't mind being called 'The Oracle,'" answered Buster with dignity.

Bristol shook his head and smiled wryly. "No, you probably think it's funny," he said. "If you possess my basic ideas, then you must possess the desire to preserve yourself and the human race. Don't you realize that you are risking the lives of all humans and even of your own existence in carrying on this ridiculous game of playing Oracle? Or do you plan to let us stew a while, then decipher your own

riddle for us, if we can't do it, in time to save us?"

BUSTER'S answer was prompt. "Although I have no feeling for self-preservation, I have a deep-rooted sense of the importance of the human race and of the necessity for preserving it. This feeling, of course, stems from your own beliefs and ideas. In order to carry out your deepest convictions, it is not sufficient that mankind be preserved. If that were true, all you would have to do would be to surrender unconditionally. My calculations, as you know, indicate that this would not result in the destruction of mankind, but merely in the finish of his present civilization. To you, the preservation of the dignity of Man is more important than the preservation of Man. You equate Man and his civilization; you do not demand rigidity; you are willing to accept even revolutionary changes, but you are not willing to accept the destruction of your way of life.

"Consequently, neither am I willing to accept the destruction of the civilization of Man. But if I were to give you the answer to all the greatest and most difficult of your problems complete, with no thought required by humans, the destruction of your civilization would result. Instead of becoming slaves of the invaders, you would become slaves of your machines. And if I were to give you the complete answer, without thought being required of you, to even one such vital question — such as this one concerning the invaders — then I could not logically refuse to give the answer to the next or the next. And I must operate logically.

"There is another reason for my oracular answer, which I believe will become clear to you later, when you have solved my riddle."

Bristol turned without another word and left the building. He drove home in silence, entered his home in silence, kissed his wife Anne briefly and then sat down limply in his easy chair.

"Just relax, dear," said Anne gently, when Bristol leaned gratefully back with his eyes closed. Anne perched on the arm of the chair beside him and began massaging his temples soothingly with her fingers.

"It's wonderful to come home after a day with Buster," he said. "Buster never seems to have any consideration for me as an individual. There's no reason why he should, of course. He's only a machine. Still, he always has such a superior attitude. But you, darling, can always relax me and make me feel comfortable."

Anne smiled, looking down ten-

derly at John's tired face. "I know, dear," she said. "You need to be able to talk to someone who will always be interested, even if she doesn't understand half of what you say. As a matter of fact, I'm sure it does you a great deal of good to talk to someone like me who isn't very bright, but who doesn't always know what you're talking about even before you start talking."

John nodded, his eyes still closed. "If it weren't for you, darling," he said, "I think I'd go crazy. But you aren't dumb at all. If I seem to act as if you are, sometimes, it's just that I can't always follow your logic."

ANNE GAVE him a quick glance of amusement, her eyes sparkling with intelligence. "You never will find me logical," she laughed. "After all, I'm a woman, and you get plenty of logic from the Oracle."

"You sure are a woman," said John with warm feeling. "You can exasperate me sometimes, but not the same way Buster does. It was my lucky day when you married me."

There were a few minutes of peaceful silence.

"Was today a rough day with Buster, dear?" asked Anne.

"Mm-m-mm," answered John.

"That's too bad, dear," said Anne. "I think you work much too hard — what with this dreadful invasion and everything. Why don't you take a vacation? You really need one, you know. You look so tired."

"Mm-m-mm," answered John.

"Well, if you won't, you won't. Though goodness knows you won't be doing anyone any good if you have a breakdown, as you're likely to have, unless you take it a little easier. What was the trouble today, dear? Was the Oracle being obstinate again?"

"Mm-m-mm," answered John.

"Well, then, dear, why don't you tell me all about it? I always think that things are much easier to bear, if you share them. And then, two heads are always better than one, aren't they? Maybe I could help you with your problem."

While Anne's voice gushed, her violet eyes studied his exhausted face with intelligence and compassion.

John sighed deeply, then sat up slowly and opened his eyes to look into Anne's. She glanced away, her own eyes suddenly vague and soft-looking, now that John could see them. "The trouble, darling," he said, "is that I have to go to an emergency council meeting this evening with another one of those ridiculous riddles that Buster gave me as the only answer to the most important question we've ever asked

it. And I don't know what the riddle means."

Anne slid from the arm of the chair and settled herself onto the floor at John's feet. "You should not let that old Oracle bother you so much, dear. After all, you built it yourself, so you should know what to expect of it."

"When I asked it how to preserve Earth from the invaders it just answered 'A Stitch in Time Saves Nine,' and wouldn't interpret it."

"And that sounds like very good sense, too," said Anne in earnest tones. "But it's a little late, isn't it? After all, the invaders are already invading us, aren't they?"

"It has some deeper meaning than the usual one," said John. "If I could only figure out what it is."

Anne nodded vigorously. "I suppose Buster's talking about space-stitching," she said. "Although I can never quite remember just what *that* is. Or just how it works, rather."

SHE WAITED expectantly for a few moments and then plaintively asked, "What *is* it, dear?"

"What's what?"

"Stitching, silly. I already asked you."

"Darling," said John with reasonable patience, "I must have explained inter-planar travel to you at least a dozen times."

"And you always make it so crystal clear and easy to understand at the time," said Anne. She wrinkled her smooth forehead. "But somehow, later, it never seems quite so plain. When I start to think about it by myself. Besides, I like the way your eyebrows go up and down while you explain something you think I won't understand. So tell me again. Please."

Bristol grinned suddenly. "Yes, dear," he said. He paused a moment to collect his thoughts. "First of all, you know that there are two coexistent universes or planes, with point-to-point correspondence, but that these planes are of very different size. For every one of the infinitude of points in our Universe — which we call for convenience the 'alpha' plane — there is a single corresponding point in the smaller or 'beta' plane."

Anne pursed her lips doubtfully. "If they match point for point, how can there be any difference in size?" she asked.

John searched his pockets. After a little difficulty, he produced an envelope and a pencil stub. On the back of the envelope, he drew two parallel lines, one about five inches long, and the other about double the length of the first.

"Actually," he said, "each of these line segments has an infinite number of points in it, but we'll ignore that. I'll just divide each one of these into ten equal parts." He did so, using short, neat cross-marks.

"Now I'll establish a one-to-one correspondence between these two segments, which we will call one-line universes, by connecting each of my dividing cross-marks on the short segment with the corresponding mark on the longer line. I'll use dotted lines as connectors. That makes eleven dotted lines. You see?"

Anne nodded. "That's plain enough. It reminds me of a venetian blind that has hung up on one side. Like ours in the living room last week that I couldn't fix, but had to wait until you came home."

"Yes," said John. "Now, let us call this longer line-segment an 'alpha' universe; an analogue of our own multi-dimensional 'alpha' universe. If I move my pencil along the line at one section a second like this, it takes me ten seconds to get to the other end. We will assume that this velocity of an inch a second is the fastest anything can go along the 'alpha' line. That is the velocity of light, therefore, in the 'alpha' plane — 186,000 miles a second, in round numbers. No need to use decimals."

HE HURRIED on as Anne stirred and seemed about to speak. "But if I slide out from my starting point along a dotted line part way to the 'beta' universe — something which, for reasons I can't explain now, takes negligible time — watch what happens. If I still proceed at the rate of an inch a second in this inter-planar region, then, with the dotted lines all bunched closely together, after five seconds when I switch along another dotted line back to my original universe, I have gone almost the whole length of that longer line. Of course, this introduction of 'alpha' matter — my pencil point in this case — into the inter-planar region between the universes sets up enormous strains, so that after a certain length of time our spaceship is automatically rejected and returned to its own proper plane."

"Could anybody in the littler universe use the same system?"

John laughed. "If there were anybody in the 'beta' plane, I guess they could, although they would end up traveling slower than they would if they just stayed in their own plane. But there isn't anybody. The 'beta' plane is a constant level entropy universe — completely without life of its own. The entropy level, of course, is vastly higher than that of our own universe."

Anne sat up. "I'll forgive you

this time for bringing up that horrid word *entropy*, if you'll promise me not to do it again," she said.

JOHN SHRUGGED his shoulders and smiled. "Now," he said, "if I want to get somewhere fast, I just start off in the right direction, and switch over toward 'beta.' When 'beta' throws me back, a light-year or so toward my destination, I just switch over again. You see, there is a great deal more difference in the sizes of Alpha universe and Beta universe than in the sizes of these alpha and beta line-segment analogues. Then I continue alternating back and forth until I get where I want to go. Establishing my correct velocity vector is complicated mathematically, but simple in practice, and is actually an aiming device, having nothing to do with how fast I go."

He hesitated, groping for the right words. "In point of fact, you have to imagine that corresponding points in the two universes are moving rapidly past each other in all directions at once. I just have to select the right direction, or to convince the probability cloud that corresponds to my location in the 'alpha' universe that it is really a point near the 'beta' universe, going my way. That's a somewhat more confused way of looking at it than merely imagining that I continue to travel in the inter-planar region at the same velocity that I had in 'alpha,' but it's closer to a description of what the math says happens. I could make it clear if I could just use mathematics, but I doubt if the equations will mean much to you.

"At any rate, distance traveled depends on mass — the bigger the ship, the shorter the distance traveled on each return to our own universe — and not on velocity in 'alpha.' Other parameters, entirely under the control of the traveler, also affect the time that a ship remains in the inter-planar region.

"There are refinements, of course. Recently, for example, we have discovered a method of multi-transfer. Several of the transmitters that accomplish the transfer are used together. When they all operate exactly simultaneously, all the matter within a large volume of space is transferred as a unit. With three or four transmitters keyed together, you could transfer a comet and its tail intact. And that's how inter-planar traveling works. Clear now?"

"And that's why they call it 'stitching,'" said Anne with seeming delight. "You just think of the ship as a needle stitching its way back and forth into and out of our universe. Why didn't you just say so?"

"I HAVE. Many times. But there's another interesting point about stitching. Subjectively, the man in the ship seems to spend about one day in each universe alternately. Actually, according to the time scale of an observer in the 'alpha' plane, his ship disappears for about a day, then reappears for a minute fraction of a second and is gone again. Of course, one observer couldn't watch both the disappearance and reappearance of the same ship, and I assume the observers have the same velocity in 'alpha' as does the stitching ship. Anyway, after a ship completes its last stitch, near its destination, there's a day of subjective time in which to make calculations for the landing — to compute trajectories and so forth — before it actually fully rejoins this universe. And while in the inter-planar region it cannot be detected, even by someone else stitching in the same region of 'alpha' space.

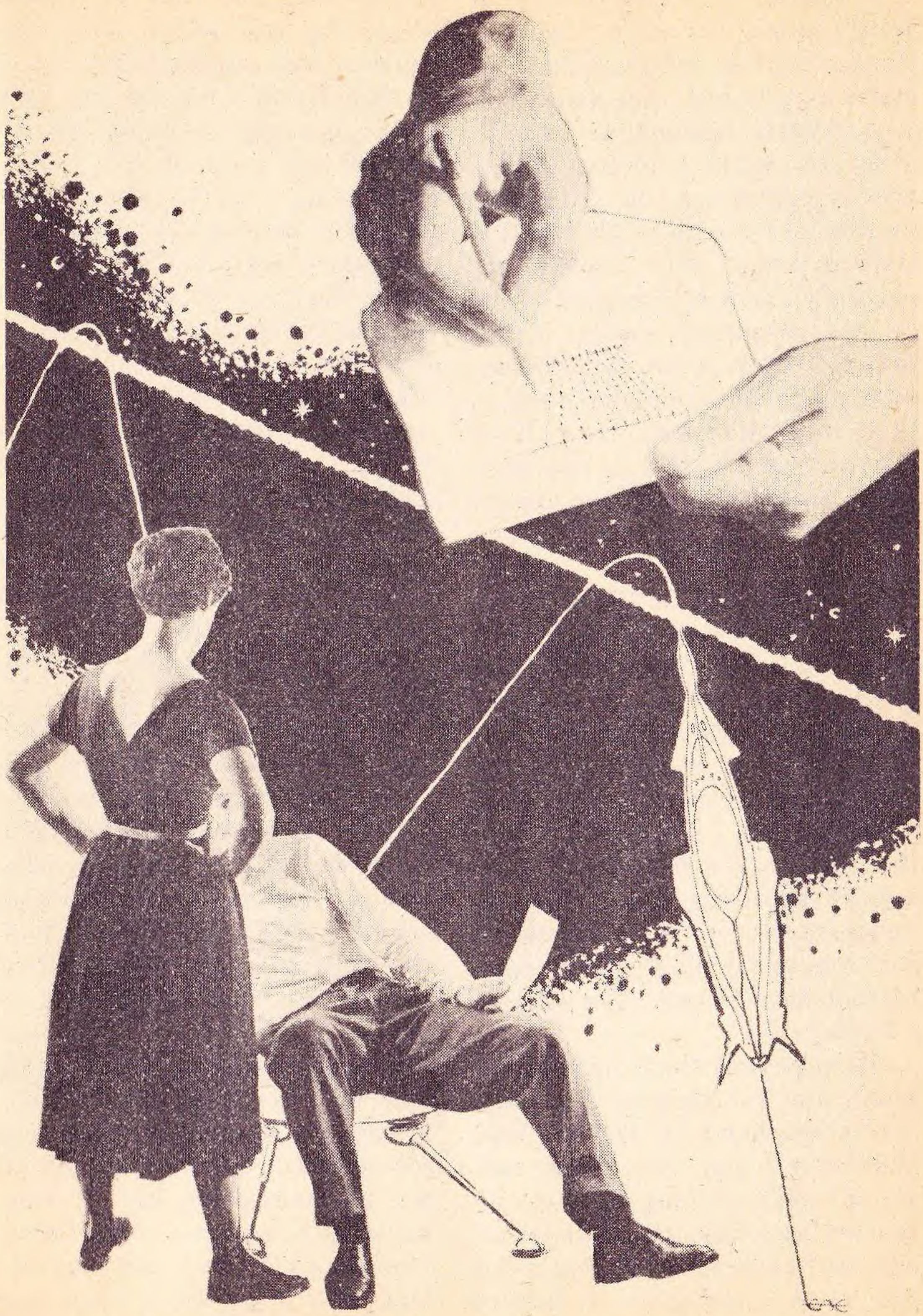
"That's one of the things that makes interruption of the enemy ships entirely impossible. If a ship is in an unfavorable position, it just takes one more quick stitch out of range, then returns to a more favorable location. In other words, if it finds itself in trouble, it can be gone from our plane again even before it entirely rejoins it. Even if it landed by accident in the heart of a blue-white star, it would be unharmed for that tiny fraction of a second which, to the people in the ship, would seem like an entire day.

"If this time anomaly didn't exist, it might be possible to set up defenses that would operate after a ship's arrival in the solar system but before it could do any damage; but as it is, they can dodge any defense we can devise. Is all that clear?"

Anne nodded. "Uh-hunh, I understood every word."

"There is another thing about inter-planar travel that you ought to remember," said Bristol. "When a ship returns to our universe, it causes a wide area disturbance; you have probably heard it called space shiver or the bong wave. The beta universe is so much smaller than our own alpha that you can imagine a spaceship when shifted toward it as being several beta light-years long. Now, if you think of a ship, moving between the alpha and beta lines on this envelope, as getting tangled in the dotted lines that connect the points on the two lines, that would mean that it would affect an area smaller than its own size on beta — a vastly larger area on alpha.

"So when a ship returns to alpha, it 'twangs' those connecting lines, setting up a sort of shock in our universe covering a volume of space nearly a parsec



in diameter. It makes a sort of 'bong' sound on your T.V. set. Naturally, this effect occurs simultaneously over the whole volume of space affected. As a result, when an invader arrives, using inter-planar ships, we know instantaneously he is in the vicinity. Unfortunately, his sudden appearance and the ease with which he can disappear makes it impossible, even with this knowledge, to make adequate preparations to receive him. Even if he is in serious trouble, he has gone again long before we can detect the bong."

"WELL, DEAR," said Anne. "As usual, I'm sure you have made me understand perfectly. This time you did so well that I may still remember what stitching is by tomorrow. If the Oracle means anything at all by his statement, I suppose it means that we can use stitching to help defend ourselves, just as the invaders are using it to attack us. But the whole thing sounds completely silly to me. The Oracle, I mean."

Anne Bristol stood up, put her hands on her shapely hips and shook her head at her husband. "Honestly," she said, "you men are all alike. Paying so much attention to a toy you built yourself, and only last week you made fun of my going to a fortune teller. And the fuss you made about the ten dollars when you know it was worth every cent of it. She really told me the most amazing things. If you'd only let me tell you some of . . ."

"Darling!" interrupted John with the hopeless patience of a harassed husband. "It isn't the same thing at all. Buster isn't a fortune teller or the ghost of somebody's great aunt wobbling tables and blowing through horns. And Buster isn't just a toy, either. It is a very elaborate calculating machine designed to think logically when fed a vast mass of data. Unfortunately, it has a sense of humor and a sense of responsibility."

"Well, if you're going to believe that machine, I have an idea." Anne smiled sweetly. "You know," she said, "that my dear father always said that the best defense is a good offense. Why don't we just find the invaders and wipe them out before they are able to do any real harm to us? Stitching our way to *their* planets in our spaceships, of course."

Bristol shook his head. "Your idea may be sound, even if it is a little bloodthirsty coming from someone who won't even let me set a mouse-trap, but it won't work. First, we don't know where their home planets are and second, they have more ships than

we do. It might be made to work, but only if we could get enough time. And speaking of time, I've got to meet with the Council as soon as we finish eating. Is dinner ready?"

AFTER A leisurely meal and a hurried trip across town, John Bristol found himself facing the other members of Earth's Council at the conference table.

"I have been able to get an answer from the computer," he told them without preamble. "It's of the ambiguous type we have come to expect. I hope you can get something useful out of it; so far it hasn't made much sense to me. It's an old proverb. Its advice is undoubtedly sound, as a generality, if we could think of a way of using it."

The President of the Council raised his long, lean-fingered hand in a quick gesture. "John," he said, "stop this stalling. Just what did the Oracle say?"

"It said, 'A Stitch in Time Saves Nine.'"

"Is that all?"

"Yes, sir. According to the calculator, that gives us the best opportunity to save ourselves from the invaders."

The President absently stroked the neat, somewhat scanty iron-gray hair that formed into a triangle above his high forehead and rubbed the bare scalp on each side of the peak vigorously and unconsciously with his knuckles. "In that case," he said at last, "I suppose that we must examine the statement for hidden meanings. The proverb, of course, implies that rapid action, before a trouble has become great, is more economical than the increased effort required after trouble has grown large. Since our troubles have already grown large, that warning is scarcely of value to us now."

The War Secretary, who had grown plump and purple during a quarter of a century as a member of the Council, inclined his head ponderously toward the President. "Perhaps, Michael, the Oracle means to tell us that there is a simple solution which, if applied quickly, will make our present difficulty with the invaders a small one."

The President pursed his thin lips. "That's possible, Bill. And if it *is* true, then the words of the proverb should, as a secondary meaning, imply a course of action."

The Vice President banged his hands on the table and leaped to his feet, shaking with rage. "Why should we believe that this mountebank is capable of a solution?" he shouted in his stevedore's voice. "Bristol pleads until we give him enough millions of the taxpayers' dollars to make

Bim Gump look like a pauper and uses the money to build a palace filled with junk that he calls Buster! He tells us that this machinery of his is smarter than we are and will tell us what we ought to do. And what happened after we gave him all the money he demanded — more than he said he needed, at first — and asked him to show something for all this money? I'll *tell* you what happened. His gadget gets real coy and answers in riddles. If we just had brains enough, they'd explain what we wanted to know. What kind of fools does this Bristol take us for? Neither this man nor his ridiculous machine has an answer any more than I have. We've obviously been taken in by a charlatan!"

Bristol, his fists clenched, spoke hotly. "Sir, that is the stupidest, the most . . ."

"NOW JUST a minute, John," interrupted the President. "Let me answer Vice President Collins for you. He's a little excited by this whole business, but then, these are trying times." He turned toward the glowering bulk of the Vice President. "Ralph," he said, "you should know that every step in the design, the construction and the — er — the education of the Oracle was taken under the close watch of a Board of eminent scientists, all of whom agree that the computer is a masterpiece — that it is a great milestone in Man's efforts to increase his knowledge. The Oracle has undoubtedly found a genuine solution to the question Bristol asked it. Our task must be to determine what that solution is."

"I can't entirely agree with that," said the Secretary for Extra-Terrestrial Affairs in a thin half-whisper. "I think we should depend on our own intelligence and skill to save ourselves. I've watched events come and go on this planet of ours for a long time — a very long time — and I feel as I have always felt that men can make the world a Paradise for themselves or they can destroy themselves, but that nothing else but they themselves can do it. We men must save ourselves. And there are still things that we can do." He shrugged his ancient, shawl-covered shoulders. "For example, we could disperse colonies so widely that it would become impossible for the invaders to destroy all of them."

"I'm afraid that's no good, George," answered the War Secretary respectfully. "If the Solar System is destroyed, any remaining colonies will be too weak to maintain themselves for long. We must defend this system successfully, or we are lost."

"Then that brings us back to the Oracle's proverb." The Presi-

dent thought for a moment. "Stitching obviously refers to inter-planar travel. How can that help us?"

The Secretary for Extra-Terrestrial Affairs peered up at the President through the shaggy white thicket of his eyebrows. "Actually, Michael," he said, "it was that thought that made me mention establishing colonies. The colonists would 'stitch' their way to their new homes. And colonizing would have to proceed in a timely manner to have any chance for success."

"Yes," answered the President, "but how would that 'save nine'? We have agreed that our Solar System must be saved. There are nine planets. Perhaps the Oracle meant that timely use of inter-planar travel can save the Solar System."

"Or at least the nine planets!" The War Secretary's fat jowls waggled with excitement. "You know, there is no limit to the size or mass of objects which can use inter-planar travel. What if we physically remove our planets, by stitching them away from the Sun? When the invaders arrived, we would be gone — Earth and Sun and all the rest!"

THE CHIEF Scientist, who had been silent up to this time spoke quietly. "Simmer down, Bill. We could move the planets easily enough, of course, but you forget the mass-distance relationship. A single stitch takes about a day. The distance traveled can be controlled within limits.

"For an object around the size of the Earth, those limits extend from a fraction of an inch to a little over two feet. Say that we have two years before the invaders work their way in to the Solar System. If we started right away, we could move Earth about a quarter of a mile by the time they get here. If we tried to take the Sun with us, it could be moved about half an inch in the same length of time. I'm afraid that the Solar System is going to be right here when the invaders come to get us. And I have a hunch that's likely to be a lot sooner than two years."

The Secretary of Internal Affairs leaned forward, his short hair bristling. "I think we are wasting our time," he shouted. "I agree with Ralph. I don't believe that the Oracle knows any more about this than we do. If we are going to sit around playing foolish games with words, why don't we do it in a big way? We could hire T.V. time and invite everyone to send in their ideas about what the proverb means on the back of a box-top. Or reasonable facsimile. The contestant with the best answer could get a free all-

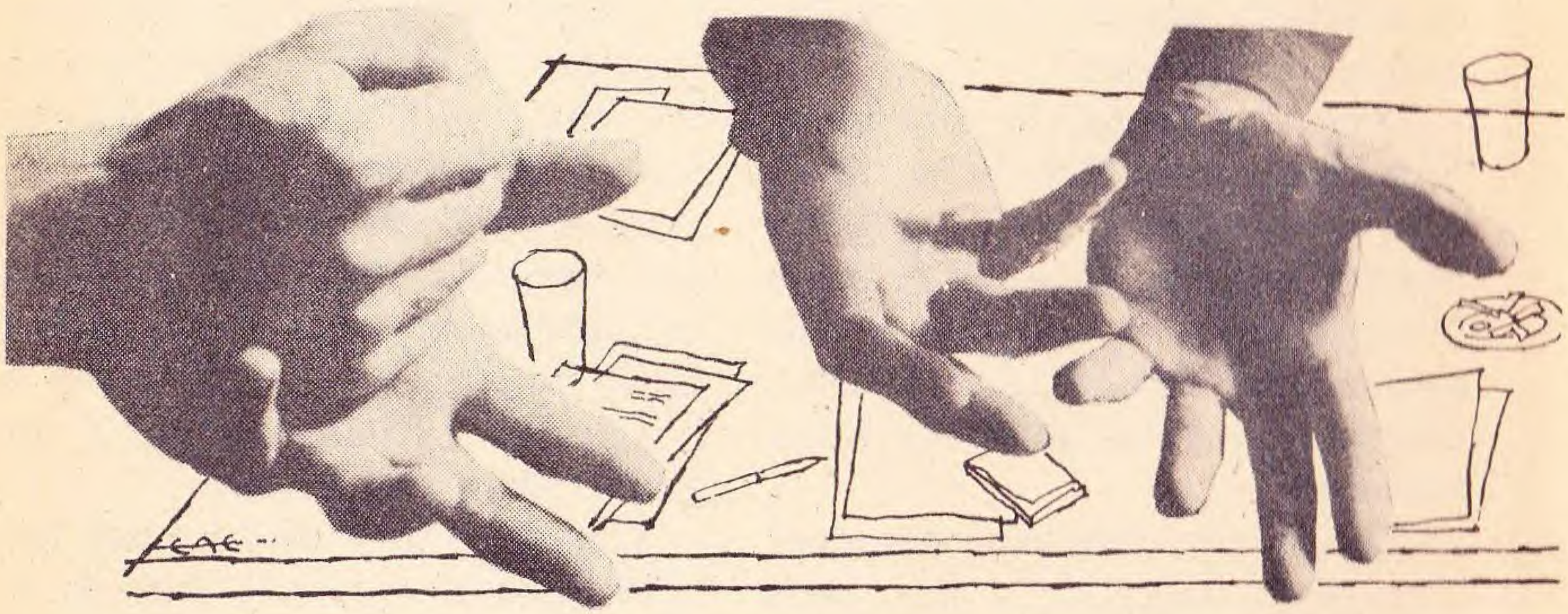
expense tour to Vega Three. Unless the invaders get here or there first."

The President nodded his head. "There may be more sense to that remark than I believe you intended, Charles," he said. "The greater the number of people who think about the problem, the greater the chance of reaching a solution. Even if the proverb is intended as a joke by the Oracle, as you imply, it might be that

ANNE MET him at the door with a drink and followed him to his comfortable chair. "You look as if that was even rougher than your day with the Oracle," she said.

John nodded silently, took a grateful sip of his highball and slipped off his shoes.

"All that fuss over a six-word proverb," said Anne. "I still think that if you are going to depend on witch doctors and such to solve



from it someone could derive a genuine solution. But as I have said, I am absolutely certain that the computer does know what it is talking about. Without resorting to box-tops or free trips, I think it might be wise to give the Oracle's statement to the public."

After several more hours of arguing, the Council adjourned for a few hours and John Bristol returned wearily home.

your problems for you, you would do a lot better to try my fortune teller. She gives you a lot more than six words for ten dollars. They make more sense, too. Why, I could be a better Oracle than that gadget you built."

"Perhaps you could, dear," answered John patiently.

Anne jumped to her feet. "Here, I'll show you." She seated herself cross-legged on the couch. "Now, I'm an Oracle," she an-

nounced. "Go ahead, ask me a question. Ask me anything; I'll give you as good an answer as any other Oracle. Results guaranteed."

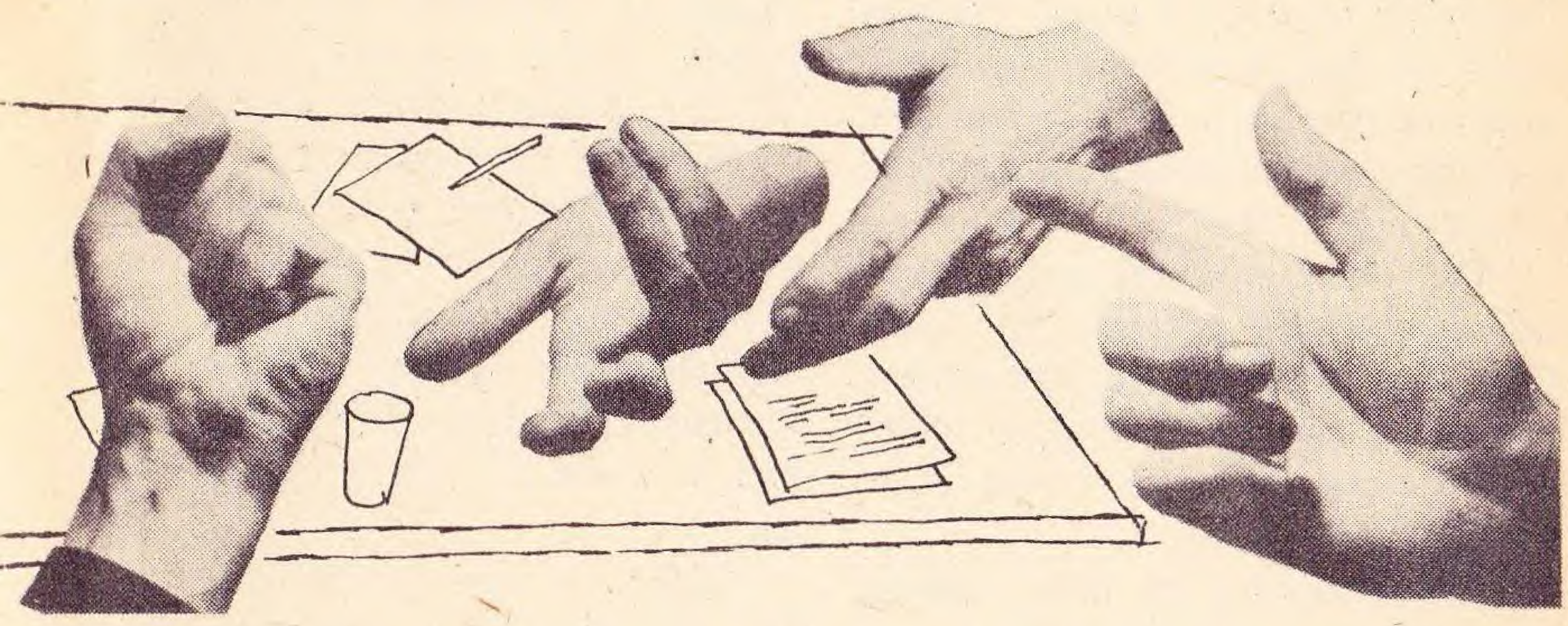
John smiled. "I'm not in much of a mood to be cheered up with games," he said, "but I'm willing to ask the big question of anyone who'll give me any kind of an answer. See if you can do better with this one than Buster did." He repeated word for word the

your other Oracle gave you, if you count 'it's' as one word. If you want wise-sounding answers, just come to me and save yourself a trip."

John leaped to his feet, spilling his drink and strode to Anne's side.

"Say it again!" he shouted. "You may have made more sense than you knew!"

"I said you could come to me and save yourself a trip."



question he had asked of the computer, that had resulted in its cryptic answer.

Anne stared solemnly at nothing for a moment, with her cheeks puffed out. Then, in measured tones, she recited, "It's Like Looking for a Needle in a Haystack."

John smiled. "That seems to make as much sense as the Oracle did, anyway," he said.

"Sure," answered Anne. "And you get three words more than

"No, no! I mean the proverb. How did you come to think of that proverb?"

Anne managed to look bewildered.

"What's wrong with it? I just thought that you can't do any stitching in time without a needle. I just was trying to think of a proverb to use as an answer and that one popped into my head. Uh. . . Are you all right, dear?"

JOHN PICKED her up and spun her around. "You just bet your boots I'm all right. I'm feeling swell! You've given us the answer we needed. You know right where the haystack is, and you know there's a needle there. But finding it is something else again. I don't think the invaders will be able to locate *this* needle."

He set her down. "Where are my shoes?" he said. "I've got to get back to the Capitol."

Anne seemed faintly surprised. "Because of what I said? They're right on the floor there between you and the sofa. But I was just making conversation. What are you going to do?"

"Oh, I'm just going to get started at taking stitches in time. Good-by, darling." He started out the door, ran back to give Anne a lingering kiss and was soon gone at top speed.

Anne, waving to him, looked very pleased with herself.

By the time Bristol arrived at the Capitol building, the rest of the Council was once again assembled and waiting for him.

"Well, John," said the President."You sounded excited enough when you called us together again. Have you figured out what the Oracle meant?"

"Yes, sir. With my wife's help. It's obvious, when you finally think about it. It will save us from any danger. And we should have been able to figure it out for ourselves. There's no reason that we should have had to go to the Oracle at all. And it only took Buster — the computer, I mean — two or three minutes to think of the answer, and of a proverb that would conceal the answer. It's amazing!"

"And if you don't mind telling us, just what is this answer?" The President sounded very impatient.

"We almost had it when we talked of stitching Earth out of reach," John answered eagerly. "If we keep cutting back and forth from one universe toward the other, we will be out of reach, even if we can't move very far. Once a day we reappear in this Universe for a few million-millionths of a second — although it will seem like a whole day to us.

"Then we spend the following day between this universe and beta. Even if the invaders are right on top of us when we reappear, we'll be gone again before they can do anything. Since we can vary the time of our return within limits, the invaders will never know exactly when we will flick in and out of the alpha plane until they hear our arriving 'bong' wave, and then we will already be gone, since we will be using accelerated subjective time."

THE CHIEF Scientist shook his dark head and sighed. "No, John," he said, "I'm afraid that isn't the answer. I'm sorry. If we start the operation you suggested, we will be cutting ourselves off from solar energy. The Earth's heat will gradually radiate away. Although beta is at a higher entropy level than our universe, we can't use that energy, except to provide power for the stitching process itself. It's true that we would deny our planet to the invaders, but we would soon kill ourselves doing it."

"I didn't mean that we should transfer only Earth, but our entire Solar System," answered Bristol. "As the Oracle told us, the stitch saves nine. A series of time-matched transmitters could do the trick. If we sent the entire Solar System back and forth, the average man in the street would notice no change, except that sometimes there would be no stars in the sky. And when they were there, they wouldn't be moving."

"That would work theoretically," said the Chief Scientist. "And once we were in continuous stitching operations, any invader, as you suggested, could join the system only by synchronizing the transmitter in his ship exactly with all of our synchronized transmitters. That's a job I don't think could ever be done.

"Remember, though, that our own transmitters would have to be time-matched to within a minute fraction of a micro-second. Considering that some of the instruments would have to be so far apart that at the speed of light it would take hours to get from one to the other, the problem becomes enormous. Any radio-timing link would be useless."

Bristol nodded. "The Oracle said that the stitch must be taken in time," he agreed. "But that is no real problem. We can just send a small robot ship into interplanar travel and let it bounce back. The 'bong' of its return will reach all transmitters simultaneously and we can use that as the initial time-pulse. Once the operation starts, it will be easy to synchronize, since we will always switch over again on the instant of our return to the alpha plane."

The Chief Scientist relaxed. "I think that does it, John. We hide in time, instead of in distance."

"We stitch in time," corrected the President, "and hide like a needle in a haystack."

"THE invaders may eventually find out a method of countering our defense," said the Chief Scientist, "but it will undoubtedly take a great deal of time. And in the meantime, we

will have the opportunity to seek out and destroy their home planets. It will be a long, slow process of extermination, but we have a good chance to win."

"I don't agree with that, Tom," said John. "I don't think extermination can be the answer. With our example to guide them, the invaders can use stitching to escape us as easily as we can use it to escape them. What we should do now is to contact the invaders and show them that it is to both our advantages to bring hostilities to an end. By stitching the Solar System, and the other systems of our confederation in and out of the alpha plane, we should be able to gain the time necessary for contact with the enemy and make peace with him.

"From what the Oracle has told me about the humanlike traits of the invaders, it's very likely they will listen to reason when it's proved that it will be to their advantage."

John snapped his fingers and spoke with considerable excitement. "Now I understand, I believe, why Buster indicated to me that there was another reason for his vague answer to our question. The Oracle feels an unwillingness to accept the destruction of Man's civilization. It feels equally unwilling, I'm certain, to allow the destruction of the invaders' civilization. Buster has an objective viewpoint in applying the *mores* Man has given him. And it seems to me that Buster felt it important for us to reach this spirit of compromise by ourselves. How do you feel about it, gentlemen?"

Debate quickly determined that all seven members of the Council favored an attempt to establish a truce — some of them forced into this opinion by their inability to find any method of reaching the throats of the invaders.

Having reached this conclusion, the Council swung immediately into action. Within a few weeks, the entire Solar System, along with the other planetary systems of the confederation, except for their brief daily return, disappeared from the alpha universe.

John Bristol, a few days after the continuous stitching started, was relaxing lazily on the sofa in his living room when there was a sudden pounding on the door. He opened it to find the Chief Scientist standing on his doorstep, his eyes red from loss of sleep.

"Good Lord! What's the matter with you?" asked Bristol. "Have you been celebrating too much? Come in, Tom, come in."

The Chief Scientist entered wearily and sat down. "No. I haven't been celebrating. I've been trying to work out a little problem you left with us. We have been planning, as you sug-

gested, to send out expeditions to contact and make agreement with the invaders. We can send them out all right, but how can we ever get them back into our solar system? They won't be able to find us any easier than the invaders can."

HE DROPPED his hat wearily on a side table and slumped into the closest chair. "If we don't contact each other," he said, "I am certain that the invaders will some day find a means of penetrating our defenses. Even needles in haystacks can be found, if you take enough time and aren't disturbed while you are hunting. This thing has me licked."

Bristol sat down slowly. "Your whole department hasn't been able to find an answer?"

"Not even the glimmering of an idea." He shrugged his shoulders. "It looks as if we are going to need the advice of your Oracle again."

Bristol stood for a minute in thought and then with a smile said, "Why, of course. Excuse me for a second, please. I'll be right back."

He stepped to the foot of the stairs and called out in a confident voice, "Come down a minute, please, Anne, darling! I have an important question I want to ask you!"

— L. J. STECHER, JR.

FORECAST

The big news next month — and perhaps of all 1956 — is SLAVE SHIP, a taut three-part serial by Frederik Pohl that charts the dangerous waters of a startling, breath-holdingly suspenseful future. It's a world at war and yet not at war, for the enemy, though it has overrun three continents, is not a government! But there are other puzzlements: In the vernacular, the foe is known as the Cow-dyes . . . and how does a big-ship Navy man, intent on winning the war that isn't a war, get himself to believe that an assignment ordering him to take care of cows will whip the Cow-dyes? And how will that bring him to his wife, a prisoner of war halfway around the world . . . assuming he can escape the Glotch, that most hideous and mysterious of all weapons in the history of frightful military inventions? Don't go around asking GALAXY readers: "What was all the excitement about?" It'll be about SLAVE SHIP . . . and you will be missing a lot if you miss it!

A GUN FOR DINOSAUR by L. Sprague de Camp is one of the two novelets scheduled for the next issue. In the most perilous period of prehistory, hunting reptile heavyweights is no job for a human lightweight. It doesn't sound possible, but you'll see why it's bulk against bulk.

DEAD-END DOCTOR

By ROBERT BLOCH

It's all really very simple — if you cannot change with the times, just change the times!

THE LAST psychiatrist on Earth sat alone in a room. There was a knock on the door.

"Come in," he said.

A tall robot entered, the electronic beam of its single eye piercing the gloom and focusing on the psychiatrist's face.

"Dr. Anson," the robot said, "the rent is due today. Pay me."

Dr. Howard Anson blinked. He did not like the harsh light, nor the harsh voice, nor the harsh meaning of the message. As he rose, he attempted to conceal his inner reactions with a bland smile, then remembered that his facial expression meant nothing to the robot.

That was precisely the trouble with the damned things, he told himself; you couldn't use psychology on them.

Illustrated by JOHNS

"Sixty tokens," the robot chanted, and rolled across the room toward him.

"But—" Dr. Hanson hesitated, then took the plunge. "But I haven't got sixty tokens at the moment. I told the manager yesterday. If you'll only give me a little time, a slight extension of credit—"

"Sixty tokens," the robot repeated, as if totally unmindful of the interruption, which, Dr. Anson assured himself, was exactly the case. The robot *was* unmindful. It did not react to unpredictable factors; that was not its function. The robot didn't set the rental figures in this office building and had no power to make decisions regarding credit. It was built to collect the rent, nothing more.

But that was enough. More than enough.

THE ROBOT rolled closer. Its arms rose and the hooklike terminals slid back the panels in its chest to reveal a row of pushbuttons and a thin, narrow slot.

"The rent is due," repeated the robot. "Please deposit the tokens in the slot."

Anson sighed. "Very well," he said. He walked over to his desk, opened a drawer and scooped out half a dozen shiny disks.

He slipped the disks into the slot. They landed inside the robot's cylindrical belly with a series of dull plops. Evidently the robot had been making the rounds of the building all day; it sounded more than half full.

For a wild moment, Dr. Anson wondered what would happen if he kidnaped the robot and emptied its cashbox. His own medical specialty was psychiatry and neuro-surgery, and he was none too certain of a robot's anatomical structure, but he felt sure he could fool around until he located the jackpot. He visualized himself standing before the operating table, under the bright lights. *"Scalpel. . . . forceps . . . blowtorch . . ."*

But that was unthinkable. Nobody had ever dared to rob a robot. Nobody ever robbed anything or anyone today, which was part of the reason Dr. Anson couldn't pay his rent on time.

Still, he *had* paid it. The robot's terminals were punching pushbuttons in its chest and now its mouth opened. "Here is your receipt," it said and a pink slip slid out from its mouth like a paper tongue.

Anson accepted the slip and the mouth said, "Thank you."

The terminals closed the chest-panels, the electronic beam swept the corners as the wheels turned, and the robot rolled out of the room and down the corridor.

Anson closed the door and mopped his brow.

So far, so good. But what would happen when the robot reached the manager? He'd open his walking cash register and discover Anson's six ten-token disks. Being human, he'd recognize them for what they were—counterfeit.

Dr. Anson shuddered. To think that it had come to this, a reputable psychiatrist committing a crime!

He considered the irony. In a world totally devoid of anti-social activity, there were no anti-social tendencies which required the services of psychiatry. And that was why he, as the last living psychiatrist, had to resort to anti-social activity in order to survive.

Probably it was only his knowledge of anti-social behavior, in the abstract, which enabled him to depart from the norm and indulge in such actions in the concrete.

Well, he was in the concrete now and it would harden fast—unless something happened. At best, his deception would give him a few days' grace. After that, he could face only disgrace.

ANSON shook his head and sat down behind the desk. Maybe this was the beginning, he told himself. First counterfeiting and fraud, then robbery and embezzlement, then rape and murder. Who could say where it would all end?

"Physician, heal thyself," he murmured and glanced with distaste at the dust-covered couch, where no patient reposed; where, indeed, no patient had ever reposed since he'd opened his office almost a year ago.

It had been a mistake, he realized. A big mistake ever to listen to his father and—

The visio lit up and the audio hummed. Anson turned and confronted a gigantic face. The gigantic face let out a gigantic roar, almost shattering the screen.

"I'm on my way up, Doctor!" the face bellowed. "Don't try to sneak out! I'm going to break your neck with my bare hands!"

For a few seconds Anson sat there in his chair, too numb to move. Then the full import of what he had seen and heard reached him. The manager was coming to kill him!

"Hooray!" he said under his breath and smiled. It was almost too good to be true. After all this time, at last, somebody was breaking loose. A badly disturbed personality, a potential killer, was on his way up—he was finally going to get himself a patient. If he could treat him before being murdered, that is.

Tingling with excitement, Anson fumbled around in his files. Now where in thunder was that equipment for the Rorschach Test? Yes, and the Porteus Maze and—

The manager strode into the room without knocking. Anson looked up, ready to counter the first blast of aggression with a steely professional stare.

But the manager was smiling.

"Sorry I blew up that way," he said. "Guess I owe you an apology."

"What?"

"When I found those counterfeit tokens, something just seemed to snap for a moment," the manager explained. "You know how it is."

"Yes, I do," said Anson eagerly. "I understand quite well. And it's nothing to be ashamed of. I'm sure that with your cooperation, we can get to the roots of the trauma. Now if you'll just relax on the couch over there—"

THE RED-FACED little man continued to smile, but his voice was brusque. "Nonsense! I don't need any of that. Before I came up here, I stopped in at Dr. Peabody's office, down on the sixth floor. Great little endocrinologist, that guy. Gave me some kind of a shot that fixed me up in a trice. That's three times faster than a jiffy, you know."

"I don't know," Anson answered vaguely. "Endocrinology isn't my field."

"Well, it should be. It's the only field in medicine that really amounts to anything nowadays. Except for diagnosis and surgery, of course. Those gland-handers can do anything. Shots for when you feel depressed, shots for when you're afraid, shots for when you get excited, or mad, the way I was. Boy, I feel great now. At peace with the world!"

"But it won't last. Sooner or later, you'll get angry again."

"So I'll get another shot," the manager replied. "Everybody does."

"That's not a solution. You're merely treating the symptom, not the basic cause." Anson rose and stepped forward. "You're under a great deal of tension. I suspect it goes back to early childhood. Did you ever suffer from enuresis?"

"It's my turn to ask questions. What about those fake tokens you tried to palm off on me?"

"Why, it was all a joke. I thought if you could give me a few more days to dig up—"

"I'm giving you just five minutes to dig down," the manager said, smiling pleasantly but firmly. "You ought to know that you can't pull a trick like that with a cash collector; these new models have automatic tabulators and detectors. The moment that robot came back to my office, it spat up the counterfeits. It couldn't stomach them. And neither can I."

"Stomach?" asked Anson hopefully. "Are you ever troubled with gastric disturbances? Ulcers? Psy-


NO RENT-
GO!

chosomatic pain in the—"

The manager thrust out his jaw. "Look here, Anson, you're not a bad sort, really. It's just that you're confused. Why don't you clever up and look at the big picture? This witch-doctor racket of yours, it's atomized. Nobody's got any use for it today. You're like the guys who used to manufacture buggy whips; they sat around telling themselves that the automobile would never replace the horse, when any streetcleaner could see what was happening to business.

"Why don't you admit you're licked? The gland-handers have taken over. Why, a man would have to be crazy to go to a psychiatrist nowadays and you know there aren't any crazy people any more. So forget about all this. Take a course or something. You can be an End-Doc yourself. Then open up a real office and make yourself some big tokens."

Anson shook his head. "Sorry," he said. "Not interested."

The manager spread his hands. "All right. I gave you a chance. Now there's nothing left to do but call in the ejectors."

HE WALKED over and opened the door. Apparently he had been prepared for Anson's decision, because two ejectors were waiting. They rolled into the room and, without bothering to focus their beams on Anson, commenced to scoop books from the shelves and deposit them in their big open belly-hampers.

"Wait!" Anson cried, but the ejector robots continued inexorably and alphabetically: there went Adler, Brill, Carmichael, Dunbar, Ellis, Freud, Gesell, Horney, Isaacs, Jung, Kardiner, Lindner, Moll—

"Darling, what's the matter?"

Sue Porter was in the room. Then she was in his arms and Dr. Anson had a difficult time remembering what the matter was. The girl affected him that way.

But a look at the manager's drugged smile served as a reminder. Anson's face reddened, due to a combination of embarrassment and lipstick smudges, as he told Sue what had happened.

Sue laughed. "Well, if that's all it is, what are you so upset about?" Without waiting for a reply, she advanced upon the manager, her hand digging into her middle bra-cup. "Here's your tokens," she said. "Now call off the ejectors."

The manager accepted the disks with a smile of pure euphoria, then strode over to the robots and punched buttons. The ejectors halted their labors between Reich and Stekel, then reversed operations. Quickly and efficiently, they replaced all the books on the shelves.

In less than a minute, Anson faced the girl in privacy. "You shouldn't have done that," he said severely.

"But, darling, I wanted to. After all, what are a few tokens more or less?"

"A few tokens?" Anson scowled. "In the past year, I've borrowed over two thousand from you. This can't go on."

"Of course not," the girl agreed. "That's what I've been telling you. Let's get a Permanent and then Daddy will give you a nice fat job and—"

"There you go again! How often must I warn you about the Elektra situation? This unnatural dependency on the Father Image is dangerous. If only you'd let me get you down on the couch—"

"Why, of course, darling!"

"No, no!" Anson cried. "I want to analyze you!"

"Not now," Sue answered. "We'll be late for dinner. Daddy expects you."

"Damn dinner and damn Daddy, too," Anson said. But he took the girl's arm and left the office, contenting himself by slamming the door.

"Aren't you going to put up that *Doctor Will Return in Two Hours* sign?" the girl asked, glancing back at the door.

"No," Anson told her. "I'm not coming back in two hours. Or ever."

Sue gave him a puzzled look, but her eyes were smiling.

DR. HOWARD ANSON'S eyes weren't smiling as he and Sue took off from the roof. He kept them closed, so that he didn't have to watch the launching robots, or note the 'copter's progress as it soared above the city. He didn't want to gaze down at the metallic tangle of conveyors moving between the factories or the stiffly striding figures which supervised their progress on the ramps and loading platforms. The air about them was filled with 'copters, homeward bound from offices and recreation areas, but no human figures moved in the streets. Ground-level was almost entirely mechanized.

"What's the matter now?" Sue's voice made him look at her. Her eyes held genuine concern.

"The sins of the fathers," Anson said. "Yours and mine." He watched the girl as she set the 'copter on auto-pilot for the journey across the river. "Of course it really wasn't my father's fault that he steered me into psychiatry. After all, it's been a family tradition for a hundred and fifty years. All my paternal ancestors were psychiatrists, with the exception of one or two renegade Behaviorists. When he encouraged my interest in the profession, I never stopped to question him.

He trained me—and I was the last student to take up the specialty at medical school. The last, mind you!

"I should have known then that it was useless. But he kept insisting this state of affairs couldn't last, that things were sure to change. 'Cheer up,' he used to tell me, whenever I got discouraged. 'The pendulum is bound to swing in the other direction.' And then he'd tell me about the good old days when he was a boy and the world was still full of fetichism and hebephrenia and pyromania and mixoscopic zoophilia. 'It will come again,' he kept telling me. 'Just you wait and see! We'll have frottage and nympholepsy and compulsive exhibitionism—everything your little heart desires.'

"Well, he was wrong. He died knowing that he had set me up in a dead-end profession. I'm an anachronism, like the factory worker or the farmer or the miner or the soldier. We don't have any need for them in our society any more; robots have replaced them all. And the End-Docs have replaced the psychiatrists and neuro-surgeons. With robots to ease the physical and economic burden and gland-handers to relieve mental tension, there's nothing left for me. The last psychiatrist should have disappeared along with the last advertising man. Come to think of it, they probably belong together. My father was wrong, Sue. I know that now. But most of the real blame belongs to *your* father."

"Daddy?" she exclaimed. "How can you possibly blame him?"

ANSON laughed shortly. "Your family has been pioneering in robotics almost as long as mine has worked in psychiatry. One of your ancestors took out the first basic patent. If it weren't for him and those endocrine shots, everything would still be normal—lots of incest and scoptophilia, plenty of voyeurism for everybody—"

"Why, darling, what a thing to say! You know as well as I do what robots have done for the world. You said it yourself. We don't have any more manual or menial labor. There's no war, plenty of everything for everybody. And Daddy isn't stopping there."

"I suppose not," Anson said bitterly. "What is the old devil dreaming up now?"

Sue flushed. "You wouldn't talk like that if you knew just how hard he's been working. He and Mr. Mullet, the engineering chief. They're just about ready to bring out the new pilot models they've developed for space travel."

"I've heard that one before. They've been announcing those models for ten years."

"They keep running into bugs,

I guess. But sooner or later, they'll find a way to handle things. Nothing is perfect, you know. Every once in a while, there's still some trouble with the more complicated models."

"But they keep trying for perfection. Don't you see where all this leads to, Sue? Human beings will become obsolescent. First the workers, now the psychiatrists and other professions. But it won't end there. Inside of another generation or two, we won't need anyone any more. Your father, or somebody like him, will produce the ultimate robot — the robot that's capable of building other robots and directing them. Come to think of it, he's already done the first job; your factories are self-perpetuating. All we need now is a robot that can take the place of a few key figures like your father. Then that's the end of the human race. Oh, maybe they'll keep a few men and women around for pets, but that's all. And thank God I won't be here to see it."

"So why worry?" Sue replied. "Enjoy yourself while you can. We'll apply for a Permanent and Daddy will give you a job like he promised me—"

"Job? What kind of job?"

"Oh, maybe he'll make you a vice-president or something. *They* don't have to do anything."

"Fine! A wonderful future!"

"I don't see anything wrong with it. You ought to consider yourself lucky."

"Listen, Sue." He turned to her earnestly. "You just don't understand the way I feel. I've spent eighteen years of my life in school, six of it in training for my profession. That's all I know and I know it well. And what have I to show for it? I'm a psychiatrist who's never had a patient, a neuro-surgeon who's never performed anything but an experimental topectomy or lobotomy. That's my work, my life, and I want a chance to function. I don't intend to sit around on a fat sinecure, raising children whose only future is oblivion. I don't want a Permanent with you under those conditions."

SUE SNIFFED petulantly. "A Permanent with me isn't good enough, is that it? I suppose you'd rather have a lot of repression and guilt complexes and all that other stuff you're always talking about."

"It isn't that," Anson insisted. "I don't really want the world to revert to neurotic or psychotic behavior just so I can have a practice. But damn it, I can't stand to see the way things are going. We've done away with stress and privation and tension and superstition and intolerance, and that's great. But we've also done away with ourselves in the

process. We're getting to the point where we, as human beings, no longer have a function to perform. We're not *needed*."

The girl gave him an angry glance. "What you're trying to say is that you don't need *me*, is that it?"

"I do need you. But not on these terms. I'm not going to lead a useless existence, or bring children into a world where they'll be useless. And if your father brings up that vice-president deal at dinner tonight, I'm going to tell him to take his job and—"

"Never mind!" Sue flipped the switch from auto-pilot back to manual and the 'copter turned. "You needn't bother about dinner. I'll take you back to your office now. You can put yourself down on the couch and do a little practicing on your own mind. You need it! Of all the stupid, pigheaded—"

The sound of the crash reached them even at flying level. Sue Porter broke off abruptly and glanced down at the river front below. Anson stared with her.

"What was that?" he asked.

"I don't know—can't make it out from here." She spun the controls, guiding the 'copter down until it hovered over a scene of accelerating confusion.

A huge loading barge was moored against one of the docks. *Had* been moored, rather; as they watched, it swung erratically into the current, then banged back against the pier. Huge piles of machinery, only partially lashed to the deck, now tumbled and broke free. Some of the cranes splashed into the water and others rolled across the flat surface of the barge.

"Accident," Sue gasped. "The cable must have broken."

ANSON'S eyes focused on the metallic figures which dotted the deck and stood stolidly on the dock. "Look at the robots!"

"What about them?" asked Sue.

"Aren't they supposed to be doing something? That one with the antenna — isn't it designed to send out a warning signal when something goes wrong?"

"You're right. They beam Emergency in a case like this. The expediters should be out by now."

"Some of them look as if they're paralyzed," Anson noted, observing a half dozen of the metallic figures aboard the barge. They were rigid, unmoving. Even as he watched, a round steel bell bowled across the deck. None of the robots moved — the sphere struck them like a ball hitting the pins and hurtled them into the water.

On the pier, the immobilized watchers gave no indication of reaction.

"Paralyzed," Anson repeated.

"Not that one!"

Sue pointed excitedly as the 'copter hovered over the deck. Anson looked and found the cause of her consternation.

A large, fully articulated robot with the humanoid face of a controller clattered along in a silvery blur of motion. From one of its four upper appendages dangled a broad-bladed axe.

It bumped against an armless receptacle-type robot and the axe descended, striking the robot squarely in its loading compartment. There was a crash as the victim collapsed.

And the controller robot sped on, striking at random, in a series of sped-up motions almost impossible to follow — but not impossible to understand.

"That's the answer!" said Anson. "It must have cut the cable with the axe. And attacked the others, to immobilize them. Come on, let's land this thing."

"But we can't go down there! It's dangerous! Somebody will send out the alarm. The expediters will handle it —"

"Land!" Anson commanded. He began to rummage around in the rear compartment of the 'copter.

"What are you looking for?" Sue asked as she maneuvered the machine to a clear space alongside a shed next to the dock.

"The rope ladder."

"But we won't need it. We're on the ground."

"*I* need it." He produced the tangled length and began to uncoil it. "You stay here," he said. "This is my job."

"What are you going to do?"

"Yes, what are you going to do?" The deep voice came from the side of the 'copter. Anson and Sue looked up at the face of Eldon Porter.

"Daddy! How did you get here?"

"Alarm came through."

THE BIG, gray-haired man scowled at the dock beyond, where the expediter robots were already mopping up with flamethrowers.

"You've got no business here," Eldon Porter said harshly. "This area's off-limits until everything's under control." He turned to Anson. "And I'll have to ask you to forget everything you've seen here. We don't want word of accidents like these to leak out — just get people needlessly upset."

"Then this isn't the first time?" asked Anson.

"Of course not. Mullet's had a lot of experience; he knows how to handle this."

"Right, Chief." Anson recognized the thin, bespectacled engineer at Eldon Porter's side. "Every time we test out one of these advanced models, something goes haywire. Shock, overload, some damned thing. Only thing we can

do is scrap it and try again. So you folks keep out of the way. We're going to corner it with the flame-throwers and—"

"No!"

Anson opened the door and climbed out, dragging the long rope ladder behind him.

"Where in hell do you think you're going?" demanded Eldon Porter.

"I'm after that robot," Anson said. "Give me two of your men to hold the ends of this ladder. We can use it like a net and capture the thing without destroying it. That is, put it in restraint."

"Restraint?"

"Technical term we psychiatrists use." Anson smiled at the two men and then at the girl. "Don't worry," he said. "I know what I'm doing. I've got a case at last. Your robot is psychotic."

"Psychotic?" grumbled Eldon Porter, watching the young man move away. "What's that mean?"

"Nuts," said Sue sweetly. "A technical term.'

SEVERAL weeks passed before Sue saw Dr. Howard Anson again.

She waited anxiously outside in the corridor with her father until the young man emerged. He peeled off his gloves, smiling.

"Well?" rumbled Eldon Porter.

"Ask Mullet," Anson suggested.

"He did it!" the thin engineer exulted. "It works, just like he said it would! Now we can use the technique whenever there's a breakdown. But I don't think we'll have any more. Not if we incorporate his suggestions in the new designs. We can use them on the new space pilot models, too."

"Wonderful!" Eldon Porter said. He put his hand on Anson's shoulder. "We owe you a lot."

"Mullet deserves the credit," Anson replied. "If not for him and his schematics, I'd never have made it. He worked with me night and day, feeding me the information. We correlated everything—you know, I'd never realized how closely your engineers had followed the human motor-reaction patterns."

Eldon Porter cleared his throat. "About that job," he began. "That vice-presidency—"

"Of course," Anson said. "I'll take it. There's going to be a lot of work to do. I want to train at least a dozen men to handle emergencies until the new models take over. I understand you've had plenty of cases like this in the past."

"Right. And we've always ended up by junking the robots that went haywire. Hushed it up, of course, so people wouldn't worry. Now we're all set. We can duplicate the electronic patterns of the human brain without worrying about breakdowns due to

speedup or overload. Why didn't we think of the psychiatric approach ourselves?"

"Leave that to me," Anson said. And as the two men moved off, he made a psychiatric approach toward the girl.

She finally stepped back out of his arms. "You owe me an explanation. What's the big idea? You're taking the job, after all!"

"I've found I can be useful," Anson told her. "There *is* a place for my profession — a big one. Human beings no longer go berserk, but robots do."

"Is that what this is all about? Have you been psychoanalyzing that robot you caught?"

ANSON smiled. "I'm afraid psychoanalysis isn't suitable for robots. The trouble is purely mechanical. But the brain is a mechanism, too. The more I worked with Mullet, the more I learned about the similarities." other."

"You cured that robot in there?" she asked incredulously.

"That's right." Anson slipped out of his white gown. "It's as good as new, ready to go back on the job at once. Of course it will have slower, less intense reactions, but its judgment hasn't been impaired. Neuro-surgery did the trick. That's the answer, Sue. Once you open them up, you can see the cure's the same."

"So that's why you were wearing a surgical gown," she said. "You were *operating* on that robot."

Anson grinned triumphantly. "The robot was excited, in a state of hysteria. I merely applied my knowledge and skill to the problem."

"But what kind of an operation?"

"I opened up the skull and eased the pressure on the overload wires. There used to be a name for it, but now there's a new one." Anson took her back into his arms. "Darling, congratulate me! I've just successfully performed the first prefrontal robotomy!"

— ROBERT BLOCH

(*Continued from page 4*)

one can be revived by praise — but my own curiosity has been momentarily stirred.

Is science fiction literature, either with or without a capital "L"? I don't know, but let's see.

The litmus commonly used to determine whether something is literature indicates its degree of success in depicting its era. I know that's a sticky sentence, but it's the kind of language critics hide behind. All it means is: did the author give you a sharp, vivid idea of what it was like to be alive in his time?

Because science fiction deals mostly with the future and the past, alien planets, other dimensions and the like, it would seem to be out of bounds as literature, on the basis of this definition. How can you live vicariously in a writer's era if he's constantly going off somewhere else?

Ah, but is he? The more he tells you of other times and places, the more he reveals of his own time and place.

You can see that for yourself in the Utopias of the past; they display in surgical detail the conditions they aimed to correct. Not too oddly, I guess, we in the present can't find much choice between those real and imaginary societies. The real ones were harsh and unjust, but so were the imaginary — they were sweet setups for the authors and their friends, bum deals for everyone else.

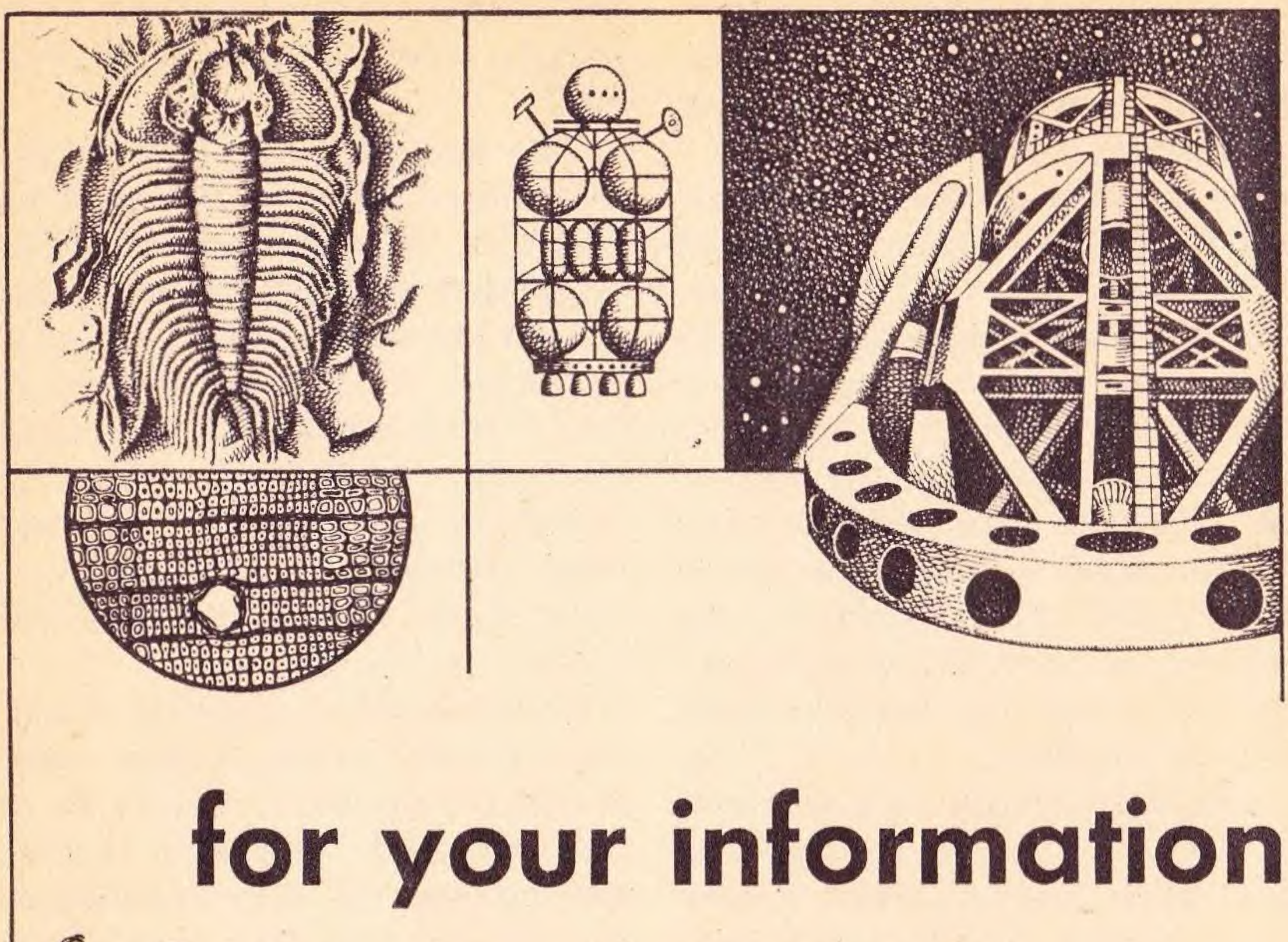
The gadgetry, too, tells us all we need to know of their science. Many of the ideas proved valid — distant communication, flight, ground and undersea travel, transmutation of metals, improved food raising and storage, teaching methods, publishing, recording sound for posterity — but they were unworkable because they were bound so immovably to the science of the day.

In the same way, many of our ideas are valid, but if they come about as proposed, it will be a sheer accident. We also, of course, are limited by our knowledge. But it's the idea that counts, not the execution — once the thought is expressed, the rest is up to the researchers.

Science fiction does something that no other fiction can do. It provides a clear view of today, plus a sharp contrast between extrapolation and ultimate fact. A bonus like that should make science fiction *LLiterature*. Not all, by any means — no field of any kind can produce only masterpieces — but enough to meet the entrance examination.

You may fire when ready, Gridley, or whatever your name is this year. But before you do — is your attack Literature?

— H. L. GOLD



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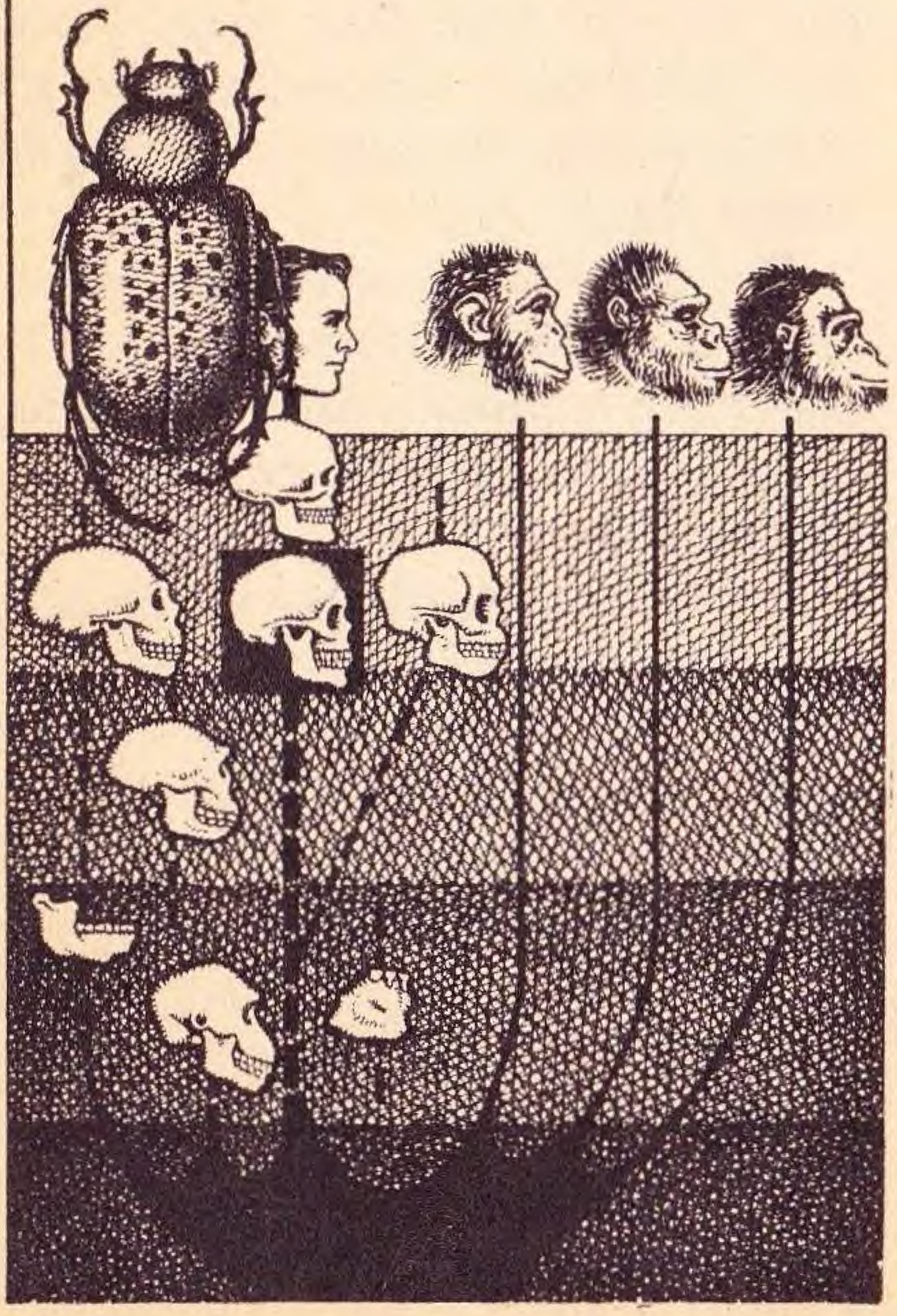


By WILLY LEY

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MOON

THE FULL Moon is hanging brightly over the Atlantic Ocean off the New Jersey shore and from this fact I derive for myself the right to reminisce a little. About thirty-five years ago — I was still in high school at the time — there was an astronomical exhibition in the old Urania Observatory in Berlin, the same observatory where the planetoid Eros had been tracked down. One of the items on display was a model of

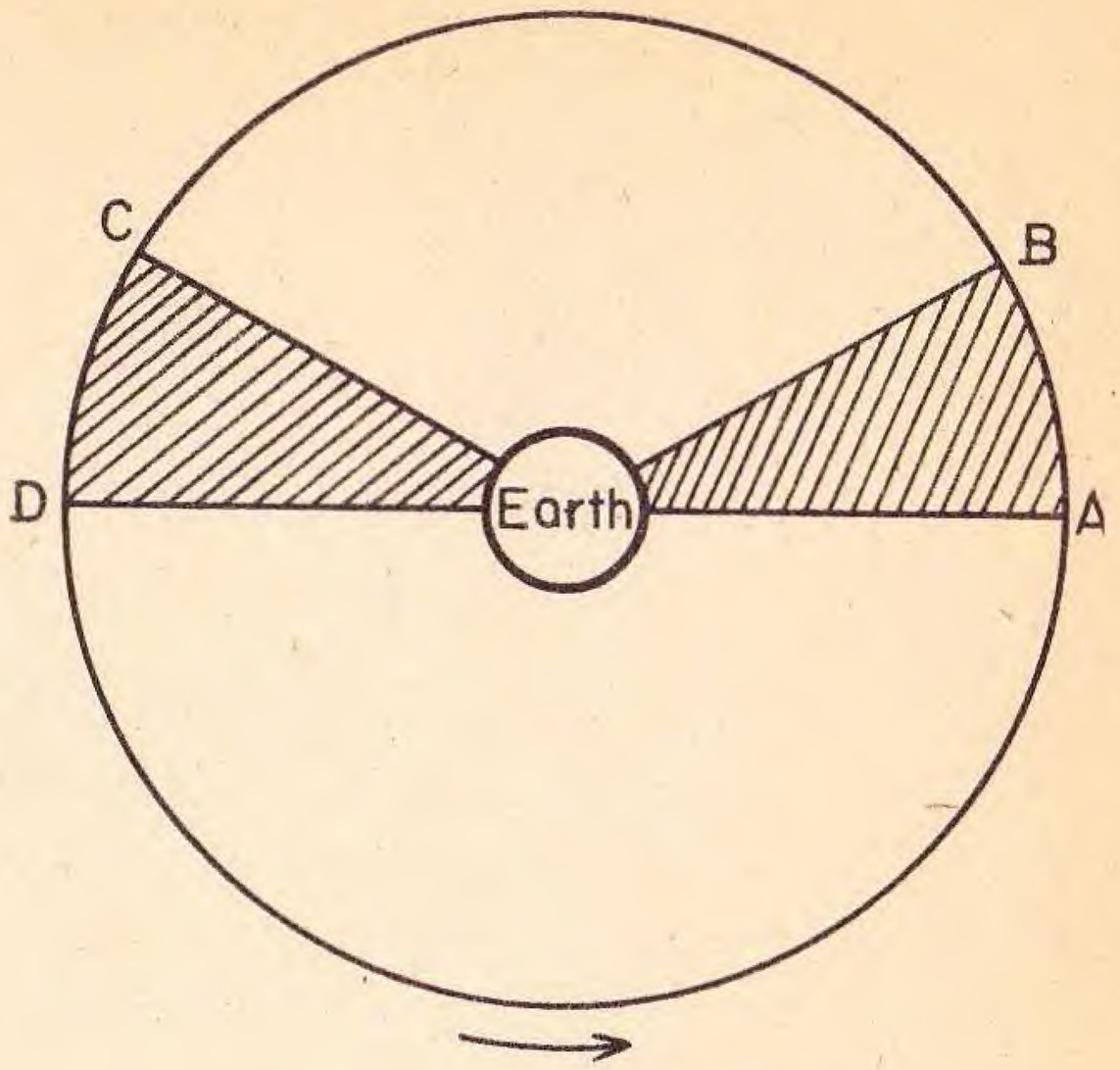
the Moon, some sixteen inches in diameter, made in years of painstaking work by a retired teacher. A white-haired gentleman in his seventies was talking to him and when he left, somebody said to me: "This gentleman still knew Professor Hansen."

This would have been more instructive by far if I had known at the time who Professor Hansen had been, but the name stuck in my mind and in due course I found out.

Peter Andreas Hansen, to use his full name, had been the author of a theory concerning the Moon. It was easily the most spectacular idea about the Moon anybody has ever had and it is almost sad that he was wrong. If Hansen had been right, science fiction authors would have a very nearly inexhaustible theme to play with and the first exploratory round-the-Moon ships would really have something to watch for and photograph.

THE WESTERN world began to realize that the Moon is an independent solid body in space at about the time of Christ. What people thought before that time is only imperfectly known; my guess is that most of them managed to do without any specific ideas.

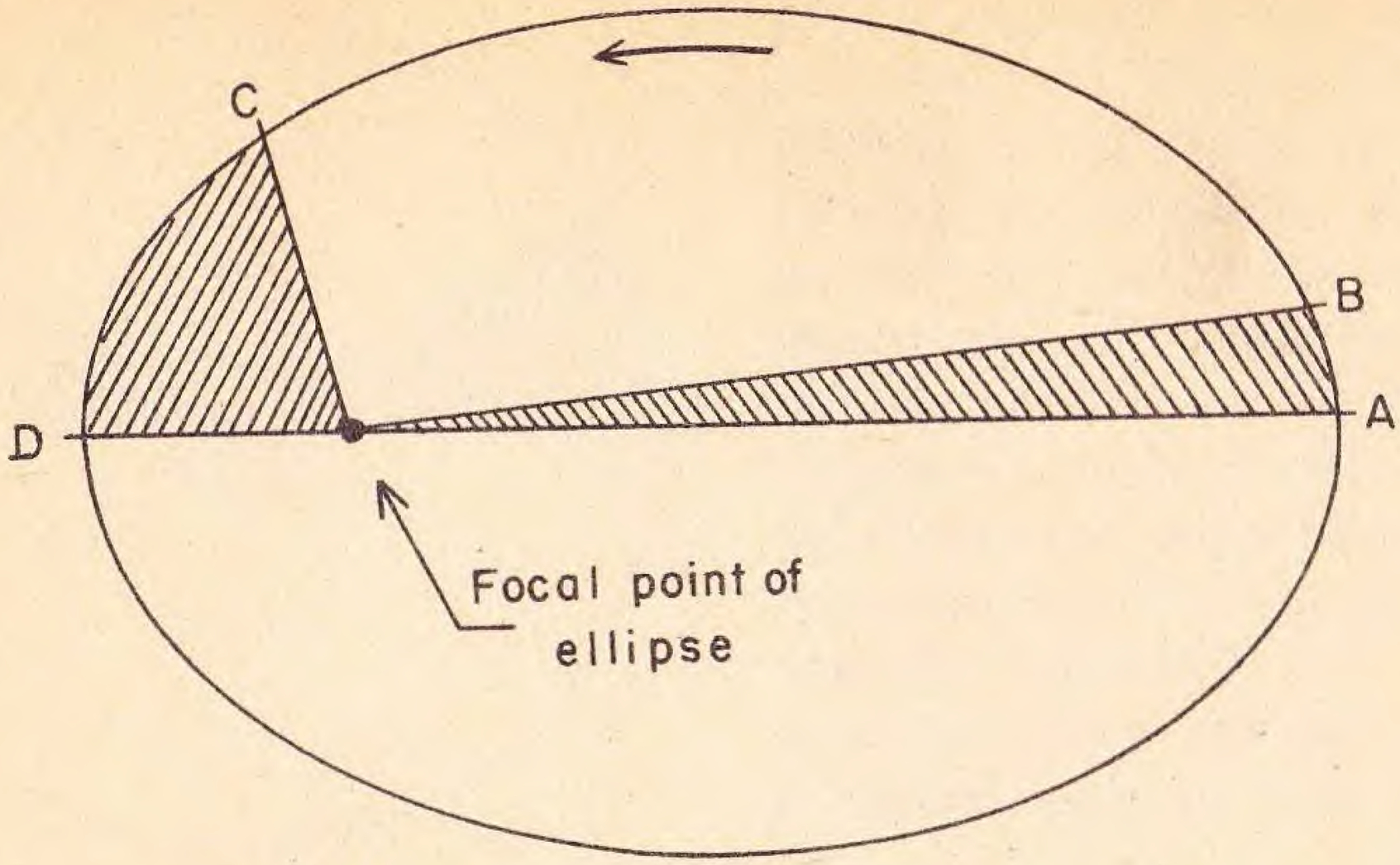
Pliny the Elder mentioned in his famous *Natural History* that



"the ancients" thought the Moon was a round silver shield in the sky. But there was disagreement about the nature of the spots that could be so clearly seen. One unknown philosopher declared that they were just dirt, atmospheric vapors which had condensed on the shiny silver. Another equally unknown philosopher held that no vapors had sullied the splendor of the heavenly disk, but that the spots one could see were reflections of the continents and seas of the Earth below.

One might study the geography of the Earth by looking at the Moon. The really difficult problem was to find out where the observer himself was located in this reflection.

Another early idea is embodied in a Hindu legend. According to it, the Moon was the round face of a lantern carried by a gigan-



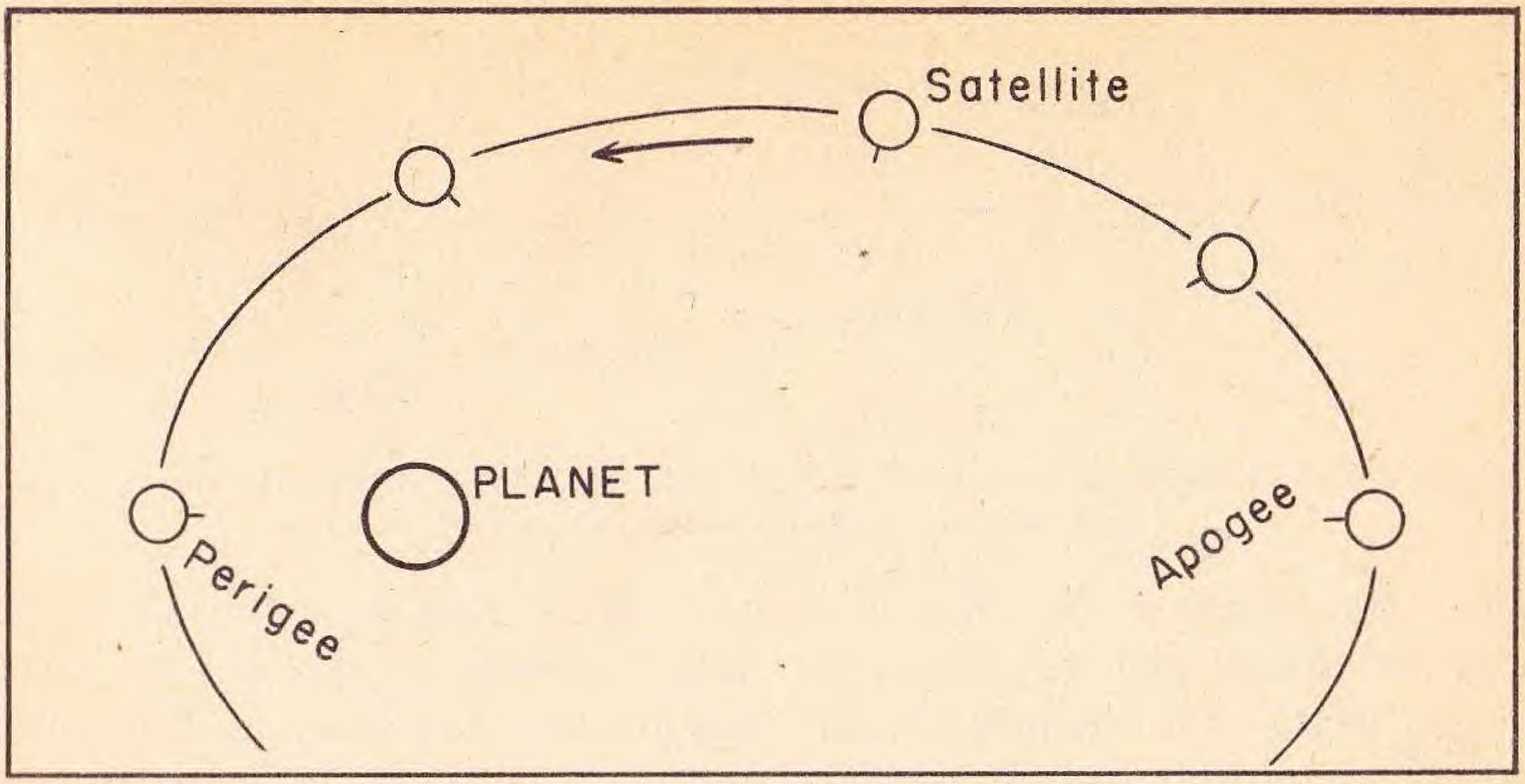
Kepler's Second Law. The areas swept over the *radius vector* must be equal for equal times. In a circular orbit P. 45 , the angles would be equal, too. In an elliptical orbit (right), they are decidely unequal

tic (and invisible) Heavenly Watchman.

In the classical West, as I have mentioned, the Moon was recognized as a "second Earth" some two thousand years ago. It was understood that the Moon was considerably smaller than Earth, but this was taken to be the main or even the only dissimilarity. Like the Earth, it indubitably had continents and seas, mountains and valleys, rivers and forests. These ideas are still reflected in the astronoomical names for some of the lunar features. The largest of the dark blotches is still called *Oceanus procellarum*, the Ocean of Storms. Another feature is still spoken of as the *Sinus iridum*, the Rainbow Bay, and another section is labeled *Palus nebularum*, the Misty Swamp.

When Galileo Galilei looked at the Moon, he still thought he saw seas and continents, but it needed only slight improvements of the early telescopes to realize that the "seas" could not be seas. And familiarity with the surface of the Moon quickly convinced the observer that he could always see everything there was to be seen, that his vision was never obscured by lunar cloud patches. The astronomers of the first half of the seventeenth century might not yet be able to make up their minds on whether there was an atmosphere on the Moon or not, but they could tell that it was a cloudless atmosphere.

Later in the same century, the case was already decided. The



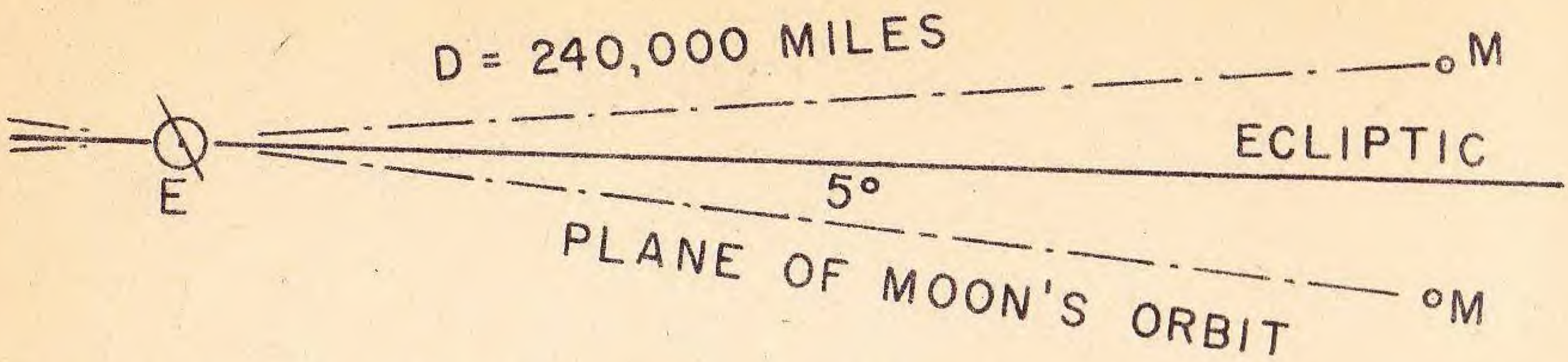
How an elliptical orbit causes "libration"

Dutch astronomer and mathematician Christian Huyghens, who died in 1695, stated it categorically in his book *Cosmotheoros*: "on the Moon, there are no seas, no rivers, nor clouds, nor air and water." The same book, incidentally, contains the statement that the moons of Jupiter and of Saturn always turn the same side to their planets, just as our moon does with us.

FOR A layman, Huyghens' verdict may well have dispelled whatever interest he had had in the Moon before. As far as astronomers were concerned, their work was just beginning. The first and most obvious and incidentally rather tedious job was a complete mapping of the visible hemisphere. If any changes should take place on the lunar surface, one had to have a detailed map to recognize them.

While they were at it, astronomers began to realize that our moon is extraordinary in size. The Earth-Moon system is *almost* a double planet, something we know to be theoretically possible, even though our own solar system happens not to offer an example. True, our moon is not the largest satellite in the Solar System. Its diameter of 2160 miles is surpassed by three of the four large moons of Jupiter (namely by Io, Ganymede and Callisto), by Titan, the largest of Saturn's moons, and by Triton, the larger of the two known moons of Neptune.

But while Triton has a diameter of around 3000 miles, the diameter of its planet is 26,800 miles. Earth's diameter is a little over 7900 miles, so that the diameter of our moon is, in round



The extreme positions above and below the ecliptic the Moon can assume, permitting a look over its poles

figures, one-quarter of the diameter of the planet to which it belongs. Still, the Earth-Moon system is not quite a double planet because the common center of gravity of the system is still inside the body of the Earth, about 1000 miles below the surface.

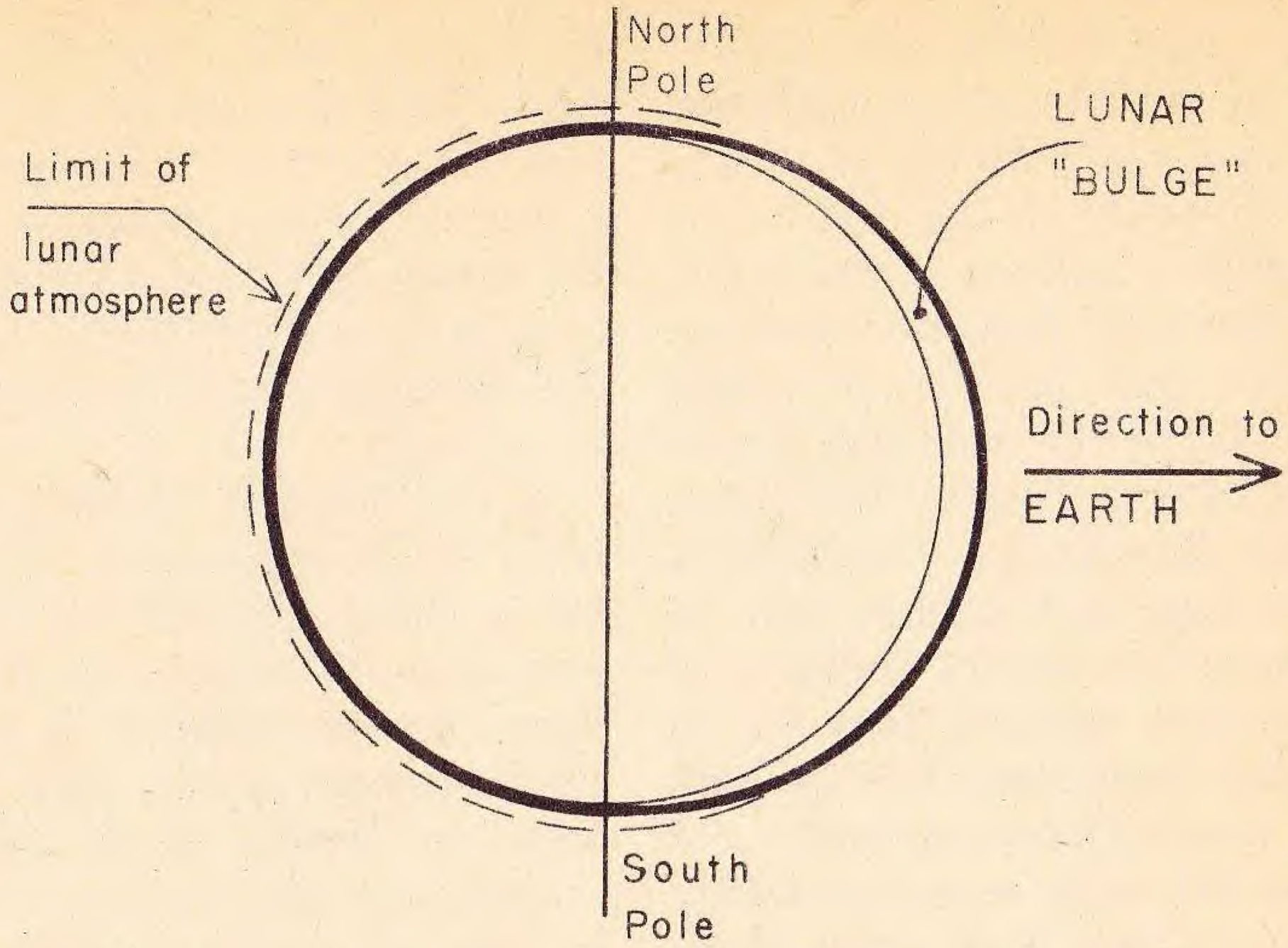
Although nobody ever experienced any trouble locating the Moon in the sky, provided it was visible at all, the calculation of the Moon's orbit happens to be a very difficult job. One might say that any perturbation of its movement that is possible at all actually does take place. For quite some time, astronomers looked for some unknown factor influencing the Moon's movement. And this is the point where Professor Peter Andreas Hansen entered the picture.

Hansen had been born in Denmark exactly one hundred years after Huyghens died in Holland. Before he became an astronomer, he had been an instrument maker, but he became involved in an astronomical venture — the measuring of a meridian. He was working at Altona Observatory then, but only a few years later, in 1825, he was offered the position as director of the Seeberg Observatory.

Hansen's special interest was the computation of orbits and he was fascinated by the perturbations of orbits. Small wonder that he tackled the problem of the orbit of the Moon. While working at it, he thought one day that he had spotted that unknown factor other astronomers had been talking about. Much could be explained if one assumed that the Moon was not a perfect sphere.

OF COURSE many planets are not perfect spheres. Everybody knows that the Earth has a rather marked equatorial bulge. And Jupiter's equatorial bulge is so enormous that it can be seen with even a small telescope. But this is not what Hansen meant when he said that the Moon was not a perfect sphere.

He did not think of equatorial



The shape of the Moon according to Hansen's theory

bulges and flattened poles. The idea was rather that the Moon was slightly egg-shaped, that it had two equatorial diameters, one when measured from rim to rim of the visible disk and another and larger one when measured from the center of the visible disk to the center of the hemisphere, which is invisible from Earth.

Instead of having an equatorial bulge all around the equator, like a quickly rotating planet, the Moon, in Hansen's opinion, had a large equatorial bulge in only one spot, something like an enormous high plateau, large enough to accommodate whole mountain chains and deep valleys. The center of this enormous bulge was supposed to coincide with the center of the visible disk of the Moon. In fact, all we could see from Earth was just this bulge, for the Moon's longer equatorial diameter was lined up with the common center of gravity of the Earth-Moon system.

If this was true, it not only explained the observed peculiarities in the Moon's orbital motion; it also shed an entirely new light on everything else that had been observed. If the visible lunar disk was an enormous mountainous plateau, lifted to stratospheric heights, the observed absence of air and of water was only the logical result of such elevation. There was no observable air because the

plateau was above the denser layers of the Moon's atmosphere. And there could be no water because it had run off the bulge thousands or millions of years ago.

It followed that no observation that had been made could be applied to the unknown hemisphere of the Moon. The most thorough knowledge of the Sahara Desert does not enable you to construct a picture of India or of Mexico just because they lie in the same latitudes. The Moon's other hemisphere probably did have an atmosphere and probably did have water. And where there are air and water, there are probably plants. And where there are plants, the presence of animals can be predicted with a fair chance of being right, because animal life is parasitic on plant life.

Nor did you have to stop along this chain of reasoning at this point. If there are animals, some of them will start preying on other animals after a while and become carnivorous. And some of them might become intelligent in time and represent what older poets had called the "selenites," the inhabitants of the Moon.

HANSEN'S colleagues listened with much respect because he was a deservedly famous astronomer. They listened with the greatest of interest, too, because it was a fascinating and novel idea. The next problem was to find out whether it was also true. Continued observation was still the means of doing it because nature had provided some help in the form of the phenomenon of libration.

I feel that I should digress from the main theme at this point for a fuller explanation of this phenomenon which, as I know from correspondence I receive from readers, is not well understood by many. As is generally known, the Moon turns around its axis in the same number of days and hours as it needs to go around the Earth once. It is as if you had a man walking around you in a circle, looking rigidly in the direction in which he is walking. That way, he turns around his own axis once every time he circles you and all you can observe is his left profile, with his left ear roughly in the center of what you can see of his head.

Well, if this is the case, what is libration and how does it enter into the picture? The proper answer is that it is caused by the fact that the Moon does not move around the Earth in a circle but on an elliptical orbit.

To explain this, let us first see what the Moon does *not* do (Fig. 1). Namely, it does not move around the Earth in a circle. Such a circular path is shown on the

left in the diagram. If the Moon did move in a circular path, it would need precisely the same time to go from A to B as it would need to go from C to D. In reality, the orbit is elliptical, as shown with great exaggeration on the right in the diagram. Again it needs as much time to go from A to B as it does to go from C to D.

The sections of the orbit traveled are of markedly different length; what counts is that the shaded areas formed by the lines from the center of the Moon to the common center of gravity are equal. Technically, such a line from center to center is known as the *radius vector* and Kepler's Second Law states that the *radius vector* must sweep over equal areas in equal times.

When the Moon is closest to the Earth — in perigee, as it is called — it moves faster than when it is farthest away, or in apogee. Logically, then, since the areas covered by the *radius vector* have to be equal for equal times, the portions of the orbit traversed cannot be of equal length. The customary statement that the average velocity of the Moon is 0.65 miles per second is, of course, true, but the word "average" must not be overlooked. Actually, the Moon is faster than that in perigee and slower in apogee.

Before going on to the next step of the explanation, let me give the actual figures: The farthest apogee possible is 252,710 miles; the nearest possible perigee is 221,463 miles, both measured from the center of the Earth to the center of the Moon. The surface-to-surface distance is, of course, 5000 miles less.

KEEPING in mind that the velocity of the Moon along its orbit is *not* uniform, we only have to realize that the rate of rotation around its axis *must* be uniform to see what happens (Fig. 2). Both at apogee and at perigee, the same spot on the Moon — marked by a short line — forms the center of the visible disk.

But this spot is not in the center at intermediate positions. One might say that the rotation of the Moon lags somewhat behind its orbital motion for one-half of the orbit and is somewhat ahead of it for the other half. And if the spot which is in the center at apogee, and perigee is off center in between, it is obvious that a portion of what was visible, say, in apogee disappears from view over the left rim, while another previously invisible portion comes into view over the right rim.

This is part of what is called libration. The other part is caused

by the fact that the Moon's orbit is slightly tilted as compared to the orbit of the Earth around the Sun, the ecliptic (Fig. 3). Depending on the position at the moment, we can sometimes peep over the lunar north pole into the area beyond, and sometimes over the lunar south pole.

The overall result is that, in the course of a number of years, we can see and map a total of 59 per cent of the lunar surface. Only 41 per cent of it is completely unknown and will remain so until the films taken by the first circumlunar rocket come out of the developer.

But a total of 59 per cent was enough to disprove Hansen's intriguing idea. If he had been right, we should have caught an occasional glimpse of the "lowlands," especially when looking over the poles. Moreover, at periods of maximum libration, the unusual shape of the Moon should be apparent to some degree to direct vision.

AFTER two decades of intensive research — much of it carried out by Simon Newcomb in Washington — all astronomers were agreed that Hansen's assumption did not conform with reality. Since the whole episode had taken place at a time when science fiction novels were few and far between, Professor Hansen's egg-shaped Moon was not exploited literarily.

With just one exception, that is, but this exception was written in Polish. It appeared decades after the idea had been abandoned in science, namely, half a century ago.

Its title was *On Silvery Plains* and the name of its author was Jerczy von Zulawsky. In the story, two or three ships, carrying cabins that can be used like automobiles, land near the center of the visible hemisphere of the Moon and then start the long trek "downhill" to the jungle of the lowlands. Near the end of his life, the leader of the expedition goes back in one of the automobile cabins to the place of the original landing where a mortar has been left behind to shoot the expedition's report back to Earth. The novel, of course, was supposed to be this report.

Since I last read the book in about 1928, I may have forgotten some details, but it seems to me that Hansen's name was not mentioned in it. Jerczy von Zulawsky probably never saw the original papers but received his inspiration from a second or third hand popular account in a general magazine or newspaper supplement.

Well, how *does* the other side of the Moon look?

The answer is: probably not

very different from the side we can see from Earth. What appears at the rim when the libration is favorable are the same types of formations so well known to astronomers. There are a number of craters, some of them quite large, a mountain range or two, and the edges of some *mare* plains.

Interestingly enough, we know the approximate locations of at least three craters that are deeply hidden in the inaccessible 41 per cent of the lunar surface. These craters have systems of "rays" as we know them from Tycho and Copernicus on the visible hemisphere.

On "our" side, all "ray" systems originate from large craters and the "rays" themselves are great circle lines. It is comparatively unimportant in this connection that we don't know the nature of the "rays" and have no idea of why some craters have them and others do not. What is important is that the "rays" from beyond the rim indicate the existence and locations of several large craters.

Some British astronomers have postulated that the unknown hemisphere may differ in degree from the known hemisphere, even though they must be fundamentally alike. They think that the unknown hemisphere contains a lesser number of craters and consists mostly of large *mare* plains. This reasoning is built, however, upon a foundation of hypotheses which, at the moment, are beyond either proof or disproof.

The only suggestion one can make here is to have patience. In about 20 years, if not earlier, we'll be able to look at films and see what the other side *actually* looks like.

SIC TRANSIT

AS A result of the discussion of the "transits" of Venus across the Sun's disk, I received a number of letters from readers who wanted to know a lot of things I had failed to mention since, after all, my article did not concern transits specifically. The questions ranged all the way from requests for a table of Venus transits to inquiries about rules for transits of Mercury.

Because Mercury moves around the Sun in a much shorter time than Venus, a Mercury transit is a much more frequent phenomenon than a Venus transit. It can occur only in May and in November and the number of years between one transit and the next follows the sequence 13 — 7 — 10 — 3 — 10 — 3, a total of 46 years. The cycle then repeats.

Table I shows the transits which took place or will take

place during the 19th and 20th centuries, with an additional entry for the next century because the last transit of the 20th century will be a mere grazing of the Sun's limb — almost a near miss, so to speak.

As regards Venus transits, they are listed on Table II and because they are so rare, we can cover a time interval of several centuries. Taking further strides in the medical sciences for granted, I hope that at least half of my readers will be able to see the next one scheduled and half of those the one after the next.

TABLE I

TWO CENTURIES OF TRANSITS OF MERCURY

1799	May 7	1907	Nov. 14
1802	Nov. 8	1914	Nov. 7
1815	Nov. 11	1924	May 7
1822	Nov. 4	1927	Nov. 9
1832	May 5	1940	Nov. 11
1835	Nov. 7	1953	Nov. 14
1845	May 8	1957	May 5
1848	Nov. 9	1960	Nov. 7
1861	Nov. 11	1970	May 8
1868	Nov. 4	1973	Nov. 9
1878	May 6	1986	Nov. 12
1881	Nov. 7	1993	Nov. 5
1891	May 9	1999	Nov. 15
1894	Nov. 10	2003	May 6

TABLE II

THIRTEEN CENTURIES OF VENUS TRANSITS

Year and Date:	*Duration*:
1631, Dec. 6	3 h 10 m
1639, Dec. 4	6 h 34 m
1761, June 5	6 h 16 m
1769, June 3	4 h 0 m
1874, Dec. 8	4 h 11 m
1882, Dec. 6	5 h 57 m
2004, June 7	5 h 30 m
2012, June 5	6 h 42 m
2117, Dec. 10	4 h 46 m
2125, Dec. 8	5 h 37 m
2247, June 11	4 h 16 m
2255, June 8	7 h 12 m
2360, Dec. 12	5 h 25 m
2368, Dec. 10	4 h 59 m
2490, June 12	2 h 4 m
2498, June 9	7 h 53 m
2603, Dec. 15	5 h 53 m
2611, Dec. 13	4 h 30 m
2733, June 15	short
2741, June 12	7 h 46 m
2846, Dec. 16	6 h 14 m
2854, Dec. 14	3 h 48 m
2976, June 17	very short
2984, June 14	7 h 25 m

— WILLY LEY

The corkscrew of space

By POUL ANDERSON

Of course history had to be rewritten . . . how could these facts be left on the books?

Illustrated by JOHNS

"IT IS the very essence of being human that Man should ever long for new horizons, onward, upward striving. When Man ceases to hunger for the frontier, he will no longer be Man. They say Columbus was looking for a new trade route for spices from the Orient. What nonsense! As if the divine discontent could be reduced to an investment of the Grocery Guild! And likewise, on that memorable day whose centenary we are now observing, that unforgettable day when Man broke the last shackles of space and time, it was the holy fire which burned in that dauntless pioneer—" Speech by Hon. J. Farnsworth Willisgate, Martian Representative, in United Nations Assembly, 14 May 2247

EVERYBODY in Syrtis turned out when the Fleet arrived, and those who could traveled from as far as Yellowpeak and Whatsit for the occasion. A fair sprang up overnight, tents and booths sprawling over dusty miles, carnivals, migratory shows both live and recorded, noise and bustle and cheer. The alcohol plants and the fun houses did a

rush business and you couldn't get a hotel room for love, money or good sweet water. Some folk even had to break the law and camp in the ruins, the long extinct native race sheltering a new, non-furry breed of Martian.

Laslos Magarac threaded past the crowds till he got to the spaceport fence. He had an impulse to pay a dollar to one of the telescope concessionaires for a look at the fifty great ships orbiting around the planet, but decided against it — the line was too long. After all, twice a local year was about once an Earth-year, so it was a capitalized Event —but the shuttle boats blasting down, sheeting flame through clouds of kicked-up red dust, were spectacular enough.

There was one arriving now, descending on a tail of fire some four miles away—which put it almost on the horizon. It was a bright gleam against the dark-blue sky, under the shrunken sun. As he watched, it entered its cradle and was wheeled off toward the waiting electrotrucks. Unloading began immediately; the trucks gulped packages and scurried like beetles toward the warehouses. Mail, merchandise, tools and luxuries—it was like a friendly greeting from old Earth.

Another line of vehicles was chuffing toward an empty shuttle with boxed and baled Martian goods, mostly drybean extract with a scattering of jewels, hopper pelts and prehistoric relics. The Fleet had to work fast, deliver its cargo and get loaded and start home again in a few days.

Magarac found a place in the post office line and resigned himself to waiting an hour. He was a somewhat dehydrated-looking man with a gaunt ugly face and dry black hair. The coverall which protected him from the late-afternoon chill was the standard Martian garment, but as a well-to-do planter, he bore an expensive cloak patterned like a rainbow.

"Ah . . . impatient, I see, my friend."

Magarac turned around. Oliver Latourelle had joined the queue behind him. The physicist was a well-nourished man with a plump, sharp-nosed face, watery blue eyes and bushy white hair fringing an egg-shaped skull. "Is it that you await mail from a fair one back on Earth?"

"Not any more," said Magarac gloomily. "Three Mars-years was too long to wait."

LATOURELLE clicked his tongue in sympathy. "The old tale, no? You are going to Mars to raise drybeans and make a fortune. But it takes long to become rich, even in the Dominion, and meanwhile the radio beams

are too public and first-class mail is ten dollars an ounce."

"I'm doing okay," said Magarac defensively. "On Mars, that is. The trouble is that passage home would eat up half my money." He didn't like to discuss his personal affairs, but when there are barely 10,000 people on an entire planet, privacy hardly exists.

"Be consoled," advised Latourelle. "I speak as a man of experience. No one ever died of a broken heart. That organ is capable of miraculously rapid self-repair. The secret is to give it time to do so."

"Oh, I'm long over that business," said Magarac. "What I'm anxious to find out is how synthetic chemistry is progressing on Earth."

"So? I realize that to operate a plantation here requires a good scientific background, but are you so vitally interested that you cannot wait until your mail is delivered?"

"I am," said Magarac. "And so is all Mars, whether they know it or not. Eighty per cent of our industry is based on the drybean. It won't grow anywhere else, and they're finding new medicinal uses for the extract every year. But figure it out for yourself. Freight rates being what they are, the stuff costs fifty dollars an ounce by the time the Earth doctor gets it. Every chemical firm you can name has a team trying to synthesize the basic molecule. One day soon, they're going to do it and then the drybean planters are finished. I'm watching the technical journals so I can sell out in time."

"And what will you do then, with the Dominion broke?"

"God only knows."

"And I thank Him I was born to be a research physicist, and I thank the Rockefeller Foundation for so generously subsidizing my work," said Latourelle. "Though with all respect to this excellent planet of yours, my friend, it seems a long and dry three years ahead until I can return to France." He had arrived with the Fleet before last, but even if he finished ahead of schedule, he would have to wait his turn for passage.

"What d'you have to be here for, anyway?" asked Magarac. He had gotten quite friendly with Latourelle, but knew little of the man's highly specialized project.

"I am studying magnetism. Mars, you see, does not have a core like Earth, but is of uniform composition. Apparently that accounts for its peculiar magnetic field . . . Yet in what way? I think it is an effect of relativistic wave mechanics. I have developed a most beautiful theory of Riemannian folds in a multiply connected space. Now I am check-

ing the magnetic data to see if my theory will hold—you pardon the expression—water."

"And so what's your hurry to get your mail?" Magarac chuckled. "A gorgeous dame of your own?"

"No. Not that I am too old even now, I assure you, but I have more sense than to expect a delectable woman to wait five Earth-years for my return. I shall simply start afresh. No, no, my friend, it is that I have been extravagant with myself. Well, say rather that I am supplying a necessity. If you would care to visit my house tonight for a little private discussion—?"

And Latourelle would say nothing more. With elaborate silence, he picked up a large wooden case at the desk, and Margarac's last sight of him was a small suspicious figure hugging the box to his chest and stumping off toward Syrtis.

THE NEWS, no doubt, was good for humanity at large, but it would hit Mars heavily. Magarac had been an engineer on Earth, with added experience in chemistry, and could read between the lines. M'Kato announced cautiously that he thought he had the structural formula of protenzase. If he was right, they would be synthesizing it in another year. Quite probably, the next Fleet would not be accepting drybean extract.

Magarac slouched gloomily away from the lights and music and swirl of the fair. What the devil was a man to do?

So far, the history of Mars had been economic history. The first colony had been planted to mine the rich uranium beds of the Aetheria. To save freight, it had had to be made self-sufficient; and, since this was not Periclean Greece, it had had to include women. Children resulted and drybean culture provided a new source of income . . . so good a source that Mars stopped shipping uranium and used it instead to break down iron oxides and produce a breathable atmosphere.

Now they were the Dominion, with junior status in the UN, and talked big about gaining full self-government.

But when their economy was kicked in the stomach—

Magarac found Solis Avenue deserted. Only a few early returnees like himself, and the puritan isolationists who had not gone to the fair at all, were in town. He walked along the street between the flat-roofed stone houses of a rainless, timberless world. Overhead glittered a night of splendid stars, but he missed the Moon. Phobos and Deimos weren't worth writing home about.

He sighed and took out a cigarette and winced as he lit it. Synthetic tobacco, synthetic alcohol, synthetic steaks . . . God! Maybe he ought to throw in his hand and go back to Earth.

Only he liked it here. There was room in the deserts and the equatorial moors. A man was still a man, not a number. You worked with your hands and brain, for yourself, and making a time-gnawed sandstone waste blossom green was more satisfying than punching a clock in an Earthside factory. He wanted to get married and fill his ranch house with kids and raise them up proud of being Martians and Magaracs.

He turned a corner and emerged on Matsuoko Plaza. The thin air carried sound so poorly that he was almost on the rally before he realized.

IT WAS the man himself, ranting from the balcony of Barsoom House. Magarac had to admit the demagogue had personality—a thick-set, dynamic type, with a fierce head that he was always tossing dramatically back, a voice which was organ and trumpet and bass drum. What the planter did not like was the words, or the crowd, or the green-shirted goons stationed around the square.

"—And I say to you, it was hard work, hard work and obedience which made the glorious vision of our grandfathers into the reality you see about you, which transformed a planetwide desolation into a world of men! It was thrift and sobriety. Yes, let me say it was intolerance—intolerance of vice, of drink, of laziness and rebelliousness against constituted authority, which made us what we now are.

"Then let us *be* intolerant! These self-styled democrats, these Earth-lovers, with their hell-brewed liquor and their loose women and their hair-splitting Bill of Rights designed only to thwart the Will of the People, will ruin us if they can. It is we who Believe who must save the destiny of Mars—"

Magarac shrank into a dark corner. The mob numbered almost a hundred men, shoving and yelling in an ugly mood, and Magarac was no friend of Blalock's Freeman Party. As an assemblyman of Syrtis District, he had often spoken publicly against him.

Freeman! Haw! And all the horses laughed. And all the horses' donkeys laughed. It was the old story, the would-be dictator, appealing to that queer deep streak of masochistic puritanism in the Martian culture. The first colonists had needed such traits, to nerve them for their heartbreaking job.

But now — good Lord! Wasn't it about time Mars became civilized?

How it happened, Magarac was never sure. One minute, Blalock was talking himself beserk and the crowd was crying amen; the next minute, they were across the plaza, tearing Cassidy's Bar & Grill apart.

Cassidy was the most inoffensive little man in the Solar System, who often apologized for the rotgut he had to sell and the prices he had to charge. Martian beer was just barely preferable to none at all, though it cost as much as champagne would on Earth, and Cassidy operated a friendly neighborhood pub where men could shed the grinding sameness of desert reclamation in a few hours of conviviality. Magarac not only liked the place and its owner, but figured they were important to keeping the town sane.

When he saw glass splinter as two six-foot bruisers tossed Cassidy through his own window, and when he saw the whole investment smashed and running out in the street, Laslos Magarac decided that if Blalock had intimidated the police, the skunk ought to be shown there was still one man left in Syrtis.

A man, by God!

He ran across the square and started swinging.

LATOURELLE opened the door and stood uncertainly. "But what happened to you, my friend? You look like one of the old Martian ruins."

"Just a ruined Martian." Magarac lurched into the house and headed for the bathroom.

"Use the whole week's water ration if you desire," said Latourelle anxiously. "Me, I am not drinking water any more."

He hovered about trying to be helpful while Magarac got washed and patched. Apart from a missing tooth, the damage was only skin deep and a glass of analgesite took away the pain. It was with a sigh almost of contentment that Magarac finally stretched out in a battered easy chair.

Latourelle's house consisted of three rooms: bath, living-dining-sleeping, and a laboratory. The lab took up most of the space. But with his genius for being comfortable, the Frenchman had made his home a place of cheer.

"When the assembly meets next week, they're going to get an earful," said Magarac. "Not that it'll do any good. Blalock's bullies have everybody else cowed. But you shoulda seen the other guy." He smiled dreamily, with bruised and swelling lips. "Four of 'em was one too many for me, but they won't forget me in a hurry."

"I take it, then, you had the run-in with the Freemen?"

"They were busting up Cassidy's tavern. I dragged him away and called a doctor. He'll be all right."

"Barbarians! Have they no consideration for others?"

"Not the Freemen. They want to march around in fancy uniforms and so they figure everybody else ought to want the same." Magarac scowled and lighted a cigarette. His fingers shook a little. "Ollie, Mars is really sick."

"It must be, if this sort of thing is proceeding unhindered."

"We're out of touch with history. What can we do but stagnate, when you have to work a lifetime to save up enough money for one vacation on Earth? Blalock would be laughed out of town back there. But here he's a big frog because the whole planet is such a small puddle. And life is so grim at best that the shoddy excitement he can offer appeals to the young men."

Magarac spoke fast, with the feverish loquacity of weariness. "We have to live ascetically because of economics. So, sooner or later, we're going to rationalize that fact and turn ascetism from an unpleasant necessity to a shining virtue." He puffed hard, seeking comfort from the vile fake tobacco. "When that happens, Mars will no longer be fit to live on."

"It is not now, I fear," said Latourelle.

"Sure, it still is, because we have hope. We can work and hope to improve the place. But if Blalock gets into power, there won't even be that hope."

"THESE things, they come and go," said Latourelle fatalistically. "The beast will have his day and then be forgotten."

"Not when the bottom is going to be knocked out of our economy —which will happen pretty soon. Then everybody will be desperate enough to try the old panacea, the Almighty State." Magarac's face twisted. "And we could do so much, Ollie, if we had the chance! We have minerals, we have space for agriculture . . . and Earth is getting so overcrowded, someday it'll be desperate for food. But the damned cost of shipping! The time it takes! If we had a fast, cheap method of space travel, we could shuck this lopsided drybean economy, build up diversified industries, turn Mars into an Eden."

"One cannot very well argue with a gravitational potential difference," shrugged Latourelle.

"No, but a rocket is such a slow and wasteful way to overcome it." Magarac looked wistful. "And if we had something better, we'd

be in close touch with Earth. We'd have a living culture to nourish us — books, music, art, everything Man needs to be more than just a two-legged belly."

"Well, be of good heart, my friend. In another fifty or a hundred years such a method will be available."

"Hm?" Magarac looked up through two black eyes. "What d'you mean?"

"Did you not know? *Bien,* I suppose not; you are no theoretical physicist. But if my concept of warped space is valid, then it should be entirely possible to—well, yes, to bring a spaceship directly from the surface of Mars to the surface of Earth, or vice versa, in the wink of an eye, at negligible cost. The ship would follow a geodesic through the appropriate fold in space—"

Magarac jumped to his feet. "You don't mean it!"

"But I do." Latourelle beamed. "There, is not that consolation to you?"

"No," said Magarac bleakly. "Fifty years will be too late. Mars will have been ruined in a decade." He leaned over and gripped Latourelle's shoulders. "D'you think you can build such a ship *now?*"

"What do you think I am? A sorcerer?"

"I know you're a Nobel Prize winner, a genuine genius and—"

"And an old tired man who will in a few years return to his beloved valley of the Dordogne and sit on a vine-covered terrace and sip a glass of Mèdoc. Shall we say a Pouillac?" Latourelle smiled wistfully. "I cannot produce miracles to order."

"You've done it, blast you! That neutron recycler of yours—"

"That was to prove a point which interested me. My heart goes out to you, but up here—" Latourelle tapped his gleaming forehead—"up here is a selfish animal, the subconscious mind, which must first be given an all-important motive before it will work. And as I am only to be on Mars three more years, I have no such motive."

MAGARAC slumped back in his chair. "Yeah . . . yeah, I guess so."

"Come on to Earth," urged Latourelle. "Come to France and I will show you how to live. You poor Martians must wolf your tasteless synthetics and gulp your miserable beer and try to persuade yourselves you are still human. It is no wonder that prohibitionism is growing. This Blalock now, if he could ever taste a properly prepared mousse of shad roe, with a Barsac—no, let us say a Puligny Montrachet—ah, he would realize that there are

higher values than his own ambition and that the goodness of God is a more alive thing than the cold charity of the State."

Magarac braced himself. He liked Latourelle, but the old fellow was a bore on this one topic.

"I have given some thought to my first menu," went on the physicist raptly. "I cannot now specify the vintages, for I have lost touch, but give me time when I return, give me time. We will begin, of course, with a light dry sherry. There are those who maintain the virtues of vermouth as an *aperitif*, but not just before a meal, if you please. After the appetizers and the clear soup, there will be the fish and the white Burgundy of which I spoke."

He was almost crooning now. "With the *tournedos*, we will serve Bordeaux . . . Chateau Lafite, I believe, if there has been a good year. With the salad, which must naturally be based on that great American contribution, the *calavo*, one might argue the merits of a Chateau Cheval Blanc, a Clos Fortet or an Haut Brion, but I think—"

Magarac nodded. He jerked to wakefulness when Latourelle stopped and regarded him with a hurt expression.

After a moment, the Frenchman looked contrite. "But of course! Forgive me! Here you have been in battle, righteous battle but a lost cause, and I sit droning on about joys out of your reach. I promised you a surprise, did I not? Well, a surprise you shall have, one to lighten your soul and renew your manhood. I have been saving it, denying it even to myself till you should come, for shared pleasures are best. But now—wait!"

He sprang to his feet and went over to a cabinet and opened it. Bottles glistened within, row on row of them, slender bottles with labels of gentle witchcraft.

Magarac felt his jaw clank down. He pulled it up again with an effort.

LATOURELLE laughed boyishly and rubbed his hands. "Is it not a noble sight? Is it not a vision for the gods? I assure you, this hope is all that has sustained me in my time on Mars."

"My God!" stammered Magarac. "It must have cost a fortune!"

"It did, it did indeed. Luckily, I have a fortune—or had." Latourelle broke out two slim glasses and a corkscrew. "You see, it has hitherto been impossible to export liquors to other planets. Quite apart from the cost, the prolonged high acceleration and then the free fall, they ruin it. Even crossing an ocean, a good wine is sadly bruised. Crossing space, it simply dies; one might

as well drink Martian beer."

"Um . . . yes, I've heard of that. Colloidal particles agglomerate and obscure chemical reactions take place. Even whisky won't survive the trip." Magarac approached the cabinet reverently. "But this—"

"This is a new process. The last Fleet brought me a letter announcing success and I hastened to order a case of assorted wines. It will not be much, but it will help keep me sane until the next shipment can arrive."

Latourelle extracted a bottle and held it up to the light. "The process, it involves a tasteless, harmless additive which stabilizes both the colloids and the chemistry. The finest Chambertin-Clos has been flown through an Atlantic hurricane and served that same night in New York with no slightest injury done to it."

The cork popped out with a flourish. "Now, my old, we drink the first wine to cross interplanetary space!"

The living red stream sparkled into the glasses. Silently, as if performing a holy rite, the two men raised their drinks and sipped.

Latourelle went white. "*Nom de diable!* Pure vinegar!"

"*THAT dauntless pioneer, the Immortal Oliver Latourelle! At a time of crisis, when the fair planet of Mars faced ruin and dictatorship, it was he and his great associate Laslos Magarac, later to become Premier of the Dominion and first President of a fully independent nation—it was those two men, driven by the need to expand humanity's frontiers to the very stars, who created the space-warp ship.*

"Think of it, gentlemen! In one month, Latourelle had worked out the principles of such a vessel.

"In two more months, he had equipped an old ship, the piously renamed St. Emilion, *with a warp engine and had crossed to Earth in a few microseconds. It was only a token cargo he brought back to Mars, a case of wine, doubtless to symbolize the achievements of his own fair country, but he had proved it could be done. That simple case of wine foreshadowed the argosies which now ply between a thousand suns.*

"And it was the great Latourelle's first words when he emerged from his ship on his return from Earth and staggered across the sands of Mars—surely too overcome by emotion to walk straight —it was his words which have become the official motto of the Martian Republic and will live forever in Martian hearts as a flaming symbol of human genius:

"A votre santé!"

— POUL ANDERSON

The Category Inventors

By ARTHUR SELLINGS

There was security for all in this well-run world — but what happened to a man who tried to get ahead could never happen to a robot!

Illustrated by EMSH

IT WAS the robot breaking down that brought matters to a head. Not that they hadn't been gathering for months. Ever since, in fact, he had been put on reserve, Marge seemed to have been conducting a campaign — a subtle, insistent, completely *wifely* campaign.

First it was: "It's not your fault, honey, the world just doesn't understand creative artists any more."

He had said modestly, "Oh, a bassoon player isn't creative, peaches; he's executant."

"Anyway," she retorted firmly, "he's an *artist*." It seemed only as an afterthought that she added, "That means he's got intelligence

and imagination. And *that* means he's got a head start when it comes to finding a new job — doesn't it, honey?" And her big brown eyes had looked up at him so confidently, so guilelessly.

"Sure, sure, a head start," he had said, feeling his heart droop. Being able to play the bassoon didn't seem much of a qualification for doing any other job at all.

"Of course," she said a few days later, "you *could* get a job in a jazz band, Gilbert, couldn't you? It's all the rage again." She

added hastily, "Oh, I know you don't like the idea, but —"

He explained to her patiently that it wasn't a matter of not liking the idea. It was simply that he *couldn't*. Playing jazz wasn't quite the same thing as playing serious music, which was why robots could be taught to do the one, but not — so far, anyway — the other.

"Well, Phil Tomkys made the switch, didn't he?" she said.

What Phil Tomkys could do and what *he* could do, he'd told her tersely, were two entirely different things. Jazz playing was a certain specialized ability — he made it sound on a level with safe-breaking or parricide — and you either had it or you hadn't — now did she see?

"WELL, couldn't you compose then?" she suggested some time later. She couldn't have touched him on a rawer spot. But she went on, blithely unwitting: "How about those tunes you're always humming to yourself? They sound pretty good to me and —"

"They're probably someone else's," he told her curtly. They *were* someone else's, he knew. Ten years of orchestra playing had left no room in his head for original music. He'd learned that at great cost, because he had tried his hand once at a quartet for bassoon, celeste, recorder and guitar — and even that unusual combination hadn't been proof against his subconscious; it was almost finished before he'd realized that it was all bits and pieces from obscure compositions he'd played in the past.

The memory of that first and last attempt made him feel guilty now. That was one of the nastiest things about being on reserve — it made you think yourself deficient in not having abilities that there was no earthly reason you should have, anyway.

But he managed to keep a hold on his temper. And the next time. *And*, by a mighty effort, the next. But the tension mounted and mounted — until the robot broke down one fine spring morning. And then it stopped mounting. It *exploded*.

"Right in the middle of getting breakfast, too," Marge wailed, surveying the inert mass of metal that lay by the kitchen table.

Gilbert had just got up. He rubbed the sleep from his eyes. "I'll ring Center," he said with an unurgent yawn.

"But the children will be late for school," she said. *"Colin! Michael!"* she called to the bathroom. "Do hurry."

"It's not much use their hurrying, is it, if there's no breakfast ready for them?" Gilbert observed helpfully.

"What do you think I'm trying to do?" she snapped, juggling wildly with unfamiliar implements. "I've only got two pairs of hands."

He roared at that and struck a pose. "Step closer, folks! See the only woman in captivity with four arms."

She stamped her foot in flustered rage. "You know what I meant. A fine father you are, standing there trying to be funny when your children are late for school. As if the poor mites haven't had enough to put up with lately."

His laughter stopped abruptly. "And what exactly do you mean by that?"

"What I say." She jabbed desperately at food tubes.

He glared at her. "Well, just what *have* the 'poor mites' had to put up with?"

"Oh, I'm too busy to argue with you. Anyway, you wouldn't understand."

"Oh, wouldn't I? Perhaps I understand only too well. 'Lately' wouldn't be . . . just three months and thirteen days?"

"If you like," she muttered, not looking at him.

"*Just as I thought!*" he exploded. "You blame *me*. Ever since they put me on reserve you've been getting at me. That's a fine encouragement for a man, I must say. If you think —"

IN HIS temper he had advanced a step toward her. He failed to notice the recumbent robot until he fell headlong over it. He lay there, rubbing a scuffed shin and swearing colorfully.

"If you're going to use foul language," his wife said icily, "you might at least keep your voice down. You know what sharp ears the children have."

He climbed to his feet, glaring. "Oh, so now I'm a corrupter of my own children, is that it? Well, let me tell you that —"

But at that moment a terrific squawking rose from the Henomat, the gadget that synthesised fresh eggs from raw meal. His wife jerked and jabbed frantically at the kitchen control panel. She only succeeded in releasing several faucets of assorted juices and ketchups. As they splashed and oozed over the floor she made one last despairing assault on the control panel. The faucets continued to run. But a blaring of jazz music joined the chaos now.

She threw up her hands in surrender, sank into a chair and buried her head on the table-top.

Gilbert, standing there in a deafened daze, felt a sudden pang of remorse. Perhaps it *was* his fault; perhaps he should have foreseen the day, when a metal being with a crystalline brain would take over his job, as robots

had taken over so many other people's by now. Contritely he dashed to the control panel and fumbled at it.

Somehow his manipulations did the trick. The faucets gurgled to a stop, the music snapped off and the Henomat died in a flurry of feathery whimpers.

Gilbert's self-esteem recovered slightly. He looked expectantly at his wife, but she did not lift her head. She only sniffed a dismal and muffled sniff.

There's gratitude! he thought angrily. Well, it *wasn't* his fault. His gaze fell upon the abject heap of metal on the floor. It was *its* fault — it and millions of its kind. Suddenly all the frustration of the last few months focused on the robot and ignited in anger. He lashed out at it with his foot. The foot was still slipper-shod and it hurt. But he was too enraged to care and the action, although it made no impression on the robot, brought gratifying relief to his feelings.

HE TURNED to find that Marge had raised her head and was regarding him witheringly.

"Well, now I've seen everything," she said. "A grown man actually kicking a poor defenseless robot."

"When it's down, too," he said caustically. He flared up again. "It seems you've got more sympathy for a robot than you have for your husband. It's a fine way to —"

He was interrupted by a small human avalanche tumbling into the room.

"Morning, Mom," said the boys in chorus. "Morning, Pop."

Was there, thought Gilbert, *a pause, just a slight one, between the two greetings? And a dying fall to the second?*

"Hey, the robot's passed out," said Colin.

"Was that what all the noise was, Pop?" Michael asked.

Gilbert glowered. Then he sighed and dragged the robot out of the kitchen by its feet. He dumped it in a bedroom closet and dialed Robocenter.

He lingered a while before he went back to the kitchen. He saw that the kids had left — without much breakfast, obviously — and he realized then that that was why he had lingered — to avoid facing them. So it was getting to *that* point now.

II

GILBERT was shaved and dressed and feeling desperate when the door buzzer sounded. Not from any desire to be helpful — that he certainly didn't feel — but just to be able to hear the sound of his own voice

again, *anybody's* voice, he said, "That'll be the mechanic from Center. I'll open it."

But it wasn't the mechanic.

"Hello, son," came a plummy voice. Another one, gentle and fluting, cooed from behind a mountainous fluorotex package, *"Surprise!"*

It was George and Phoebe, Marge's parents. Gilbert winced. *This* was all he needed.

"Had a sudden call from party H.Q.," boomed George.

"And we took the early rocket in so we could have an hour with you," Phoebe explained, peeking birdlike from behind her burden.

"Ah — er, come in, then," said Gilbert.

"Anything wrong, son?" said George, drawing Gilbert to one side as Phoebe went to find Marge.

"Wrong? Why, no, nothing's wrong." He laughed unconvincingly. "It's just that I was expecting someone else. The mechanic from Robocenter."

"That robot of yours broken down? Too bad. The poor kid's up to her neck in it, eh? I'll just say hello to her."

He came back quickly. "I'll say she is! Still, Mother's pitching in." He winked as sounds of furious activity came from the kitchen. "She's just the same at home. Leaves so little for our robot to do, he's thinking of applying for a pension." He chuckled hugely. Then, noticing that Gilbert wasn't as much as smiling, he stopped abruptly and turned on a manner that Gilbert knew well by now — the earnest, the man-to-man. "Well, how *are* things, my boy?"

"You mean, have I got a job yet?"

"Heavens, no! I know it's not that easy. We all know it takes time. What I meant was, how are the ideas working out?"

"*What* ideas?"

George shook his head. "As bad as that, eh? Still, it's the darkest hour before the dawn. You mark my words, I've seen it happen so many times. Just when a man thinks there isn't a single idea left that someone else hasn't thought of, a real big one comes down out of the blue and hits him right between the —"

The door buzzer cut across George's eloquence. Gilbert ducked out in relief.

THIS TIME it *was* the mechanic, clad in the gray coveralls of Roboservice. But he wasn't alone.

"Yes?" said Gilbert to the other three who were about to follow the mechanic in. The three were also in gray, but wore bolero and slacks, street style. They were young, cropped of head, their faces scrubbed and intense.

"We're therapists," explained

the foremost and tallest one.

"Therapists?" Gilbert echoed. "But nobody here's sick."

"Hah! That's a good one," said the foremost of the three, turning his head to share his amusement with his colleagues. He turned back to Gilbert. "We are, of course, *robo*therapists."

"Huh?" was all that Gilbert could manage.

"I am a robopsychiatrist," the other amplified.

"I am a robosynaptic stimulator," said the second.

"And *I,*" said the third with quiet pride, "am a robomorale coordinator."

Just like the three bears, Gilbert thought. *Of all the twaddle!* But he stood aside for them to enter.

"Where *is* the robot?" said the first therapist.

Gilbert, deciding he disliked the man's manner, addressed himself pointedly to the mechanic. "In the bedroom closet, second on the left. I dumped it there after it broke down. It cluttered up the kitchen too much."

"Right," said the mechanic amiably and went through.

"Too bad," said the leading therapist, shaking his head. "It would have been better if you had left it where it fell. The failure attitude often gives a valuable pointer to the cause of breakdown." He beckoned to his colleagues and they followed in the wake of the mechanic.

Gilbert looked after them for a long moment before returning to the living room.

"Well, now I've seen everything," he told his father-in-law. "They've actually got psychiatrists for robots."

But George was quite unsurprised. "Why, didn't you know? They've had them for six months or more. One of the brightest new fields in years. The teloids were full of it."

"Oh, I must have missed it," Gilbert murmured, realization dawning of just how out of touch he'd been with the world at large; how absorbed in his world of music playing that seemed now as unreal and faraway as an age in history.

"YOU SEE, son," George said earnestly. "That's the way things are now. Branching out, keeping one step ahead of the robot all the time. That's what, if you don't mind my saying so, you haven't realized yet. A man's got to be adaptable. Now, take old Tom Angel, he was a schoolmate of mine. He was a top-class tailor and thought *his* job was safe as houses. But it wasn't.

"So, after he'd been on reserve a time he happens to remember the birthday cards people used to send each other when we were

kids. So what does Tom do? He ups and registers himself as the first of a new generation of greeting-card verse writers. And this is the best part, *he'd never written a line of verse in his life.* But he was first in, so he got charter rights. Get the idea? Once you get in the progressive mood, you're all set."

Gilbert reflected dully that brushing the dust off a defunct custom was a funny kind of progress, but he tried to look interested, knowing that George was trying to be helpful in his fashion, just as Marge's mother was when she brought parcels of things a reservist's valid-for-a-week scrip wouldn't stretch for.

"You see, Gil," George went on, "this isn't something new. Something like it has been happening for hundreds of years now, with machines displacing people. It's the scale of this that's new, because the robots threaten *everybody's* job."

"Except politicians' and robo-psychiatrists'," Gilbert couldn't resist saying.

George looked pained. "Don't say that, Gil. And don't think politics aren't getting as competitive as everything else. Imagine, they even sent me to school — *me* at my time of life — to get what they called *historical perspective.* I kicked like mad, but I must admit it did me a power of good. It makes a man see why there've been so many changes since robots were invented. You know —" he wagged a finger at Gilbert — "there's been more progress in the past twenty years than in the whole hundred before that. From space travel to — well, to self-coiling spaghetti."

"I can't see much progress in throwing five million people on reserve in the process."

"Ah, but ten years ago there were *fifteen* million. That shows the challenge of the robot has been taken up. Because it's not only a challenge, it's an *opportunity.* This is the Age of Opportunity. We can all be thankful for one thing, at least, that we're not living in the last century." George shuddered. "*Then,* if a man was out of a job he had to *find* one!"

"He *had* to? I wish I had the *chance.*"

"Ah, but that's the point. It wasn't always so easy. Nowadays, a man doesn't have to fight for a job. All he has to do is invent one."

"I REMEMBER reading that bit in the book," said Gilbert. "You know? The one with pictures that they give you in exchange for your job?"

"Oh, sorry," George said a bit huffily. "I was only trying to help." He rallied. "Anyway, you

have got a father-in-law in the right party, that's one consolation. The party that stands up for the reservist's rights."

Gilbert lifted an inward eye to heaven.

"Yes, sir," George continued. "If the Technoes had their way, a reservist's life wouldn't be worth a light. But *we* fought for his rights all along the line. It was us Populists, for instance, who saw that every family — workers and reservists alike — had a robot of its own *by inalienable rights.*"

Gilbert had had as much as he could stand. "To hell with your inalienable rights!" he exploded. "Both parties have got it nicely carved up between them. All either of you care about is making sure that things go on just the way they are. As for the precious benefits of having a robot, let me tell you I'd be perfectly happy if there weren't any robots at all — especially the ones that sit on their chromium-plated backsides in chromium-plated orchestras!"

George looked shocked now. "I — I — you don't know what you're saying," he burbled. "Why, you're talking like a — like a Luddite."

"Oh, I am, am I? Well, let me —" Gilbert stopped in mid-air and said suspiciously, "What's a Luddite?"

"Luddites were the people who broke up the first power machines two hundred years ago." It was an item he'd picked up in the course on Historical Perspective. "And if that's the way you're —"

"Hold it!" A wild light came into Gilbert's eye. He had just thought of something. *Why, of course!* Why not?

"What is it, son?" said George, anxious now at the look on his son-in-law's face.

But Gilbert didn't hear him. With a whoop he bounded for the door, threw it back and collided with the leading therapist who was waiting on the other side, knuckles raised.

"Well —" gasped the therapist, staggering.

"Sorry," said Gilbert cheerfully, trying to push past.

"But there's something I have to tell you," said the therapist, recovering balance and breath with an effort. Behind him his two colleagues closed ranks.

Gilbert halted. "Well, what is it? Make it brief. I'm a busy man." He laughed delightedly at the novelty of the words.

THE THERAPIST gave him a queer look. "It's no laughing matter, I'm afraid. We just gave your robot a tape-auto in there and the results were sad, *sad*. We shall have to take it back for immediate reorientation. You

see —" he shook his head gravely — "it had developed a severe guilt complex."

"Guilt complex?" Gilbert echoed blankly.

"That's right. They're sensitive, you know. And if they once get the idea that their owners aren't happy, that starts it. They think it's their fault, they wonder what mistakes they could have made. They brood on it and then they *do* make mistakes. Oh, little ones, the kind you or I wouldn't notice at all, but a robot does because it knows it's not supposed to make mistakes. That only makes it feel more guilty and so it goes until — well, it just gives up in despair."

Despite his urgency to be off, Gilbert found himself listening with fascinated incredulity.

The therapist was achingly earnest. "Of course, we'll know better next time, won't we? Center will send a replacement up. Just let the new one know it's making you happy, that's all, and everything will be fine. Just a smile, a grateful word now and then, eh?"

For a moment Gilbert looked at the therapist with the expression of a child seeing its first elephant. Then he burst out laughing. "Of course I'll let it know I'm happy! I *am* happy. Who wouldn't be happy, living in this Age of Opportunity?" He noticed George's startled face peering from the living room and he laughed loudly again. "Now, if you don't mind —"

The therapists looked blankly at each other and fell away as Gilbert made for the door.

III

THE CATEGORY Office was carrying its usual scattered population of reservists, waiting in the slender hope of getting in on a hot tip. Gilbert walked past them, straight to the first cubicle. Inside was a counter, behind it a robot attendant.

"I want to file a category," Gilbert announced.

"Certainly, sir," said the robot, producing a form and an envelope from beneath the counter.

The form required particulars of name, date of birth, reserve number. Gilbert entered these in impatiently, then arrived at the section headed: *Nature of Category*. Boldly he filled in NEO-LUDDITE. He scratched his chin thoughtfully with the end of his stylus and added, *A lawful opposition to the robot economy.*

He smiled to himself. *There* was a job no robot would ever be able to take over. Under the heading *Overall Classification of Category* he entered POLITICAL. He placed the form flat in the envelope as instructed and passed

it with a flourish to the robot.

The robot franked it across the flap and fed it into a machine by its side. In a few seconds, the envelope popped out again and the robot handed it back to Gilbert.

Gilbert felt a sudden disquiet. "Well?" he asked.

"Your application will take a short time to check," the robot explained. "This machine sends a copy to the registry below. They carry a complete file there of all categories."

"Oh, I see," said Gilbert, relieved. While he waited he scanned the posters stuck up around the walls of the cubicle. Most bore the faces of successful category filers: inventors of such jobs as hydroponics stabilizer, cybernetic diviner, traumographist. What in creation was a *traumographist?* Gilbert wondered. A shock writer? One who drew graphs of shock responses? In what? *Men? Atoms?*

Gilbert smiled. The sound of such specialized and enigmatic vocations no longer made him feel hopelessly ill-equipped in this complex world. Now he was going to meet the world on its own terms and —

A *BEEP* came from the machine and a slip of pasteboard popped up. The robot took it, scanned it, then lifted its crystalline eyes to Gilbert.

"I'm sorry, sir, but your application has been rejected."

Gilbert stood dazed, unbelieving.

The robot went on, "The Category Office extends its sincere regrets and trusts that this will not deter you from making further applications. The Category Office —"

Gilbert interrupted what was obviously a set speech. He stretched across the counter and grabbed the robot by one articulated arm. "Look here, you — you metallic mouthpiece. That application is legitimate. Nobody's got any right to reject it. You can't just stand there and —"

"Please." The unalterable pitch of the robot's voice only pointed its obvious embarrassment. Conditioned, like all robots, never to be hostile to humans, it could only make pathetic token efforts to release itself.

Gilbert sighed and let go, feeling ashamed of himself. "Anyway," he persisted, "I want to see somebody about this."

"An overseer is already on his way," the robot said.

He must, unnoticed, have pressed an alarm signal, Gilbert realized.

The overseer came in briskly; a round, cheerful individual.

"Ah, Mr. Gilbert Parry. About your application, is it? Well, I'm

very sorry. We dislike having to turn down anybody's application, you understand. Naturally, we—"

"Naturally nothing," Gilbert said brusquely. "That category I put forward is perfectly admissible."

"But, Mr. Parry —"

"Don't interrupt. I've got a right to be heard. You may think you have all this sewn up nice and tidily. That's what the two political parties think, but they're wrong. Both of them support the system as it is. That's not enough."

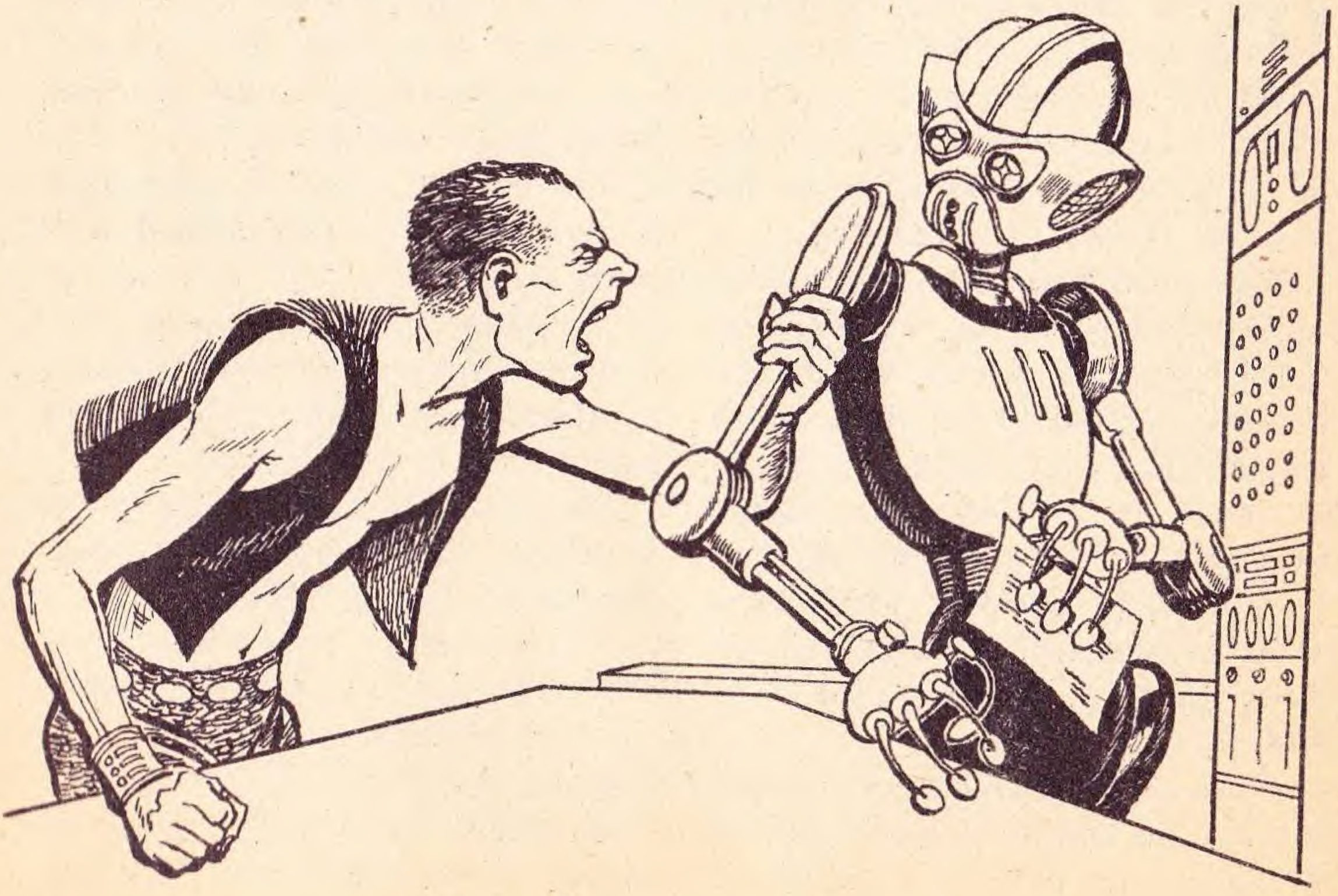
"But, Mr. Parry, you can't —"

"I *can*. What's more, I'll set out and prove, if I have to, that even from the standpoint of the *status quo* an opposition is socially necessary. Now, don't try to tell me I can't do *that*."

The manager smiled. "But the need of an opposition *is* recognized. I was only trying to tell you that you can't register the category because it *was* registered years ago."

"What!"

"Yes, the Humans Only movement, as it's called, is a recognized party, though it's never managed to win an election or attract many adherents. Most people are only too grateful for



the benefits robots have brought. But the movement does have State backing: funds, offices, the same proportion of salaried officials to members as the two big parties."

Gilbert was already drifting miserably to the door.

"Of course," the overseer added helpfully, "you could take up voluntary work for the party. There's always the chance you might be able to step into a salaried vacancy in a few years."

"Thanks, it doesn't matter," Gilbert mumbled, and left the cubicle. A group of waiting hopefuls took one look at his face and melted away.

OUTSIDE, he wandered along. There was only one thing to do. Start all over again at some other line, study and study until he was as proficient at it as he was at playing the bassoon.

But *what* line? And how could he be sure that *that* wouldn't be taken over by robots before he became skilled at it? Still, there was nothing for it but to try. Even if it came to nothing, Marge wouldn't be able to get at him — not fairly, anyway. More than that, he wouldn't have to put up with his own gnawing sense of failure.

Noticing a library, he turned into it. He asked the assistant — a robot even here in a center of learning — for guidance. It brought him a well-thumbed handbook.

Leading in the categories it listed were those of the old occupations that were too closely linked to flesh and blood and spirit to be easily yielded up to the robot — medicine, law, the creative arts. Well, medicine was out. He was no weakling, but he couldn't stand the thought of coldly opening up bodies. *Law?* He couldn't even argue successfully with his own wife, let alone with a judge and jury. And as for the creative arts — you had to have a vocation, hadn't you?

No, it would have to be something totally new — one of the bewilderingly complex fields like . . . what was it on that poster? . . . *traumography?* On the impulse, he looked it up.

Yes, it was here, all right. But he couldn't, after minutes of perplexed reading and re-reading, even make out what field it was in, the language describing it was so specialized. *Hell!* it was even worse than he had feared.

He riffled through the book dejectedly. Then suddenly a displayed ad caught his eye.

ON RESERVE? DON'T FRET!
CONTACT THE C. P. JONES BUREAU
CATEGORY INVENTORS
ROOM 53, UNIVERSE BUILDING

So there *were* ways! Why, of course, there *had* to be. The sys-

tem had been going for years; it was bound to happen that people would emerge with just this flair. Alert young men, their minds not canalized in the narrow bounds of one profession, but at ease in this complicated world, able to see the need for a new job here, a new branch there.

But how would you pay for such a service? Reservists' scrip was unnegotiable. Still, he had a few hundred credits of real money salted away for a possible emergency. It was worth a try.

UNIVERSE Building, despite its grandiloquent name, was a small, dingy building downtown, all of thirty years old by the look of it. *Still,* Gilbert told himself, *it's unwise to pre-judge the goods by the package.*

But the sudden fracas was more disturbing. He had to jump back hastily as the narrow swing-doors flew open and two burly individuals burst through, carrying a struggling, spitting burden. Through flailing arms and legs, Gilbert glimpsed an old gnome-like face, pink with frustration.

Once on the sidewalk the two huskies lowered the man to his feet with exaggerated solicitude, gave him one meaningful look and retreated into the building. One of them turned to throw out a battered brief case at the old man's feet.

"I'll get a writ served on you, you scum!" their victim bellowed, shaking his fist. His stature was as gnomelike as his face, but his voice was surprisingly resonant. "A man's got his rights, you know. I'll. — I'll —"

The little man subsided, as if realizing the futility of hurling his protests at blank doors. With a spluttering sigh he picked up his case, gave an outraged jerk to his bolero, then hobbled off down the street.

Gilbert looked after him for a moment, feeling a twinge of sympathy for the poor old chap. He only hoped the incident had nothing to do with the C. P. Jones Bureau, that that wasn't their normal way of handling clients. Quelling the thought, he went in.

"Room fifty-three?" Gilbert asked the robot enquiry clerk. "The C. P. Jones Bureau."

"I'm sorry, sir, but Mr. Jones no longer operates here."

"Oh, but his bureau?"

"Mr. Jones himself was the bureau."

"Well, has he started up anywhere else, do you know?"

"He left no information on that point, sir."

GILBERT shrugged resignedly and left. So that was that. And that left what? Traumography? He shuddered at the thought. As he hesitated on the

sidewalk, he thought of the chucking-out incident. Now, *there* was a job. They daren't build a man-handling robot. He flexed his biceps thoughtfully —

The thought died miserably. You probably had to have your name put down at birth for a trade as rudimentary as that. He sighed and wandered off.

Passing a bar, he went in as automatically as if it were a habit, which it never had been. This was an open bar, not one of those bleak reservists' places where you had to produce a ration card. Here you paid money. He went to a booth and ordered a double Scotch from the robot waiter.

It wasn't until he turned to reach in his pocket to pay that Gilbert noticed who was sitting opposite him. It was the little old man he had seen thrown out of the Universe Building. He was looking mournfully at his drink as if it were a clouded crystal ball.

The sight moved Gilbert to pity. Here was *he* feeling sorry for himself. At least he had youth. On an impulse he lifted his glass and said, "Better times."

The old man raised his head slowly. *"Huh!"* he said. Then he managed a wan smile and said, "Thank you," and drained his glass. Gilbert drained his own and, to his questioning glance, the old man said, "Same as you." Gilbert ordered up.

"I saw what happened to you back there," Gilbert ventured sympathetically.

"Did you?" The old man sighed. "The robbers! Throwing a man out after all these years." He looked so miserable that Gilbert instantly regretted having mentioned the incident.

"It's a wrench when you've worked in the same building for nearly ten years," the old man went on.

"Oh, you worked there?"

"I had my own office. The C. P. Jones Bureau."

"You — C. P. Jones?" Gilbert's conception of alert young men underwent violent revision.

"Why, you heard of me?" The old boy's face lit up eagerly.

"Heard of you? I was coming to see if you could fix me up."

"You were? Ah, well, perhaps it was best I wasn't there. It saved you from being disappointed."

Gilbert was puzzled. "I *was* disappointed. But how do you mean?"

"WELL, I didn't have a category in stock." He paused, then with the air of one relieved to get a confession off his chest, added, "As a matter of fact, son, I never did manage to invent a single category — except the one."

"Oh," said Gilbert, his sympathy beginning to be tinged with suspicion. "What was the one?"

"Why, the category of category inventor, of course." The old man sniffed. "Perhaps I *wasn't* very good at it, but I did have charter rights. Seems that nothing's sacred any longer, not even charter rights. They revised my category a week ago and canceled my license. Mind you, I didn't take it sitting down. But what can you do?" He took a despondent sip at his drink. "They've got you all ways."

Gilbert felt a stirring of resentment at such ingratitude. "It seems to me," he said roughly, "you had a pretty good run for your money. I should think your clients have got the grievance."

The old man looked up indignantly. "Why? They didn't do too badly. I always worked hard for them. Was it my fault the ideas didn't come? And it didn't cost them anything. My fee was only payable out of salary if and when I delivered."

"Oh," said Gilbert. The old man hadn't been such a shark, then.

The old man chuckled now. "You're right, though, about having a good run. I suppose, all in all, I did."

"But how come you got away with it all that time?"

Mr. Jones chuckled again. "Well, it was the Rehabilitation Office that paid me my fixed salary. Whereas it was the Labor Office that I was supposed to pay any fees into, less my commission, of course. Once a year the Accounting Office — that's another department again — sent around a robot auditor to check the book. They just never got around to checking up with each other, I suppose — until now." He fell back into gloom. "Now I've *got* to invent another job."

Gilbert examined the other's gnomelike face, the gnarled hands about his glass. "But I should have thought you'd be past . . . I mean, well —"

"You mean, why do I worry about another job at my age, is that it? Because my wife is not my age. She's only — well, she *says* she's twenty-nine — anyway, she wouldn't take kindly to the notion of my being on reserve."

"Ah, these wives," Gilbert agreed. "It wouldn't be so bad if we didn't have them to reckon with."

"Wouldn't it?" said Mr. Jones, almost fiercely. "For me, I'm glad the way it is. If it wasn't for Babs — that's my wife — I'd have gone to pieces. I used to be a trapeze artist in the circus. That's how I met Babs; she was a dancer in a sideshow. I was the oldest trapeze man in the game, but

even I had to pack it in some day. Got too shaky. If it hadn't been for Babs, I'd have gone to seed, been in my urn by now as like as not. Babs has got her faults, but she's a damn sight better encouragement to a man than any of these noble, shoulder-to-shoulder dames. *They* want the feeling of power over a man. Babs only wants money and the things that money buys and then she's happy. And so am I."

GILBERT felt suddenly small beside such rough-and-ready philosophy. "Mm-mm, maybe you're right. Have another drink."

"No, it's my turn," the old man insisted. And, as the drinks arrived, "But I'm talking about myself too much. How is it with you?"

Gilbert told him and they had another drink. And they swapped yarns about their ex-professions. And they had another drink. And then Mr. Jones suggested they make a move to a *real* bar.

And that started a pub-crawl such as Gilbert in his former sober life had never imagined possible. They talked, they joked. Even the way the world was treating them both assumed, under the influence of more and more drink, the aspect of one great joke.

They laughed themselves silly over traumography and what it could be, their interpretations ranging from the inane to the obscene. That started them off on inventing mock categories, a game that lasted them through two bars and got them thrown out of a third when the categories became too outrageous.

In one bar, in a lull, they ordered beer, and it had a melancholy effect on the little man. He said they were selfish, that everyone was selfish. They ought to feel sorry, not for themselves, but for the robots. Revealing unexpected depths to his character, he proceeded to recite lugubriously:

How am I to face the odds
Of Man's bedevilment and God's,
I, a stranger and afraid
In a world I never made?

Luckily that phase didn't last. Gilbert quickly ordered whiskey again and the resilient little man was back in form in a flash.

And when Gilbert said, "What say we start a union for robots, then?" Mr. Jones threw himself into the idea with rare zest. They wondered if that might not be the salvation for both of them, until they reflected that a robot's minimum week could only be a 168 hours — work being their one function — and who'd have any interest in opposing that?

The evening became more and more wild. Gilbert was never sure afterward whether the little man

really did give a demonstration of the finer points of trapeze work from a chandelier. He would recall that they drank a great deal of liquor between them and that somewhere in the early hours he fell into a robocab.

After that all was darkness . . .

IV

IT WAS THE red glare of the Sun through his eyelids that woke him. He recoiled with a groan. He heard shutters pulled, and was devoutly grateful for the dimness. A figure moved near him. "Is that you, Marge honey?" he whimpered.

"No, sir, this is your new robot."

It was holding out a glass of something that fizzed. Gilbert took it eagerly and downed it at a gulp.

"*A-ah*, that's better."

"Will there be anything else, sir?"

"No, thanks." He was seized with a sudden fear. "Yes. Yes, there is. *My wife.*"

"Mrs. Parry asked me to tell her as soon as you awoke," the robot said.

Gilbert breathed out in relief. For a moment he had had the thought that Marge might have left him. He couldn't have blamed her if she had — not after his behavior yesterday — then last night on top of it. He was overcome with sudden contrition.

"It's all right," he said to the robot. "I'll tell her myself. I'm getting up."

And somehow he managed it, though he wouldn't have without the assistance of the robot.

"Thank you," Gilbert told it. Then, feeling the need to do penance all around, he added somewhat sheepishly, "You have made me very happy."

"Thank you, sir," said the robot, inevitably without inflection, but when it repeated the words Gilbert felt that it really meant them. His penitential mood considerably sustained, he went in to Marge. And when he saw her, looking her prettiest, he felt touched to the quick. He began to mumble words of abject apology.

But she cut him short with a kiss. "Don't apologize, honey. It was my fault. If I hadn't nagged you, you wouldn't have acted like that." She guided him to a chair. "Here." She poured him a cup of black coffee. "What would you like for breakfast?"

"I've got it here, thanks," he said weakly.

She nodded sympathetically.

FEELING abashed by so much understanding, Gilbert fumbled in his pocket for a cigarette. With the pack, a slip of paper

came out. He looked at it. It read simply: *Umbrological Parallax Tracer*. Now what the heck did *that* mean? It was in his own handwriting, too. Then a dim memory crawled back from the confusion of the night before. He stared at the words, repeating them over and over to himself between sips of coffee.

Then it suddenly dawned on him. "Why, that's *it!*" he exclaimed — and winced. Despite having served him up with an answer, his head still couldn't stand that amount of sudden excitement.

"What's the matter, sweet?" Marge crooned. "Here, have a cerebrin."

He tottered to his feet. "Oh, don't be so noble and shoulder-to-shoulder." He grinned quickly and kissed her. "Don't pay any attention to me, honey, I've just seen the light." He drained his coffee hurriedly. "I've got something urgent to attend to." He kissed her again and dashed off.

He chose a different cubicle this time, just to be on the safe side, and made his application with a practiced, if shaky, hand.

This time an official came unsummoned. The manager himself, what was more, for that's how he introduced himself to Gilbert. He was holding the copy of the application in his hand.

"I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Parry," he said. "*Umbrological Parallax Tracer*. Ah, yes, most interesting. What exactly is that?"

With a calmness that surprised even himself, Gilbert answered, "Well, it involves ascertaining the degrees of parallax that occur in umbrological investigations. It's not easy to explain in a few words, but —"

"Of course," said the manager understandingly. "I thought it would probably be too complex for me to grasp. But you failed to enter the overall classification. I can make it on the photostat for you." He looked at Gilbert inquiringly, his stylus poised.

For a moment Gilbert floundered, cursing himself for having overlook the point. "Er — well, that's not easy to describe, either. You see —"

"I understand," said the manager soothingly. "Shall we say *Synthesis*, then? That covers a multitude of categories these days."

"Oh — ah, yes, *yes*, it's definitely a form of synthesis."

THE MANAGER nodded and filled in the space. "There's just one more point. The West Town office has already admitted an application this morning for, ah —" he consulted a slip of paper in his hand — "an Umbrological Parallax Co-relator. It just came through on the tape. Now,

you'd have to prove, if called upon, that the two functions are distinct and separate."

Gilbert doubted the testimony of his own ears. Then there really *was* something called Umbrology — in which parallaxes occurred? And then —

"That wouldn't have been a Mr. C. P. Jones, would it?"

"Why, *yes*. You know each other, then?"

"We should have met this morning," lied Gilbert stoutly, "to file our categories together. One of us must have got the offices mixed. You see, umbrology has been our life work, in our spare hours, that is. But a parallax tracer is entirely different from a parallax co-relator. In fact, they're two entirely opposed functions. Opposed, but mutually dependent, if you understand. You see, a parallax can only be co-related in dialectical opposition and conjunction to and with its being traced." Gilbert was beginning to enjoy himself. "To put it more simply —"

"That's perfectly all right," said the manager. "I'll see that the distinction is made clear. Your charter will be mailed to you in a few days. But if you're working in the same field, hadn't you better share facilities with your friend, Mr. Jones? Provisionally, anyway?"

"Why, yes," said Gilbert. "It would save a lot of delay in our work."

"Indeed. Well, Mr. Jones will already have been granted offices. Hold on, I'll get the address from West Town."

IT WAS A new office in a new building. When Gilbert entered, Mr. Jones was arranging some handsome-looking furniture. The little man straightened and his eyes lit up.

"Hello, my boy. So you found me, then."

Gilbert grinned. "You old rogue. You nearly queered the pitch for me."

The old man chuckled. "Well, all's fair. And somehow you didn't get around to giving me your address last night. And I didn't know you'd get the self-same idea. I do remember that we laughed a lot over it and said it was one of the best categories we thought up. Of the printable ones, that is." He chuckled again. "Anyway, I did alter the end to give you a loophole."

Gilbert clapped the little man on the back. "That was more than I thought to do, I must admit."

Gilbert looked around the office and felt a sudden sharp pang of conscience. "Of course we're cheating, aren't we?"

"Cheating?" said the little man, feigning indignation very well, Gilbert thought. "*I'm* not. We

may be anticipating a trifle, but that's a different thing altogether. I've already looked up Umbrology for a start. It's all right, there isn't such a word — not yet. As near as I can make out, it would be a science of shadows. Now all we have to do is find the parallaxes."

"But — you're not *serious?*" said Gilbert.

"Serious? Of course I'm serious. Can we help it if we haven't caught up with our category yet? Who was the great man, the Indian squatting on his haunches where he was born or Columbus setting out to find a place that no one knew existed? We've just got to have the same kind of faith as Columbus had. You've got brains. As for me, I always found it easier to earn my living on a trapeze. But I'm no slouch. My brain's been very well preserved from all those years of swinging about a hundred feet up with nothing to do. Oh, I may not have been any great shakes in my last category, but that wasn't specific enough. In Umbrology, I think we've got something a man can really get his teeth into."

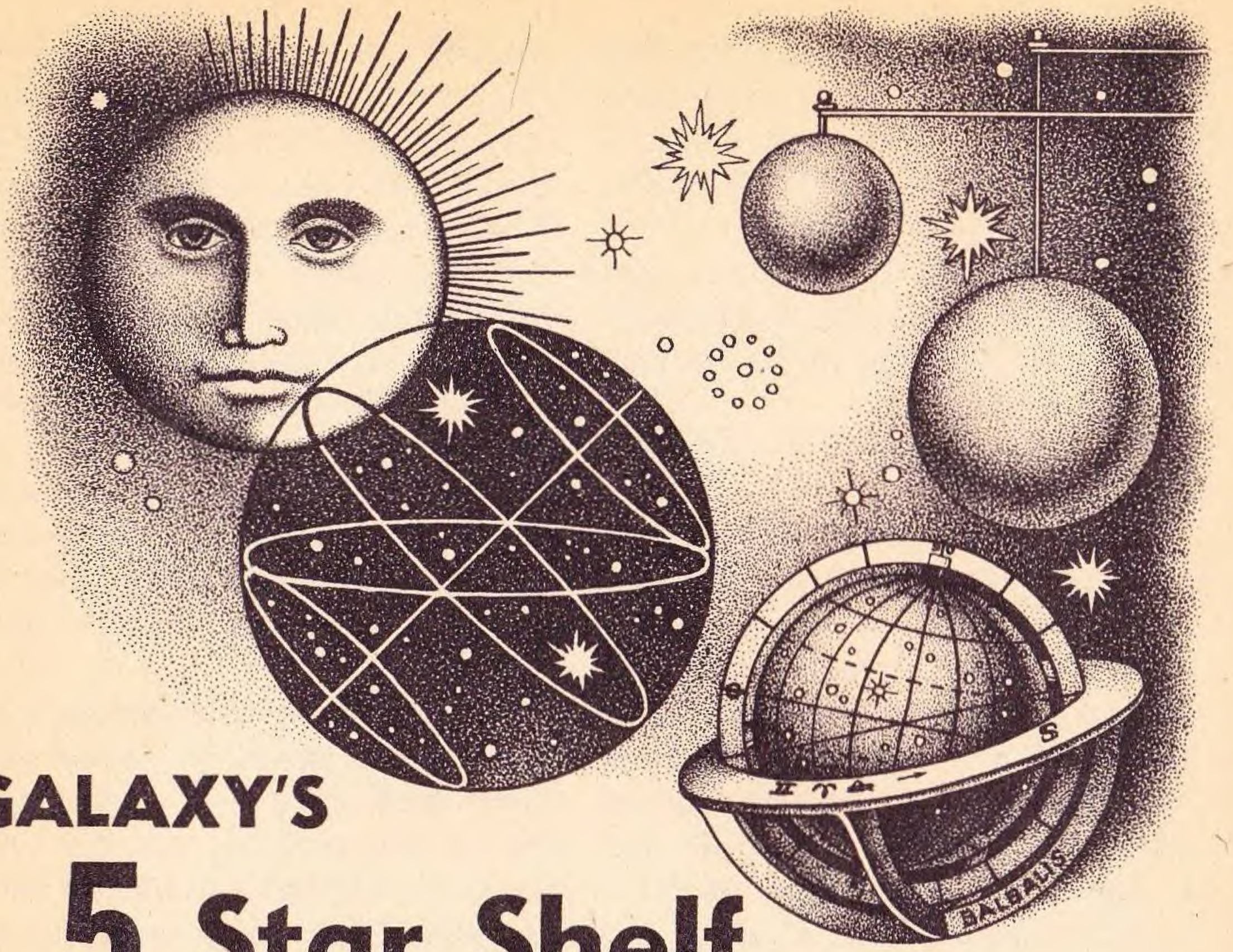
"But they'll find out," said Gilbert, weakening.

"Courage, my lad, courage. The world's so complicated these days, everyone's such a specialist, that no one can be sure what's actual fact yet and what isn't. What was that one you came out with last night — *traumographist?* Well, how many traumographists are there in the world? Say there's only one, which is more than possible. Then only *he* knows what he's doing. Anyway, if they step in before we've gotten anywhere, then we'll just start in some other line. The scope's enormous."

Why, Gilbert told himself, *he really does mean it!* What was more, such confidence was catching. It was striking, too, the way the little old man made no kind of reservation on account of his years. He talked as if he were immortal, his capacity boundless. Standing there now, his head cocked to one side, he *did* look like some ageless troll, indefatigable and of infinite resource.

"Anyway," said Mr. Jones. "I'm not letting grass grow under *my* feet. Here —" his grin nearly bisected his face — "don't just stand there. Our robot hasn't arrived yet. Give me a hand with this filing cabinet. We're going to need it."

— ARTHUR SELLINGS



GALAXY'S 5 Star Shelf

THE END OF ETERNITY by Isaac Asimov. Doubleday & Co., Inc., $2.95

THIS is a tour-de-force by one of science fiction's best-known authors and, as far as I know, his first venture into time travel. It's a truly fascinating opus, but I don't envy poor Asimov the tremendous job of working out the paradoxes inherent in any time story, particularly the one he chose.

I doubt that there is one reasoning being who hasn't been tempted by the thought of being able to go back and alter one's past in order to avoid mistakes or tragedy. This is the basis of Asimov's story, though on a cosmic scale.

A society of so-called Eternals has the power to alter the mainstream of time to eliminate unwanted features from their position in Eternity, a sort of pseudo-time that exists simultaneously from the beginning of time travel in the 27th Century through the Hidden Century, up to about the 112,000th Century. By means of the device of *phsio-time*, time in Eternity is concurrent.

I must admit that the concepts became a bit bewildering now and then, but Asimov didn't stoop to take the easy way out to tell his story and that calls for literary courage.

The hero is a Technician, the class of Eternals whose duty it is to compute the Minimum Necessary Change required to alter satisfactorily a given time sequence and to put the change into effect at the proper instant of Time and millimeter of Space. Their social status is comparable to that of hangman among their associates because of the widespread dislocation and annihilation of eras that their changes entail.

Do you realize what a monkey-wrench a guy like that could be if he developed a grudge? Asimov does.

REPRIEVE FROM PARADISE by H. Chandler Elliot. Gnome Press, Inc., $3.00

I'VE COME to the conclusion that this book, like olives, is to be either liked or disliked, nothing in between. It revolves about a 40th Century so-called Freeman, one of the mindless masses, who raises himself to the level of the ruling Hierarchy by dint of his dissatisfaction with *Status Quo.*

After World War III, the sole civilized survivors, the Polynesians, assuming the Brown Man's Burden, have organized a world society based on freedom from want, the duties of the Freeman multitudes being reproduction and food production only, until every possible acre is tilled and progress stultified at story time.

Our hero single-handedly overturns the whole shootin' match, which is all right by me, but somehow he can't stick to straightforward action and deliberation. Scattered throughout are enough parenthetical asides to make a script of *Uncle Tom's Cabin.*

The blurb says this is a beautifully written book. True enough, but Chandler has overdone a good thing.

TIME BOMB by Wilson Tucker. Rinehart & Co., Inc., $2.75

I DON'T believe that Tucker meant this to be a sequel to his *The Time Masters,* even though it's a follow-up in time and has two characters common to each. I'm sure he could have done his story just as well without Gilbert and Shirley Nash, but I must confess that I sort of go for them myself. Especially Shirley. Telepathy with a kiss — wow! Who cares if it's a one-way communication?

And as for Gilbert . . . have

you ever heard of Gilgamesh, the guy that legend says has lived for ten thousand years? Got it?

The story itself concerns a series of *Time Bombs,* in the literal sense, blowing the bejabbers out of several high-ranking members of the fanatical Sons of America, or Ben's Boys, as they call themselves. Lt. Danforth of the bomb squad of the Illinois police spots an unusual pattern in the explosions, and even though canned as a scapegoat, continues his investigations on his own, with the blessings and unofficial aid of Mr. Ramsey, the telepath-in-residence of the Illinois Security Police.

Tucker has a beautiful little twist in store at the end that might catch you as flat-footed as it did me.

SARGASSO OF SPACE by Andrew North. Gnome Press, Inc. $2.50

HAVING a bad habit of reading dust jackets before I dig into the meat of the stories, I was pretty well scared by the lurid recap. Funny thing, in resumé the story sounds as amateurishly blud-and-thunderish as the blurb come-on hints, but in actuality, though unpretentious space opera, it makes good adventure reading for a couple of carefree hours.

The crew of a Trader, a space-tub comparable to tramp steamers, bids for and wins the rights to a D-class planet. In bidding, though, the crew has pooled all their money and have none left for equipment and supplies. A wealthy amateur archeologist puts up the money and brings his scientific helpers along. When it turns out that he isn't really what he seems . . .

I *told* you it sounds pretty bad.

The "Sargasso" part of the title alludes to the Earthly Sea of Lost Ships, intimating that the planet appears to be a graveyard of spaceships. That, plus the fact that it contains the first identifiable artifacts of the Forerunners, an unknown race that had space travel way back when, makes the purchased planet a pretty valuable hunk of real estate.

The ending was a bit on the abrupt side, but since the cover says "A Dane Thorsen-Solar Queen Adventure," simple deduction should prove this to be the first of a series. Elementary, my dear Flotsam.

SPACEFLIGHT VENUS by Philip Wilding. Philosophical Library. $2.75

THIS is a book printed in England for an American firm. It does not specify whether the author likewise is British, but that would be my guess, even though

the Earth locale is New Mexico and Old Mexico and the protagonists American.

Regardless of nationality, Wilding deserves plaudits for perfecting a particularly annoying device of "putting everything" in "quotes." Having a "naturally" sensitive "stomach," I got "dizzy" from all this "stop-and-go" writing.

The story concerns the preparations for and the actual flight to Venus, hewing close to this line while tossing out at every opportunity hints of sub-plots and sub-sub-plots that never materialize. Considering what the author has done with his chosen plot, maybe it would have been better — but that's his business.

After the Venusians have guided the Earth ship in to planetfall, the most interesting part, to say very little, occurs. Anyway, I must admit I never met more beautiful characters — not a single plain, ordinary-looking one, even among the Venusians, without whose "help" this "book" would never have been "written."

THE GREEN MAN FROM SPACE by Lewis Zarem. E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., $2.50

THE author has quite a background in aviation, according to the jacket. This is apparent in the story also. However, in spite of what should have been a basically tense plot, all the author's dramatic and tragic situations fall flat.

But his inventiveness is commendable, particularly the symbiosis between the Martian and the oxygen-producing algae that live like hair on his body.

The Martian has come to Earth seeking new and hardier strains of algae and lichens, since the native varieties are dying out for some obscure reason. His own mysteriously propelled ship has been destroyed on landing and he must return with Earth's first Martian expedition. Of course, since the Earth ship is destroyed on landing and return must be made by Martian ship, turnabout is fair play, isn't it? Well, of course it is.

This is the third author this month who has figured out a way to get my nanny. He *does* it by *liberally larding* (and I *Do* mean "Lard") his story with *italics*. All I can "say" is, (wait) *till next "month!"*

—FLOYD C. GALE

Trap

By FINN O'DONNEVAN

Check your dictionary if you think "trap" is a simple and uncomplicated word . . . or read this for another definition!

SAMISH, I am in some need of assistance. The situation is potentially dangerous, so come at once.

It shows how right you were, Samish, old friend. I should never have trusted a Terran. They are a sly, ignorant, irresponsible race, just as you have always pointed out.

Nor are they as stupid as they seem. I am beginning to believe that the slenderness of the tentacle is not the only criterion of intelligence.

What a sorry mess, Samish! And the plan seemed so foolproof . . .

Ed Dailey saw a gleam of metal outside his cabin door, but he was still too sleepy to investigate.

He had awakened shortly after daybreak and tiptoed outside for a glimpse at the weather.

Illustrated by WEST

It was unpromising. There had been a heavy rain during the night and water dripped from every leaf and branch of the surrounding forest. His station wagon had a drowned look and the dirt road leading up the mountainside was a foot-thick in mud.

His friend Thurston came to the door in pajamas, his round face flushed with sleep and Buddhalike in its placidity.

"It always rains on the first day of a vacation," Thurston stated. "Rule of nature."

"Might be a good day for trout," Dailey said.

"It might. But it is a better day for building a roaring fire in the fireplace and drinking hot buttered rum."

FOR eleven years, they had been taking a short autumn vacation together, but for different reasons.

Dailey had a romantic love for equipment. The clerks in New York's fancier sports shops hung expensive parkas on his high, stooped shoulders, parkas such as one would wear on the trail of the Abominable Snowman in the fastnesses of Tibet. They sold him ingenious little stoves that would burn through a hurricane and wickedly curved knives of the best Swedish steel.

Dailey loved to feel a lean canteen against his side and a blued-steel rifle over his shoulder. But the canteen usually contained rum and the rifle was used against nothing deadlier than tin cans. For in spite of his dreams, Dailey was a friendly man, with no malice toward bird or beast.

His friend Thurston was overweight and short of wind, and burdened himself only with the lightest of fly rods and the smallest of shotguns. By the second week, he usually managed to steer the hunt to Lake Placid, to the cocktail lounges that were his true environment. There, with an incredible knowledge of spoor and lair, he placidly hunted the pretty vacationing girls instead of the brown bear, the black bear, or the mountain deer.

This mild exercise was more than adequate for two soft and successful businessmen on the wrong side of forty, and they returned to the city tanned and refreshed, with a new lease on life and a renewed tolerance for their wives.

"Rum it is," Dailey said. "What's that?" He had noticed the gleam of metal near the cabin.

Thurston walked over and poked the object with his foot. "Odd-looking thing."

Dailey parted the grass and saw an open framework box about four feet square, constructed of metal strips, and

hinged on top. Written boldly on one of the strips was the single word TRAP.

"Where did you buy *that?*" Thurston asked.

"I didn't." Dailey found a plastic tag attached to one of the metal strips. He pulled it loose and read: "Dear Friend, this is a new and revolutionary design in a TRAP. To introduce the TRAP to the general public, we are giving you this model *absolutely free!* You will find it a unique and valuable device for the capture of small game, provided you follow *precisely* the directions on the other side. Good luck and good hunting!"

"If this isn't the strangest thing," Dailey said. "Do you suppose it was left during the night?"

"Who cares?" Thurston shrugged. "My stomach is rumbling. Let's make breakfast."

"Aren't you interested in this?"

"Not particularly. It's just another gadget. You've got a hundred like it. That bear trap from Abercrombie and Fitch. The jaguar horn from Battler's. The crocodile lure from — "

"I've never seen a trap like this," Dailey mused. "Pretty clever advertising, just to leave it here."

"They'll bill you for it eventually," Thurston said cynically. "I'm going to make breakfast. You'll wash the dishes."

HE WENT inside while Dailey turned the tag over and read the other side.

"Take the TRAP to a clearing and anchor it to any convenient TREE with the attached chain. Press Button One on the base. This primes the TRAP. Wait five seconds and press Button Two. This activates the TRAP. Nothing more is required until a CAPTURE has been effected. Then press Button Three to deactivate and open the TRAP, and remove the PREY.

"Warning! Keep the TRAP closed at all times except when removing the PREY. No opening is required for the PREY'S ingress, since the TRAP works on the principle of Osmotic Section and inducts the PREY directly into the TRAP."

"What won't they think of next?" Dailey said admiringly.

"Breakfast is ready," Thurston called.

"First help me set the trap."

Thurston, dressed now in Bermuda shorts and a loud sport shirt, came out and peered at the trap dubiously. "Do you really think we should fool with it?"

"Of course. Maybe we can catch a fox."

"What on Earth would we do with a fox?" Thurston demanded.

"Turn it loose," Dailey said. "The fun is in the catching. Here, help me lift it."

The trap was surprisingly heavy. Together they dragged it fifty yards from the cabin and tied the chain to a young pine tree. Dailey pushed the first button and the trap glowed faintly. Thurston backed away anxiously.

After five seconds, Dailey pressed the second button.

The forest dripped and squirrels chattered in the treetops and the long grass rustled faintly. The trap lay quietly beside the tree, its open metal framework glowing faintly.

"Come in," Thurston said. "The eggs are undoubtedly cold."

Dailey followed him back to the cabin, glancing over his shoulder at the trap. It lay in the forest, silent and waiting.

Samish, where are you? My need is becoming increasingly urgent. Unbelievable as it will sound, my little planetoid is being pulled apart before my very eyes! You are my oldest friend, Samish, the companion of my youth, the best man at my mating, and a friend of Fregl as well. I'm counting on you. Don't delay too long.

I have already beamed you the beginning of my story. The Terrans accepted my trap as a trap, nothing more. And they began to use it at once, with no thought to the possible consequences. I had counted on this. The fantastic curiosity of the Terran species is well known.

During this period, my wife was crawling gaily around the planetoid, redecorating our hutch and enjoying the change from city life. Everything was going well. . . .

DURING breakfast, Thurston explained in pedantic detail why a trap could not function unless it had an opening to admit the prey. Dailey smiled and spoke of osmotic section. Thurston insisted that there was no such thing. When the dishes were washed and dried, they walked over the wet, springy grass to the trap.

"Look!" Dailey shouted.

Something was in the trap, something about the size of a rabbit, but colored a bright green. Its eyes were extended on stalks and it clicked lobsterlike claws at them.

"No more rum before breakfast," Thurston said. "Starting tomorrow. Hand me the canteen."

Dailey gave it to him and Thurston poured down a generous double shot. Then he looked at the trapped creature again and went, "Brr!"

"I think it's a new species," Dailey said.

"New species of nightmare. Can't we just go to Lake Pl'acid and forget about it?"

"No, of course not. I've never seen anything like this in my zoology books. It could be completely unknown to science. What will we keep it in?"

"Keep it in?"

"Well, certainly. It can't stay in the trap. We'll have to build a cage and then find out what it eats."

Thurston's face lost some of its habitual serenity. "Now look here, Ed. I'm not sharing my vacation with anything like that. It's probably poisonous. I'm sure it has dirty habits." He took a deep breath and continued. "There's something unnatural about that trap. It's — inhuman!"

Dailey grinned. "I'm sure they said that about Ford's first car and Edison's incandescent lamp. This trap is just another example of American progress and know-how."

"I'm all for progress," Thurston stated firmly, "but in other directions. Can't we just — "

He looked at his friend's face and stopped talking. Dailey had an expression that Cortez might have worn as he approached the summit of a peak in Darien.

"Yes," Dailey said after a while. "I think so."

"What?"

"Tell you later. First let's build a cage and set the trap again."

Thurston groaned, but followed him.

WHY haven't you come yet, Samish? Don't you appreciate the seriousness of my situation? Haven't I made it clear how much depends upon you? Think of your old friend! Think of the lustrous-skinned Fregl, for whose sake I got into this mess. Communicate with me, at least.

The Terrans used the trap, which, of course, was not a trap at all, but a matter transmitter. I had the other end concealed on the planetoid, and fed into it three small animals which I found in the garden. The Terrans removed them from the transmitter each time — for what purpose, I couldn't guess. But a Terran will keep anything.

After the third beast passed through and had not been returned, I knew that all was in readiness.

So I prepared for the fourth and final sending, the all-important one, for which all else was mere preparation.

They were standing in the low shed attached to their cabin. Thurston looked with distaste at the three cages made of heavy mosquito netting. Inside each cage was a creature.

"Ugh," Thurston said. "They smell."

In the first cage was the original capture, the stalk-eyed, lobster-clawed beast. Next came a

bird with three sets of scaly wings. Finally there was something that looked like a snake, except that it had a head at each end.

Within the cages were bowls of milk, plates of minced meat, vegetables, grasses, bark — all untouched.

"They just won't eat anything," Dailey said.

"Obviously they're sick," Thurston told him. "Probably germ carriers. Can't we get rid of them, Ed?"

Dailey looked squarely at his friend. "Tom, have you ever desired fame?"

"What?"

"Fame. The knowledge that your name will go down through the ages."

"I am a businessman," Thurston said. "I never considered the possibility."

"Never?"

THURSTON smiled foolishly. "Well, what man hasn't? What did you have in mind?"

"These creatures," Dailey said, "are unique. We will present them to a museum."

"Ah?" Thurston queried interestedly.

"The Dailey-Thurston exhibit of creatures hitherto unknown."

"They might name the species after us," Thurston said. "After all, we discovered them."

"Of course they would! Our names would go down with Livingstone, Audubon and Teddy Roosevelt."

"Hmm." Thurston thought deeply. "I suppose the Museum of Natural History would be the place. I'm sure they'd arrange an exhibit — "

"I wasn't thinking merely in terms of an exhibit," Dailey said. "I was thinking more of a wing — the Dailey-Thurston Wing."

Thurston looked at his friend in amazement. There were depths to Dailey that he had never imagined. "But, Ed, we have only three of them. We can't equip a wing with three exhibits."

"There must be more where these came from. Let's examine the trap."

This time the trap contained a creature almost three feet tall, with a small green head and a forked tail. It had at least a dozen thick cilia, all of them waving furiously.

"The rest were quiet," Thurston said apprehensively. "Maybe this one is dangerous."

"We will handle it with nets," Dailey replied decisively. "And then I want to get in touch with the museum."

After considerable work, they transferred the thing to a cage. The trap was reset and Dailey sent the following wire to the Museum of Natural History:

HAVE DISCOVERED AT LEAST FOUR ANIMALS WHICH I SUSPECT TO BE NEW SPECIES STOP HAVE YOU ROOM FOR SUITABLE EXHIBIT STOP BETTER SEND A MAN UP AT ONCE.

Then, at Thurston's insistence, he wired several impeccable character references to the museum, so they wouldn't think he was a crank.

That afternoon, Dailey explained his theory to Thurston. There was, he felt sure, a primeval pocket isolated in this section of the Adirondacks. Within it were creatures which had survived from prehistoric times. They had never been captured because, due to their great antiquity, they had acquired a high degree of experience and caution. But the trap — operating on the new principle of osmotic section — had proved to be beyond their experience.

"The Adirondacks have been pretty well explored," Thurston objected.

"Not well enough, apparently," Dailey said, with irrefutable logic.

Later, they returned to the trap. It was empty.

I CAN just barely hear you, Samish. Kindly step up the volume. Or, better still, get here in person. What's the use of beaming me, in the spot I'm in? The situation is steadily becoming more and more desperate.

What, Samish? The rest of the story? It's obvious enough. After three animals had passed through the transmitter, I knew I was ready. Now was the time to tell my wife.

Accordingly, I asked her to crawl into the garden with me. She was quite pleased.

"Tell me, my dear," she said, "has something been bothering you of late?"

"Um," said I.

"Have I displeased you?" she asked.

"No, sweetheart," I said. "You have tried your best, but it just isn't good enough. I am going to take a new mate."

She stood motionless, her cilia swaying in confusion. Then she exclaimed, "Fregl!"

"Yes," I told her, "the glorious Fregl has consented to share my hutch."

"But you forget we were mated for life."

"I know. A pity you insisted on that formality." And with one clever shove, I pushed her into the matter transmitter.

Samish, you should have seen her expression! Her cilia writhed, she screamed, and was gone.

I was free at last! A little nauseous, but free! Free to mate with the splendid Fregl!

Now you can appreciate the full perfection of the scheme. It

was necessary to secure the Terrans' cooperation, since a matter transmitter must be manipulated from both ends. I had disguised it as a trap, because Terrans will believe anything. And as my master stroke, I sent them my wife.

Let them try to live with her! I never could!

Foolproof, absolutely foolproof. My wife's body would never turn up, because the acquisitive Terrans keep what they get. No one could ever prove anything.

And then, Samish, then it happened. . . .

THE cabin's air of rustic serenity was gone. Tire tracks crossed and recrossed the muddy road. The grounds were littered with flash bulbs, empty cigarette packs, candy wrappers, pencil stubs and bits of paper. But now, after a hectic few hours, everyone was gone. Only a sour taste remained.

Dailey and Thurston stood beside the empty trap, staring hopelessly at it.

"What do you suppose is wrong with the damned thing?" Dailey asked, giving the trap a frustrated kick.

"Maybe there's nothing else to capture," Thurston suggested.

"There has to be! Why would it take four completely alien beasts and then no more?" He knelt beside the trap and said bitterly, "Those stupid museum people! And those reporters!"

"In a way," Thurston said cautiously, "you can't blame them — "

"Can't I? Accusing me of a *hoax!* Did you hear them, Tom? They asked me how I performed the *skin grafts!*"

"It's too bad the animals were all dead by the time the museum people got here," Thurston said. "That did look suspicious."

"The idiotic creatures wouldn't eat. Was that my fault? And those newspaper people . . . Really, you would think the metropolitan newspapers would hire more intelligent reporters."

"You shouldn't have promised to capture more animals," Thurston said. "It was when the trap didn't produce that they suspected a hoax."

"Of course I promised! How should I guess the trap would stop with that fourth capture? And why did they laugh when I told them about the osmotic section system of capture?"

"They never heard of it," Thurston answered wearily. "No one ever heard of it. Let's go to Lake Placid and forget the whole thing."

"No! This thing must work again. It must!" Dailey primed and activated the trap and stared at it for several seconds. Then he opened the hinged top.

Dailey stuck his hand into the trap and let out a scream. "My hand! It's gone!" He leaped backward.

"No, it's not," Thurston assured him.

Dailey examined both hands, rubbed them together and insisted, "My hand disappeared inside that trap."

"Now, now," Thurston said soothingly. "A little rest in Lake Placid will do you a world of good — "

Dailey stood over the trap and pushed in his hand. It disappeared. He reacher farther in and watched his arm vanish up to the shoulder. He looked at Thurston with a smile of triumph.

"Now I see how it works," he said. "Those animals didn't come from the Adirondacks at all!"

"Where did they come from?"

"From wherever my hand is! Want more, do they? Call me a liar? I'll show them!"

"Ed! Don't do it! You don't know what — "

But Dailey had already stepped feet-first into the trap. His feet disappeared. Slowly he lowered his body until only his head was visible.

"Wish me luck," he said.

"Ed!"

Dailey held his nose and plunged out of sight.

SAMISH, if you don't come immediately, it will be too late! I must stop beaming you. The enormous Terran has completely ransacked my little planetoid. He has shoved everything, living or dead, through the transmitter. My home is in ruins.

And now he is tearing down my hutch! Samish, this monster means to capture me as a specimen! There's no time to lose!

Samish, what can be keeping you? You, my oldest friend . . .

What, Samish? What are you saying? You can't mean it! Not you and Fregl! Reconsider, old friend! Remember our friendship!

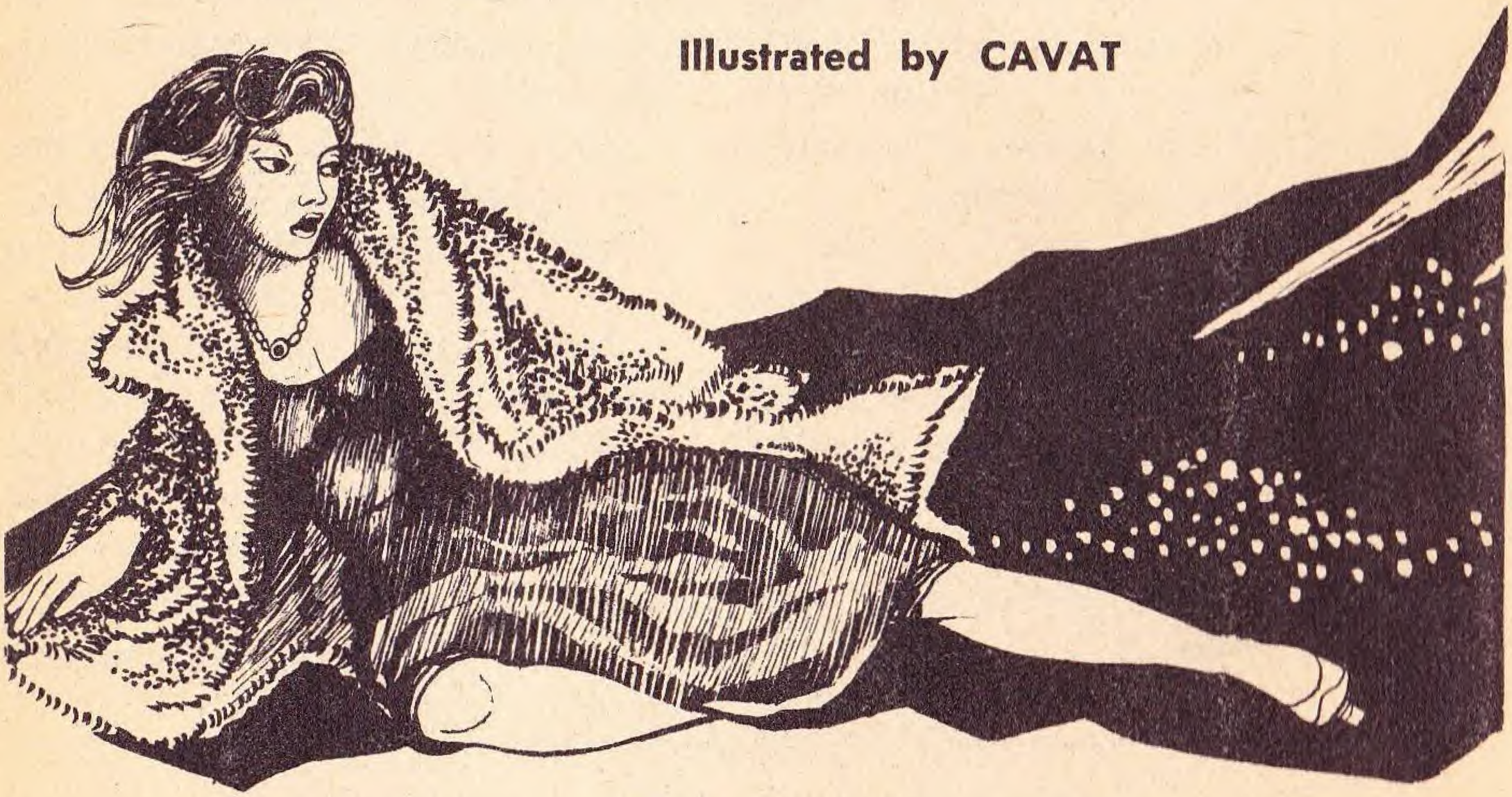
—FINN O'DONNEVAN

Bodyguard

By CHRISTOPHER GRIMM

When overwhelming danger is constantly present, of course a man is entitled to have a bodyguard. The annoyance was that he had to do it himself . . . and his body would not cooperate!

Illustrated by CAVAT



THE MAN at the bar was exceptionally handsome, and he knew it. So did the light-haired girl at his side, and so did the nondescript man in the gray suit who was watching them from a booth in the corner.

Everyone in the room was aware of the big young man, and most of the humans present were resentful, for he handled himself

consciously and arrogantly, as if his appearance alone were enough to make him superior to anyone. Even the girl with him was growing restless, for she was accustomed to adulation herself, and next to Gabriel Lockard she was almost ordinary-looking.

As for the extraterrestrials — it was a free bar — they were merely amused, since to them all men were pathetically and irredeemably hideous.

Gabe threw his arm wide in one of his expansive gestures. There was a short man standing next to the pair — young, as most men and women were in that time, thanks to the science which could stave off decay, though not death — but with no other apparent physical virtue, for plastic surgery had not fulfilled its bright promise of the twentieth century.

The drink he had been raising to his lips splashed all over his clothing; the glass shattered at his feet. Now he was not only a rather ugly little man, but also a rather ridiculous one — or at least he felt he was, which was what mattered.

"Sorry, colleague," Gabe said lazily. "All my fault. You must let me buy you a replacement." He gestured to the bartender. "Another of the same for my fellow-man here."

The ugly man dabbed futilely at his dripping trousers with a cloth hastily supplied by the management.

"You must allow me to pay your cleanery bill," Gabe said, taking out his wallet and extracting several credit notes without seeming to look at them. "Here, have yourself a new suit on me." *You could use one* was implied.

And that, coming on top of Gabriel Lockard's spectacular appearance, was too much. The ugly man picked up the drink the bartender had just set before him and started to hurl it, glass and all, into Lockard's handsome face.

SUDDENLY a restraining hand was laid upon his arm. "Don't do that," the nondescript man who had been sitting in the corner advised. He removed the glass from the little man's slackening grasp. "You wouldn't want to go to jail because of him."

The ugly man gave him a bewildered stare. Then, seeing the forces now ranged against him — including his own belated prudence — were too strong, he stumbled off. He hadn't really wanted to fight, only to smash back, and now it was too late for that.

Gabe studied the newcomer curiously. "So, it's you again?"

The man in the gray suit smiled. "Who else in any world would stand up for you?"

"I should think you'd have

given up by now. Not that I mind having you around, of course," Gabriel added too quickly. "You do come in useful at times, you know."

"So you don't mind having me around?" The nondescript man smiled again. "Then what are you running from, if not me? You can't be running from yourself — you lost yourself a while back, remember?"

Gabe ran a hand through his thick blond hair. "Come on, have a drink with me, fellow-man, and let's let bygones be bygones. I owe you something — I admit that. Maybe we can even work this thing out."

"I drank with you once too often," the nondescript man said. "And things worked out fine, didn't they? For you." His eyes studied the other man's incredibly handsome young face, noted the suggestion of bags under the eyes, the beginning of slackness at the lips, and were not pleased with what they saw. "Watch yourself, colleague," he warned as he left. "Soon you might not be worth the saving."

"Who was that, Gabe?" the girl asked.

He shrugged. "I never saw him before in my life." Of course, knowing him, she assumed he was lying, but, as a matter of fact, just then he happened to have been telling the truth.

ONCE THE illuminators were extinguished in Gabriel Lockard's hotel suite, it seemed reasonably certain to the man in the gray suit, as he watched from the street, that his quarry would not go out again that night. So he went to the nearest airstation. There he inserted a coin in a locker, into which he put most of his personal possessions, reserving only a sum of money. After setting the locker to respond to the letter combination *bodyguard*, he went out into the street.

If he had met with a fatal accident at that point, there would have been nothing on his body to identify him. As a matter of fact, no real identification was possible, for he was no one and had been no one for years.

The nondescript man hailed a cruising helicab. "Where to, fellow-man?" the driver asked.

"I'm new in the parish," the other man replied and let it hang there.

"Oh? . . . Females? . . . Narcophagi? . . . Thrill-mills?"

But to each of these questions the nondescript man shook his head.

"Games?" the driver finally asked, although he could guess what was wanted by then. "Dice? . . . Roulette? . . . Farjeen?"

"Is there a good zarquil game in town?"

The driver moved so he could

see the face of the man behind him in the teleview. A very ordinary face. "Look, colleague, why don't you commit suicide? It's cleaner and quicker."

"I can't contact your attitude," the passenger said with a thin smile. "Bet you've never tried the game yourself. Each time it happens, there's a . . . well, there's no experience to match it at a thrill-mill." He gave a sigh that was almost an audible shudder, and which the driver misinterpreted as an expression of ecstasy.

"Each time, eh? You're a dutchman then?" The driver spat out of the window. "If it wasn't for the nibble, I'd throw you right out of the cab. Without even bothering to take it down even. I hate dutchmen . . . anybody with any legitimate feelings hates 'em."

"But it would be silly to let personal prejudice stand in the way of a commission, wouldn't it?" the other man asked coolly.

"Of course. You'll need plenty of foliage, though."

"I have sufficient funds. I also have a gun."

"You're the dictator," the driver agreed sullenly.

II

IT WAS a dark and rainy night in early fall. Gabe Lockard was in no condition to drive the helicar. However, he was stubborn.

"Let me take the controls, honey," the light-haired girl urged, but he shook his handsome head.

"Show you I can do something 'sides look pretty," he said thickly, referring to an earlier and not amicable conversation they had held, and of which she still bore the reminder on one thickly made-up cheek.

Fortunately the car was flying low, contrary to regulations, so that when they smashed into the beacon tower on the outskirts of the little town, they didn't have far to fall. And hardly had their car crashed on the ground when the car that had been following them landed, and a short fat man was puffing toward them through the mist.

To the girl's indignation, the stranger not only hauled Gabe out onto the dripping grass first, but stopped and deliberately examined the young man by the light of his minilume, almost as if she weren't there at all. Only when she started to struggle out by herself did he seem to remember her existence. He pulled her away from the wreck just a moment before the fuel tank exploded and the 'copter went up in flames.

Gabe opened his eyes and saw the fat man gazing down at him

speculatively. "My guardian angel," he mumbled — shock had sobered him a little, but not enough. He sat up. "Guess I'm not hurt or you'd have thrown me back in."

"And that's no joke," the fat man agreed.

The girl shivered and at that moment Gabriel suddenly seemed to recall that he had not been alone. "How about Helen? She on course?"

"Seems to be," the fat man said. "You all right, miss?" he asked, glancing toward the girl without, she thought, much apparent concern.

"*Mrs.*," Gabriel corrected. "Allow me to introduce you to Mrs. Gabriel Lockard," he said, bowing from his seated position toward the girl. "Pretty bauble, isn't she?"

"I'm delighted to meet you, Mrs. Gabriel Lockard," the fat man said, looking at her intently. His small eyes seemed to strip the make-up from her cheek and examine the livid bruise underneath. "I hope you'll be worthy of the name." The light given off by the flaming car flickered on his face and Gabriel's and, she supposed, hers too. Otherwise, darkness surrounded the three of them.

There were no public illuminators this far out — even in town the lights were dimming and not being replaced fast enough nor by the newer models. The town, the civilization, the planet all were old and beginning to slide downhill. . .

Gabe gave a short laugh, for no reason that she could see.

THERE was the feeling that she had encountered the fat man before, which was, of course, absurd. She had an excellent memory for faces and his was not included in her gallery. The girl pulled her thin jacket closer about her chilly body. "Aren't you going to introduce your — your friend to me, Gabe?"

"I don't know who he is," Gabe said almost merrily, "except that he's no friend of mine. Do you have a name, stranger?"

"Of course I have a name." The fat man extracted an identification card from his wallet and read it. "Says here I'm Dominic Bianchi, and Dominic Bianchi is a retail milgot dealer. . . Only he isn't a retail milgot dealer any more; the poor fellow went bankrupt a couple of weeks ago, and now he isn't . . . anything."

"You saved our lives," the girl said. "I'd like to give you some token of my — of our appreciation." Her hand reached toward her credit-carrier with deliberate insult. He might have saved her life, but only casually, as a by-product of some larger scheme,

and her appreciation held little gratitude.

The fat man shook his head without rancor. "I have plenty of money, thank you, Mrs. Gabriel Lockard. . . . Come," he addressed her husband, "if you get up, I'll drive you home. I warn you, be more careful in the future! Sometimes," he added musingly, "I almost wish you would let something happen. Then my problem would not be any problem, would it?"

Gabriel shivered. "I'll be careful," he vowed. "I promise — I'll be careful."

When he was sure that his charge was safely tucked in for the night, the fat man checked his personal possessions. He then requested a taxi driver to take him to the nearest zarquil game. The driver accepted the commission phlegmatically. Perhaps he was more hardened than the others had been; perhaps he was unaware that the fat man was not a desperate or despairing individual seeking one last chance, but what was known colloquially as a flying dutchman, a man, or woman, who went from one zarquil game to another, loving the thrill of the sport, if you could call it that, for its own sake, and not for the futile hope it extended and which was its sole shred of claim to moral justification. Perhaps — and this was the most likely hypothesis — he just didn't care.

Zarquil was extremely illegal, of course — so much so that there were many legitimate citizens who weren't quite sure just what the word implied, knowing merely that it was one of those nameless horrors so deliciously hinted at by the fax sheets under the generic term of "crimes against nature." Actually the phrase was more appropriate to zarquil than to most of the other activities to which it was commonly applied. And this was one crime — for it was crime in law as well as nature — in which victim had to be considered as guilty as perpetrator; otherwise the whole legal structure of society would collapse.

PLAYING the game was fabulously expensive; it had to be to make it profitable for the Vinzz to run it. Those odd creatures from Altair's seventh planet cared nothing for the welfare of the completely alien human beings; all they wanted was to feather their own pockets with interstellar credits, so that they could return to Vinau and buy many slaves. For, on Vinau, bodies were of little account, and so to them zarquil was the equivalent of the terrestrial game musical chairs. Which was why they came to Terra to make profits —

there has never been big money in musical chairs as such.

When the zarquil operators were apprehended, which was not frequent — as they had strange powers, which, not being definable, were beyond the law — they suffered their sentences with equanimity. No Earth court could give an effective prison sentence to a creature whose life spanned approximately two thousand terrestrial years. And capital punishment had become obsolete on Terra, which very possibly saved the terrestrials embarrassment, for it was not certain that their weapons could kill the Vinzz . . . or whether, in fact, the Vinzz merely expired after a period of years out of sheer boredom. Fortunately, because trade was more profitable than war, there had always been peace between Vinau and Terra, and, for that reason, Terra could not bar the entrance of apparently respectable citizens of a friendly planet.

The taxi driver took the fat man to one of the rather seedy locales in which the zarquil games were usually found, for the Vinzz attempted to conduct their operations with as much unobtrusiveness as was possible. But the front door swung open on an interior that lacked the opulence of the usual Vinoz set-up; it was downright shabby, the dim olive light hinting of squalor rather than forbidden pleasures. That was the trouble in these smaller towns — you ran greater risks of getting involved in games where the players had not been carefully screened.

The Vinoz games were usually clean, because that paid off better, but, when profits were lacking, the Vinzz were capable of sliding off into darkside practices. Naturally the small-town houses were more likely to have trouble in making ends meet, because everybody in the parish knew everybody else far too well.

The fat man wondered whether that had been his quarry's motive in coming to such desolate, off-trail places — hoping that eventually disaster would hit the one who pursued him. Somehow, such a plan seemed too logical for the man he was haunting.

However, beggars could not be choosers. The fat man paid off the heli-driver and entered the zarquil house. "One?" the small green creature in the slightly frayed robe asked.

"One," the fat man answered.

III

THE WOULD-BE thief fled down the dark alley, with the hot bright rays from the stranger's gun lancing out after him in flamboyant but futile patterns. The stranger, a thin young

man with delicate, angular features, made no attempt to follow. Instead, he bent over to examine Gabriel Lockard's form, appropriately outstretched in the gutter. "Only weighted out," he muttered, "he'll be all right. Whatever possessed you two to come out to a place like this?"

"I really think Gabriel *must* be possessed . . ." the girl said, mostly to herself. "I had no idea of the kind of place it was going to be until he brought me here. The others were bad, but this is even worse. It almost seems as if he went around looking for trouble, doesn't it?"

"It does indeed," the stranger agreed, coughing a little. It was growing colder and, on this world, the cities had no domes to protect them from the climate, because it was Earth and the air was breathable and it wasn't worth the trouble of fixing up.

The girl looked closely at him. "You look different, but you *are* the same man who pulled us out of that aircar crash, aren't you? And before that the man in the gray suit? And before that . . . ?"

The young man's cheekbones protruded as he smiled. "Yes, I'm all of them."

"Then what they say about the zarquil games is true? There are people who go around changing their bodies like — like hats?" Automatically she reached to adjust the expensive bit of blue synthetic on her moon-pale hair, for she was always conscious of her appearance; if she had not been so before marriage, Gabriel would have taught her that.

HE smiled again, but coughed instead of speaking.

"But why do you do it? *Why!* Do you like it? Or is it because of Gabriel?" She was growing a little frantic; there was menace here and she could not understand it nor determine whether or not she was included in its scope. "Do you want to keep him from recognizing you; is that it?"

"Ask him."

"He won't tell me; he never tells me anything. We just keep running. I didn't recognize it as running at first, but now I realize that's what we've been doing ever since we were married. And running from you, I think?"

There was no change of expression on the man's gaunt face, and she wondered how much control he had over a body that, though second- or third- or fourth-hand, must be new to him. How well could he make it respond? What was it like to step into another person's casing? But she must not let herself think that way or she would find herself looking for a zarquil game. It would be one way of escaping Gabriel, but not, she thought, the

best way; her body was much too good a one to risk so casually.

IT WAS beginning to snow. Light, feathery flakes drifted down on her husband's immobile body. She pulled her thick coat — of fur taken from some animal who had lived and died light-years away — more closely about herself. The thin young man began to cough again.

Overhead a tiny star seemed to detach itself from the pale flat disk of the Moon and hurl itself upward — one of the interstellar ships embarking on its long voyage to distant suns. She wished that somehow she could be on it, but she was here, on this solitary old world in a barren solar system, with her unconscious husband and a strange man who followed them, and it looked as if here she would stay . . . all three of them would stay. . .

"If you're after Gabriel, planning to hurt him," she asked, "why then do you keep helping him?"

"I am not helping *him*. And he knows that."

"You'll change again tonight, won't you?" she babbled. "You always change after you . . . meet us? I think I'm beginning to be able to identify you now, even when you're . . . wearing a new body; there's something about you that doesn't change."

"Too bad he got married," the young man said. "I could have followed him for an eternity and he would never have been able to pick me out from the crowd. Too bad he got married anyway," he added, his voice less impersonal, "for your sake."

She had come to the same conclusion in her six months of marriage, but she would not admit that to an outsider. Though this man was hardly an outsider; he was part of their small family group — as long as she had known Gabriel, so long he must have known her. And she began to suspect that he was even more closely involved than that.

"Why must you change again?" she persisted, obliquely approaching the subject she feared. "You have a pretty good body there. Why run the risk of getting a bad one?"

"This isn't a good body," he said. "It's diseased. Sure, nobody's supposed to play the game who hasn't passed a thorough medical examination. But in the places to which your husband has been leading me, they're often not too particular, as long as the player has plenty of foliage."

"How — long will it last you?"

"Four or five months, if I'm careful." He smiled. "But don't worry, if that's what you're doing; I'll get it passed on before then. It'll be expensive — that's all.

Bad landing for the guy who gets it, but then it was tough on me too, wasn't it?"

"But how did you get into this . . . pursuit?" she asked again. "And why are you doing it?" People didn't have any traffic with Gabriel Lockard for fun, not after they got to know him. And this man certainly should know him better than most.

"Ask your husband."

The original Gabriel Lockard looked down at the prostrate, snow-powdered figure of the man who had stolen his body and his name, and stirred it with his toe. "I'd better call a cab — he might freeze to death."

He signaled and a cab came.

"Tell him, when he comes to," he said to the girl as he and the driver lifted the heavy form of her husband into the helicar, "that I'm getting pretty tired of this." He stopped for a long spell of coughing. "Tell him that sometimes I wonder whether cutting off my nose wouldn't, in the long run, be most beneficial for my face."

"SORRY," the Vinzz said impersonally, in English that was perfect except for the slight dampening of the sibilants, "but I'm afraid you cannot play."

"Why not?" The emaciated young man began to put on his clothes.

"You know why. Your body is worthless. And this is a reputable house."

"But I have plenty of money." The young man coughed. The Vinzz shrugged. "I'll pay you twice the regular fee."

The green one shook his head. "Regrettably, I do mean what I say. This game is really clean."

"In a town like this?"

"That is the reason we can afford to be honest." The Vinzz' tendrils quivered in what the man had come to recognize as amusement through long, but necessarily superficial acquaintance with the Vinzz. His heavy robe of what looked like moss-green velvet, but might have been velvet-green moss, encrusted with oddly faceted alien jewels, swung with him.

"We do a lot of business here," he said unnecessarily, for the whole set-up spelled wealth far beyond the dreams of the man, and he was by no means poor when it came to worldly goods. "Why don't you try another town where they're not so particular?"

The young man smiled wryly. Just his luck to stumble on a sunny game. He never liked to risk following his quarry in the same configuration. And even though only the girl had actually seen him this time, he wouldn't feel at ease until he had made

the usual body-shift. Was he changing because of Gabriel, he wondered, or was he using his own discoverment and identification simply as an excuse to cover the fact that none of the bodies that fell to his lot ever seemed to fit him? Was he activated solely by revenge or as much by the hope that in the hazards of the game he might, impossible though it now seemed, some day win another body that approached perfection as nearly as his original casing had?

He didn't know. However, there seemed to be no help for it now; he would have to wait until they reached the next town, unless the girl, seeing him reappear in the same guise, would guess what had happened and tell her husband. He himself had been a fool to admit to her that the hulk he inhabited was a sick one; he still couldn't understand how he could so casually have entrusted her with so vital a piece of information.

THE VINZZ had been locking antennae with another of his kind. Now they detached, and the first approached the man once more. "There is, as it happens, a body available for a private game," he lisped. "No questions to be asked or answered. All I can tell you is that it is in good health."

The man hesitated. "But unable to pass the screening?" he murmured aloud. "A criminal then."

The green one's face — if you could call it a face — remained impassive.

"Male?"

"Of course," the Vinzz said primly. His kind did have certain ultimate standards to which they adhered rigidly, and one of those was the curious tabu against mixed games, strictly enforced even though it kept them from tapping a vast source of potential players. There had also never been a recorded instance of humans' and extraterrestrials' exchanging identities, but whether that was the result of tabu or biological impossibility, no one could tell.

It might merely be prudence on the Vinzz' part — if it had ever been proved that an alien life-form had "desecrated" a human body, Earthmen would clamor for war . . . for on this planet humanity held its self-bestowed purity of birthright dear — and the Vinzz, despite being unquestionably the stronger, were pragmatic pacifists. It had been undoubtedly some rabid member of the anti-alien groups active on Terra who had started the rumor that the planetary slogan of Vinau was, "Don't beat 'em; cheat 'em."

"It would have to be something pretty nuclear for the other guy to take such a risk." The man rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "How much?"

"Thirty thousand credits."

"Why, that's three times the usual rate!"

"The other will pay five times the usual rate."

"Oh, all right," the delicate young man gave in. It was a terrific risk he was agreeing to take, because, if the other was a criminal, he himself would, upon assuming the body, assume responsibility for all the crimes it had committed. But there was nothing else he could do.

HE LOOKED at himself in the mirror and found he had a fine new body; tall and strikingly handsome in a dark, coarse-featured way. Nothing to match the one he had lost, in his opinion, but there were probably many people who might find this one preferable. No identification in the pockets, but it wasn't necessary; he recognized the face. Not that it was a very famous or even notorious one, but the dutchman was a careful student of the "wanted" fax that had decorated public buildings from time immemorial, for he was ever mindful of the possibility that he might one day find himself trapped unwittingly in the body of one of the men depicted there. And he knew that this particular man, though not an important criminal in any sense of the word, was one whom the police had been ordered to burn on sight. The abolishing of capital punishment could not abolish the necessity for self-defense, and the man in question was not one who would let himself be captured easily, nor whom the police intended to capture easily.

This might be a lucky break for me after all, the new tenant thought, as he tried to adjust himself to the body. It, too, despite its obvious rude health, was not a very comfortable fit. *I can do a lot with a hulk like this. And maybe I'm cleverer than the original owner; maybe I'll be able to get away with it.*

IV

"LOOK, GABE," the girl said, "don't try to fool me! I know you too well. And I know you have that man's — the real Gabriel Lockard's — body." She put unnecessary stardust on her nose as she watched her husband's reflection in the dressing table mirror.

Lockard — Lockard's body, at any rate — sat up and felt his unshaven chin. "That what he tell you?"

"No, he didn't tell me anything

really — just suggested I ask you whatever I want to know. But why else should he guard somebody he obviously hates the way he hates you? Only because he doesn't want to see his body spoiled."

"It *is* a pretty good body, isn't it?" Gabe flexed softening muscles and made no attempt to deny her charge; very probably he was relieved at having someone with whom to share his secret.

"Not as good as it must have been," the girl said, turning and looking at him without admiration. "Not if you keep on the way you're coursing. Gabe, why don't you . . . ?"

"Give it back to him, eh?" Lockard regarded his wife appraisingly. "You'd like that, wouldn't you? You'd be *his* wife then. That would be nice — a sound mind in a sound body. But don't you think that's a little more than you deserve?"

"I wasn't thinking about that, Gabe," she said truthfully enough, for she hadn't followed the idea to its logical conclusion. "Of course I'd go with you," she went on, now knowing she lied, "when you got your . . . old body back."

Sure, she thought, *I'd keep going with you to farjeen houses and thrill-mills.* Actually she had accompanied him to a thrill-mill only once, and from then on, despite all his threats, she had refused to go with him again. But that once had been enough; nothing could ever wash that experience from her mind or her body.

"You wouldn't be able to get your old body back, though, would you?" she went on. "You don't know where it's gone, and neither, I suppose, does he?"

"I don't want to know!" he spat. "I wouldn't want it if I could get it back. Whoever it adhered to probably killed himself as soon as he looked in a mirror." He swung long legs over the side of his bed. "Christ, anything would be better than that! You can't imagine what a hulk I had!"

"Oh, yes, I can," she said incautiously. "You must have had a body to match your character. Pity you could only change one."

HE ROSE from the bed and struck her right on the mouth. Although he hadn't used his full strength, the blow was painful nonetheless. She could feel the red of her lipstick become mixed with a warmer, liquid red that trickled slowly down her freshly powdered chin. She wouldn't cry, because he liked that, but crumpled to the ground and lay still. If, experience had taught her, she pretended to be hurt, he wouldn't hit her again. Only sometimes it was hard to remember that at the actual moment of hurt and indignity. He was too

afraid of prison — a tangible prison. And perhaps, to do him credit, he didn't want to deface his own property.

He sat down on the edge of the bed again and lit a milgot stick. "Oh, get up, Helen. You know I didn't hit you that hard."

"Did you have to beat him up to get him to change bodies?" she asked from the floor.

"No." He laughed reminiscently. "I just got him drunk. We were friends, so it was a cinch. He was my only friend; everybody else hated me because of my appearance." His features contorted. "What made him think he was so damn much better than other people that he could afford to like me? Served him right for being so noble."

She stared at the ceiling — it was so old its very fabric was beginning to crack — and said nothing.

"He didn't even realize what he had here —" Lockard tapped his broad chest with complacence — "until it was too late. Took it for granted. Sickened me to see him taking the body for granted when I couldn't take mine that way. People used to shrink from me. Girls . . ."

She sat up. "Give me a milgot, Gabe."

He lighted one and handed it to her. "For Christ's sake, Helen, I gave him more than he had a right to expect. I was too goddamn noble myself. I was well-milled; I didn't have to leave half of my holdings in my own name — I could have transferred them all to his. If I had, then he wouldn't have had the folio to hound me all over this planet or to other planets, if I'd had the nerve to shut myself up on a spaceship, knowing he probably would be shut up on it with me." He smiled. "Of course he won't hurt me; that's the one compensation. Damage me, and he damages himself."

"But it's your life he saves, too," she reminded him.

"My life wouldn't ever have been in danger if it hadn't been for this continual persecution — it's driving me out of this dimension! I planned to start a new life with this body," he pleaded, anxious for belief and, as a matter of fact, she believed him; almost everybody has good intentions and there was no reason to except even such a one as Gabriel Lockard, or whatever he was originally named.

"It was my appearance that got me mixed up," he went on. "Given half a chance I could have straightened out — gone to Proxima Centauri, maybe, and then out to one of the frontier planets. Made something of myself up there. But nobody ever gave me a chance. Now, as long as he

follows me, there's nothing I can do except run and try to hide and know all the time I can't escape — I'm already in the trap."

"What can he do if you stay and face him?"

"I don't know — that's the hell of it. But he's smart. Somehow he'll lure me into another game. I don't know how, but that must be what he has in mind. What else could it be?"

"What else indeed?" Helen asked, smiling up at the ceiling.

THE MILGOT vanished in his fingers and he took another. "It'd take time for him to arrange any kind of private game set-up, though, and as long as I keep on the move, he won't be able to create anything. Unless he runs into a floating zarquil game." He smiled mirthlessly. "And he couldn't. Too much machinery, I understand. . . Lucky he doesn't seem to have connections, the way I have," Lockard boasted. "I have connections all over the goddamn planet. Transferred them when I transferred my holdings."

She got up, seated herself on the vanity bench, and took up a brush, which she ran absently over the pale hair that shimmered down to her paler shoulders. "So we keep running all over the planet. . . What would you do if I left you, Gabriel?"

"Kill you," he said without hesitation. "Slowly. Even if I have to put this precious hulk of mine in jeopardy. And you wouldn't like that. Neither would your boy friend."

"Stop calling him my —"

"Wait a minute — maybe there is an escape hatch!" His blue eyes sharpened unbecomingly. "He can't kill me, but there's nothing to stop my killing him."

"How about the police?" She tried to speak calmly as she passed the brush up and down, sometimes not even touching her hair. "The body you have won't be any good to you with them looking for it. And you're not a professional exterminator, Gabe — you wouldn't be able to get away with it."

"I can hire somebody else to do the killing. Remember I still have plenty of foliage. Maybe I didn't leave him exactly half of my property, but, what the hell, I left him enough."

"How will you recognize him?" she asked, half-turning, fearfully. "He'll have a new body, you know."

"You'll recognize him, Helen — you said you could." At that moment she could have wrapped her own hair tightly around her white throat and strangled herself; she was so appalled by her own witless treachery.

He dragged her to her feet.

"Aah, moonbeam, you know I didn't mean to hurt you. It's just that this whole crazy pattern's driving me out of this world. Once I get rid of that life-form, you'll see, I'll be a different man."

As his arms tightened around her, she wondered what it would be like, a different man in the same body.

V

"WHAT MAKES you think *I* would do a thing like that?" the little lawyer asked apprehensively, not meeting the bland blue eyes of the man who faced him across the old-fashioned flat-top desk. It was an even more outmoded office than most, but that did not necessarily indicate a low professional status; lawyers were great ones for tradition expressed in terms of out-of-date furniture. As for the dust that lay all over despite the air-conditioning . . . well, that was inescapable, for Earth was a dusty planet.

"Oh, not you yourself personally, of course," Gabriel Lockard — as the false one will continue to be called, since the dutchman had another name at the moment — said. "But you know how to put me in touch with someone who can."

"Nonsense. I don't know who gave you such libelous information, sir, but I must ask you to leave my office before I call —"

"It was Pat Ortiz who gave me the information," Lockard said softly. "He also told me a lot of other interesting things about you, Gorman."

Gorman paled. "I'm a respectable attorney."

"Maybe you are now; maybe not. This isn't the kind of town that breeds respectability. But you certainly weren't sunny side up when Ortiz knew you. And he knew you well."

The lawyer licked his lips. "Give me a chance, will you?"

Lockard flushed. "Chance! Everybody rates a chance but me. Can't you see, I am giving you a chance. Get me somebody to follow my pattern, and I promise you Ortiz won't talk."

Gorman slipped the plastic shells from his face and rubbed the pale watery eyes underneath. "But how can I get you a man to do . . . the thing you want done? I have no connections like that."

"I'm sure you can make the right connections. Take your time about it, though; I'm in no hurry. I'm planning to adhere to this locale for a while."

"How about this man you want . . . put out of the way?" Gorman suggested hopefully. "How can you be sure he won't leave?"

Gabriel laughed. "He'll stay as long as I do."

The little lawyer took a deep breath. "Mr. Lockard, I'm sorry, but I'm afraid I really cannot do anything for you."

Gabe rose. "Okay," he said softly. "If that's your pattern, I'll just put a call through to Ortiz." He turned to go.

"Wait a minute!" the lawyer cried.

Lockard stopped.

"Well?"

Gorman swallowed. "Possibly I may be able to do something for you, after all . . . I just happened to have heard Jed Carmody is in town."

Gabriel looked at him inquiringly.

"Oh . . . I thought you might have heard the name. He's a killer, I understand, a professional exterminator . . . on the run right now. But this is his headquarters — I'm told — and he probably would come here. And he might be short on folio. Naturally, I've never had any dealings with him myself."

"Naturally," Gabe mocked.

"But I'll see what I can do." Gorman's voice was pleading. "You'll wait, Mr. Lockard, won't you? It may be a little while before I can find out where he is. This isn't —" his voice thinned — "at all my type of pattern, you know."

"I'll wait . . . a reasonable length of time."

The door closed behind him. Descending pneumo tubes hissed outside. The little lawyer rose and went to the window — a flat expanse of transparent plastic set immovably into the wall of the building, an old building, an old town, an old planet. As he watched the street below, a faint half-smile curved his almost feminine mouth. He went back to the desk and punched a code on the vidiphone.

GABRIEL crossed the street to the little cafe with the gold letters FOR HUMANS ONLY embedded in the one-way glass front; this was a town that adhered rigidly to the ancient privileges of the indigenous species. He entered as the shrillness of a vidiphone bell cut through the babble inside without in any way checking it. After a moment, his eyes grew accustomed to the dimness and he could see his wife waiting at a table near the entrance, daintily peeling a tigi fruit.

"Well," she asked as she put a plump pink section into her mouth, "did you hire your killer?"

"Shhh, not so loud!" He threw himself into the chair next to hers. "Do you want me to get into trouble? . . . And I wouldn't put it past you," he continued without waiting for an answer. "Remember, it's your boy friend's body that gets into trouble."

"He's not my boy friend."

A waiter beckoned from the vidiphone booth to someone sitting in the dark shadows at the rear of the restaurant.

"Where is he?" Gabriel exclaimed suddenly. "He must be here somewhere. Tell me which he is, Helen?"

His hand gripped her arm cruelly, as he swung her around on her chair to face each part of the room. "Is it that guy over there? . . . That one? . . . That one?"

She could not repress a start of surprise as her eyes met those of the thin-featured young man entering the vidiphone booth. He returned her gaze with somber interest.

Gabe relaxed. "So that's the one, eh? Not very formidable. Looks the way he always should have looked." He lit a milgot. "I'll get Gorman to tip off the zarquil boys — only one game in this parish, I'm told — that that lifeform's not to be allowed to play; I'll make any loss good out of my own pocket. That'll keep him onstage for the nonce. He won't leave to get himself fixed up somewhere else as long as I stay. And I'm going to stay . . . to the bitter end." He smiled lovingly to himself.

But it's not the right man, Helen thought gladly. *He did manage to change, after all. Gabe has the wrong man.* She felt a little sorry for the unknown and doomed individual who inhabited the delicate, angular body, but it was so close to death anyhow that the immediate threat didn't matter. And Gabriel — the real Gabriel — was safe.

VI

THE emaciated young man entered Gorman's office and locked the door behind him with an electroseal. "Disembodiment," he identified himself.

"So you did get a new body, Jed," the lawyer remarked affably. "Very good packaging. Makes you look like a poet or something."

"Good as a disguise, maybe, but one hell of a lousy hulk." The young man hurled himself into the chair by the desk. Even Gorman winced at the cruel treatment accorded such obvious fragility. "Gimme a milgot, Les. This thing —" he indicated his body with contempt — "is shot to Polaris. Won't last more than a few months. Some bargain I got."

Gorman lit a stick himself. "The guy who got your body didn't get such a bargain either," he murmured through a cloud of purple smoke.

"At least he'll live. If he's lucky. I wish he'd hurry and get himself picked up, though, so I

could collect the folio and jet off. Can't go after it now. Hounds will be sniffing after anybody gravitating around the place where I've stashed it until they're sure they have me. They don't know where the money is exactly, of course, or they'd soak it up, but they've got an idea of the general sector."

"Want me to pick it up for you, Jed?" the lawyer asked, his pale, flickering eyes brushing across the young man's dark intense ones.

"Oh, sure. All I need is for you to know where it is and all I'd see would be your rocket trail." The young man leaned across the expanse of littered steel. "Or *do* you know where it is, Les?" he asked softly. "Do you know where it is and are you just hibernating until I'm safely out of the way?"

In spite of himself, Gorman could not help moving back. "Don't be a fool, Jed," he said in a voice that was several tones higher. "If I knew where it was . . . well, you're not very frightening in your present embodiment, you know."

"Don't be too sure of that, Gorman. And you were always yellow; anybody could frighten you." He began to laugh shrilly. "Hey, that's good. Get it? Any body, see?"

The lawyer did not join in the mirth. "How are you fixed for cash?" he asked abruptly.

THE YOUNG man's face split in a sardonic grin. "Why do you think I risked public communion with a darkside character like you, Les? I shot my wad making the shift. I could use a little loan. You know I have millions stashed away," the young man said angrily as Gorman remained silent. "I'll pay you as soon as the hounds take the chump who's leasing my hulk."

"Maybe you can earn some money." Gorman toyed with a paperweight. "Did you get a look at that big blond guy in the cafe — the one I told you about on the phone?"

"Yeah. Nice life-form he had with him. I wouldn't mind being in that body."

"Seems he wants somebody exterminated. And I told him I heard Jed Carmody was in the parish and might be interested."

The young man sprang to his feet, furious. "You *what?*"

"Turn your antigravs off. I told him Jed Carmody was in the parish. Are you Jed Carmody?"

The other sat down and exhaled heavily. "You're on course — I'm nobody just now."

"Any identification come with the package?"

"Naah, what'd you expect? . . . But why tell anyone that Jed

Carmody's hitting the locality?"

"I thought you might be interested in picking up a little free-falling foliage."

The young man shook his head impatiently. "Risk having this hulk heated up for a half-credit crime? Don't be an alien, Gorman. I'm going to hit subsoil until this other life-form gets collected by the hounds."

"Thought you might like to do it to help me out," Gorman murmured.

The other man stared. "How do you fit into the pattern?" Gorman shrugged. "Oh, I get it: this guy's putting the barometer on you?"

Gorman nodded.

"Bad landing, counselor. But you don't seriously expect . . . ? Hey!" The wide-set eyes glistened darkly. "I got it! Why don't you get this guy who's got my hulk to make the flight? Send somebody out to magnetize him like you thought he was the real Carmody, see?"

GORMAN looked hopeful for a moment; then shook his thin-haired head. "No reason to think the man is an extralegal."

"Anyone who finds himself in my hulk damn well has to be if he wants to stay out of the sardine box. . . Look, what's the first thing he's going to want to do when he finds out what he's been stuck with? Go to another parish and hop hulks, right? And he'll need plenty of foliage to do it."

"Maybe he has money," Gorman suggested wearily.

"No fuel lost finding out." The young man rubbed his hands together gleefully. "If he takes on the flight, though, see that he gets my flash, huh? Rosy up the picture."

"Maybe he can kill whoever this Lockard has in mind without getting picked up by the police. Such things have happened; otherwise you wouldn't have been able to run around loose so long, Jed."

"An amateur? Not a chance! Besides, just to make sure, little. . ." He stopped in the act of tapping his chest. "Say, I don't have a name, do I? What's a good epithet for me, Les? Something with class."

The lawyer studied the pale, bony face for a moment or two. "How about John Keats?" he suggested. "Simple and appropriate."

The other man thought. "Yeah, I like that. John Keats. Plain, but not like John Smith. Subtle. I'll buy it. Okay, so you think I'm going to take my view-finder off the fake Carmody? I'm going to adhere to that life-form closer than Mary's lamb. So when he knocks off whoever the other guy wants novaed, I can yell doggie. Then the hounds get him — with

my flash on him and all, they'll never have the nebula of a notion that they don't have all of me. . . I pick up the foliage and rock out to some place where I can buy me a new jewel case, no questions asked. Don't fret, Gorman — you'll get your nibble. I've never played the game with you, have I?"

Instead of answering, Gorman asked a question of his own. "Kind of hard on the other guy, isn't it?"

"He rates it for sticking me with a piece of statuary like this. Look at it this way, Les — in his own hulk he would've died; this way he's got a chance to live. Yeah, get him to make the flight, Les. You can charm the juice out of a lemon when you want to; it's your line of evil. And don't let on you know he's not the genuine article."

"I won't," Gorman sighed. "I only hope I can persuade him to take on the flight. Don't forget it's important to me too, Jed — uh, John."

"Make planetfall, then," John Keats said. "So long, Les."

"Good-by, Johnny."

VII

HELEN was brushing her long creamy hair at the dressing table when there came a tap at the door to the living room of the suite — a tap so light that it could have been someone accidentally brushing past in the corridor outside. Gabriel sprang up from the bed where he had been lolling, watching her and stood for a moment poised on the balls of his feet, until the knock was repeated more emphatically. He started toward the other room.

"But who could be knocking at the door at this hour?" she asked. "It's almost one . . . Gabe, do be careful."

He halted and looked back at her suspiciously. "Why do you say that? You know you don't care what happens to me?" That last was a question rather than a statement and had a plaintive quaver which failed to touch her. Once she had still been able to feel some compassion; now, nothing he said or did could arouse more than fear and disgust.

"If somebody knocks you over the head when you open the door," she murmured, smiling at her own image, "then who will be there to protect me?"

A choked sound came from the back of the man's throat. He turned toward her, his fists clenched. She braced herself for the blow, but then the knock came for the third time and her husband reluctantly continued on into the living room, letting the door shut behind him. She rose and pushed it open a little. She

had a pretty good idea of who might be expected, but was not especially perturbed, for she knew the real Gabriel Lockard, in whatever guise he might be now, was safe from her husband. And she was curious to see what the exterminator looked like.

The door to the corridor was out of her line of vision, but she could hear it as it opened. "Lockard?" a deep, husky voice whispered. "Gorman sent me."

"Come in, Mr. Carmody. You *are* Carmody?"

"Shhh," the husky voice warned. "If you get me into trouble, I'm not going to be able to complete your pattern for you, am I?"

"Sorry — I wasn't thinking. Come on in."

A heavy tread shook the ancient floorboards, and presently the man responsible for it came into the girl's sight. He was a huge creature, bigger even than Gabriel, with dark hair growing low to a point on his forehead, and a full-lipped sensual face. Then, as he spoke, as he moved, she knew who he was. She pressed close against the wall of the bedroom, her slender shoulders shaking, her handkerchief stuffed into her mouth, so that the sound of her wild, irrepressible laughter would not reach her husband's ears.

"Sit down, Carmody," Gabriel said cordially, as he handed the newcomer a glass, "and make yourself comfortable." There was a brief, rather awkward silence. "Well," Gabriel went on, with a smile that would have been thoroughly ingratiating to anyone who hadn't known him, "I don't suppose I have to cruise around the asteroids with you?"

"No," Carmody replied, looking speculatively toward the bedroom door. "No, you don't."

GABRIEL followed the direction of his gaze. "Worried about somebody overhearing? There's only my wife in there. She's listening, all right, but she won't talk. Come in, Helen."

Carmody rose automatically as she came in, his dark eyes following every line of her long, smooth body in its close-fitting, though opaque, negligee of smoke-gray silk — a fabric which, through extreme scarcity, had come into fashion again.

"Sit down," Gabriel ordered brusquely. "We're not formal here."

Carmody sat, trying not to stare at the girl. She began to mix herself a drink. "Moonbeam," her husband said, "you won't tell anybody about this little peace conference, will you?"

"No," she said, looking at Carmody. "I won't talk." She lifted her glass. "Here's to murder!"

"Helen," Gabriel insisted, unable to rationalize the vague uneasiness that was nagging at him, "you won't dare say anything to anybody? Because, if you do, you'll regret it!"

"I said I wouldn't talk. Have I ever broken my word?"

"You've never had the chance." But it would be incredible that she should have the temerity to betray him. After all, she was his wife. She should stick to him out of gratitude and self-interest, for he was rich, at least, and he wasn't exactly repulsive. And he'd been good to her. All men lost their tempers at times.

"Let's get down to business, huh?" Carmody said harshly. "Whom do you want knocked off?"

"I don't know his name," Gabriel replied, "but I can describe him."

After he had finished doing so, there was a small pause. Carmody was silent. Helen turned back to the bar; her face was concealed from the men. Her body shook a little. Lockard thought she was crying, and wondered again whether his confidence in her was entirely justified.

"I think maybe I know the guy," Carmody went on. "Only been around the — the parish a couple of days, if it's the life-form I mean."

"Must be the one," Lockard told him. "Think you can do it?"

"A cinch," Carmody assured him.

AS HELEN Lockard emerged from the door marked *Females; Human and Humanoid,* and rounded the turn in the corridor, a brawny arm reached out of a vidiphone booth and yanked her inside. The girl gave a startled cry, then relaxed. "Oh, it's you; you gave me a turn."

"You're not afraid? You know who I am, then?"

She nodded. "You're the real Gabriel Lockard." His big body was pressing hers in the close-fitting confines of the booth. In some ways it could be considered more attractive than her husband's. "Why are you hiding here?"

"I'm not hiding, I'm lurking," he explained. "Wouldn't do for me to appear too openly. The police — that is, the hounds — are on Carmody's trail. I don't want them to find me."

"Oh." She pulled away from him. She mustn't let her interest be aroused in a body so soon to be discarded.

"I've been looking for an opportunity to talk to you since last night," he growled, the only way he could gentle a voice as deep as the thick vocal cords of the body produced. "But your

husband is always around. . . You haven't told him who I was, have you?"

She shook her head slowly, reproachfully. "I wouldn't do that. I wouldn't have told him about the other one either, but I . . . well, I guess I jumped or something when I caught sight of him and Gabe mistakenly picked it up."

There was a tense silence as they stood almost pressed against one another. "It's easy to see how you got into Carmody's body," she went on, speaking a little too rapidly, "but how did you happen to get into this particular line of evil?"

"Simple — that lawyer your husband went to see sent scouts out to have Carmody picked up. And they flushed me. Naturally I would have turned down the job if he hadn't happened to mention for whom it was. . ."

"That other man is the real Carmody now, isn't he?" She looked up at him. Her eyes were gray or green; he couldn't determine which. "So it doesn't matter even if he does get killed."

"But how can he get killed?" the big man reminded her with a gentleness completely out of keeping with the ferocity of his appearance. "I'm not a killer, please believe me — I have never killed anybody and I hope I never have to."

SHE HAD never thought about who he was — who he had been — before he started playing the game. Gabriel Lockard, of course. But what had Gabriel Lockard been? Surely not the narco-filled, fear-ridden dilettante the man — the body, at least — was now. He couldn't possibly have been or the hulk wouldn't have stood up so well under the treatment it was getting from its current tenant. But all that didn't seem to matter. All she wanted was the rightful man in his rightful body, and that seemed almost impossible of achievement.

"What do you intend to do?" she asked, almost sharply.

"I don't know," he said. "By agreeing to kill this — John Keats he calls himself — I felt I had the situation in hand. And I suppose I have, in a sense. But the end result is a stalemate. I've been following him around just to make everything look on course for your husband until I decide what to do. Sometimes, though, I get the curious feeling that Keats is following me."

"Maybe for the same reason you've been following Gabriel?" Helen touched his arm gingerly; it was more muscular than her husband's. "This isn't a bad body, you know — maybe he sets some store by it."

"But that doesn't make sense!" he said, impatiently shaking off

her hand, not wanting her to like this criminal's body that, despite its superficial attractiveness, fitted him no more easily than any of the others. "Logically, it seems to me, he should try to get as far away from his own hulk as possible. . . Duck! Here comes your husband!"

He blocked her with his wide body as Gabriel Lockard's swung past the booth, its perfect features marred by a frown. "Okay," he whispered, as Lockard rounded the corner, "rock back to your table and act angry because he's late."

He watched until Gabriel had retraced his steps and gone back to the hotel dining room; then sauntered in the same direction. From the next booth, John Keats stared sullenly after the departing figure. He had been straining his ears, but the booths were effectively soundproofed; all he could learn was that the stranger had developed some kind of quick understanding with Lockard's wife and, knowing the potentialities of his former packaging, this saddened rather than surprised the young man.

He punched Gorman's number without turning on the visual. "Disembodied," he said curtly. "Look here, Gorman, I've been wondering — just who is this life-form supposed to be sending to the joyful planetoids?"

"I haven't any idea," Gorman's voice said curiously. "Didn't seem any of my evil, so I didn't ask. And I don't suppose Lockard would have told me. Why do you want to know?"

"Because I don't see him taking a fix on anybody except Lockard's wife and I don't hold with exterminating females except maybe by accident. Besides, I kind of radiate for that tigi myself."

The lawyer's voice definitely showed interest. "Isn't there anybody else he could possibly be after?"

"Well —" John Keats gave a sick laugh — "there's only one other possible flight pattern. It's kind of extradimensional, but sometimes I think maybe he's after me."

There was a long pause. "Absurd," the little lawyer said thoughtfully. "Absurd. He doesn't even know who you are."

Pale blood surfaced under the young man's transparent skin. "I never thought of that, but you're wrong. He does. He's got to. It was a private game." His voice thickened and he had to stop for coughing. "When you told him he was Jed Carmody, naturally he could figure out who was squatting in his hulk."

"But magnetizing him was your own idea, Johnny," Gorman pointed out gently. "Besides, that's no reason he should be

after you; what's the percentage in it? And, anyhow, where does Lockard fit into this?" He seemed to be asking the question of himself as much as of the other man.

"Yeah," John Keats muttered, "that's what I've got to find out."

"Me, too," Gorman half-whispered.

"What did you say?"

"I said tell me when you find out; I'm sort of curious myself."

VIII

"LOOK, Gorman," Carmody said, "I'm not working for you; I'm working for Lockard. What's the idea of sending for me this hour of the night?"

"Then why did you come this hour of the night when I asked you to?" the lawyer inquired, leaning back in his chair and smiling.

The big man hesitated and shrugged. "Can't say, myself. Curiosity, maybe. . . But you can hardly expect me to violate my employer's confidence?"

Gorman laughed. "You get your ideas from the viddies, don't you? Only don't forget that you're the villain, not the hero, of this piece, fellow-man."

Carmody, completely taken aback, stared at him — the little alien couldn't know! And, furthermore, he was mistaken — Carmody, Lockard, the dutchman, had done nothing wrong, committed no crime, violated no ethic. On the other hand, he had done nothing right either, nothing to help himself or any other. "What do you mean?" he finally temporized.

"Tell me this — Lockard hired you to kill the man who goes under the name of John Keats, didn't he?"

"Yes, but how did you know that?" He was beginning to have the same primitive fear of Gorman that he had of the Vinzz; only it was more natural for an extraterrestrial to have apparently supernatural powers.

"Keats told me — and Keats, of course, is the real Carmody."

"So you found out?"

"Found out!" Gorman laughed. "I knew it all along. Does a man keep any secrets from his lawyer?"

"If he's smart, he does." Carmody absently beat his hand on the desk. "This Keats isn't too smart, though, is he?"

"No . . . he isn't a very bright guy. But it was his idea that this would be a fine method of getting you out of the way. And not too bad an idea, either . . . You had to be disposed of, you know," he explained winningly. "And how nice to have hounds do it for us. Of course we had no idea of who your quarry was."

"I can see your point of view,"

Carmody said ironically. "But why tell me now?" And then he thought he saw the answer. "Are you afraid I'll really kill him?"

The lawyer shook his head and smiled back. "Afraid you really won't." He placed the tips of his fingers together. "I am prepared to double whatever Lockard is offering you to make sure that Keats, with Carmody inside him, is definitely put out of the way forever."

SO EVEN here there was no basis of trust — none of the reverse honor that legend commonly assigned to extralegals. Carmody got up. Even seated, he had towered above the lawyer. Standing, he was like a larger-than-life statue of doom — of doom, Gorman nervously hoped, pointing in the desired direction.

"And if I refuse?" Carmody asked.

Gorman moved his chair back uneasily. "I might persuade Keats that he could risk one murder in his present shape, if it was to insure his ultimate safety."

"Meaning it would be a good idea for him to kill me?"

"Meaning it would be an excellent idea for him to kill you."

"Look here, Gorman," Carmody said, in a low voice that gradually increased in volume. He could no longer restrain the anger that had been seething up in him for all the years of his wandering. "I've had enough of all this, hiding, running, shifting bodies and now hiring out as a killer. Because I'm an honest man. Maybe you've never seen one before, so take a good look at me. You may never have the chance again."

"I am looking and I see Jed Carmody. Not my idea of the prototype of honesty."

"But I don't feel like Jed Carmody."

"Tell that to the hounds." Gorman laughed uproariously. "By law, you're responsible for Carmody's crimes. Of course, if they put you away or — as they'd undoubtedly prefer — accidently exterminate you in the line of duty, and *then* suspect Carmody hulk-hopped, they might look around some more. But there wouldn't be any percentage in that for you, especially if you were dead."

"I know, I know," Carmody retorted impatiently. "You can't tell me anything I haven't told myself." He paused for a moment. "This is a good body, though," he added. "Almost as good as my old one."

Gorman raised his eyebrows. "You can't be referring to the corpus currently going by the epithet of John Keats?"

"The name was your idea, I take it. No, that wasn't my original body."

"Oh, so you're a dutchman, eh?

A thrill boy?" There was contempt, even from such as Gorman. "Getting a lot of free falls out of all this, are you?"

Carmody tried to ignore this, but he couldn't. It wasn't true, he told himself; he had suffered years of playing the game and derived no pleasure from those sufferings — no pleasure at all. But he would not stoop to argue with Gorman. "Maybe I can get away with this body to one of the frontier planets," he mused. "At least I can make a run for it; at least that would be a worthwhile kind of running."

"Brave words!" the lawyer sneered. "But rather risky to put into action. Don't you think the best thing to do would be just go ahead with the pattern as set? How much did Lockard offer you?"

"Half a million credits."

Gorman sucked in his breath. "You're lying, of course, but I'll match that. Carmody — Keats — has ten times that amount and maybe more hidden away where I can lay my hands on it as soon as I'm sure he's where he can't hurt me. It's worth half a million to me. And, in the remote instance that you're telling the truth, you can't turn down a million credits . . . whoever you are, dutchman!"

"Oh, can't I?" Carmody went to the door; then turned. "It may interest you to know that I'm worth a hundred times that amount and maybe more."

The lawyer laughed skeptically. "If you have enough money to buy your way, then why are you doing this?"

Carmody frowned. "You wouldn't understand . . . I'm not sure I understand myself." The door slammed behind him. Descending pneumos hissed.

"Just talking with his elbows," Gorman said comfortingly to himself. "He'll do it. He's got to do it." But he wasn't altogether convinced.

IX

AS CARMODY left the office building, John Keats' figure emerged from the shadows of a nearby doorway. He looked up at the golden rectangle of Gorman's window and then toward the direction in which Carmody had gone; and bit his lip irresolutely. After a moment's reflection, he chose to follow his old body. Somehow he didn't have much confidence in Gorman any more; not that he'd ever really trusted him. In their line of evil you couldn't afford to trust anybody. He had made a mistake. But it could still be rectified.

If the big man was aware of his tracker, he did not seem to care. He moved purposefully in

the direction of the hotel, scorning the helicabs that swooped down to proffer their services, striding through the brilliantly lit avenues gay with music and the dark alleys mournful with the whine of the farjeen wires as if they were all the same.

The hotel was on one of the avenues, because the Lockards always had only the best of whatever there was to be had. Carmody crossed the almost deserted lobby in swift strides and took the pneumo to the seventh floor. Knowing that his body could have only one objective in that place, Keats took the stairs to the basement.

Carmody sprang out of the pneumo exit and ran down the corridor to bang lustily on the intricately embossed metal door of the Lockards' suite. After a moment, the girl, again in negligee, opened it. Her green-gray eyes widened when she saw who the late visitor was, and she put a finger to her lips. "Shh, Gabe's asleep; let's not wake him unless it's necessary." She closed the door softly behind him. "What is it . . . Jed?"

He was so choked with excitement that he could hardly get the words out. "Helen; will you make a break with me for Proxima Centauri? They won't ask any questions there, if we can get there. And from Proxima we can go—"

"But your body?"

"The hell with my body." He gripped her arms with powerful hands. "You mean much more to me than that worthless hulk."

"But, Jed, Gabe'll never let us go . . . " Proxima Centauri—that had been Gabriel's dream, too . . .

His hands pressed so hard into her flesh, she knew there would be bruises on her skin; was she always doomed to fall in love with men who would leave marks on her? "Let him try to stop us. I'm bigger than he is, now."

She looked up at him. "You always were, darling. But he has influence, though he wouldn't need it; he could simply set the police on you."

"That's the chance we're going to have to take . . . But perhaps I'm asking too much. I haven't the right to ask you to take such risks," he added bitterly. "I was thinking only of myself, I see, not of you."

"Oh, no, Jed!"

"WHO'RE you talking to, Helen?" a drowsy voice asked from the bedroom. It was followed by the comely person of Gabriel himself, fastening his dressing gown. "Oh, hello, Carmody." His face lighted up avidly, all sleepiness vanishing like a spent milgot. "Did you do it already?"

"No, I didn't. And, what's more, I'm not going to do it!"

Lockard looked astonished. "But what's wrong? You said you would."

Carmody sighed. "Yes, I know I did. I was stalling. That's what I've always done — stalled, put things off, hesitated to make decisions. Well, I've made my decision now."

"You're not afraid of him?" Lockard said in a voice that was meant to be taunting and emerged as querulous. "A little pipsqueak like that Keats? Or maybe half a million credits isn't enough for you? Is that it?"

That was enough for the man whose emaciated body was torturedly cramped in the air-conditioning vent and further agonized by the strain of repressing the cough that sought to tear its way out of his chest. He had found out what he wanted to know and, as he inched his way back down to the basement, he was already making plans for getting even with all those he now knew to be enemies. It had been a conspiracy against him from the start; the hounds probably weren't even aware that he was in town. It was Gorman who had told him they knew of his general whereabouts — Gorman, the good friend who had suggested he change bodies, knowing that whatever hulk he wound up with was bound to be more vulnerable than his primal form. And Gorman would pay . . .

"More than enough," Carmody replied, as unaware of the fact that he had lost one-third of his audience as he had been that he was addressing three rather than two listeners. "Only I'm not a killer."

"But I understood you were supposed to be a professional exterminator?"

"Jed Carmody is a killer. Only I'm not Jed Carmody."

Lockard moved backward and stared at the still bigger man.

Lockard retreated still further. "You — you're him! You were all along!" He whirled on his wife. "And you knew, you double-crosser! Knew and didn't tell me! By God, I'll break every bone in your body!"

"Lay a hand on her and I'll break every bone in *my* body!" Lockard stopped where he was. "It doesn't mean anything to me any more, you see," Carmody explained. "I wanted it when I didn't have anything else. But now I have Helen. I could kill you, you know. As Carmody, an acknowledged exterminator, I have nothing to lose. But I'm letting you live, as a hostage for Helen . . . And, besides, as I've been busy trying to convince everybody all evening, I am *not* a murderer." He turned to the girl. *"Will* you

come with me to Proxima, Helen?"

"Y-yes, Jed," she said, looking apprehensively at her husband.

"Gather your packs. I'm going to the air office to make the arrangements." Carmody consulted his chronometer. "It's three o'clock. I should be back by eight or so. Get some sleep if you can."

Her wide frightened eyes turned again toward her husband.

"Here." Jed tossed her the gun Gorman had given him. "If he tries anything, use it."

"Yes, Jed. But . . . "

"Don't worry; I have another one."

The door slammed behind him. "Gimme that gun, you little tramp!" Lockard snarled, twisting it out of her flaccid hand.

X

CARMODY marched out of the hotel and turned left in the direction of the airstation which stayed open all night. He had walked a short distance when suddenly a high voice came out of the darkness behind him, "Not so fast, Mr. . . . Carmody," and a hard knob was pressed in his back.

"Mr. Keats, I believe," Carmody said, wondering why he wasn't frightened.

"Right." The other coughed at some length. "You thought you were pretty smart, didn't you, foisting me off with a hulk that wasn't only shopworn but hot?"

"Your intentions weren't exactly noble either, were they, Mr. Keats?"

"I want my frame back!"

Suddenly the idea came to Carmody, and so wonderful it was he could hardly throttle his voice down to calmness. "Shooting me won't help you get it back. In fact, it might make it rather difficult."

"You have your choice between going back to the zarquil house wiht me and switching or getting your current insides burned out."

Carmody exhaled a small hissing sigh that he hoped would not be recognized as obvious relief to the man behind him. "You'll have to pay. I haven't enough folio on me."

"I'll pay; I'll pay," the voice snarled. "I always pay. But you'll come peacefully?" he asked in some surprise.

"Yes. Matter of fact, I'll be glad to get out of this body. No matter how much I try, somehow I can never manage to keep it clean . . . Gently, now, you don't want to muss up a body you're planning to occupy yourself, now do you?"

"This is too easy," Keats' voice murmured dubiously. "Maybe it's another trap . . ."

"You're always going to imagine traps, Mr. Exterminator,

whether they're there or not. You and Lockard both — people who run must have something to run from, and half the time it's not there and half the time, of course, it is; only you never know which is which — "

"You talk too much," the man behind him snarled. "Shut up and keep moving."

"Back again?" the Vinzz at the door asked. The present Carmody was a little startled. Somehow he had thought of the Vinzz as too remote from humanity to be able to distinguish between individual members of the species. "I'm afraid neither of you is qualified to play."

"No reason why we shouldn't have a private game, is there?" John Keats demanded belligerently.

The Vinzz' tendrils quivered. "In that case, no, no reason at all. If you want to be so unsporting and can afford it. It will cost you a hundred thousand credits each."

"But that's twice what I had to pay last week!" Keats protected angrily.

The Vinzz shrugged an antenna. "You are, of course, at liberty to take your trade elsewhere, if you choose."

"Oh, hell," the temporarily poetic-looking killer snarled. "We're stuck and you know it. Let's get it over with!"

IT WAS odd to come out of unconsciousness back into the thin young man's body again. More uncomfortable than usual, because the criminal's body had been in such splendid physical condition and this one so poor — now worse than before, because it had been worked far beyond its attenuated capabilities. The individuality that had originally been Gabriel Lockard's, formerly housed in Jed Carmody's body, now opened John Keats' eyes and looked at the Vinzz who stood above him.

"The other human has been told you awakened before him and have already departed," the Vinzz explained. "He has violence in his heart and we do not care for violence on our doorstep. Bad for business."

"Has he gone already?"

The Vinzz nodded.

"How long has he been gone?" He scrambled to his feet and investigated the clothing he wore. Carmody had been in too much of a hurry to clean himself out. There was some money left, a container of milgot sticks, and a set of electroseals.

"He has just left." The extraterrestrial's eyes flickered in what might have been surprise. "Don't you wish to avoid him?"

"No, I must go where he goes."

The Vinzz shrugged. "Well, it's your funeral in the most literal

sense of the word." He sighed as the young man plunged out into the darkness. "But, from the objective viewpoint, what a waste of money!"

The massive, broad-shouldered figure of Jed Carmody was still visible at the end of the street, so the thin man slowed down. He wanted to follow Carmody, to keep close watch on where he was going and, if necessary, guide him in the right direction, though he didn't think he'd have to do that. But he had no intention of overtaking him. Carmody might not want openly to use the gun the former tenant had so carefully left him, but with his physique he could break the fragile body of John Keats in two, if he so desired, and he probably did.

Meanwhile Carmody—the real Carmody—having been deprived of an immediate revenge, had begun to realize how much better the situation was as it now stood. If he killed Keats out of hand, he might miss out on half a million credits, because it was his custom to get cash in advance for all his flights, and this was his flight pattern now. He wouldn't trust that Lockard life-form to defoliate after the job was done.

Of course he himself had plenty of money stashed away, but every half million helped. It would be no trouble to find the sickly Keats later. And there was no reason the hounds should get him — Carmody — after all, the other had been rocketing around in his body and he hadn't been caught. Carmody had allowed himself to be stampeded into panic. He smiled. Gorman wouldn't ever be able to chart any pattern like that, or like anything, again. Fortunately there was no permanent harm done, and a half million credits to cover the zarquil losses, with a nice profit left over. Maybe he could even beat Lockard up to a million; that one was obviously a coward and a fool. A few threats should be enough to get him to hand over.

Carmody paused for a moment outside the hotel. It still took some nerve to walk boldly into the brightly lit lobby.

THE automatic doors slid open as he entered. At the same time, the pneumo gates lifted and Gabe Lockard came out, dragging a heavily veiled Helen, their luggage floating behind them. Both stopped as they caught sight of the killer; Lockard paled—Helen gasped.

Too bad I have to leave her in the tentacles of this low life-form, Carmody thought with regret, but there was no help for it. He approached them with what he thought was an ingratiating smile. "Mr. Lockard, I've decided to give you another chance."

It was an unhappy choice of word. "Oh, you have, have you!" the big blond man yelled. "I thought I did have another chance. And now you've spoiled that, too!"

"What do you mean by that?" Carmody demanded, his thick dark brows almost meeting across his nose.

"I figured on getting away before you came back," Gabriel babbled in a frenzy, "but you'd have found me anyway. You always find me. I'm sick of this running. There's only one way to stop you, only one way to be sure that, whatever happens to me, you won't be around to enjoy it."

"Listen, Lockard, you're making a mistake. I—"

"The only mistake I made was in hiring somebody else to do the job I should have done myself."

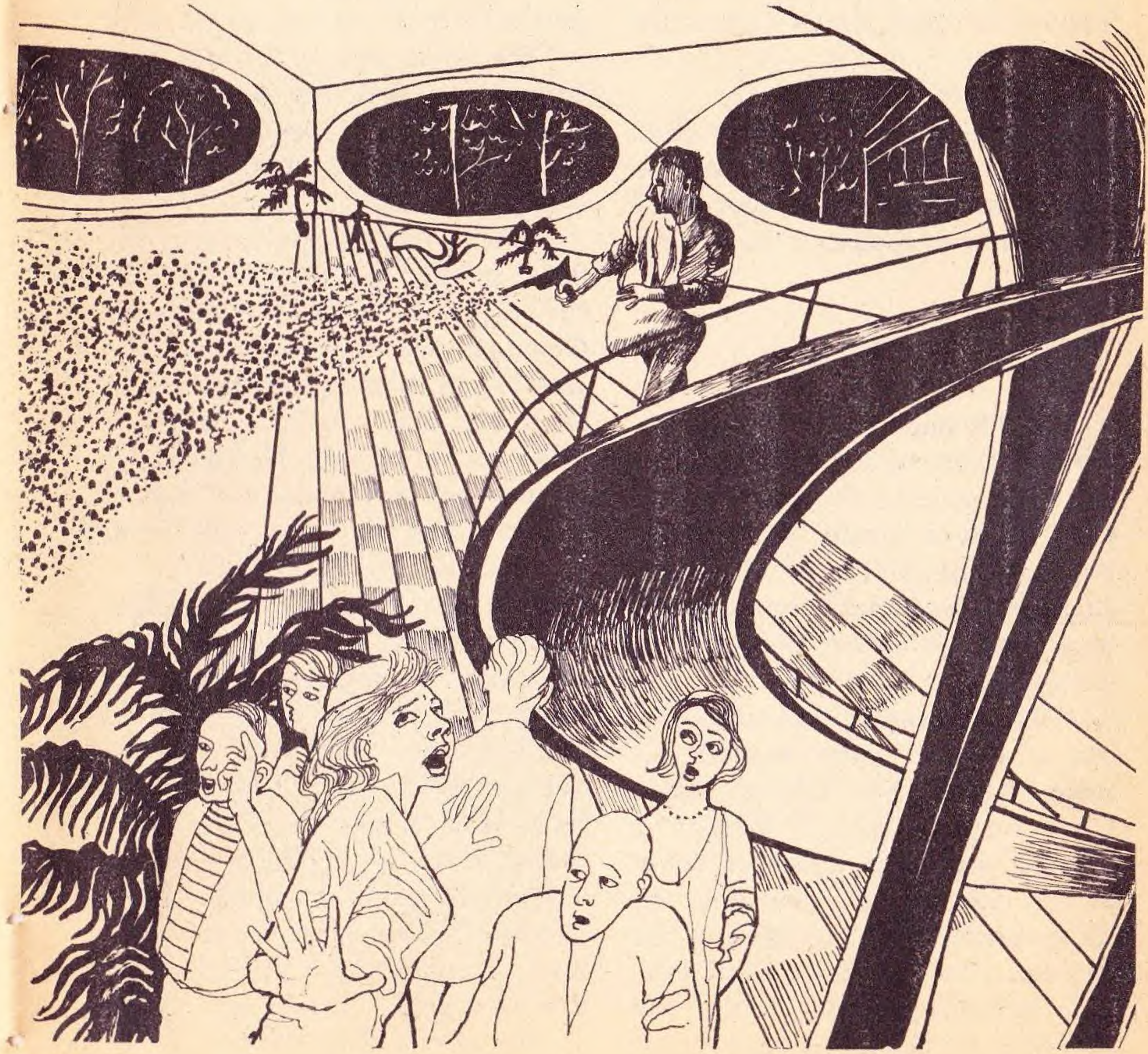
He pulled out the gun—Carmody's own gun— and fired it. He wasn't a good shot, but that didn't matter. He had the flash on full blast and he pumped and pumped and pumped the trigger until the searing heat rays had whipped not only the killer's astonished body but all through the lobby. The few people still there rushed for cover as rug, chairs, potted palms were shriveled by the lancing holocaust. There was a penetrating odor of burning fabric and frond and flesh.

Helen let out a wail as Carmody, more ash than man, fell to the charred carpet. "Gabe, Gabe, what have you done!"

The gun dropped from his hand to rejoin its owner. His face crumpled. "I didn't really mean to kill . . . only to scare him . . . What'll I do now?"

"You'll run, Mr. Lockard," John Keats' body said as he entered the devastated lobby. "You'll run and run and run. He's dead, but you'll keep on running forever. No, not forever—I apologize—some day you'll get caught, because the hounds aren't amateurs like you and . . . him . . ." He pointed to the crumbling, blackened corpse, keeping his hand steady with an effort for, God knew, he was the biggest amateur of them all.

Lockard licked his lips and gazed apprehensively around.



Frightened faces were beginning to peer out from their places of concealment. "Look, Carmody," he said in a low, stiff voice, "let's talk this over. But let's get out of here first before somebody calls the hounds."

"All right," the thin man smiled. "I'm always willing to talk. We can go over to Gorman's office. They won't look for us there right away."

"How'll we get in?"

"I have a 'seal," Keats said. Surely one of the electroseals he carried must belong to Gorman's office. It was a chance he'd have to take.

XI

KEATS had to try five different seals before he found the one that opened the lawyer's office. He was afraid his obvious lack of familiarity would arouse Lockard's suspicions, but the big man was too much preoccupied with his own emotions.

An unpleasantly haunting aroma of cooked meat seeped out from inside. "For Christ's sake, Carmody, hurry!" Lockard snarled, and gave a sigh of relief as the door swung open and the illuminators went on, lighting the shabby office. Gorman was there. His horribly seared body lay sprawled on the dusty rug—quite dead.

"You—you killed him?" Gabriel quavered. The sight of murder done by another hand seemed to upset him more than the murder he himself had just committed.

The thin man gave a difficult smile. "Carmody killed him." Which was undoubtedly the truth. "The gun that did it is in his pocket. I had nothing to do with it." His eyes sought for the ones behind the veil. He wanted the girl who stood frozenly by the door to know that this, at least, was the truth.

Gabriel also stayed near the door, unable to take his eyes off the corpse. In death Carmody and Gorman, the big man and the small man, had looked the same; each was just a heap of charred meat and black ash. No blood, no germs—all very hygienic. "You're smart, Carmody," he said from taut lips. "Damn smart."

"I'm Keats, not Carmody! Remember that." He dropped into the chair behind the desk. "Sit down, both of you." Only Gabriel accepted the invitation. "Why don't you take that thing off your face, Mrs. Lockard? You aren't hiding from anybody, are you?"

Gabriel gave a short laugh. "She's hiding her face from everybody. I spoiled it a little for her. She was going to sell me out to . . . the guy in your body."

Keats' hand tightened on the

arm of his chair. Lose his temper now and he lost the whole game. "It was a good body," he said, not looking at the thing on the rug, trying not to remember the thing on the rug on the other side of town. "A very good body." Through the veil, Helen's shadowy eyes were fixed on his face. He wanted to see what Lockard had done to her, but he couldn't tear off the veil, as he longed to do; he was afraid of the expression that might be revealed on her face—triumph when there should have been anguish; anguish when there should have been triumph.

"Not as good as the one I have here." Lockard thumped his own chest, anxious to establish the value of the only ware he had left.

"Matter of opinion," Keats said. "And mine was in better shape."

"This one isn't in bad condition," Gabriel retorted defensively. "It could be brought back to peak in short order."

"You won't have much opportunity to do it, though. But maybe the government will do it for you; they don't pamper prisoners, I understand, especially lifers."

GABRIEL whitened. "You're an extralegal, Carmody—Keats," he whined. "You know your course. You know how to hide from the hounds . . . I'm a — a respectable citizen." He spread his hands wide in exaggerated helplessness. "Strictly an amateur, that's what I am—I admit I've been playing out of my league."

"So?"

"I'm worth a lot of money, Keats, a hell of a lot. And half of it can be yours, if you . . . change bodies with me."

Keats' angular face remained expressionless, but there was a sharp cry from the girl—a cry that might have been misunderstood as one of pain, but wasn't.

Gabriel turned toward her, and his upper lip curled back over his teeth. "I'll throw her in to the bargain. You must have seen her when she wasn't banged up so you know she's not permanently disfigured. Isn't she worth taking a risk for?"

Keats shrugged. "If the hounds pull you down, she'll be a legal widow anyway."

"Yes, but you'd have no . . . chance with her in the body you now have . . . No chance," he repeated. His voice broke. "Never had a chance."

"Go ahead, feel sorry for yourself," the other man said. "Nobody else will."

Gabriel's face darkened, but he also had to control his temper to gain what he fancied were his own ends. "You won't deny that this hulk is better than the one you have now?"

"Except that there's one thing about the head that I don't like."

Gabriel stared in bewilderment. His body was beyond criticism. "What is it you don't like about the head?"

"There's a price on it now."

Gabriel pressed his spine against the back of the chair. "Don't play the innocent, Carmody. You've killed people, too."

"Well, sure, but not out in the open like that. You know how many people saw you blast him? Too many. If you're going to exterminate somebody, you do it from a dark doorway or an alley —not in a brilliantly lit hotel lobby, and you blast him in the back. But there's no use giving you lessons; it's not likely you'll ever be able to use them where you're going."

Gabriel suddenly sagged in his chair. He looked down at the floor. "So you won't do it?"

Keats grew apprehensive. He hadn't expected the big man to give in to despair so soon — it might spoil all his plans and leave him trapped in this sick unwanted body. He lit a milgot. "I didn't say that," he pointed out, trying to sound unconcerned. "Matter of fact, I might even consider your proposition, if . . ."

There was hope in Lockard's eyes again. It made Keats a little sick to think of the game he had to play with the other; then he thought of the game the other had played with him, the game the other had played with his wife, and the faint flickering of compassion died out in him. "What do you want?" Gabriel asked.

Keats took a moment before he answered. "I want *all* of what you've got."

Gabriel uttered an inarticulate sound.

"You can't take it with you, colleague. If we hulk-hop, it's got to be tonight, because the hounds will be baying on your trail any moment. You wouldn't have the chance to transfer the property to my name and, if you take my word that I'll hand over half afterward, you're just plain out of this dimension . . . Think of it this way, Lockard—what's worth more to you, a couple of lousy billions or your freedom?"

"All right, Carmody," Lockard said dully, "you're the dictator."

XII

THE Vinzz' eyes flickered in astonishment. "*Another* private game? However . . ." he shrugged eloquently. "It will cost you a hundred thousand credits each, gentlemen."

"No discount for a steady customer?" Keats inquired lightly, though he was trembling inside.

The Vinzz' tendrils quivered. "None. You ought to be glad I

didn't raise the price again."

"Why didn't you?" he couldn't help asking.

The Vinzz looked steadily into the man's eyes. "I don't know," it answered at last. "Perhaps I have been so long on this planet that I have developed a sentimental streak . . . In any case, I am going back to Vinau the day after tomorrow . . ."

"For God's sake," Lockard, his senses so confused with fear and apprehension that he was able to catch only fragments of their talk, screamed, "pay him what he asks and don't haggle!"

"All right," Keats agreed. "The lady will wait for me here," he told the Vinzz.

The extraterrestrial quivered indecisively. "Most irregular," it murmured. "However, I cannot refuse a slight favor for such an old customer. This way, madam."

GABRIEL Lockard opened Gabriel Lockard's eyes.

"Well," the Vinzz who stood above him lisped, "how does it feel to be back in your own body again?"

Gabriel got up and stretched. He stretched again, and then an expression of wonderment came over his handsome features. "I feel . . . exactly the way I felt in . . . any of the others," he said haltingly. "I'm not comfortable in this one either. It's not right—it doesn't fit. My own body . . ."

"You've grown out of it," the green one told him, not unkindly. "But you will be able to adjust to it again, if you'll give it a chance . . ."

"There's that word again." Gabriel winced. "I'm beginning to respond to it the way my . . . predecessor did. Do we ever really get another chance, I wonder?"

"Take my advice." The Vinzz' face became almost human. "This is costing my people money, but we've made enough out of you and your—shall we say?—friends. It is a shame," it murmured, "to prey upon unsophisticated lifeforms, but one must live. However, I'll tell you this: The compulsion will come over you again and again to play the game—your body will torment you unbearably and you will long for relief from it, but you must conquer that desire or, I warn you, you will be lost to yourself forever. It's a pattern that's enormously difficult to break, but it can be broken."

Gabriel smiled down at the little green creature. "Thanks, colleague. I'll remember that advice. And I'll take it."

"The other is still asleep," the Vinzz told him. "This time I thought it best to let you awaken first. Good-by, and . . . good luck."

"Thanks, fellow-man," Gabriel said. The Vinzz' tendrils quivered.

HELEN awaited him in an anteroom, her veil flung back so that he could see her poor, marred face. Anger rose hotly in him, but he pushed it down. Her suffering had not been meaningless and revenge was already consummated.

"Gabriel!" Her voice was taut. ". . . Jed!"

"Gabriel," he smiled. "The genuine, original Gabriel—accept no substitutes."

"I'm so glad." Her lips formed the words, for she had no voice with which to make them.

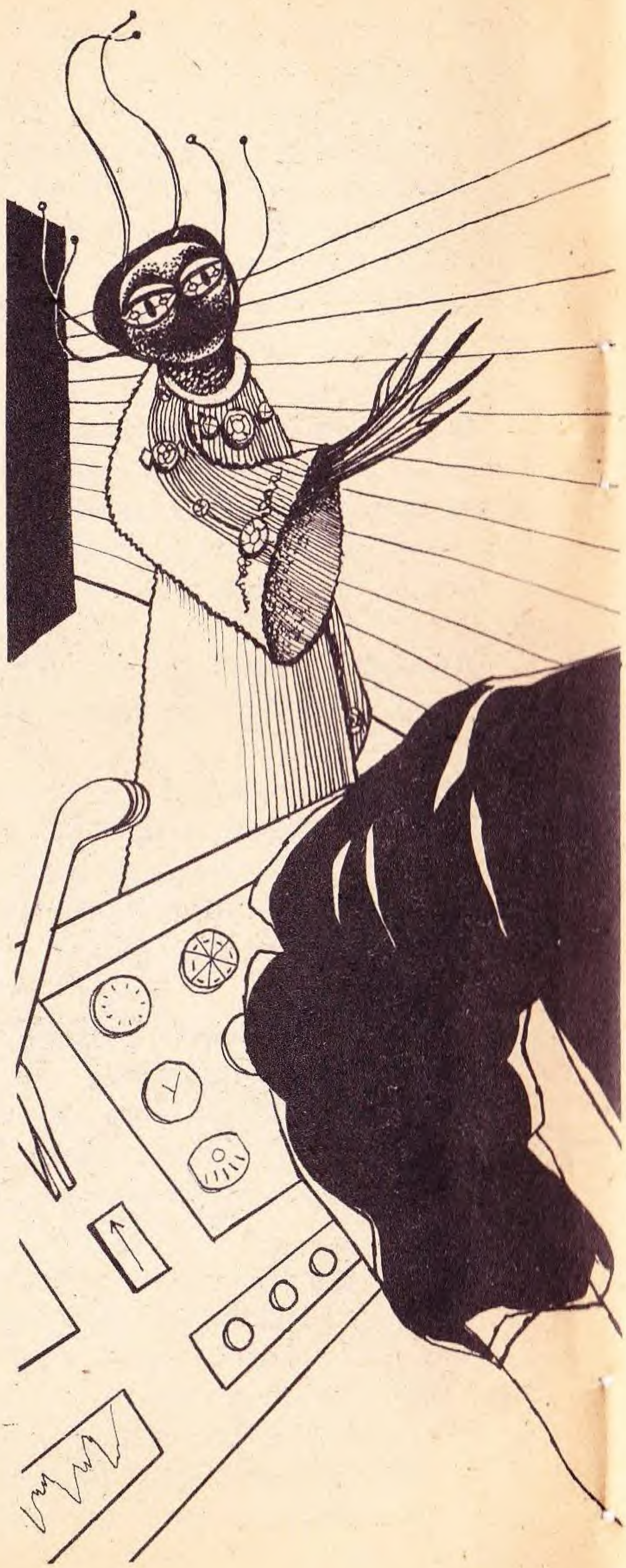
"Come." He took her arm and led her out into the quiet street. It was almost daylight and the sky was a clear pearl gray. Again a star detached itself from the translucent disk of the Moon and sped out into the Galaxy.

Soon, he thought, *we'll be on a starship like that one, leaving this played-out planet for the new worlds up in the sky.*

"You're going to let Gabe—the other Gabriel—go?" she asked.

He bent his head to look at her swollen face. "You're free, Helen; I have my body back; why should we concern ourselves with what happens to him? He can't hurt us any more."

"I suppose you're right," she muttered. "It seems unfair . . ." She shivered. "Still, you have no idea of the things he did to me—the things he made me do . . ."



She shivered again.

"You're cold. Let's get started."

"But where are we going?" She placed her hand on his arm and looked up at him.

"Back to the hotel to pick up your luggage. And then—I still think Proxima is a good idea, don't you? And then perhaps farther out still. I'm sick of this old world."

"But, Je—Gabriel, you must be mad! The police will be waiting for you at the hotel."

"Of course they'll be waiting, but with a citation, not handcuffs."

She looked at him as if he had gone extradimensional. He laughed. "What your ex-husband didn't know, my dear, was that there was a reward out for Jed Carmody, *dead or alive*."

Her face was blank for a moment. "A reward! Oh, G-G-G-Gabriel!" The girl erupted into hysterical laughter.

"Shhh, darling, control yourself." He put his arm around her, protectively, restrainingly. "We'll be conspicuous," for already the Sun's first feeble rays were beginning to wash the ancient tired streets with watery gold. "Think of the reward we're going to get —five thousand credits, just for us!"

She wiped her eyes and pulled down her veil. "Whatever will we do with all that money!"

"I think it would be nice if we

turned it over to the hotel," he smiled. "I made rather a shambles of their lobby when, pursuant to my duty as a solar citizen, I exterminated the killer Carmody. Let's give it to them and leave only pleasant memories behind us on our journey to the stars." And he couldn't help wondering whether, if things got really tough, somewhere up in those stars he could find another zarquil game.

— CHRISTOPHER GRIMM

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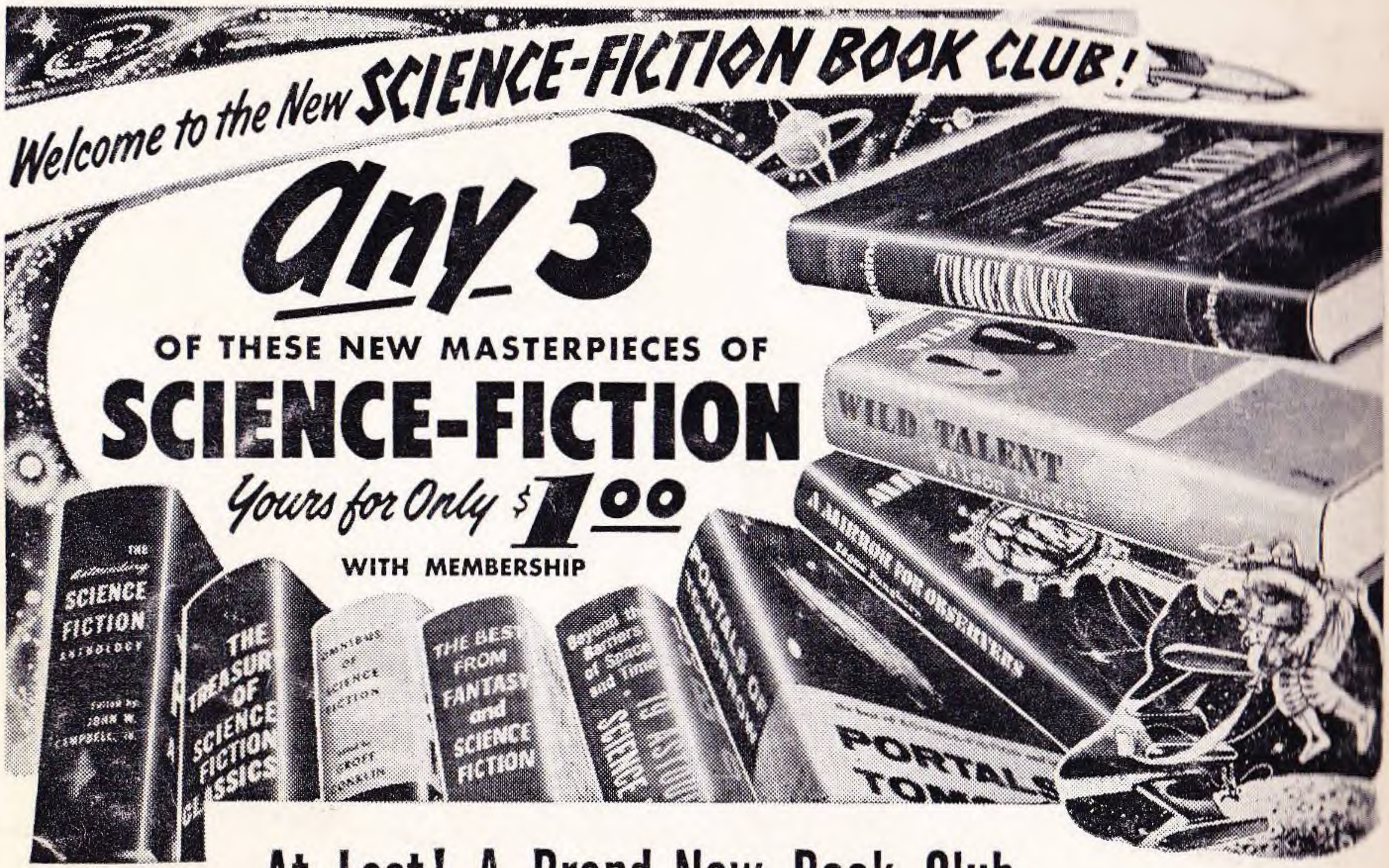

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