

The Original

# SCIENCE FICTION

Stories

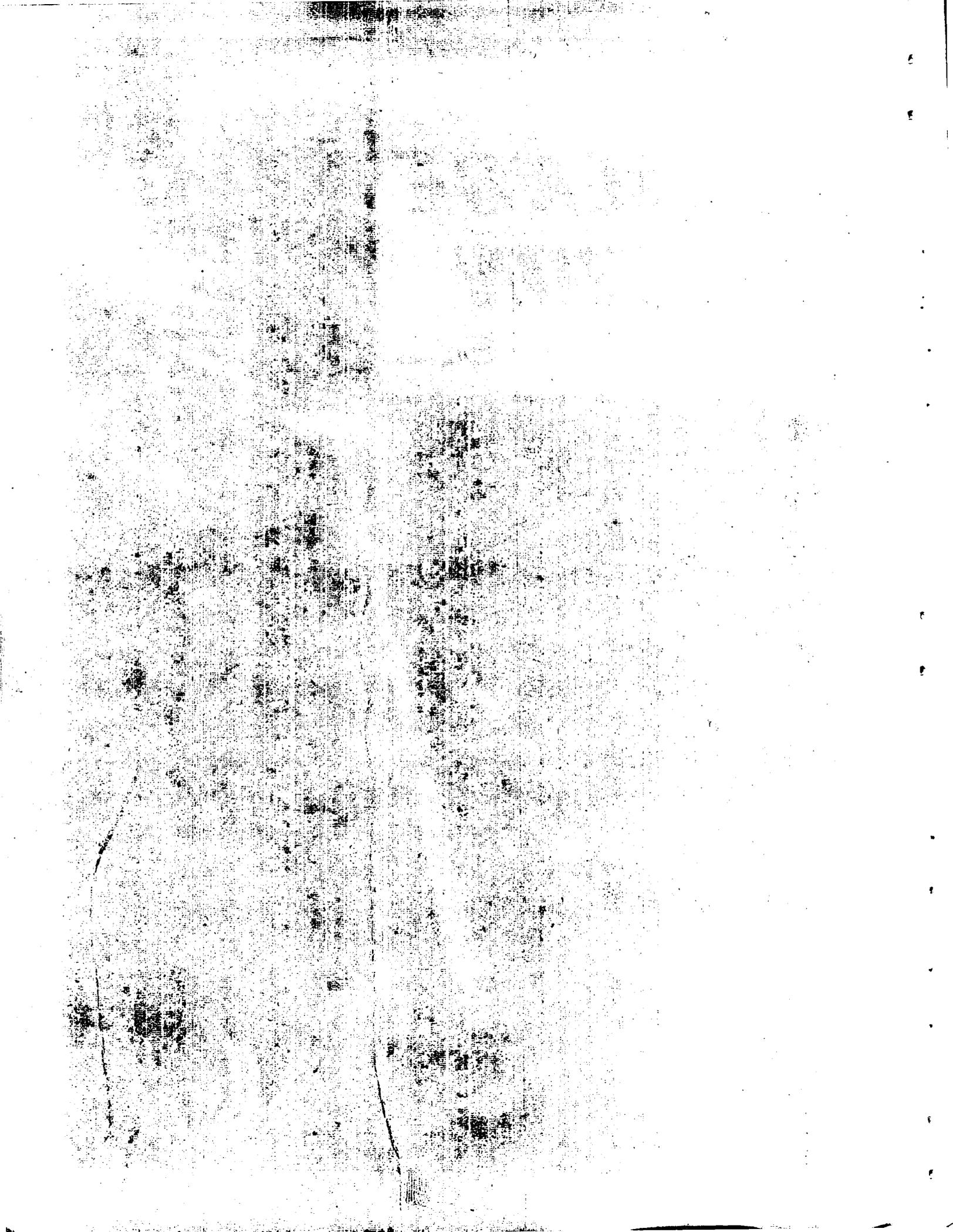
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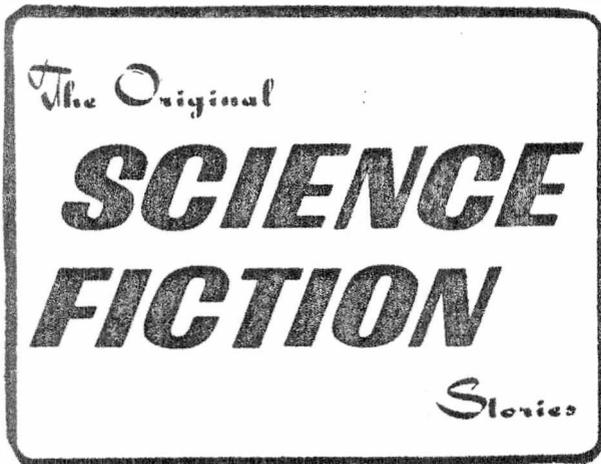
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1962



JOHN SHANTA '62





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WINTER, 1962

Volume 11

No. 3

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COVER: by John Giunta, illustrating "Fishfood".

The Original SCIENCE FICTION STORIES is published quarterly by Science-Fiction Times, Inc.; Ray Van Houten, President; Frank R. Prieto, Jr., Secretary-Treasurer; and James V. Taurasi, Sr., Vice-President; P. O. Box 115, Solvay Branch, Syracuse 9, New York. 50¢ per copy, 2 copies for \$1.00. All stories printed in this magazine are fiction, and any similarity between characters and actual persons is coincidental. All material submitted must be accompanied by self-addressed stamped envelopes. No payments are made for material used. Winter 1962; Vol. 11 - No. 3.

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# EDITORIAL

## Son Of The Purple Peril

**B**ACK IN ITS HEYDAY --- during the Second Fandom, circa 1937 --- Science fiction fan publishing sat in a puddle of gooey hekto gelatin, merrily splashing purple hekto ink in all directions.

In the poorly duplicated but eagerly read amateur mags of that day appeared what is undoubtedly the worst science fiction stories that were ever written, hardly, one might say, worth half the time, effort and eye-strain required to produce and read it.

Those were the days of childhood, filled with childish activities and infantile dreams.

But --- stop and consider.

One of these groups of amateur publishers, Science-Fiction Times, Inc. --- then known by the universe-spanning monicker of "Cosmic Publications" --- put out a mag called COSMIC TALES QUARTERLY, in which appeared material by such now well-known names as Richard Wilson, Donald A. Wollheim and Sam Moskowitz, and artwork by John Giunta (now with GALAXY and IF) and Morris Dollens (now a movie artist of some stature. Other mags put out by the same group published work by James Blish, Robert W. Lowndes and Thomas S. Gardner.

Other such groups across the country were publishing material by Ray Bradbury, Robert Bloch, Fred Pohl, Cyril Kornbluth, Isaac Asimov, Forry Ackerman, Bob Tucker and Damon Knight, to name just a few; before they ever became professionals.

These and others like them have written a great deal of enjoyable sci-

ence fiction that has entertained us over the intervening years. Would they have become professionals without the "purple peril", the eye-straining hektoed mags that published their first works?

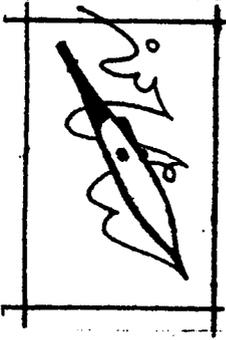
Well, perhaps some would have, but most, we believe, would not. We think that the satisfaction of having their amateur work published for others to read and pass comment on was a definite factor in keeping these tyro pros at their writing, helping them to learn the trade.

That's the tradition which this series of The Original SCIENCE FICTION STORIES seeks to carry on. World War II halted most fan activity of the day, and the subsequent world situation seemed to wreak an enormous change in fan interests. The amount of amateur fiction written and published since that time has dwindled away to practically nothing. That's a loss, we think, so much of a loss that we're putting out TOSFS in an effort to do something about it.

In these pages you will be reading the amateur work of writers who may turn out to be the Bradburys and Kornbluths of the future! Send us your comments and criticisms --- we'll publish as many as we can, and pass on the rest to the authors concerned.

We think you'll be pleasantly surprised at the quality of the science fiction which today's apprentice authors can turn out, and will agree with us that such talent deserves as big a boost

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# THE LAST WORD

New York, N. Y.

A magazine is like a child to an editor, and, as with real children, some are loved and some are unloved. SCIENCE FICTION STORIES was fondly loved, so I am happy to see it given a new chance of life, even if the circumstances be somewhat straitened.

Since you will be on an amateur basis for an indefinite period, you will have one advantage that the professional editor does not have: you will not be forced to run material you rather deplore simply because schedules have to be met and a certain number of pages must be filled somehow by that time. Pray take full advantage of this opportunity: one issue a year, which you truly consider good is far better than several with compromises for the sake of having several. In the long run, it doesn't really matter whether others agree, or whether increased experience and insight results in a change of attitude toward what you formerly thought was good.

Of course if the best you can do isn't good enough --- then the child will be lost again; but at the very least you will have had the satisfaction of having made the most of the opportunities you saw that you had. (An opportunity you do not see is no opportunity)

May the care of SCIENCE FICTION STORIES be a fulfilling experience for you and your colleagues; my best wishes to all concerned.

Sincerely,  
Robert A. W. Lowndes

Advice and best wishes from the former editor of SCIENCE FICTION STORIES is

most welcome. Being amateur also has a great disadvantage: not being able to pay for material seriously restricts the choice available, no matter how long we may choose to wait for that "right" story. -rvh

-----  
New York, N. Y.

The announcement that you are taking over SCIENCE FICTION STORIES to be published as an amateur science fiction magazine is indeed good news. As the old, successful professional writers are drawn more and more into other mediums; the field certainly needs new talent. If, as a result of your enterprise, new writers can be spotted and developed, it will be a boon to all those connected with science fiction.

It is with a great deal of interest that I wish you good luck and success.

Sincerely,  
Cele Goldsmith  
Editor,  
AMAZING and FANTASTIC

-----  
Many thanks for your interest and good wishes. We do indeed hope that SCIENCE FICTION STORIES will be the means of encouraging a new group of science fiction writers. Even if only one such writer appears because of us, all this work will not have been for nothing. -rvh

-----  
New York, N. Y.

It is good news to hear that your new incarnation of SCIENCE FICTION STORIES is about ready to appear.

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(continued on page 50)



# FISHFOOD

By Arthur D. Graham

---

WHERE IGNORANCE is bliss, a fool's got a chance --- or so the saying goes. The Colonel certainly was ignorant of what he was getting into, alright, and that made him just enough of a fool not to know when he was licked!

---

## I.

THE BLIP on the radar screen disappeared.

"It's down, sir," said the sergeant technician. "About thirteen miles out."

Colonel Cooper's face was grim as he straightened from watching the radar. His unpressed uniform hung on him like burlap.

"That was the last try they'll make," he growled. "Those Chino picket subs are too thick for a goddam fly to get past them."

He ran a thick hand over a two-day stubble of beard in a tired, absent-minded gesture. He turned to the map-table and picked up the navigator's scale. The sergeant flipped the switch on the radar and moved over beside him.

"Right about here," the Colonel said, flopping the scale down and marking a small "X" at its end. "That does us a hell of a lot of good --- 'X' marks the spot! No-good, stinking Chino bastards!"

The sergeant picked up the pencil

and drew a lozenge around the "X", with its long axis pointing to the position of his radar antenna atop the small hill five hundred yards away from the shack where they were.

"At least that's the closest one yet by a couple of hundred miles," he said. "Just inside the 25-fathom line, on the edge of the shelf. Do you think we could rig up a crane on the LCD and go out and raise it?"

The Colonel snorted.

"Send a surface craft out into that wolf-pack?" he said. "It wouldn't get two miles before they blew it out of the water. If we had a sub, we might make it out there and tow it in, but we haven't got a sub."

He scratched his tousled hair.

"In fact, we haven't got anything that's made to go underwater, except those skin-diving outfits, and who's going to swim thirteen miles? One thing I do know --- if we don't get the plutonium and the rest of the stuff on that supply rocket, we'll all be dead one way or another in two days!"

The sergeant nodded.

"Wouldn't it be simple if this lousy island was only thirteen miles bigger?" he said. "Then we could drive out with one of the wreckers and just haul the damn thing in."

The Colonel grunted.

"Yeah; if those things could go underwater, it would ---."

He stopped and rubbed his bristly chin again, deep in thought.

"Sergeant," he said suddenly, "How deep is the ocean in the direction of that spot?"

They both moved back to the chart table.

"Right here where the rocket is down," the sergeant explained, pointing with a pencil, "It's about 25 fathoms, or 150 feet, deep. In between, it's mostly shallower, but there's likely gullies and reefs which would vary the depth considerably. Why, what do you have in mind?"

"It's probably a crazy idea, but what if we could make one of those wreckers watertight? Do you think it could make it across the ocean floor to the rocket and back again, carrying the load?"

Now the sergeant scratched his head.

"There's just no telling whether it would be possible or not, sir," he said. "We don't have any detailed map of the bottom along the route, and we don't know if an M-24 would stand such a long trip completely underwater ---"

He suddenly realized what he was saying.

"Underwater?! Why, that's impossible, Colonel, the engine won't run without air, and how could a man breathe, and --- and, well, it just isn't built like that!"

"I got a couple of ideas," said the Colonel. "I'm going to find Sandy and see what he thinks about it."

## II.

THE LOOMING FLAT side of the M-24 Heavy Vehicle Retriever rose fifteen feet above them as they looked it over.

"Well, what do you think, Sandy?" said the Colonel.

Lt. Horace Sanderson, Corps of Engineers, "Sandy" to his friends, and you

had better not call him by his first name, took his time about answering.

"It would be quite a job, Colonel," he said. "And I'd need help. But, yes, I'd say it could be done."

"Okay --- get right to work. Take Pinelli and Saunders to help you. We'll have to close down Air Monitor anyway on account of the power loss. If the three of you aren't enough, give a yell and I'll come top. I'll be in the mess tent most of the time, and if I'm not there I'll be in the radar shack with Sergeant Gates. I want this monster ready to go by tomorrow night if it can be done at all. We've got to have that supply rocket, Sandy!"

It was quite a job. An M-24 Retriever is an enormous land dreadnought, 82 feet long by 19½ feet wide, with double caterpillar treads on each side to drive it against the toughest resistance handling the heaviest loads. It was designed to rescue disabled heavy tanks and other fighting vehicles from under the nose of an active enemy under combat conditions, and was armored against even tactical atomics, as far as anything could be armored against them.

But it was not designed to operate underwater.

Lt. Sanderson began the modification job by welding shut all openings to the driver's cab except one emergency hatch on top, which he fitted with a rubber gasket made from an old inner tube to make it watertight. The armored flaps which folded down over the windshield and side windows were all welded into place after adhesive packing had been sandwiched between them and the glass to add maximum possible strength.

The adhesive was made by dissolving shredded rubber in rubber cement, and slobbering this gook on both sides of tough nylon fabric used for machine-tool covers. Only the six-inch slots of the peepholes were left open.

Next, the engine compartment just behind the cab was welded shut after the giant Fairbanks-Morse diesel had been gone over and tuned to top efficiency. The air-intake grilles were closed off from the inside with quarter-inch sheet metal, except the main one in front, which was fitted with an adapter flange

made from an old gas tank, allowing the connection of 200 feet of flexible wire-bound rubberoid fire hose.

Another 200 feet of hose was fastened to the exhaust of the engine, and both hoses were finished off by the addition of four empty 55-gallon oil drums at their free ends, which would act as floats to hold the ends about six feet out of the water.

Sandy and his two-man crew labored all night. Several times the Colonel, who was acting as cook for the survivors of his command, brought them coffee and grub, and checked on their progress.

Another length of hose was run from the engine intake to the cab, so that anyone inside could get air without having to carry it along bottled.

The track links, bogeys, springs and other parts of the driving and steering mechanisms were smeared with grease to keep out as much of the salt water as possible. All wiring and connections were gone over with paste insulation which dried to a waterproof covering. The massive, glass-cased, lifetime batteries were given an extra charge to make sure.

Dawn broke, and still they worked.

The winch and crane jig which the M-24 carried on its back was swarmed over, all gear boxes checked and sealed, all cable greased. The rear end of the platform, under the beetling crane trackage, was shaped like a horseshoe so that the Retriever could back in over half the length of a sixty-ton tank, slam down its magnetic hooks, which were made so as to catch themselves on any slight projection, and lift its charge bodily up, forward and under the heavy steel canopy which formed the crane support.

### III.

IN THE MESS TENT, The Colonel was nursing along the fourth pot of coffee he had put on since the previous evening and trying to keep from yawning too much.

The boys were doing a wonderful job, he thought. Sandy was a genius at improvising. If this thing worked out, it would be Sandy who deserved the credit.

If it worked --- it had to work, or they were dead men, and the main Allied base in Australia would lay wide open to

Chino attack.

The war wasn't going so good. The bright boys back in the '50's and '60's who had said that an atomic war would be all over within 48 hours had been out of their minds. This one was going on four years now, and the end wasn't in sight yet ---.

--- Unless this, or some other, island warning base failed suddenly, and Chino forces were allowed a clear path down which to sneak, unobserved, for an assault against Australia itself. That might well be the end of the war, alright.

Mainland bases on both sides were long ago craters and mounds of rubble. No installations worth an atom bomb, let alone a big H-cracker, remained anywhere on the continents of the world.

Except population centers, and bombing population centers had been given up long ago as unprofitable --- too easy to retaliate, too expensive in men and machines for the resultant damage, and you didn't kill anyone important, anyway --- dispersal had moved all the big brass, the skilled workers, the people important to the war effort, well out of harm's way.

Dispersal had been the answer to the long atomic war, Truman and Eisenhower and their advisors had been more far-seeing than anyone then had believed when they sacrificed billions of U.S. dollars in return for military bases all over the world. When the first blow of this fiasco had been struck, over 80% of U.S. and Allied military strength had been off-continent, comparatively safe, and ready to strike back --- which they did with devastating effect.

Each foreign base had been protected by a ring of subsidiary bases, which in turn were protected by smaller installations, which were --- "little fleas have littler fleas, and so on, ad infinitum."

Anti-aircraft missiles, anti-missile missiles, super-sonic picket planes, radar warning lines stretching across wastelands --- had proved completely effective in maintaining Allied fighting power practically intact through the first 48 hours of intensive attack.

At home, they hadn't been so lucky. New York, London, Washington, Seattle,

Chicago, Detroit, Tokyo, the British Midland cities, even poor, old, battered Frankfort, Germany, had all taken H-bomb hits during that 48 hours.

Some guy once said that the safest place to be during an atomic war was in the Army, and damned if he wasn't right!

Now it was the old chess-game of play for advantage. Feint here, make a move there, try to force your enemy to leave open a crack in his ring of eyes and ears, so that you'd have a few hours during which to move unobserved, move closer to the nerve centers in Australia or Tibet, Greenland or Murmansk.

SAC bombers still flew, and Chino missiles still screamed halfway around the world, but the real battle was being fought on island bases such as this one, upon which HQ depended for minute-by-minute information of what the enemy was up to.

Then this base had been blockaded. In force.

This tiny island became the focal point of the enemy's entire war effort. Hundreds of Chino subs had surfaced at dawn two days ago and began missileing. Their long, racy destroyers and cruisers had moved in under the protection of the subs and added their heavyweight punches to the melee. The island's radar-controlled guns and missile installations had accounted themselves well, but the Chinos had come prepared to knock this island out at all costs, and they had just about succeeded.

Out of Colonel Cooper's original garrison of over 200 men, only nine were left.

No building of bigger than outhouse size was left standing. About 10% of the guns and missile-launchers were still in operating condition, which was possibly why the Chinos had not yet tried to land.

The atomic power plant was heavily damaged, and its plutonium alloy fuel was almost exhausted in fighting off the attack. Great amounts of supplies had been destroyed, and if help didn't come soon, the island and the remaining nine men were doomed.

Australia, six hundred miles away, and island bases nearby, had tried to help, but surface ships would merely be committing suicide by trying to crash

through the almost solid ring of Chino subs. Aircraft would fare no better against the plane-killing missiles carried by these subs.

Even the cargo missiles which Australia had fired, loaded with fuel for the pile and other supplies, had all been knocked down, the last one being that which he and Sergeant Gates had watched on the radar screen. It had come the closest of any of them --- only thirteen miles out in the ocean, the enemy subs were thickest.

If they could only get that plutonium fuel, food and ammunition, they could hold out a few more days, maybe as long as two weeks, preventing a Chino landing and giving Australia time to mount a counter-attack, plugging up the hole which would be left if this base fell without a substitute means of gathering information on enemy movements.

Australia had said via the radio that this would be the last missile they would try to send --- low on plutonium themselves, too low to waste it at the bottom of the ocean.

Hold out as long as you can, they had said. We'll get there as fast as we're able.

But we'll all be dead by that time. Face it, Cooper. HQ is writing you off as a calamitous --- but inevitable --- loss.

With this distressing thought in his mind, the Colonel alternately watched the breaking dawn and the perking coffee. He was yawning more frequently now. Just about time to take another walk down to see how Sandy was making out, and take them some Joe ---.

"Colonel!"

He swung around to see who called. Pinelli came through the tent-flap.

"Sandy --- Lt. Sanderson wants you to come over right away, sir," he said. "We got it just about ready to go."

"Fast work, Pinelli!" said the Colonel. "Grab that pot of coffee, will you? I'll bring the cups. Let's get the hell down there!"

Tin cups jangling, Colonel Cooper jogged out to where the M-24 squatted.

A bleary-eyed Sandy, covered with grease and dirt, showed him what had been done.

"Okay," said the Colonel finally.

"I'm going to test this monster out. I'll need two men to come along. Sandy and one other. Which of you guys wants to come?"

Pinelli looked at Saunders, who looked back.

Pinelli slid a greasy hand into his pocket and came out with a coin.

"Flip you," he said, and tossed the coin into the air.

"Heads," said Saunders.

"Heads it is," said Pinelli, looking. "Good luck!"

He stuffed the coin back into his pocket and rubbed a greasy hand across his face. The streak it left was hardly noticeable against the grease that was already there.

#### IV.

THE THREE CLIMBED through the hatch and into the cab of the M-24.

"Sandy, you drive," said the Colonel. "I'll watch for leaks and equipment failure. Saunders, you be ready to jump with those sticky patches if something gives and meanwhile help Sandy with the seeing in the buddy seat. Did you put the skin-diving equipment aboard?"

Sandy looked up from the instruments, which he was watching as the big diesel warmed up.

"We won't need that stuff now, will we?" he said.

"Hell, yes!" said the Colonel. "What if this wagon conks out under fifty feet of water? How the hell do you expect to get home?"

A shout through the hatch at Pinelli brought the needed tanks, suits, masks, flippers and other gear, which they stowed in the underseat compartment.

"Ready to move, Colonel," said Sandy.

"Okay, boy, let 'er go!"

Sandy released the brakes and the hulking vehicle moved slowly forward toward the nearby beach. Faces tense, they watched the front tracks slide into the water. Foot by foot, the water crept up the flat sides of the cab. The Colonel scanned the floor for the least trickle of water.

"So far, so good," he muttered.

The water rose over the bottom edge of the driving slits. The diesel rumbled and growled behind them.

Then they were underwater.

"Stop here, Sandy," said the Colonel.

The M-24 stopped.

"Now --- look for leaks, everybody!"

They searched every inch of the interior for tell-tale streaks which would reveal an imperfectly-welded seam. Sandy crawled through the inspection door into the engine compartment and looked there.

He found water, but it was only condensation on the metal siding from the hot engine inside and the cold water outside.

"All tight!" said the Colonel with satisfaction. "Let's go deeper!"

Sandy released the brakes and they went forward again.

Seeing was difficult at first because of the sparkle effect thrown below the surface by the motion of the waves. But as they went deeper this disappeared, until they were moving across a carpet of white coral sand in a deepening gloom.

"I'd better turn on the lights," said Sandy as he flicked the switch. A path of illumination opened out before them. Startled fish of all colors swirled about as their natural twilight was suddenly dispelled.

Crunching over small coral outcroppings and threading their way through jungles of swaying seaweed, they crept onward and downward. The Colonel kept eye and ear alert for the slightest indication of something wrong, but everything continued smoothly.

"Reef ahead," announced Sandy.

"Think we can get over it?" asked the Colonel.

"Not over it, but maybe through it or around it."

Slowly they crept up to the wall of coral, higher than the sides of the M-24. It blocked their way like a natural tank-trap. No break was visible either to left or right.

"Which way, Colonel?" said Sandy.

"Lemme see."

The Colonel took Saunders' place at

the view-slit.

As far as he could see, the jagged wall of coral stretched without any indication of a break through which they could crawl. Its sheer sides made climbing it out of the question, even for such a vehicle as the M-24, which could go anywhere --- except up a perpendicular wall.

There was no real choice. Which ever way they turned might be right --- or wrong.

"Try to the right," said the Colonel. That was at least in the general direction of the downed rocket.

Sandy swung the M-24 around in a right turn and moved off along the foot of the reef. The bottom was a lot rougher here and the M-24 jounced them around so much that they had to hang on.

"Wonder how our float's doing?" mused the Colonel over the rise and fall of the diesel's rumble.

"If it wasn't doing alright," said Sandy, "We'd be sitting here with a dead engine and no air to breathe."

With a shock the Colonel realized he was right. If that untested float rig had failed --- as it very well might have --- they'd either be dead or in serious trouble by now, stuck many feet below the surface of the ocean.

All at once it struck him what a desperate venture this was. Thirteen miles --- more in actual distance traveled --- under the ocean in a vehicle never meant to get more than its tracks wet, jury-rigged by over-tired men working under pressure with make-shift material and equipment. And the job done overnight on nothing but coffee and sheer nerve!

War brought out strange extensions of man's capabilities. Back home he had never gone out without his umbrella.

Put up your umbrella now, Cooper! You got a whole damn ocean over your head!

## V.

"MAYBE WE'D BETTER turn back now, Sandy," he said, hoping that the suggestion didn't reveal too much of the trend of his thoughts.

Sandy didn't answer right away, and the Colonel was on the verge of repeating.

"I think I see a break up ahead, Colonel."

The Colonel took Saunder's place at the view-slit. Just inside the furthest limit of the headlights, there appeared a dark opening in the coral wall.

This was what they had been looking for.

"Go on up and see if we can get through, Sandy. Then we'll go back to the island and check this buggy over. After we get some sleep and load up for a long trip, we'll be off again, this time for real."

"Okay," said Sandy, and maneuvered the big Retriever up to the break in the reef.

It was a break, alright, and wide enough to let the M-24 through. The floor was rough coral. Black, unfathomable water was all they could see on the other side as they nosed cautiously into the breach and edged forward.

The reef was a little thicker through than the M-24 was long, so that the tail end of the vehicle was past the rear edge before they found themselves at the other end. The floor of the cleft slanted not too steeply in their direction of travel --- not too steeply, but just enough to give that slight extra tendency to move forward that fooled Sandy.

"That's far enough!" the Colonel suddenly shouted.

Simultaneously Sandy yelled "Whoa!" irrelevantly, and Saunders let out a bleat of combined fear and surprise.

The sudden screech of the brakes was counterpointed by the grind and crunch of crumbling coral under the M-24's treads as the lip of the reef cracked and sank under the weight of the massive vehicle. Brakes locked, they continued to skid forward into what looked through the view-slits as the very deepest deeps in the ocean's unplumbed depths!

It felt like a roller-coaster ride to death as the M-24 sledged down the steep outer slope of the reef, deeper and deeper under the waves. There was only two hundred feet of life-giving hose-line between them and complete disaster.

If the M-24 went deeper than that, the top ends of the hoses would be pull-

ed underwater, and that would be all she wrote!

The beams of the headlights waved wildly ahead of them. Sandy bumped his head against the edge of the viewing slit and was temporarily blinded.

Saunders stared straight ahead-through his slit along the beams of light, unable to tear his eyes away from the apparently bottomless pit into which they were rushing.

Then, as suddenly as they had started, they stopped with a grinding jar.

For a heart-stopping ten seconds, none of them dared move a muscle. They waited for water to come pouring into the cab through the breather hose and the diesel's growl to be drowned into silence.

But it didn't. They were on solid bottom again, and still not two hundred feet below the surface.

Colonel Cooper's breath, which he had been unconsciously holding, came out of his lungs with a whoosh.

"Mother of God!" he whispered.

Sandy's face turned toward him, eyes round, color drained away, the effect made grotesque by streaks of blood running down his cheek from a small cut on his forehead.

Sandy grinned sickly.

"We stopped," he said in a high-pitched voice that seemed about to crack like an adolescent's.

Sandy's face and the sound of his frightened voice was like a dash of cold water to the Colonel. They couldn't crack now!

With an effort, he gathered his wits.

Yes, they were stopped, and at a safe depth still. They were still in business.

The thing to do was to stick to his original plan --- go back, take stock of the M-24, make whatever repairs were needed, what improvements they could (including better seeing arrangements!), and then come back again, this time with more caution. They'd make it yet!

Sure, just like that! a small voice inside him said. Turn this beast around and climb back up that precipice just like it was 42nd Street, and all the time one more move could pull the float under the surface and drown them all.

And how about getting back up that hill? From the feel of it coming down, it's impossible. You can't move, Cooper --- you're trapped!

"Colonel," said a voice.

What can you do, Cooper? You'll be crushed under tons and tons of water, smothered under fathoms and fathoms of the Pacific Ocean, not even the chance of a rat in a sinking ship.

Wait a minute ---!

"Get out that skin-diving stuff, quick!" he snapped.

"Colonel!" said the voice again, this time he recognized it as Saunders' voice. The man still had his eyes glued to the view-slit.

"What is it, Saunders," he said, impatient to get himself and his men into the comparative safety of the diving gear.

Saunders turned his head away from the slit.

"Look out there," he said.

## VI.

THE COLONEL BENT and pressed his face against the cold glass of the windshield, peering out into the depths of the water ahead of the M-24.

At first he could see nothing as his eyes refused to focus on the unfamiliar scene. Then, dimly, he could see the bottom stretching away in the beams of the headlights.

The water was cloudy with debris they had stirred up in their rapid descent.

He looked further ahead. A fish or two swam lazily in and out of the beams.

Then --- something indistinct, something alien to its surroundings, almost the same color as the water, revealing itself only by vague outline and seemingly different texture. A sharp, streamlined prow, broken in irregular pattern by darker patches that were openings --- openings through which shattering death could erupt!

A Chino submarine!

"Cut the engine, Sandy!" breathed the Colonel.

The diesel's rumble died.

"What's up, Colonel?" asked Sandy.

"We landed right under the nose of a Chino picket sub! All that noise we made coming down --- it's a miracle they

haven't got us spotted right now!"

Sandy took a look.

"They're not moving," he said. "Just laying doggo a few feet off the bottom. If they'd spotted us, we'd have had a torpedo by this time."

"Maybe --- and maybe something moving on the bottom, when they're looking for something moving through the water, has them confused. We must have made a hell of a racket in their sonar sliding down that cliff. I can't see how they could have failed to notice it."

"Well, we can't move now, that's a cinch. Say, can't they see our lights?"

"If they could," said the Colonel quietly, "We'd have had a torpedo down our throats long ago. According to the latest poop from Base, only a few of the newer Chino boats have T-V eyes. This must be one of the older ones --- what the hell ---!?"

The Colonel had suddenly become aware that he was standing in something that sloshed when he moved his feet, and that he was beginning to feel wet down below. Looking down, he saw that the floor was covered by about two inches of water!

"Leak!" he snapped. "We must have sprung a seam when we hit."

They all felt an instant of panic, but then realized that the leak must be only a pin-hole, or the water would have been up to their ears.

Methodically, they set about finding it.

"Must be damned small," the Colonel muttered after they had searched the entire cab without success. Then he spotted the tiny trickle coming from under the engine compartment door.

"It's in there," he said, grabbing the handle which would open the door.

Then he hesitated.

The engine compartment might be full of water and opening that door might bring half the Pacific Ocean in on them! Opening that door might be the last act he would ever perform.

Sure, he told himself, and leaving it closed to fill up with water was death just as sure, and more prolonged.

Besides, you idiot, that's what you brought along the skin-diving stuff for! You can always get out through the hatch if the cab's flooded.

The Colonel relaxed visibly as he let go of the handle.

"Nothing to worry about," he said. "Let's put on this diving gear right now. Should have done it when we first started in case of emergencies. But we're learning!"

They put on the tanks and harness, but left off the flippers and masks.

Without hesitation this time, Colonel Cooper pulled open the engine compartment door.

A small rivulet of foaming sea-water poured over the sill, adding about an inch to the depth on the cab floor. Then it stopped.

He sloshed into the engine compartment, Saunders with his sticky patches right behind him. A hasty inspection revealed that one of the plates that had been welded across the inside of one of the air-grilles had sprung a tiny leak. Saunders slapped patches across the seam, and the leak stopped.

Sandy stuck his head through the door.

"Any damage?" he inquired.

"Didn't reach the engines," said the Colonel. "What's that smell?"

Sandy sniffed.

"The batteries!" he said urgently.

"They must be flooded!"

He came through the door in a hurry and stood ankle-deep in the water over the floor-plates which covered the battery-well.

"They're completely immersed," he said. "We gotta get this water out of here in a hurry, or we'll never start the engine again. The water's shorted out the terminals and our juice is draining away!"

"Bail it out into the cab!" snapped the Colonel.

Using their helmet liners, it was close quarters for the three of them to work, but the water flew into the driver's compartment in a steady stream. Soon it was too low to scoop up, and the level in the cab was up to the bottom of the door.

They had reached an impasse. The battery was well below floor level, and any water on the floor meant that the terminals were still covered.

Now there was no further place to put the water, and it was too low to

bail.

They straightened up and looked at each other.

Saunders giggled.

"We can open a window and throw it outside," he said.

The Colonel shut him up with a piercing look.

"How about the storage boxes, Sandy? Will they hold water?" he asked.

Sandy shrugged.

"Should do," he said. "They're welded metal. But how do we get the rest of it out of here?"

"Mop it up!" said the Colonel, taking off his air-tank and peeling off his shirt.

The others did likewise, and soon the floor was merely damp.

Sandy unloosened the battery well plates and lifted them off. The well was brimful.

"Just get it below the terminals," said Sandy, "and the rest is easy."

A few minutes of sopping their shirts in the offending liquid had the waterline down below the top of the battery case.

Sandy then took down one of the fire extinguishers which hung in the engine compartment and squirted a little of the fluid over the damp terminals, wiping it off again with his hankerchief.

"Carbon tetrachloride," he explained. "That gets rid of the last film of water. Now we're in business again --- if there's still enough juice to turn over the engine."

"Well, we're not going to try right now," said the Colonel grimly. "Not with that Chino sub lying out there!"

Saunders had sloshed back into the driver's cab while they were finishing up, and now he called to the Colonel.

"The sub's moved," he said. "It's further away now. I can hardly see it."

The Colonel peered through the view slit.

"It's just drifting," he said, "Tide must be taking it out. Keep a watch on it, Saunders, and when you can't see it any more, we'll try to start up and get the hell out of here."

They waited.

The sub drifted further and further away, until it was gone out of the head-

light beams.

"Sub's gone," announced Saunders.

"Now, Sandy," said the Colonel.

Sandy pressed the starter button.

The engine ground slowly and did not catch.

"Turn off the headlights," said the Colonel.

Sandy flipped a switch and pushed the button again.

This time the diesel sputtered into life.

They heard the sound with mixed emotions. It meant they could move again. But it was also a means by which the enemy sub could detect their presence, returning to blast them with a torpedo.

They watched tensely down the red-lit headlight beams as the diesel idled, warming up, but no sinister shape came gliding through the water at them.

"Move her out, Sandy," said the Colonel.

Sandy's hands revealed his tenseness as he released the brakes once more and the M-24 came to life under him.

Slowly they moved forward. The water had cleared by this time and they could see the path ahead. It led down a gentle slope for a few yards and then leveled off to a smooth, sandy bottom, similar to that on the landward side of the reef, but without the long, waving strands of seaweed which had blocked their view. They could now see to the very fringe of their headlight beams.

They all held their breaths as inch by inch they crept down the slight slope, wondering whether the next inch would bring water pouring through the hoses. Then they were on the level again.

"Stop here," said the Colonel.

The Retriever stopped.

Sandy looked around at the Colonel and saw that he had come to a decision.

"I think we should go on right now, instead of trying to go back," said the Colonel. "I think we have a better chance that way than trying to climb the cliff again, and then having to come back and do it all over again. Especially since we know that Chino subs are patrolling this area. We might never get by them again.

"But I can't order you to do it. I'm asking you --- what do you think?"

Sandy and Saunders both nodded

their agreement. Sandy spoke for both of them.

"I think you're right, Colonel," he said. "There's really nothing we can do to improve this beast if we did take it back, and why waste time? The sooner we get to that rocket, the better off we'll be."

"Right," said the Colonel. "Let's go."

## VII.

FOR ALL OF THEM this was their first experience with the weird world of the ocean bottom, except through the medium of motion pictures and T-V, and they were in a constant state of fascination as the M-24 moved across the undersea terrain.

Sandy drove as before, and Saunders and the Colonel alternated at the extra view-slit as observers.

The sea-bottom was exceptionally smooth, showing only tiny ripples like the waves on a pond. The animal life was a continual marvel.

They had covered about ten miles from the foot of the reef when a slight downward tilt to the terrain made itself apparent.

"We must be getting near the edge of the island shelf now," said the Colonel. "We'd better turn a little north-northeast, and run parallel to it. The rocket should be no more than a mile or so in that direction."

Sandy set the new course.

Apprehension still nagged the Colonel's mind.

"We should have seen more Chino subs before this," he muttered, as much to himself as to his companions. "I wonder why they've left us alone? I'm almost sure that the one back at the reef detected us, and by now there ought to be a pack of them hunting us down."

"Thank the Lord for little favors, Colonel," said Sandy wryly. "Incidentally, the edge of the shelf is now about a hundred yards off to the left. We're approaching it at an angle, and I think we ought to turn more northerly now or we'll get too close. That's one cliff we just dassn't fall off!"

The Colonel took a look and confirmed Sandy's diagnosis.

"You know," he said. "We didn't

have to worry about our float being pulled under back at the reef -- this chart shows 25 fathoms, 150 feet, along here, and the depth hasn't changed at all in between."

"Yeah," said Sandy, "But I wasn't thinking of looking at that damned chart while we were sleigh-riding down that cliff. I thought we were headed for the center of the Earth!"

The Colonel chuckled.

"It sure felt like it," he said. "And at that, there could have been a gully or canyon at the foot, deeper than the normal bottom ---."

"Colonel!" Saunders' voice, sharp and strident, cut him short.

"What's up, Saunders?"

"Another sub; I think. Just at the edge of the light. Did you see it, Sandy?"

"Yeah, I saw it. And four more just like it, just as you spoke. I also saw something else, Colonel."

He turned from driving and the M-24 eased to a stop, engine idling.

"The rocket's up there too," continued Sandy, "And there's a whole nest of Chino subs sitting on top of it, like a swarm of goddam vultures around a carcass. If one of them's a T-V sub ---."

The Colonel dove for the buddy seat.

Through the view-slit he saw the beams of the headlights stretching out two hundred yards ahead. Then as his eyes adjusted, he could see dim shapes in the water, hovering over a spot on the bottom. Straining his eyes at the spot underneath the enemy sub pack, which seemed to be circling slowly, he saw the rocket.

Then his attention was snapped instantly back to the circling enemy subs. One of them had suddenly blossomed out with a cone of powerful light from its needle prow and was turning to point in their direction! A T-V sub, and it had detected them!

"Sandy --- lights out, quick!" he yelled.

Their lights went dark.

The light of the enemy craft swung full on them, looking like the malignant eye of some Cyclops of the deep whose very stare was death --- it began to get larger and brighter.

The sub was getting closer!

"It's coming at us!" yelled the Colonel. "Get your diving gear ready --- we might have a chance if it doesn't get us with the first shot! And pray, damnit, pray ---!"

Suddenly they were tumbled to the water-covered floor by a stunning concussion, their ears paralyzed by a wave of sound. Saunders' head hit the metal wall with a crack and the Colonel landed on top of him.

Sandy, safety straps straining, fought to keep his seat.

The Colonel scrambled up and made for the view-slit.

A huge expanding bubble of rolling debris now occupied the place where the enemy T-V sub had been a few seconds before. He could make out masses of machinery and broken sections of hull falling out of it to the bottom, glowing with a dull red light of their own and illuminating the scene eerily.

Just as he was reaching for the headlight switch, another shock wave hit them and the Colonel's eyes were blinded as a second Chino sub flowered into a bubble of orange flame.

"Somebody slipped them a fish!" he chortled. "There they are! They're our subs --- four of 'em, and all T-V babies!"

Four sleek, silvery shapes had come out of the inky depths to the left, from over the edge of the shelf. The remaining Chino subs were spiraling away, two of them shooting out sudden cones of light to aid their T-V eyes.

The Colonel flicked on the headlights.

The rocket lay unguarded. Its outline was clearly discernable in their lights. The enemy subs were high-tailing it, with the Allied craft right on their heels.

"Get going, Sandy!" snapped the Colonel. "Now's our chance!"

#### VIII.

IT TOOK SANDY only a few seconds to get the big Retriever into motion, but during that short space of time another shock wave hit, and another orange bubble formed far ahead;

Detouring around the pieces of the enemy sub which lay on the bottom, they raced for the rocket with diesel roar-

ing. There was no telling when a Chino sub would return to the spot, and that's all it would take to end their trip in a blast of flame.

Sandy throttled down fast as they came up to the big cargo rocket, and swung around on the right-hand tracks.

"Back her up and drop the hooks," directed the Colonel. "Dammit, I wish we had thought of some way to see behind us."

A ringing clang went through the structure of the M-24, then another and another as the Retriever gathered the rocket into its horseshoe-shaped opening under the crane.

Sandy slammed a lever by his left leg and with an electric whine, the magnetic hooks went down to grapple their load.

Up they came again, and the M-24 began to settle in the sand under the additional weight.

Then, with a screech and a clang, the hooks slipped and the rocket dropped back to the bottom.

"Try again!" said the Colonel anxiously.

Again Sandy pushed the lever down --- back --- the hooks caught and the M-24 began to settle --- then the ear-splitting squeal of metal scraping metal as the hooks lost their grip.

"Dammit!" growled Sandy. "The rocket's too smooth. Not like a tank where the hooks can catch on the housing or the treads. What'll we do?"

The Colonel swore.

"Hell of a note," he finished up, "To get this far and not be able to get our hooks on the thing!"

He rubbed his beard-covered chin in frustration.

"Maybe we could dent up the rocket's hull by banging into it," offered Sandy. "The hooks might catch then."

"And bang up what might still be usable inside? No, that's worse than nothing."

The Colonel scowled in thought.

"Only one way I can think of," he said, "And that's go outside and put the hooks where they'll hold --- by hand!"

Sandy looked at him as if he'd lost his mind.

"Don't look at me like that!" the Colonel bridled. "We're not too deep

for skin - diving --- Navy frog-men work deeper than this all the time."

"Sure they do!" said Sandy. "But they work out of special subs with escape hatches designed just for that purpose, for one thing. How are we gonna get out of this can without ruining the work? We crack that escape hatch and the cab fills with water --- under pressure. How do we get the water out again?"

"We don't," said the Colonel. "We run the rest of the way in the diving gear. It can't hurt anything in here, can it? We'll make the engine-room watertight with sticky patches and pray that nothing happens to the diesel."

Saunders went to work sealing up the door, while Sandy and the Colonel examined the escape hatch in the cab ceiling.

"Get the pinch-bar," said the Colonel, "And we'll worm a little hole in this rubber gasket. That way, the water will come in slowly, and we won't be able to open the hatch anyway until the pressure equalizes."

A few minutes work with the pinch-bar was rewarded with an iron-hard jet of water through the gasket, which splattered all over the cab and began rapidly to fill the floor with water.

"Watch that spout of water, Sandy!" warned the Colonel. "It'll knock you kiting if it touches you."

Even the drops which bulleted around the cab as the jet broke up against the wall were dangerous. They covered their eyes with the diving masks and prepared to have the water cover them.

The level rose rapidly, until finally with a monstrous "glub-glub-glub", the trapped air forced its way past the hatch and to all intents and purposes they were one with the fishes.

It was only then that the Colonel realized one big disadvantage of this underwater work.

He couldn't talk to Sandy and Saunders to give them instructions!

Damn! he thought, I should have laid it all out before cracking the hatch! But it's too late now.

He tapped Sandy on the shoulder and pointed to the driver's seat.

Sandy nodded, took his place in graceful slow-motion, and turned to look

at the Colonel.

The Colonel gestured to left the hooks down as far as they would go.

Sandy nodded and hit the lever.

The Colonel went out the hatch, holding on to the outside of the M-24, and pulled himself to the rear. He wasn't foolish enough to try to swim it.

Carefully he swung himself out to where the cables dangled from the crane-block and, guided by his hand-light, worked his way down the smooth side of the rocket, looking for a place to lodge the hooks. Movement seemed ridiculously easy underwater.

But there wasn't any place to put the hooks.

Up again and down the other side.

On this side was a two-foot hole, undoubtedly caused by the anti-missile missile which had brought the rocket down. A hook could go here.

He reached up to catch one of the magnetic grapples, and then froze into immobility.

Coming toward them, about 500 yards off over the deeps, shone the eye of a T-V sub!

Friend or enemy?

If friend, would they shoot first and examine the pieces later?

The M-24 was plainly marked with the star-in-a-circle of the Allied forces, but could they see it well enough at that distance?

All he could do was sit and wait.

Would it be life, or death?

Death would be a small spurt of vapor from the nose of the sub, a streaking needle shape coming at them through the water, and then --- nothing else that he and Sandy and Saunders would ever know about.

Life would be --- what? Such a little thing as a painted star on the side of this deadly hunter. Or the wave of a magic wand to make it disappear?

The sub was getting close now. They must see the M-24 now. If it were a Chino, surely they would have shot before this.

Then, no more than 100 yards off, the sub swung broadside, and relief flooded through him.

There was that good old star-and-circle, big as life!

The sub swung back nose-to and gaz-

ed at him with its T-V beacons. He wavered at it and reached for the hook and slipped it under the lip of the jagged hole.

But that was only one hook. What about the others?

He went over the rocket, foot by foot, but no other spots could he find. By stretching the last two cables to their utmost lengths, he could just reach the nearest fin with their hooks, but there was still no edge under which they could be slipped.

Only one way, he thought, and maybe that won't work.

Down the belly of the rocket he went, to where its side met the sand. He began scooping the sand away until he had a hole under the rocket as deep as his arm and shoulder could reach. He stuffed the grapple into the back of the hole and left it there.

Then, carefully keeping along the same circle around the rocket's hull, he scooped another hole on the opposite side until his fingers hit the grapple.

He pulled it through, snapped another grapple onto it from the opposite side of the crane-block, and he had a sling around the load.

Twice more he repeated the operation at regularly-spaced intervals. Then he headed back to the cab.

Sandy and Saunders were both outside. As he came up to them, Sandy pointed violently at the sub which was still watching them, and shook hands with himself. The Colonel could see him grinning under his mask.

He nodded and pointed into the cab.

Sandy went through the hatch head-first and settled into his seat.

Through the hatch, the Colonel motioned to "lift away!"

The cables snaked their way through the block and began to tauten. Anxiously the Colonel watched them take up the load. They slipped a little on the smooth surface, but held, and inch by inch the rocket lifted above the sand.

"Forward!" the Colonel motioned to Sandy.

The rocket glided into the hooded carrier and clanged against the back-plate.

They had it! Hot damn!

The Colonel slapped Saunders' sho-

ulder, pointed into the cab and went through the hatch. Saunders followed.

The Colonel gave Sandy the "OK" sign, and then motioned "Let's get the hell out of here!"

Sandy released the brakes, the diesel roared, the tracks churned sand, and they were started on the return trip.

The Colonel swooped up to the hatch and sat on the edge, like a tank commander in the turret of his tank.

The Allied sub, he could see, was following them. An escort, even! They were a long way from home base, but he was beginning to feel as if they would make it.

The tracks they had made on the way out were still plainly visible and Sandy followed them at as fast a pace as the M-24 could make.

Damn the leaks, full speed ahead! chortled the Colonel to himself. This is better than the goddam submarine Navy! We got that stinking rocket right out from under their stinking Chino noses!

He listened gleefully to the growl of the diesel as they lumbered along at a steady fifteen miles or so per hour.

And then the diesel coughed and died!

The sudden silence sounded like the clap of doom.

Sandy's face was turned toward him as he came through the hatch.

He tried to motion "What's wrong?" but got nothing but a frantic shrug in answer.

Sandy punched the starter button, but the diesel ground over lifelessly. His face was white under the mask.

Then he pointed urgently at his air tank, then at the engine compartment, back at his tank, to the engine ---.

The Colonel got the idea. The diesel wasn't getting air. Something had plugged the air-line to the surface.

A Chino surface craft?

Or had their float submerged and flooded the engine with water?

Either eventuality would soon spell the end of their journey.

Only one way to find out.

IX.

S TICKING HIS HEAD through the hatch, he followed the long black streak of their triple line up and up with

his eyes until it seemed to disappear some distance short of the dim-grey "sky" far overhead which represented the surface. It slanted back from the M-24 in a gentle curve --- no kink or tell-tale slump which would betray a sunken float.

Still only one way to find out what was wrong.

Turning back inside the cab, he motioned to Sandy and Saunders to "Stay put"; and indicated that he was going "up".

Sandy grabbed his arm and motioned "take it easy! Go slow!"

He nodded, gripping Sandy's arm in turn.

Their faces looked like those of two scared one-eyed owls as he turned and went through the hatch.

Slowly, slowly, he told himself, as hand over hand he followed the lines upward.

"One, two, three, four, five..." One hand up. "One, two, three, four, five..." Another hand up.

Somewhere he had read or heard that divers returning to the surface followed a rigid time-schedule. He had no idea if he was going too fast or too slow.

The rough surface of the hoses felt reassuring under his hands as he gripped them.

So engrossed in the sensations of his climb did he become that it was a surprise when he suddenly became aware that the surface was only a dozen feet or so above his head.

He stopped.

Carefully he looked around in all directions for the hull of a ship or anything else which might spell danger when he surfaced.

There was nothing, not even a fish bigger than his hand.

There was only the gentle dip and sway of the lines --- the sea must be calm. The light from overhead was strong. Must be early afternoon by this time.

Hand over hand he went up the remaining distance, breaking the surface into bright sunlight that hurt his eyes.

The first thing he did after clinging to the gently-bobbing oil-drums while his eyes adjusted to the daylight, was to scan the sea in all directions.

Outside of a few lazily-circling gulls, the only thing in sight was the low dim shape of the island to the east, its position marked by plumes of smoke rising from still-burning fires started by the Chino shelling. Not a single ship or plane was in sight. As far as visible evidence could be trusted there wasn't another human being within a hundred miles of this spot.

But he knew better.

A Chino sub might be watching him right this second.

Ignoring that pleasant thought, he hoisted himself up onto the oil-drum float and stood swaying with the motion of the gentle swells.

Looking up to where the ends of the hoses bobbed against the sky, he could already see what had shut off the air to the engine.

White feathers stuck up out of the opening of one of them.

A damnfool curious seagull had decided to land on the rim of the hose, and the suction had drawn it into the opening!

Stupid bird! growled the Colonel to himself. You'd think the puffing of the exhaust hose would have scared it away. Humans aren't the only creatures whose curiosity gets them into trouble.

Pulling the top of the hose toward him, he extracted the feathery body and after examining it for a few seconds, tossed it into the sea.

A quick but thorough check of the float, the lashings and the hoses told him that everything was as it should be, and he began to think about going back down.

Then a wry thought struck him.

Again pulling the hose-tops toward him, he put his face close to the openings and shouted at the top of his lungs

"OK, Sandy, start the engine!"

If the exhaust had suddenly begun to pop off, he would have jumped out of his skin.

Some sort of communication apparatus would have to be rigged up if they ever did this again. Did it again ---! What the hell was he thinking of?!

Still grinning to himself, he slipped his mask into place, plopped into the water and started down along the hose-lines.

Remembering that divers go down much faster than they come up, he didn't waste time counting on the return trip, so that it seemed like only seconds later that the top of the M-24 came into view below him.

Both Sandy and Saunders were outside again, sitting on top of the cab and looking up along the lines. Obviously they were watching for his return.

After wordless greetings, the Colonel motioned "OK!" and pointed inside.

Sandy scrambled to the driver's seat and a few seconds later the diesel whirred and caught.

His grinning face reappeared in the hatch and he gestured "What was wrong?"

Laughing to himself, the Colonel flapped his elbows like bird wings, but either Sandy didn't catch on, or didn't believe him, for he finally shrugged and went back inside.

The Colonel wished that he had brought the inquisitive gull with him.

#### X.

THEY MOVED OFF AGAIN, following their own tracks in the sand. The Colonel's eyes adjusted to the gloom of the depths again, and, perched on the edge of the hatch, he watched their progress with satisfaction.

It wasn't long before they were at the foot of the reef, where Sandy stopped the Retriever and joined the other two on top of the cab.

All the debris had settled, and they could plainly see what had nearly been disaster.

The lip of coral on the outer edge of the break in the reef had crumbled under the weight of the Retriever, toppling them headlong down the steep slope. Broken pieces lay at the bottom.

Another thing could quite plainly be seen.

The slope was too steep for the M-24 to climb. Especially with the added weight of the rocket.

To search for another, possibly easier to climb, rift in the reef would take hours, even if there was another one to find, which was more than merely doubtful. They couldn't waste that much time.

Sandy tugged at his arm and pointed to the front of the vehicle, then swam

off in that direction. The Colonel followed.

Down in front, Sandy patted a bulky housing which rested behind the massive front bumper, out of which sprouted the ends of two cables topped off with steel hooks.

Of course! The winch!

There were a hundred feet of strong steel cable on each reel --- run it out, swim up to the other side of the reef with the hooks, sink them in the coral there, and by winding in the winch and tracking forward at the same time, they could scramble up even the almost perpendicular side of the reef!

In slow motion, he slapped Sandy on the back and grinned broadly. Sandy nodded and started back for the cab.

As the Colonel followed, he noted with annoyance that he felt awfully sleepy.

Well, that was only natural, he thought, considering that he hadn't had more than a couple of hours sack time in about 48 hours. But the slowness with which he was forced to move as he made his way back to the cab disturbed him.

It was more than just fatigue. Even his lungs seemed to be laboring to draw breath.

Breath! Yes --- oxygen --- he was running out of oxygen! All the activity of going to the surface and down again.

Got to get to the cab. Only a little way --- but so hard to move --- so hard --- can't move ---.

His mind sank below the threshold of consciousness ---

--- and came up again, shaking off the cobwebs like a dog shaking water after a swim.

He was inside the cab of the M-24. Sandy and Saunders, masks close to his, were peering at him with concern in their eyes.

He struggled to rise, but they pushed him back down.

"Easy!" Sandy motioned. Then he pointed to the air tanks of all three of them and made the "OK" sign.

The Colonel grinned.

Good boy, Sandy! he thought. Caught on right away. You saved my life among other things.

This time they allowed him to get up and float to the center of the cab.

He made a couple of experimental movements back and forth and found himself in good working order.

OK, he told himself, let's get that goddam winch line out and get moving again!

Motioning for Sandy to stand by the winch controls, he started for the hatch overhead.

Strong hands clamped around his ankle and he was brought abruptly to a halt and pulled back down.

What the hell! he thought.

He got no chance to protest.

Sandy motioned imperiously to the buddy seat with the unmistakable command "Sit the hell down!"

Saunders pointed to himself and then outside.

The Colonel shook his fist in mock anger and subsided meekly into the seat.

Then's my boys, he thought. They think the old man's had enough, eh? I'll get my second wind in a minute and then I'll show 'em!

Meanwhile, he realized, it was nice to sit, with the water bouying him up, and just watch as the other two went to work.

Saunders became visible in the rays of their lights, towing the twin cables behind him as he swam upward toward the cleft in the reef. He disappeared over the ragged edge.

Sandy continued to pay out the cables.

Half a minute later, Saunders reappeared and waved to Sandy "Come ahead!"

Simultaneously winding in on the winch and moving forward on the tracks, the Retriever inched toward the slope and began to nose slowly up the almost perpendicular wall of coral.

The cables tautened like violin strings and the weight of the vehicle leaned on them, and the tracks scraped and ground across the coral as they fought for purchase.

Saunders hovered in the mouth of the cleft and watched their progress.

The Colonel watched through the view-slit, tensely counting the inches and feet.

Then it happened ---.

The M-24 lurched ponderously and skidded sideways. Sandy jammed on the brakes and locked the winch, and they

hung by one cable.

Propelled by the elasticity of its taut cable, the hook which had pulled loose came shooting back through the cleft straight at Saunders.

With a frantic flurry of arms and flippers he managed to dodge the bulleting hook --- but not the cable, which caught his legs and then his body in a tightening bight and tumbled him, tangled as if in a spider's sticky strand, through the water.

The dark red stain of blood eddied around him as the harsh surface of the cable chewed into his flesh.

From nowhere, it seemed, two long, dark, malevolent shapes glided into the headlight beams, making straight for Saunders' struggling form.

Sharks!

Before the Colonel could move, they had Saunders.

Mercifully, the water around Saunders frothed and clouded redly as the sharks went into a feeding frenzy, shutting out the sight.

Saunders' air tanks, spewing bubbles, dropped to the bottom.

There, the Colonel's mind shrieked at him, was almost me! I was on my way out when they stopped me --- My God! I don't know which is worse!

Both he and Sandy were paralyzed by the swiftness of the horror, but suddenly they both clawed upward through the hatch, making for the grisly scene as fast as they could swim.

What they intended to do when they got there, the Colonel didn't know, but he felt like venting his horror and anguish on the sharks with his bare fists.

A sudden monstrous dark shadow directly over their heads brought them up short in their mad, useless rush toward death. The Colonel's stomach knotted as he prepared to meet his own shark ---.

But it wasn't a shark --- it was the Allied sub!

The water around them was abruptly bathed in light as if lit by the sun.

The sharks glided away out of the light and out of sight. The Colonel, trembling and shaken, made his way back to the hatch, where he watched the huge hovering shape of the sub. It had stopped its forward movement and seemed to be settling slowly downward. It appear-

ed to be only a few feet over his head.

He began to fear that the gigantic bulk would settle straight down on the M-24 and crush it.

But it didn't.

A powerful light --- another T-V eye --- blossomed on its underside, momentarily blinding him.

It began blinking. Automatically the Colonel read the Morse signals.

"H-C-O-K O-N T-O-W Y-O-U O-V-E-R R-E-E-F" it blinked. "K-E-E-P C-L-E-A-R O-F P-R-O-P-S K-E-E-L B-I-L-G-E H-O-L-E-S O-K H-U-R-R-Y H-U-R-R-Y C-H-I-N-O S-U-B-S H-A-L-F M-I-L-E S-O-U-T-H H-O-O-K O-N N-O-W N-O-W N-O-W!"

Not even looking back to see how Sandy was doing, and carefully avoiding the spot where the sharks had been, the Colonel shot away from the M-24 toward the cable, now lying limp on the bottom.

Picking up the hook, he swam with it up under the belly of the sub. Keel bilge holes, he thought, must be along the bottom center line.

He found them, rows of six-inch holes along a ridge which ran the whole length of the undersea craft, and placed the hook securely as far up toward the bow as the cable would stretch. This would keep the Retriever from dragging too far back toward the propellers.

Now the other hook.

The full weight of the M-24 was keeping its cable taut. Sandy looked pale and shaken as the Colonel motioned to him to slack it off.

This is a rough trip on both of us, the Colonel thought as he swam up for the remaining hook and anchored it to the sub.

Hovering in the light of the T-V eye, he waved and gave the "OK" sign, then went through the hatch head first.

Sandy was already in the driver's seat, ready to feed power to the tracks and winch.

As it moved by nothing more than a vagrant current, the sub began to move forward. The cables straightened and tightened as they felt the strain.

The diesel growled and the winch whined. The sub drifted inexorably forward.

Up the slope ground the M-24, bumping and scraping, through the cleft with

its rough floor and out onto the sandy, weed-covered bottom inside the reef.

The sub stopped, the cables sagged, and they were through!

The moment the hooks were free, the sub began to back off into deeper water. As it moved overhead, the eye blinked "G-O-O-D L-U-C-K", and the Colonel realized what a gamble the sub-men had taken to help them. If a Chino had caught them in this shallow water, with a saw-toothed reef right under their keel, impossibly towing a silly little M-24 Tank Retriever ---.

God Save The Navy, he thought fervently as he swam back to the hatch.

There were no signs of sharks.

## XI.

NO SOUNDLESS WORDS were exchanged between him and Sandy as they moved off again under their own power. Sitting on the cab roof, the Colonel watched their lines trail up and backwards through the water and tried not to think of Saunders. The water was shallower here, not more than forty or fifty feet separated them from the surface, which once again shone above them like a "sky".

Waves showed a slightly darker streaks across the comparatively brilliant surface, otherwise unbroken.

Suddenly the even vibration of the M-24 under him was broken by a series of sharp tremors, and slight stirrings in the sandy bottom made little puffs of sand rise like tufts of brown grass.

Explosions somewhere, but not under the water, or he would have felt the concussion.

Were they shelling the island again? Perhaps he could see if he surfaced.

He didn't follow the line this time but went straight up, confident that he could locate the vehicle again in such shallow water.

The island was in plain sight, and so were the shell-bursts which blossomed on it in thickening frequency.

The attack had been resumed!

This time for sure they'd try for a landing. Their boats should already be in the water heading for the beach, to come in under cover of that barrage.

Stretching out of the water as far as he could, he looked out to sea.

There they were, at the limit of his vision, coming straight toward him at a ninety-degree angle to the course of the M-24. He could just make out what they were --- amphibious tanks towing sea-trains of rubber rafts, which would of course be loaded with Chino marines.

Standard procedure for open, sloping beaches --- the tanks could tow the rafts right up out of the water and as far inland as necessary to allow for maximum speed in getting to cover and concealment. No more dropping men at the water-line to dash madly for the protection of the palm trees --- maybe getting there and maybe not. Tactics had improved during the last twenty years.

Well, he thought wryly, it had all been for nothing. They had gotten the rocket alright, but it wouldn't do them any good now. The Chinos had beaten them to the punch, had taken a chance that their defenses wouldn't be strong enough to stand off a landing.

Their bluff had been called, the cat was in the fire, the snail was on the thorn, and he and Sandy were in the water --- they wouldn't even be able to make it to the beach in time.

In time for what? --- to be clobbered along with the rest?

One thing this landing party wouldn't be looking for was defending forces between them and the beach! And that's right where we're sitting at the moment, he realized with unreasonable surprise, right between them and the beach!

"The element of surprise is your greatest ally," said the Combat Officers Manual.

So I'll wait right here under the water and when they come by, I'll pop out and yell "Boo!" --- that should surprise the bejesus out of them.

Just long enough for a couple of dozen of them to get their rifles to their shoulders and sink me with ten pounds of lead. Hah!

Well, what then, Cooper? Come on, get organized. You haven't got much time.

First thing to do is to get Sandy to stop, he thought, and I'll think of

the next step on the way down.

Readjusting his mask, he ducked under the surface and headed down. The M-24 had proceeded forward out of his range of vision, but the long snakes of the air-lines were right below him, and down then he went, hand over hand.

As he went, he turned over fragments of plans in his mind.

The amphibs would be tough nuts to crack. About the best they could do was disable a couple of them --- snap their tracks with a monkey wrench in the gears or something.

The rafts --- now there was juicy prey indeed!

They could be had with such a simple weapon as a diver's knife. One pass across their soft, bulging bottoms, trailing a sharp blade against the rubberized fabric --- and two dozen screaming Chino marines would be struggling in the water instead of heading for the beach with blood on their minds.

Yeah!

A knife was also swift, silent, and didn't need reloading.

The cab of the Retriever came into view below him.

He was able to convey the main outline of his last ten minutes activity to Sandy by means of gestures --- Sandy had already guessed the meaning of the tremors that were reaching them.

A few seconds rummaging turned up two extra knives, the pinch-bar and a number of empty air-tanks.

He found that he could swim comfortably with the pinch-bar and an air-tank clipped to his harness --- two monkey-wrenches for two amphibs, and plenty of sharp steel for the rafts.

Sandy grabbed two air-tanks and one of the extra knives and followed him upwards.

When the Colonel surfaced again, the Chino sea-trains were much closer. Clouds of rolling grey smoke all but blotted the island from view. The flashes of exploding missiles marched through the smoke like the footsteps of a dancing high-tension wire.

The boys on the island were taking a pasting again. He wondered what they were doing --- if they were still alive. He hadn't seen any answering fire from

the island's automatic weapons, which was not reassuring, but it might only be that the power-pile had taken another direct hit, or something had fouled up the radar. He hoped that was all it meant.

Then there was no more time to think about Dergeant Gates and the others. The amphib was almost on top of them.

"Try for the tracks first, 'Sandy,'" he said, keeping his voice low. "Then go right down the line underneath the rafts. Don't go back if you miss the amphib --- keep moving. And let's hope no bright boy gets the idea of dropping a grenade over the side on us. OK, boy, let's go get 'em!"

The leading amphib was no more than a hundred yards away when they ducked under the surface and began to swim slowly forward to meet them. A whining, churning noise grew louder in the water.

They could see the square-black patches ---.

Involuntarily, the Colonel gave a mental Rebel yell as he spurred forward, just to the right of the amphibious tank approaching him straight on, and jammed the pinch-bar between the slithering track and the notched drive wheel.

The track parted with a "clunking!", the engine noises over his head rose in pitch as the engine raced with the lightened load.

The amphib heeled over and began to circle.

Something whoosed down right behind his head, and with a shock he realized that he had almost been hit by the broken track as it plummeted away, twisting and snapping like an angry millipede. Have to watch that next time!

He was already on his way toward the string of rafts whose underbellies trailed behind the now disabled amphib.

Easy, swift and deadly! he thought, as his knife ripped into the fabric of the first one.

Rolling white bubbles of air gouted out as his knife slitted along. In one breath he was out from under it and reaching up for the second.

It was not until the sixth and last had felt the bite of his blade that he turned to look.

Flaccid rafts, like Dali watches,

were crumbling toward the sea-bottom, dripping flailing bodies, weapons, boxes and other equipment in a wild melee. The sea churned white as men fought to regain air, and were pulled under relentlessly by the weight of their assault harness.

Helmets and rifles fell downward like a comic rain of chamberpots and garden spades. Then bodies began to follow.

The Colonel tried to laugh, but the best he could manage around his scuba-mouthpiece was a demoniac gurgling, something like "Rur-rur-rur-rur!"

The amphib had stopped and now bobbed gently with the waves. The rafts sank until they tautened the tow-lines. As many of the Chinos that could make it had made for the amphib and were crowded around it, fighting for handholds.

Amphibious tanks, although they float, are still tanks, their weight giving them a comparatively low freeboard above the water.

Add the weight of forty or more struggling, panicky, drowning men, and the drag of six deflated rubber rafts. The Chino amphib wallowed for a few seconds, shipping water, then ponderously settled beneath the surface and headed for the bottom.

The Colonel watched it go with glee.

Popping to the surface again, he looked around for another victim. One other amphib, surrounded by yelling, scrabbling Chinos, sat low in the water about fifty yards away, its stern low and blunt, bow high, tilted that way by the weight of its sunken raft train. As the Colonel watched, its stern sank lower as more Chinos found room for a hand.

Seconds later, water began pouring over its low backboard and it began a stern-first dive under the surface.

Score one for Sandy! he chortled to himself.

Inshore, six sea-trains were still making for the beach. Two more, towing their rafts, had swerved toward the men struggling in the water.

The Colonel tried to spot Sandy somewhere in the melee, but with no success.

The course of one of the sea-trains coming to the rescue would bring it to within a couple of yards of where he was.

There was nothing he could do about the ones already past --- the landing couldn't be prevented. But he could account for one more; which would bring the odds down some.

Under he went once more. The black rectangle came churning at him through the water. Reaching up to his harness, he unfastened the air-tank and held it ready.

A slight movement to his right, and the slab side of the amphib began to slide past him. The current caused by the track helped him swing the metal tank up and into the notches, which then carried it backwards into the teeth of the drive sprocket.

This time he was yards away when the track broke and went angling away through the water. Swimming swiftly, he was under the rafts in seconds, and using two hands on the knife, he went down the line leaving a trail of bubbles, sagging fabric and thrashing Chino marines.

He didn't stay to watch this time. He should find Sandy as soon as possible now --- they had done all they could.

The sharks would be showing up about now, and he didn't want to be mistaken for a victim rather than the victor.

Added to which, you hypocrite, he told himself, you don't want to see anybody else get what Saunders got, even if it is a Chino.

## XII.

LEAVING THE HAVOC he had created behind, he swam until he thought it was safe to surface. A hundred yards away, the one remaining sea-train was trying to rescue some of the men in the water. Sandy either hadn't seen it coming, or else hadn't had a clear crack at it. The six that had escaped were just pulling up on the beach.

A sense of frustration gripped him as he watched the Chinos leap from the rafts and fan out along the sand, unopposed.

It was a good fight, Mom, but we lost.

The island is lost to the enemy, and with it, perhaps, the South Pacific front.

Lose the South Pacific and you lose the whole shooting match.

Tough.

Too bad you couldn't have been a whole underwater army, Cooper. A dozen more men and another watertight M-24 and you'd have taken on the whole stinking Chino Navy; eh? You're bucking for a medal, boy. Posthumous, of course. You get any sassier with them and they'll be bound to walk all over you sooner or later. Be satisfied with what you've done already.

Be a good loser, Cooper, just for once. You never could take a licking, but you're getting one now, and what are you going to do about it?

Where's the goddam Navy now?

That was unfair. Twice the Navy had saved his bacon --- to look for them again was asking for three miracles in a row.

No dice, Cooper, this is the end of the line. Now you're even mixing your metaphors. Well; maybe it's a crap-game on a trolley-car, eh?

Find Sandy and then what?

You can't go back to the island --- they've got that. You poke your nose up on that beach and they'll shoot your tail off.

Katmu, the nearest Allied base, is 120 miles away.

Start swimming, Cooper; you're damn-fool enough to try anything.

The only thing you got to go back to is the M-24. It's a dead end, friend. It looks like you'll spend the rest of your life, all twenty-four hours of it, underwater.

A sudden increase in the commotion at the spot where the sea-train was still trying to haul survivors aboard drew his attention away from his thoughts.

Men were screaming and thrashing in the water, and as he watched some disappeared below the surface.

The sharks were on the scene.

Time to get the hell out of the vicinity. Readjusting his mask, he went under again.

His air was getting low, so he decided to go back to the Retriever for a fresh tank before looking for Sandy.

Sandy must have had the same idea, but he didn't quite make it.

He found him about a hundred yards short of the M-24, floating unconscious

just over the bottom. His air-tank gauge showed empty.

The Colonel's was just about empty, too, as he pushed Sandy through the hatch and followed. And when he looked, there was only one remaining full tank of air.

Well ---.

What does the world have against you, Cooper?

A pulse still beat when he felt Sandy's wrist. He hooked the fresh tank to Sandy's hose.

Hooking his legs around the unconscious man's middle; he alternately squeezed and let go, squeezed and let go --- the nearest approximation to underwater artificial respiration he could think of. He had no idea whether it would do any good, but it was all he could think of to do. He didn't know how long Sandy had been without air, or how long an airless man could still retain life in the water. Sandy might be deader than Saunders right now --- no!

He kept on squeezing --- squeezing ---.

Feeble hands pushed against his legs. Sandy's head rolled from side to side and his legs scissored weakly, as if he were trying to swim away from whatever sea-monster it was that had him in its grip.

A few minutes later, Sandy was fully awake, massaging his ribs.

In sign language, the Colonel was telling him: "Last tank of air. Must do for both of us. Where do we go from here?"

"I dunno," Sandy shrugged.

The Colonel's air-tank went dry. They began passing the one remaining air mask back and forth between them.

"Surface?" Sandy pointed.

The Colonel shook his head. "Nothing there but water, he thought. And cruising sharks.

They might be able to sneak back on the island, but they wouldn't last long without food or weapons, or even water. They'd be killed, or worse, taken prisoner to be used as hostages, or as a source of information.

So what other way can you go, Cooper? Out to sea? There's nothing out there but a lot more water filled with Chino subs.

And an Allied sub or two, like the one that had helped them over the reef.

It's a wild hope, boy, but what's one more miracle in this day of miracles? If it doesn't work, you'll be no worse off.

His plan was a difficult thing to explain to Sandy, but he finally got the idea across. When it dawned on Sandy what the Colonel had in mind, he gestured a rejection, made an imitation of a torpedo coming at them, blowing up, and drew a finger across his throat, "Kaput!"

The Colonel answered by pointing back at the island and crossing his throat twice, "Double kaput!"

Sandy nodded and slipped into the driver's seat. The diesel growled into life and once more the M-24 was moving.

### XIII.

IT WAS ON THAT TRIP back to the slot in the reef that fatigue, hunger, thirst and exposure finally caught up with them. Sandy could hardly keep the Retriever on its course over the sandy bottom. Several times it was only the thrusting of the air-mask into his face that brought the Colonel back from the fringes of unconsciousness as his eyes tried to force themselves closed. The pain in his stomach and throat had evened out to a constant ache.

The air-tank gauge crept toward the empty mark with chocking swiftness in response to their double demand.

But finally they were there, with the nose of the M-24 poked out through the reef as far as it was safe to go.

They spelled each other at the light switch, and the message flashed out through the dark water minute after monotonous minute --- "A-L-L-I-E-D S-O-S S-O-S S-O-S A-L-L-I-E-D S-O-S S-O-S A-L-L-I-E-D S-O-S ---".

The diesel coughed and died, out of fuel. They hardly noticed.

"A-L-L-I-E-D S-O-S ---".

It was an invitation to sudden death. Noticed by a Chino sub, it would bring the swift, straight run of a torpedo, a cloud of red flames with them at its center.

"S-O-S S-O-S".

As far as they knew, there were many more Chino subs out there than Allied --- if there were any Allied subs

at all by this time.

"S-O-S ...".

An answering light blossomed far out over the deeps.

They waited dully. There was no turning back now. This was it.

The light was coming closer.

It was a plain "yes" or "no" now. Life or death. Off, on. Black or white. To be or not to be --- what a question!

The light began to blink.

"S-T-A-N-D B-Y", it said in open Morse. "P-I-C-K U-P O-N S-U-R-F-A-C-E W-A-I-T F-O-R S-I-G-N-A-L S-U-B C-1-4-5-5 H-E-R-E R-E S-O-S S-T-A-N-D B-Y".

The Colonel was too tired to do more than put a hand on Sandy's shoulder. Sandy nodded and made the "OK" sign.

They had won a desperate gamble. One more miracle had happened.

The sub was quite close now. They could make out its dark bulk behind the light.

It began to rise, and the light began blinking again.

"S-U-R-F-A-C-E N-O-W F-O-R P-I-C-K-U-P S-U-R-F-A-C-E N-O-W S-U-R-F-A-C-E N-O-W S-U-R-F-A-C-E N-O-W O-U-T!"

And the light went out.

The sub was already awash in the deepening twilight as they reached the top of the water. Hands reached out from a rubber boat and hauled them over its soft round sides.

The hands guided their stumbling steps over the slatted deck, pushed them bodily up a short ladder into other waiting hands, and they found themselves in an oval room suffused with dim light.

Other hands prodded them medically.

"Sickbay!" said a voice.

The last they knew they were being carried off to an inner part of the sub as utter exhaustion rolled over them in a black wave.

#### XIV.

SEVENTEEN HOURS OF dead-dog sleep later, interrupted twice by cups of hot broth, and with six pep shots salted in for good measure, the Colonel was back in the land of the living, and seeking against strict orders to get back on his feet.

Before he could test his legs, he had a visitor.

"I'm Captain Bean, in charge of this can," said his visitor. "You're a bloody hero, Mac!"

The Colonel stretched out his hand and grinned.

"A real hero, yup!" Captain Bean went on. "Orders from Admiral Rumprik, no less, to get your fanny back to Australia quicker'n hell. He wants to see you soonest. You started a war, bub!"

The Colonel started to say that he didn't know what Bean was talking about, but he didn't get the chance.

"A real bat-eared, whang-tailed war, I'm sayin'!" Captain Bean went right on. "We were gonna let the stinkin' Chinos have this spittin' little island until you crawled that go-buggy of yours out there --- scared the grease right outta them, yup!"

Captain Bean's very prominent Adams apple pogoed as he laughed.

"We were layin' off a ways watching them sit on top of your rocket, and wondering how we could give 'em the biggest blasting, when in you crawl with your sea-going what-the-hell-is-it. Hoo-boy!"

He laughed again.

"One of them broke formation to investigate --- you saw that? --- and we let him have it. They thought you did it, and the riot started! The rest scattered, squawking their heads off! Their HQ got it all, and so did we. 'Terrible new weapon', 'monster sub-killing tanks all the way from Australia', 'Send reinforcements!', 'call off the attack!', 'nan the poop-decks' --- hyuk!"

It sounded good the way Captain Bean told it, thought the Colonel.

"Well, they got so shook up that it was four hours --- four hours! --- before Chino HQ got them organized again. We can do a lot in four hours, bub! Chino HQ decided to send reinforcements --- 'reinforcements' --- hell, they sent their whole goddam Navy down there, plus enough troops to cover that miserable little island ten feet thick, and the Admiral just grinned, and sent his whole Navy, and right about now that part of the ocean is heavin' and boilin' like a potful of oatmeal.

"We been tryin' to get the Chinos to commit themselves for months now, but you know how it's been --- deader'n Dillon's dickie all over. Goddam ches

game instead of a war --- everybody scared spitless to make a move. Everybody on the raw edge of their nerve. You gave them a jolt and that's all it took.

"So now the boys are battering the hell outta 'em, the Admiral wants to give you every medal he's got in stock, and your own Army boys want to know who the hell gave you permission to go crawlin' all over the bottom of the sea and gettin' in the Navy's way! Haw!

"And I want to give you a drink. How about it, Scotch all right?"

Captain Bean held up an unopened bottle of Black Label which the Colonel hadn't noticed before.

"Sure," he said, hitching himself upright on his pillow.

His first medal, thought the Colonel as he accepted the half-full tumbler.

A glass of Scotch. Well, it wouldn't be something that would last so he could show it off, but it was something that would live in his memory just as long.

Bean filled his own glass and lifted it in a toast.

"Here's to you and your Loocy --- he's aft with the Engineer, by the way, havin' a wonderful time with the machinery --- and the war you started."

The Colonel felt the clean sheets, the soft pillow under him, the muted purr of the engines carrying him to the safety of Australia --- contrasting it all with what had happened in the M-24. This drink should be on me, he thought.

"God Save The Navy," he said, and drank.

T H E E N D

## THE WORLD OF TOMORROW TODAY

There was a story --- name and author escapes me at the moment --- in a very early Gernsback AMAZING which told about an airplane race and how one of the planes attained the speed of sound and came apart in the air because the sound waves kept building up and building up ---.

Then there have been many stories which told about the trouble rockets and planes were going to have with the heat of air friction, usually giving the author's solution to the problem.

These were the "sound" barrier and the "heat" barrier. Both of them have been exceeded.

It won't be very many years before nuclear energy will have been perfected for propulsion in space, and then the next "barrier" will be the "light" barrier.

The theory of relativity claims that no speed greater than that of light can possibly be attained in the physical universe --- that, as an objects approaches that speed, dubbed "c" for convenience, enormous amounts of energy are needed for each small increase in speed, and that, somehow the mass of that object rapidly approaches infinity.

Science-fiction authors have proposed a number of ways around this "barrier" --- space warps (if you can't exceed "c" in normal space, change space so that you can); fourth dimensional drives (the speed of light is not necessarily a limit outside of our dimension); plus any number of variations, such as the one where you take space like a piece of paper and fold any two points on the surface so that they are right next to each other, and just hop across.

But it's also possible that "c" is not a limit --- light itself has mass, and not infinite mass either. And light can be generated by the puny power of a flashlight battery. Mathematicians themselves admit that mathematics have nothing whatever to do with the real universe, so it would seem that only the actual attempt to attain "c" will answer the question. It will be interesting to see what the results will be.



# MAN OF THE MULTIMAN

BY JACK DONOHUE

---

HE WAS SUPPOSED to be less a man for being born than Man; he was supposed to be helpless, alone and unarmed, face to face with the "rugged individualist" who had plagued his life and fouled his dreams. But he was doing what had to be done --- even if he died for it, and what measure of a man is there that is finer than that?

---

AT THE EDGES of the forest, John Tremont paused. He lifted his telepathic helmet to his head and the thousands of tiny antennae extending from its flexible matrix glittered in the morning sunlight.

It was the helmet of a leader in the community of the Multiman, massive and with wide range and precise discrimination. But Tremont had retained the athletic condition of his youth while he doubled his years. His easy movements gave no indication of the helmet's weight. It seemed to become an integral part of him when he tightened the straps. Tremont's broad shoulders squared and his erect figure became even straighter. He felt like a whole man again.

With his eyes narrowed as he faced into the sun, a sun which his earth ancestors a millenium before his birth had known as a star called 61 Cygni, Tremont concentrated. The probe ends of the antennae, each of which was both a corti-

cal contact and a molecular transmitter-receiver unit operating on its own frequency, pressed against his depilated crown but he could detect no response. There was only the silence of his own thoughts. As he had anticipated, he was no longer linked with the other half-thousand men and women on this planet. He was no longer a participant in the Multiman of Secterra.

For a moment, Tremont scanned the wide and monotonous expanse of the prairie that separated him from the still distant mountains. He reached for his cloak and pack.

Ruth --- his thoughts raced back to her.

He had been stuffing the last of his hidden store of rations into the pack when he had heard her characteristic light tapping on the door.

Startled, he called, "Just a minute!"

Hastily, like an intruder in his

own quarters, he jammed the pack into one of the lockers which lined the hull of the grounded spaceship.

Ruth's somewhat singular features appeared drawn. She was apologetic.

"Sorry, John, but I couldn't get back to sleep after I heard you get up. Is something wrong?"

He shook his head.

"Just some work I want to finish!"

"In your uniform? And ---, a slight movement of her grey eyes indicated his desk, " --- your helmet?"

"I thought I might check the guards."

"It's more than that --- you've something on your mind!"

"Yes ---."

How much did Ruth know, he wondered? Or suspect? Ever since the resolution began to form in his mind, he had masked his conscious thoughts whenever he wore the helmet. But he could have slipped.

"You know what's on my mind, don't you?" he said.

Ruth smiled faintly.

"Carl Slagger ---." When she said the name, it sounded almost like an accusation.

The old feeling of hurt and frustration welled up inside him in spite of all his efforts to suppress it. Why couldn't she understand ---?

"Yes, Carl Slagger!" he said, struggling to keep every trace of defensiveness out of his voice, but fearing even as he spoke that he was failing. "Slagger the renegade --- Slagger who preys on us, murders one of us ---."

"He'll be caught, John. It's only a matter of time."

"Time? How much time, Ruth? Two years ago, it was the boy on guard, shot with his own disgun. A boy just helmeted hardly older than our own Michael.

"Now it's Lilith ---."

"The men were after him before he could harm her," she interrupted.

"Yes, but he got away!" His voice betrayed his impatience. "She was hysterical for hours. Who knows what will happen next time he comes back! He mustn't come again, Ruth! If we don't take matters in our own hands, it will never end and we'll be at that brute's mercy until the end of time!"

"John, be reasonable!" she said. "Slagger's only a man, and not your personal Memesis. He has his limitations. You know that better than any of us."

"I know --- I should have let him drown! We were just fool kids. He jumps in to swim the river on a dare and I jump in to haul him out --- don't you think that bothers me, too?! I'm doubly responsible for Slagger, Ruth! I'm not only responsible as Guard Leader for the safety of each of us, but I'm actually responsible that Slagger is alive! I was too young to know what was coming, or I'd have let the river have him ---."

Ruth laughed.

"I can imagine you letting anyone drown," she said. "Even Slagger."

She came to him and rested her head on his shoulder, but his mind was too laden with his obsession to respond.

"No, he's not indestructible," he said. "And I intend to prove it. We chased him through the forest time after time, then we reach the periphery and we can't go further without splitting from the Multiman. We come trailing back to wait, or we set another useless trap. Ruth, I'm going to get my hands on Slagger ---!"

She stepped back to look up into his face. Her grey eyes were serious.

"You'll get that chance, John," she said. "You're impatient at our slow progress in the labs. We're working on holonets of much greater range, and one day we'll cover all of Sacterra. The Multiman keeps growing --- that's the important thing, isn't it? When Earth sends another ship, we'll be ready."

He always found her seriousness fascinating. It was like being in the presence of one of the original crew of the Centaurus. He envied her the dedication that lay beneath her gentleness. The early scientists must have felt the same way when they departed from the Solar System, and later generations of voyagers must have been as dedicated when they evolved the Multiman to keep their mission intact during the long ages of the interstellar journey.

"Yes," he said. "That's the important thing, of course. But Slagger is a menace, has been since the day he smashed his helmet and ran off, laughing ---. At first it was only the bad example he

set our young folks, tempting them ---."

She laughed again.

"Tempting them? With what --- the animal life or a renegade? Without children or companions? Only a madman would be tempted by that ---."

"I must finish my work, Ruth," he interrupted. "That's enough of Slagger for one night. Go back to sleep now --- I'll --- I'll be along in a little while."

When he was alone, He struck his fist against the edge of his desk. What was Slagger doing to him? He had lied to Ruth, knowing that tomorrow she would discover his lie.

Disquieting thoughts hung on and he had to keep pushing them down throughout the summer night, as he stole from the Centaurus and made his way through the sparse ring of structures surrounding the ship. He followed the river through the forest, evading his own guards like a fugitive. His helmet he kept wrapped in his cloak.

The price had to be paid, he told himself. Slagger had to be destroyed; his menace could no longer be tolerated. And he, John Tremont, could no longer tolerate the sleepless nights when he tossed and turned, fighting off the jeering image of the renegade, which mocked his constraint and dared him to venture out of the Multiman against him.

John glanced up at the mountains while he adjusted the pack. Now he was answering that challenge and carrying it back to Slagger in the renegade's own domain. An eagerness began to appear in the long and steady strides with which he began his trek across the prairie.

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The third night, although there had been a light shower, he held to his resolution never to build a fire. Instead, he lay wrapped in his cloak, convincing himself it was better to endure the discomfort than to forewarn Slagger of his coming.

He disliked these periods when he had to settle down to rest. While he was on the move, he experienced a constant enthusiasm, and the pursuit assumed some of the aspects of a boyish adventure as he swung along, the dry grass crunching under his feet. The sweat

streamed from his body and soaked into his uniform but there was something in the very air he breathed and in the wide vistas he scanned with every glance that made him feel more alive than he had since the days of his youth.

Whenever he stopped, however, the same feeling of not having the right to be where he was began to steal over him. He tried to rationalize it away, but there was still a vague sense of guilt in him about the ease with which he had slipped out of his habitual interaction with the Multiman. At first, it was true, he had had occasional moments when an unfamiliar and uneasy sense of aloneness crept into his mind, or when he suddenly became aware that he was straining to catch the response of the group-mind. But he had brushed off these moments with little difficulty and they had rapidly disappeared.

The rain ceased and he watched the stars emerge from the clouds. Soon, they spattered the whole black surface of the sky's inverted bowl. A soft breeze rustled through the grass and dried the moisture on his forehead.

His thoughts drifted to the men of Earth. Somehow, out here alone amid the vast sweep of the prairie night, he felt closer to them than he ever had in the community, where they were considered only as the potential enemies of the Multiman. They had built the Centaurus, he knew, and had passed on to his forefathers an astounding scientific and technical legacy. But in spite of their accomplishments, they must be a childish and emotionally primitive race, since their entire lives were spent in a manner similar to a childhood in his community, for they never entered into the collective consciousness of a real adult period.

How would they react, back there in their Solar System, when they came to realize that the Centaurus would never return? Or had they already forgotten it in the short-lived fervor of their individualistic pursuits?

He laughed to himself. These were questions for the far future into which only the Multiman would survive. He'd better get some sleep; the greater part of his journey still lay ahead.

-----  
He had climbed the initial slopes before he came upon the first sign of Slagger's presence. Behind him and far below, the dusk had transformed the prairie into a hazy and featureless expanse, broken only by the golden thread of the river. It was a panorama inviting contemplation, but he could not spare it more than a passing glance.

He turned back to watch the mountain with the split crest. The setting sun still flecked its peaks, but twilight was already wrapping the wooded plateau upon which he kept his eyes fixed.

The chill of the darkened heights gradually descended and penetrated his light uniform but he never relaxed his vigil. His cloak, draped over the boulder against which he leaned, remained untouched while he waited, tense and expectant. For he was certain the glowing point would appear again tonight over on the plateau. And he was almost as certain that it marked Slagger's campfire, where the renegade basked in comfort and warmth, confident of his immunity from human pursuit.

Almost as certain, John kept reminding himself. What if the fire was of accidental origin? Or some natural phenomenon? These were valid explanations, he had to admit, but he could not accept them now any more than he had the previous night as he pushed forward in the darkness until the luminous spot disappeared with the dawn.

The night had deepened and the plateau had become an unbroken mass of darkness when its abrupt appearance surprised him. He straightened and blinked his eyes. No, they were not playing tricks on him. There it was --- a tiny circle glowing like a beacon to guide his steps.

He settled back against the hard surface of the boulder. All uncertainty vanished; he knew he had located Slagger's camp. All he needed now was a weapon.

He slid the disgun from its holster. Yes, he had planned things well. He certainly had. He had carefully gathered his supplies in secrecy; he had correctly surmise Slagger's river route into the mountains; he had timed every step; he had checked each detail. Then,

a little rodent had happened along to force him into the discovery that he had forgotten the most important item.

The incident had occurred the day before he reached the foothills when the rat-like creature had scampered across his path.

His hand had darted to the disgun before he stopped to grin. The animal had been nursing her young when his footsteps had startled her. They still clung to her teats as she sped away, their tiny brown bodies bumping along the ground.

He started to slide the weapon back into its holster, and stopped. His grin changed to a frown.

It was the first time he had drawn it since leaving the settlement. He had checked it, of course, before he started and he had seen his target noiselessly disintegrate. It had functioned well in focusing the power waves propagated by the reactors in the ship.

But they were waves --- they would attenuate with distance, just like the Multiman's span.

He almost knew the answer before he squeezed the trigger. It was a certainty after he had twice decreased his range.

He had carefully dismantled the weapon and inspected every part. Nothing was wrong with it. His weapon was useless simply because he was too far from its source of power.

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He reached the plateau three nights later, sometime between midnight and dawn. When he neared the scene of the fire, he stopped to cache his cloak and pack behind an old stump before resuming his cautious approach. The dancing flames transformed the trees into a mass of twisting shadows as he went on; his senses alert for any sign of danger, his disgun drawn. The weapon was a bluff, yet it was all he had and Slagger could not know the difference.

Once his helmet brushed against a low-hanging limb, but he reached the edge of the clearing around the fire without incident, and stood studying Slagger's reclining figure. The renegade lay back from the heat midway around the clearing, a spear stuck upright in the ground near what seemed to

be his head. Like the rest of his body, it was blanketed by a large covering --- it looked like an old tent stolen from the settlement --- on which he slept and which he had folded over himself. His sleeping figure was like an image carved from one of John's own adolescent fantasies when he, like the other youths, had also dreamed of running off to the freedom of these distant mountains, a dream Slagger alone had achieved.

He stepped warily into the clearing.

Halfway to the spear, he heard a mocking voice.

"Welcome to my humble abode, John," it said.

He spun around, bringing the disgun to bear on the spot as he turned. Slagger stood at the edge of the clearing, no more than ten strides away. An arrow, taut in his primitive bow, was aimed directly at his pursuer. He was also armed with a crude dagger stuck into his belt of his trousers.

"Drop it!" John commanded.

Slagger ignored both the order and the weapon. He approached slowly, treading silently on his moccasined feet, until he had halved the distance between them. The firelight lit his torso, bare in spite of the chill and browned by years of exposure, the white scars across his chest intensified by the contrast.

Motionless, John studied his adversary, who had no more deteriorated with the passing years than he had. Instead, Slagger had acquired a new quality. Now in addition to his herculean build, there was an animal perfection in his supple movements and an alertness which projected itself to the viewer.

When the renegade motioned with his head at the decoy figure, John was struck by the man's hairiness. Apparently the wind and the rain had effaced his early depilatory treatments, for a heavy red beard, as dirty and matted as his bushy locks, framed the smile which was half a sneer on his thick lips.

"You admire my work of art, John? I worked hard on it!"

"I told you to drop that bow!"

"Stop wasting your orders. I'm not one of your guards." Slagger kept the

arrow taut. "You know, I was sure it was you. Said I to myself: 'You know you hate the man's guts, but you have to admit he has 'em. Who else down there would have the nerve to come crawling out?' It had to be you."

"So it is. And, for the last time, I'm telling you to drop that weapon before I fire." John motioned with the disgun.

Slagger snorted. "Fire with that piece of junk? You can find another one over there in the canyon where I tossed it --- no, go ahead and pull the trigger. I want to see your face when it doesn't work."

"I'd rather take you back alive than kill you."

Slagger seemed amused. His eyes bored directly into John's. "You know, if you came here knowing that thing wouldn't work, you've got more nerve and less sense than I gave you credit for. Don't try to bluff me, man. I killed your guard for one of those things and I would have killed more the last time if I hadn't lost my temper and threw it away when it wouldn't work out here in the mountains."

"The weapon you took from the guard was defective."

Slagger laughed mirthlessly. "You don't remember his carcass very well, do you?"

"I haven't forgotten. Nor have I forgotten a certain screaming girl. Why didn't you kill her too, if you've come to enjoy wanton slaughter?"

"Look, Tremont, don't throw up the woman. It wasn't what you think it was. The guard, yes! I killed him and I'll kill any man who stands against me. But the woman was different!"

John was surprised by Slagger's emotion. Perhaps he could agitate him further, possibly into making a wrong move.

"You're a filthy animal as it is," he replied with deliberate disdain. "Don't make yourself a liar, too."

Slagger did not anger. Instead, he continued in a calmer manner, as if he were trying to make John understand something. "I'm talking too much, but I may as well while I have the chance," he said. "Who knows when I'll --- don't try it!" he roared.

John stayed the foot he had been sliding forward. "I'm not trying anything," he said.

"Well, don't!"

The renegade paused a moment, then went on again. "Yes, I wanted the woman and I wanted her bad, just like I wanted someone to talk to or even look at. You know, I've gone all the way down there sometimes just to make sure there were other people in the world. Half your life out here alone is more than any man can stand."

"You could have returned before you killed the guard."

Slagger spat. "I'd sooner hang from the nearest tree. But you let me do the talking."

"I still think you're a liar."

John's second attempt to anger him also met with no success. "And I don't care what you think," he said. "I intend to get it out of my system and you're going to listen whether you want to or not. Sure, I wanted the woman but there was more to it than you think. Yes, I mean that!"

The scornful smile stayed on John's lips.

"Look, Tremont, I've managed to stay alive out here but I've done some thinking, too. Some day, it's going to be all over, I know that, and what's going to be left? A pile of bones spotted with a couple of chunks of rotting fleah. Not much to look forward to, is it?"

John did not reply; he did not even know what to reply. The termination of an individual life had never seemed a matter of great importance in the Multiman.

Slagger seemed unable to stop talking. "Continuity, that's what I wanted. You know, the men of Earth faced the same problem and they knew how to get that continuity. Homes, family life, children, a chance to pass on the things that mean something. That's why I wanted the woman. And that's how the men of Earth intended all of us to live, not like insects in a hive."

John quickly suppressed his sympathy for the man. "You're afraid to die," he taunted. "And you dig up the men of Earth to cover your crimes. Did murder and abduction fill their lives, too?"

"Yes, and at times worse besides." Slagger's voice rose. "But they were real people leading real lives, not a bunch of spineless worms packed together into a Multiman. You fools are trying to make something of yourselves you were never intended to become. It won't work, I tell you. It's not the way for human beings!"

Out on the prairie, John could permit himself the indulgence of sympathizing with the remote men of Earth. Confronted with the living example of Slagger, their professed admirer, he felt compelled to defend the Multiman. "It has worked," he said evenly. "We've lived now for generations within the Multiman without bloodshed or conflict. Compared to that record, your men of Earth resemble a pack of brutes, a transition stage between raw animal life and what we have become."

"Brutes! Why, they built the spaceship you still live in and gave you everything you'll ever have. What has your Multiman accomplished? A few shacks thrown up around the Centaurus!"

"What has the Multiman accomplished? A new way of life --- one that you can't comprehend. A way of life that at last makes man and woman truly human beings. As for the buildings and other externals, we'll have those when the Multiman expands enough to need them." He was speaking in the words of Ruth, he realized, but they were his words, too.

"And what do you get out of all that?"

"A definite meaning for our lives, which the men of Earth never had. Everything we do becomes an integral part of the Multiman, and in that way," he added very deliberately, "more of what we endure than a few chunks of rotting fleah and a pile of bones."

"Then you can go back to your precious Multiman and consider yourself lucky I let you go. You saved my life once and Slagger pays his debts. But if you ever come this way again, Tremont.."

John started to back toward the edge of the clearing.

"Wait," the renegade ordered, "Toss that dingus over here; then take off the helmet and leave it."

"Why should I?" John demanded, "You claim the disgun won't work and my hel-

met fits me alone."

"Because that's the way I want it." Slagger grinned maliciously. "And that's the way you're going to do it."

"And if I refuse?"

"You'll die!"

"You'd like to see me go back stripped like a child --- or a renegade. wouldn't you? A real chance for you to gloat."

"At least you'd go back looking like a man; not like a caricature in that thing. Anyway, if you'd had any sense, you wouldn't have worn the helmet. The sun bouncing off it out on the prairie told me where you were with every step you took."

Twice a fool, thought John, and he was paying the price. But he could not yield. The disgun was too potent a weapon in the vicinity of the settlement to let fall into Slagger's hands. And the helmet was too integral a part of himself to relinquish. More than ever, he needed it as a psychological link with the Multiman.

"I keep both," he told Slagger.

"You know, I'll get the disgun when I kill you. I bury you with the helmet if that's the way you want it --- now, I'm giving you the count of ten ---."

"You don't get them!"

"This shaft will go clean through you at this close distance!"

John did not answer. He had thought of a way to keep the disgun out of Slagger's hands.

"One --- two --- three --- four ---"

John started to say something, then stopped.

"--- five --- six --- seven ---"

He spoke suddenly. "All right, you win," he announced. "At that, I suppose you would kill in cold blood."

"Don't suppose --- I would. Now, throw that disgun right here." Slagger indicated a spot between them. "And don't try anything!"

Although he was tensed for action, John tried to make his movement look like a casual, even a careless, gesture as he tossed the disgun precisely into the golden heart of the fire.

Slagger almost made the instinctive jump to retrieve it that John had hoped for, but he caught himself. "Defiant little hero, aren't you?" he sneered,

moving the bow forward a trifle. "But I'll let it go. Now get that helmet off!"

Without haste, John began to undo the straps. "You get your chance to gloat now, don't you?"

"And you know I'm doing it! The proud John Tremont, see how he does my bidding! Funny, but I thought you had the guts to die first. I guess a man always shows up for what he really is at the final showdown."

John's lips pressed together. When the straps came loose, he slipped off the helmet and held it in front of him. He slowly maneuvered it into a position directly between Slagger and himself as he rotated it in his hands.

The renegade laughed. "What a re you --- in love with that blasted thing? What a sight!" His huge frame shook with merriment.

John's muscles tightened. It was time for his move. He balanced the helmet as he pressed the balls of his feet against the ground.

"Laugh at this!" he shouted as he suddenly hurled the massive headpiece directly at the renegade. The moment it left his fingers, he sprang. The arrow whistled by him.

Slagger could move fast, too. He had dropped the bow and his hand darted to the dagger in his belt before John reached him.

John's left hand seized his arm as Slagger raised the weapon in a flashing arc. His right arm circled his adversary's waist, pinning his other arm to his side. The sour smell of the renegade's body filled his nostrils as their faces swung up close to each other.

Slagger's sneer hung directly in front of his eyes. "Now you'll die for sure!" the renegade gritted from between his yellowed teeth.

John gave him a quick jerk for an answer.

It did not budge the renegade. "Try this!" he snapped as he brought up his knee.

John shifted fast, throwing all his weight to one side. The knee struck him on the inside of the thigh instead of in the groin as they fell down together. In the fall, Slagger managed to twist his unarmed hand free but John immediately

caught his wrist.

Neither loosened his grip as they rolled across the campsite, first one on top and then the other. A thought of rolling toward the spear flashed through John's mind but he could not control the direction and they ended up beside the fire with Slagger on top. John could feel the heat scorching his side while he strained to hold back the dagger descending toward his throat with all of Slagger's strength and weight behind it.

"Beg, beg for your life, little man of the Multiman," the renegade jered. "Beg for it before you die."

His forehead beaded with sweat and his palms sticky with it, John strained with all his might to halt the descent of the dagger. It took all he had but he finally held Slagger's arm stationary.

Was this the way he would die? And why was he not afraid of dying? Instead he felt a kind of exhilaration. Yes, they were afraid --- Slagger and the old men of Earth; they had to be, for they perished like isolated fragments, afraid to be no more. He was different, for he was an integral part of the Multiman, and the Multiman would live forever. And if he died, he would do the Multiman's work by seeing that Slagger died with him. He laughed directly into the face of the renegade.

It infuriated Slagger, who lunged downward. Instead of trying to hold back the blow, John threw all his stren-

gth into a quick twisting turn while at the same time he pushed upward.

It worked. Slagger slid face first into the fire as John scrambled out from beneath him. He leaped to his feet and raced for the spear. He heard the bellow behind him as he grabbed it and spun around.

The renegade, his beard aflame and a maddened cry on his lips, came charging in like a crazed beast. John thrust the spear forward, adding all his weight and strength to the momentum of the charge. The spear was almost torn from his hands as it plunged into Slagger's chest.

His frantic hands clutching at the shaft, the renegade screamed again and again --- great screams that split the silence of the night and came rolling back in echoes from the surrounding heights.

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It was morning before John completed the cairn over Slagger's body. There had been plenty of stones lying about the clearing, and the renegade, after all, had been a human being.

When he had completed the task, John put out the smoldering fire and retrieved his helmet. The metallic antennae glittered like jewels in the light of the rising sun as he tightened the straps. He felt like a whole man again.

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The End

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COMING IN "SCIENCE FICTION STORIES":

OUTCASTS OF LIGHT

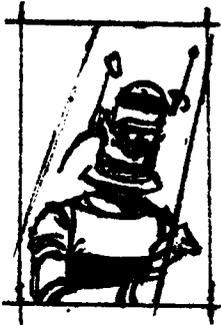
BY SAM MOSKOWITS

Through the barrier of the speed of light and into the trap of Time went Jack Hidley and his crew --- into dimensions where man had never been before!

THERE ARE FLOWERS ON THE MOON

BY ALDO GIUNTA

Yes, there were --- Cogan said there were and he could show them to Landry! And to add the final proof, he was sending a shipload of them back to Earth --- which only deepened into incomprehensibility the mysteries beheld by the first man on the Moon!



# INSIDE SCIENCE FICTION

BY SAM MOSKOWITZ

"I AM PARTICULARLY well pleased that the publishers of this new magazine have chosen the name of 'SCIENCE FICTION', which I originally coined, and I believe they are to be congratulated upon their wisdom in the selection of this title", wrote Hugo Gernsback in a guest editorial in the first (March 1939) issue of SCIENCE FICTION. Many things would happen in the roller-coaster-like up-and-down career of Blue Ribbon Magazine's initial entry into the science-fiction field, but nothing would eclipse the distinction of it being the first professional publication whose publishers were courageous enough to use the name "SCIENCE FICTION".

In 1938, F. Orlin Tremaine and John W. Campbell, Jr., editors of ASTOUNDING STORIES had compromised and changed the title of their league-leading magazine to ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION. The "science-fiction" was in small letters, of course, since it was traditional for publishers to try and disguise the nature of the far-out fantasies of the future that they were purveying.

There were other elements about SCIENCE FICTION that were rife with nostalgia. These were brought about by the fact that Louis Silberkleit, publisher of SCIENCE FICTION, had worked for Hugo Gernsback in the late twenties, and the two were good friends. Gernsback wrote the above-mentioned guest editorial for the first number, and put Silberkleit in contact with Charles D. Hornig who had ably edited WONDER STORIES for three years.

On the cover of SCIENCE FICTION and doing many of the interior illustrations in fine style was Frank R. Paul, the

best-loved artist, considered by many a genius at capturing the spirit of the genre.

"All is not gold that glitters" and disillusion set in fast for the readers when they sampled the stories. The editorial budget was microscopic, rates being half a cent per word after publication. Established authors were fearful of antagonizing their regular markets which paid one cent a word on acceptance by having their names appear in SCIENCE FICTION. Hornig found procuring stories a real problem.

From its second issue on, SCIENCE FICTION inaugurated a series of departments slanted at the science fiction fan. That issue saw the debut of "The Tele-Path", a readers' department. The third issue featured a regular fan magazine as a department, "The Fantasy Fan", title of Hornig's old publication. This excellent section was to carry articles on science fiction, biographies of celebrities, fan magazine reviews, meeting and convention notices, and chit-chat of interest to fans. Along with it, a department called "The Eternal Conflict" was devoted to subjects of scientific controversy, including atomic energy, utopia, telepathy, and, believe it or not, television.

The failure of the magazine rested on its inability to get any truly outstanding fiction. The last-ditch rejects (many under pen-names) of Eando Binder, John Russell Fearn, Henry Kuttner, Manly Wade Wellman, Frank Belknap Long, Ray Cummings and Nelson S. Bond were present. Attempts were made to bring back outstanding performer of the past. Neil R. Jones, previously popular

author of the "Prof. Jameson" series; was represented by a short novel, "Swords of Saturn", in the October, 1939, number; a satirical short novel, "The Planet of the Knobheads" by Stanton A. Coblenz, led off the December, 1939, number; Willard E. Hawkins, editor of AUTHOR & JOURNALIST, who had not written science fiction since the early days of WEIRD TALES, contributed a short novel, "The Man Who Was Millions", to the June, 1941, number, and several stories were obtained from Helen Weinbaum, sister of the late Stanley G. Weinbaum, who had a reputation for writing detective stories under her married name of Helen Kasson. Most of these efforts were barely passable reading.

Despite this, Blue Ribbon Publications launched a companion, FUTURE FICTION, whose first issue was dated November, 1939, and which appeared bi-monthly. Most astonishingly, a companion quarterly appropriately titled SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY was also added to the roster. Publisher Silberkleit had remembered that the early quarterlies published by Gernsback had done extremely well, so he took a crack at one.

SCIENCE FICTION was a 128-page magazine which sold for 15¢ while the quarterly (first issue dated Summer 1940) was 144 pages for 25¢. The quarterly featured a complete novel each number and was standard pulp size with trimmed edges. The first two novels in the quarterly, "The Moon Conquerors" by R. H. Romans and "The Shot Into Infinity" were reprinted from 1929 and 1930 issues of Gernsback's SCIENCE WONDER QUARTERLY and were outstanding stories.

Between the higher price and the finer stories, the quarterly did well enough to warrant continuance. In the meantime, Hornig, who had been conducting a love affair with the State of California, decided he wanted to live there permanently, and moved from Elizabeth, N. J., to Los Angeles. After a few issues edited at this long range, he found his publisher unwilling to continue with the arrangement.

Payment had been unsatisfactory, anyway, the three publications being edited on a not-too-rewarding flat-fee basis, so with the June, 1941, issue,

FUTURE FICTION passed under the editorial aegis of Robert W. Lowndes, and within months, so did SCIENCE FICTION and SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY.

After only two issues under Lowndes, SCIENCE FICTION combined with FUTURE FICTION, which, with its October, 1941, issue, became known as FUTURE Combined With SCIENCE FICTION. Lowndes had the same problems procuring good material at his rates as Hornig, particularly since science fiction magazines were then at a near-record total in numbers. However, he had an ace in the hole. He was a member of the Futurian Literary Society of New York, an organization composed of aspiring writers and artists. From this group he was able to recruit budding talent, supplying him with passable enough material so that he could eliminate the lowest level of fictional trash from his magazine.

Both SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY and FUTURE Combined With SCIENCE FICTION were committed to a series of Ray Cummings reprints during this period; some of them of considerable reputation, including "Tarrano The Conqueror", "Into The Fourth Dimension", "Brigands Of The Moon", "Wandl, The Invader", "The Shadow Girl", "Beyond The Stars", "Around The Universe", and "The Man On The Meteor". Most of these appeared in SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY, where Lowndes had the almost impossible task of trying to find original novels of 50,000 words in length for \$200.00 each.

There is an amusing story in this regard. Only weeks away from his deadline one issue, with no novel in sight, Lowndes imparted his desperation to Julius Unger, old-time fan and science fiction dealer. At the time I was taking a flyer at writing and agenting science fiction and had sold some novelettes and short stories to PLANET STORIES and COMET. Unger asked me if I had anything around of novel length. I didn't, and at the time was not on friendly terms with Lowndes. Unger suggested that I take a crack at a 50,000-word novel, which would have to be finished and delivered within two weeks.

Young and full of oats, I rose to the challenge while Unger went back to tell Lowndes that he had discovered a

brilliant young female writer in New Jersey named Ruth Gerber (Gerber being my mother's maiden name) who was polishing up a novel he felt confident would be a knockout. I wrote the novel, titled "Guardian Of The Universe", in about 10 days, my best day seeing 10,000 words pour out of the typewriter. It was a super-science epic in the grand tradition, but in order to get the 50,000 word length I threw in the plots of three stories I had in the planning.

The big job came with the re-typing, since my eyes were subject to quick tiring. My sister volunteered for that, but after only about 15,000 words of the novel had been retyped, a telephone call from Unger informed me that Lowndes had made a deal to buy second serial rights to the string of Cummings novels listed above, at a rate considerably below what he was paying for new stuff. I put the novel up on the shelf where it remains today, three-quarters in first draft. I excerpted one segment, "Outcasts Of Light", which will be used in the second issue of this new version of SCIENCE FICTION.

With its October, 1942, number, the title of FUTURE changed to FUTURE FANTASY and SCIENCE FICTION. The percentage of fantasy became heavier.

Meanwhile, the United States was well into World War II, and shortages were becoming more pronounced, one of the most acute of which was paper. Pulp magazines were cancelled right and left, including many in the science fiction world. SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY was dropped with its Spring, 1943, issue.

The title of FUTURE FANTASY and SCIENCE FICTION was changed to SCIENCE FICTION STORIES with its April, 1943, number, and for two issues, its last for the time being, the magazine reached the highest peak of quality of its career, up to that time. Stories appeared by names as prominent as Clifford D. Simak, Henry Kuttner, Robert Bloch, Frank Belknap Long, L. Ron Hubbard, Arthur Leo Zagat, Edmond Hamilton, Cleve Cartmill and Arthur J. Burks. Interior illustrations included the work of Frank R. Paul and Virgil Finlay. Julius Unger ran a department called "Science Fiction Spotlight", the title borrowed from a column

in his weekly news magazine, FANTASY FICTION FIELD. It is quite probable that to procure so outstanding a lineup, Lowndes received a substantial story budget increase for these issues.

Nevertheless, for whatever the reasons, SCIENCE FICTION STORIES terminated publication with its June, 1943, issue, and nothing further was seen of it until late 1953.

A boom in science fiction periodicals which began in 1949 saw Blue Ribbon Publications, now called Columbia Publications, mounting the bandwagon by issuing FUTURE Combined With SCIENCE FICTION STORIES with the number dated May-June, 1950. Rates were still below the field average, but Lowndes was having much better luck with the quality of his material, displaying names as distinguished as Arthur C. Clarke, Poul Anderson, Lester Del Rey, L. Sprague de Camp, C. S. Youd (John Christopher) and Raymond F. Jones. Many stories were subsequently anthologized or included in authors' collections.

One year later, SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY was released with a May, 1951, dateline. Here the earlier policy of a very long lead novel was discarded and it emerged as a balanced general science fiction magazine. One thing this magazine inaugurated which has since become a regular part of science fiction magazine content is the article on science fiction. For years, science fiction magazines had published articles on scientific subjects which rarely were as popular as the fiction and infrequently as well done as articles on similar subjects elsewhere. Lowndes was among the first to take cognizance of the fact that his readers were not all technical people and that those who were could get much better and more authentic material in the same vein in scientific journals.

This lesson was brought forcibly home to me a few years back. I married a girl who was a practicing Board Surgeon, Christine E. Haycock, M. D., and who had been reading science fiction for twenty years. I asked her opinion of several articles that had recently appeared in science fiction magazines bearing on future medicine. "I wouldn't know", she responded. "I didn't read

the articles."

"Why not?" I asked. "They were on medical subjects."

"I don't buy science fiction magazines to read articles on medical subjects," was her reply.

This wasn't snobbery. She bought science fiction magazines for entertainment. Reading shop wasn't her idea of entertainment, nor did she have confidence that a science fiction magazine was the place for the most reliable articles on medicine.

SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY first ran transition articles, such as "Science In Science Fiction: The Psychological Story" BY James Blish, and "Did Science Fiction Predict Atomic Energy?" by Sam Moskowitz and Robert A. Madle, and then swung into more literary aspects, such as "Edgar Allen Poe --- Ancestor" by Robert A. Madle, and "The Evolution of Science Fiction" by Tom Claeson.

However, science fiction was headed for a fall, and in 1953 the bottom dropped out and science fiction magazines began to fold by the numbers. By late 1953 the survival of FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION and SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY was in grave doubt. An undated one-shot titled SCIENCE FICTION STORIES was issued in December, 1953. Unlike its two companions, this periodical was digest-sized, 128 pages and sold for 35¢ instead of a quarter. The new publication more closely resembled a paperback book than a magazine, it contained no departments and the type ran full across the page like a book, instead of the standard two-column magazine text. There was no advertising and the back cover had a black-and-white symbolic half-tone, similar to what was being run on SCIENCE FICTION PLUS at the time.

The stories were primarily by new science fiction writers on the rise, including Poul Anderson, Robert Sheckley, Algis Budrys, Philip K. Dick and Katherine MacLean, among others. The publisher waited until final results were in, and then put a second issue on sale in August, 1954, very close to the first in policy and format. The third issue, January, 1955, announced regular bi-monthly publication. Simultaneously, FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION was suspended.

For awhile, SCIENCE FICTION STORIES followed this format, stressing second-line writers on their way up and eliminating departments. This policy changed with the July, 1955, number, when editorials by Lowndes and a long book review department by Damon Knight appeared. The following September issue added a readers' department and a coming events section, but most interesting were the words "The Original" prefacing the title on the cover.

The term "science fiction", once an anathema in the field, was becoming increasingly common in magazine titles. New magazines that carried the words unusually large could be mistaken for SCIENCE FICTION. So the words "The Original" were put before the title to indicate that this was the first magazine ever to carry the title of "SCIENCE FICTION". Readers misunderstood this, even though the copyright line of the magazine carried the correct title of SCIENCE FICTION STORIES, and afterward the periodical was commonly referred to in speech and print as "The Original Science Fiction Stories". Most readers tended to think that the word "original" meant all the stories were published for the first time and that there were no reprints.

For the next year the mag made a strong bid for field leadership. It jumped its pages to 144 with the January, 1956, issue. A series of lead stories by frontliner Clifford D. Simak appeared as well as work by Isaac Asimov and Murray Leinster. Lowndes was being permitted to pay higher rates to get a single important name for an issue, but the rest of the magazine still had to be scraped together with funds that were inadequate to do the job during a national depression several decades earlier, which made it literally impossible now. Artwork by Freas, Emsh and Orban was highly professional.

Few people knew what problems Lowndes worked under, nor that his science fiction magazines were but a small part of anywhere from 8 to 16 pulps he had to put together virtually singlehandedly. December, 1955, found FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION reissued as a digest on a one-shot basis. This clicked and regular

bi-monthly publication was effectuated, but this added to rather than eased his problems. With his magazines, he displayed ingenuity and resourcefulness in making do with what he had. When there was no stand-out story, he substituted controversial editorial matter. Somehow, he managed to balance the material in the magazine and except near the very end, his cover art work was consistently good.

The year 1956 was SCIENCE FICTION STORIES' high point. The upgrading of the magazine had not, however, paid off in sales, and with its July, 1957, number, 16 pages were dropped. Lowndes managed to sustain the level of quality but now another factor was coming into play. The American News Company, which had controlled its own distribution in major cities throughout the nation, including most large railroad stations was disbanded in late 1956. The hundreds of fine magazines which it controlled were split among the other, smaller distributors. American News had so carefully handled its distribution that the inferior facilities of the remaining companies showed instantly in the circulations of fantasy magazines such as SCIENCE FICTION STORIES.

Whereas previously, distributors had made every type of concession to get even the smallest magazine, now, most of them had so many good properties that they didn't want to be bothered with the small-yield science fiction magazines.

Science fiction magazines that weren't controlled by powerful publishers such as Street & Smith and Ziff-Davis were told that the distributors were not too interested in bi-monthly publications. Either the magazines tried to get on a profitable monthly foundation, or gave up the ghost. Science fiction magazines operating on a small profit margin frequently found that the additional month's display was the difference between survival and oblivion.

With its May, 1958, number SCIENCE FICTION STORIES went monthly --- not because sales justified the move, but to satisfy the distributors. To give the magazine impetus, Lowndes had secured a novel by L. Sprague de Camp, "The Tower of Zanid", which he began that issue as

a four-part serial. Beyond that there was little to offer that was novel or imagination-stirring. The monthly move lasted but five issues and the November, 1958, issue saw the resumption of bi-monthly publication and the beginning of the death-watch for the magazine. At any moment either declining sales or a distributor's dictum would mark finis. The magazine was living on borrowed time; each issue might be its last.

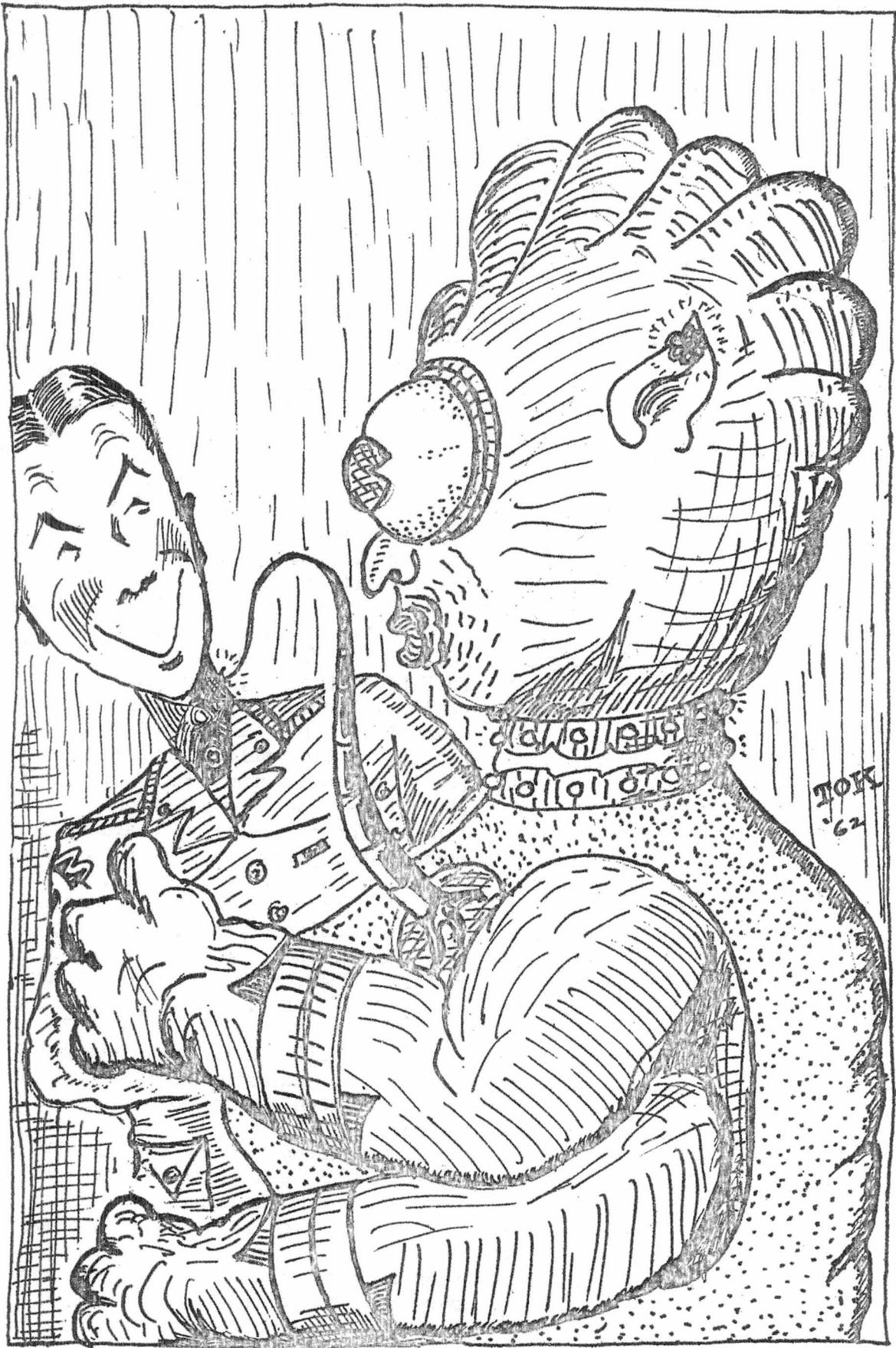
Whether under the goad of the distributor or otherwise, SCIENCE FICTION STORIES made another desperate try for monthly publication (10 issues a year) with its January, 1959 number, and again a serial novel by an important author, Ward Moore (in collaboration with Robert Bradford) was to provide the big draw.

The momentum this time lasted only three issues, and by March, 1959, the magazine could no longer support the luxury of a four-color cover, or even original cover art. Now the type was being set so that the magazine did not contain even 40,000 words of fiction.

The end came abruptly, not for SCIENCE FICTION STORIES and FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION alone, but for the entire chain of Double Action pulps put out by Columbia, the largest remaining such group. While sales were scacely good, the boom was lowered by the distributor, who dropped the publications from his line. The publisher cast around for six months attempting to obtain a new distributor, but with no success.

Then came a move unprecedented in science fiction history. Science-Fiction Times, Inc., publishers of SCIENCE FICTION TIMES, an amateur news magazine edited by James V. Taurasi, Sr., bought the title SCIENCE FICTION STORIES from Columbia Publications on September 28th 1961. The magazine would be edited by Ray Van Houten, with John Giunta as art editor.

The purpose of the new SCIENCE FICTION STORIES was to be as a proving ground for new authors. A strange turn indeed for a professional magazine, but it would be stranger than science fiction if some day a publisher were to purchase the title from Science-Fiction Times, Inc., and return it to the newsstands. The End



# THE WOOING OF UMPO

BY H. B. MUNN

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THE FEMALE SEX --- of whatever race, genus or phylum --- has ever been a source of apprehension and astonishment to a l l who have had occasion to cross its devious path. The entire inhabited universe, bellwethered by Earth, the mightiest world of them all, could be wrapped around womankind's finger once she had her stubbornness aroused, and when the course of the universe runs counter to the will of two females --- well ---!

---

PRINCESS UMPO, WHOOL was not only ugly per se, she was ugly even by the weird standards of her own unlovely race, the Hoobu.

As an entity, however, she was not without worth. She had learned English in the best universities, and although her accent was unusual and her voice like that of an amplified owl, she conversed fluently on a wide variety of topics, from aardvarks to zylography.

She was ever ready to dig up bits of gay gossip from the palaces of her home planet with which to amuse her companions. As a sportswoman, she had no peer; physically she was engineered for survival against grim competition in the murky past of her race. She played doubles tennis without a partner and never lost a set.

Not a few minor officials of the Terran World Government, into whose com-

pany she was frequently thrown by her position as social secretary to the Hoobuan Ambassador to Terra, went home to a night of troubled dreams after a day with Princess Umpo.

One of these, Paul Donald Frisbee III, an undersecretary in the Terran Department of Interstellar Protocol, slouched behind his huge mahogany desk one afternoon and stared at a slip of canary-colored paper as if a really black scowl, with all his heart in it, would incinerate it to ashes.

His eyes raised but his scowl did not soften as the door to his office opened and a honey blonde slipped in.

Her brows lifted as she noted his surly expression. From the corner of his desk, one lovely leg crossed over the other, she leaned over at him to glimpse what he was reading.

"Oh, that!" she said.

His face grew a bit discolored in his glandular effort to reconcile his canary-colored-paper rancor with the feelings set circulating by the sensational fableau vivant the girl was presenting.

"Uk --- what do you mean, that?" he managed, finally unglueing his epiglottis and forcing his eyes hotly to her face. "It's a memo from Toby."

"I know," she said. "Came up the tube while you were out to lunch. Why the little black cloud? It's only another weekend house-party."

"House-party, schmous-party," he growled, flinging the pale yellow slip on the desk. "It's at the Alcorian Embassy, and Uggerat always invites that Unpo Princess. One more weekend with that --- that ---!"

From his lap she smoothed his temples with small, soft, cool fingertips.

"Aw," she lisped, "Is doodums all mad 'Cause he don't wanna go to naughty ol' party? Aw ---."

"Now, Mavis --- don't do that!" The slight squirm he suddenly developed was not born of ordinary discomfort.

She sat back with a self-satisfied look which women sometimes get; and watched him take two deep breaths.

"You know how I feel about that --- female Hoobuan," he said with indignation. "I can't stand her. She beats me at tennis, she beats me at golf, she plays pool like an octopus, and did you ever see her run? It's terrible!"

Mavis grinned mischievously.

"You know, Paul, I think she's got a crush on you," she said.

"Crush on me? Why, that's ridiculous! Utterly ridiculous. I can't imagine anything more ridicu---."

"Yes, you said that," interrupted Mavis. "But it takes a female to know another female. I've seen her watching you when she thought no one was around. I'll bet she'd be a real terror if you ever made her jealous."

"Oh, Mavis, you're being quite ridiculous. Completely and utterly ---."

"Yes, I know. Ridiculous. But don't you think it's strange how you're assigned to the same house-parties and things as she is? And haven't you noticed how people sort of disappear leav-

ing you and her together --- alone? If I had a nasty mind," she continued darkly, "I'd say that you two were being thrown together!"

"Oh, Mavis, that's ---."

But he didn't say it. His exasperated expression degenerated into a melancholy gawp as memories in support of this ghastly logic percolated through his brain.

Mavis wriggled off his lap and picked up her notebook and pencil again. She patted her hair expertly back into place and swung toward the door.

"Buzz me if you want anything," she said with a flirt of blonde curls.

He hardly noticed as the door closed behind her. Unmoving, he sat staring at an imaginary point a few feet from his nose.

What a perfectly ridiculous, frightful idea! he was thinking.

But was it? a chill voice answered.

The Honorable Tobias Townley, Bureau Chief, Terran Department of Interstellar Protocol, spanged a button in the array on his desk panel, giving it an extra jab before lifting his finger.

He appeared to be counting off the seconds before the richly decorated door opened and a bright young man in striped shorts and cutaway cape entered.

"Yes, Chief?" said the young man eagerly.

"Bring me the guest list for the Alcorian party, Alvin," he said. "And the complete menu for the weekend."

"Yes, Chief."

"Better bring me the wine and drink list, too."

"Yes, Chief."

"Has Frisbee been given his assignment?"

"Yup."

"What did he say?"

"Well, I didn't see him personally ---."

"Oh, come now, Alvin," said Tobias Townley. "Surely this department is not unaware of its own hitherings and thitherings, its own heavings and boilings?"

"Well, sir, Mavis said that he was as sore as frostbite, and all but bit her when she went in to check. I gathered that he's beginning to smell a rat,

although she didn't say so in so many words."

"Um --- that's b a d. Although I can't blame h i m for being sore if he does smell that rat." His laugh was a snorting crackle. "T h a t Um-po jane is really off the record, I'll have to admit."

"But orders are orders, he said, recovering his grammar. "And see if you can't keep Mavis away from h i m until this i s in the hopper. She's had her net out for young Frisbee f o r a long time, and Um-po can't meet her competition. Don't forget, if it isn't Frisbee, it might be you or me!"

Alvin nodded thoughtfully.

"Check with Uggerat, and bring me a container of Coffeeless. And a couple of super-cetadin tablets. I got a headache."

Alvin nodded around the door and vanished.

----

The Alcorian Embassy was a huge, two story, ranch-type, glass-and-chrome edifice set deep within its own forests and parks, about fifteen minutes flight from the teeming capital. Swimming pools, tennis courts, greenhouses and secluded little cottages dotted the vast expanse of its grounds, and the private golf course rolled gently away from the clubhouse over the green velvet hills.

Ambassador Edcor Uggerat himself was greeting guests as Paul arrived.

"Well, well, well, my boy!" he twittered. "No gathering complete without a representative of Terra, I always say. Come in, come in! What do you hear from the horse's mouth?"

The Alcorian Ambassador was fond of showing off his command o f the Terran idiom.

Aliens involved in interstellar eventually developed some such idiosyncrasy. Other worlds were lusher, or richer in natural resources, or held sway over a greater number o f vassal globes; b u t in technology, inventive genius, mechanical ability, and in just plain brains, all trailed Terra at a respectful distance.

It was Terran-engineered spacecraft which kept the stream o f interstellar trade burbling merrily along. Terran-invented sub-space video made communica-

tion over the light - years practically instantaneous, serving the hundreds of habitant worlds as telephone had served the cities of the past.

Terran atomics, Terran chemical processes, Terran breakfast foods (specially prepared, packaged and ballyhooed for the various alien markets), Terran gew-gaws and Terran gadgets --- all were the best to be had.

Most of them were copied or caricatured in a short time, b u t when something new appeared, it was almost always a Terran product.

It was not strange, therefore, that Terra occupied an envied position. Copying easily becomes habitual, and Terran customs, mores, major and minor vices and other human foibles spread through the galaxy like a sneeze.

Sometimes the results, as practiced by uri-human races on the strange worlds in space, were ludicrous and droll, neat for the Sunday supplements. Sometimes they were horribly, tragically unfunny, and these instances fed the front pages of the interworld newspapers --- printed by Terran-developed electronic facsimile process simultaneously in every capital, city, town and hamlet in inhabited space.

Terra, in return, gathered to her the cream of the wealth of many worlds. No longer proscribed in preying on its own flesh and blood b y the bounds and limits of one world, benevolent capitalism became fact as well as catch-phrase. Every Terran was a plutocrat. Even the veriest beggar, h a d there been any, would have ridden whither he whilst in a brand-new CadilloldsnoJet Eight.

Alien worlds vied with each other in their need for a nipple on this cornucopia of plenty. Interstellar war and planetary occupation being impossible from a logistical standpoint (as well as the certainty that Terra, if attacked, would emerge the victor), the scramble for favored position was conducted on a more peaceable, if wholly as vicious and uncompromising, level. March and counter-march took place in the field of diplomatic relations; trade advantages were spilled as the blood of battle.

The governmental agencies corresponding to Departments of State served as high command, shock troops and SS Elite Corps.

"Hi, Uggerat," said Paul, shaking the proffered wing-tip hand of the Alcorian. "The horse had laryngitis today."

"Tee-hee! Tee-hee-hee! Always the joker, eh, Paul? Well, go on in --- you'll find people in every room, and the entertainment starts in about an hour. I've got something really special for tonight ---."

Paul shuffled nervously. "Has --- has the Princess Umpo Whool arrived yet?" he asked.

Uggerat's bird-like features were not built for expressiveness, but he managed to register a surprised beam.

"Why yes, yes she is, my boy! Amazing --- she asked the same thing --- that is, she asked if you were here yet, too!"

Paul jumped. "She did?"

"Yes, yes, she certainly did! I'm sure you'll find her around somewhere."

Paul moved off down the gleaming length of the hall with the thought that this was not quite what he had in mind.

The buzz of voices, in many pitches and timbres, heterodyned out into the broad passage from the archways of a dozen rooms. There were at least two hundred alien embassies maintained on Terra, and it seemed that representatives of every one of the variegated races were here at Uggerat's party.

Paul peered cautiously into the nearest archway. Light from the French windows opposite made detailed examination difficult, but the room appeared empty, so he moved hastily inside.

"Hello, Paul," said Princess Umpo from a divan near the windows.

Paul's first reaction was involuntary, a move toward the exit:

"Wait, Paul don't go," said the Princess. "Come, sit here. I want to talk to you."

Too late! his inner voice shrieked. He seated himself, feeling somewhat like an ancient Christian facing the Roman lions. The Princess Whool's person, however familiar, was still overwhelming.

"There," she said. "That's comfortable, isn't it? Shall I ring for drinks?"

She paused and regarded him gravely. Paul, for one hair-raising instant,

felt like running, but he shook his head wordlessly. Alcohol wouldn't help him now.

"Paul," she said suddenly. "Paul --- do you like me?"

"Oh Great Good In Heaven, thought Paul, this is it!

"That," he asked cautiously, "Do you mean, like you?"

"Well --- you know --- like me," she floundered for words. "I mean --- you don't hate me, do you, Paul? You do like me a little bit?"

There was the hint of a break in Princess Umpo's hooting voice, and Paul's rather definite feelings in the matter notwithstanding, now that he was faced with the actual, vocalized question, he felt something of a heel and a cad. Even more so as he realized that any attempt at deception would fail and thereby cut more cruelly than the truth.

"Umpy," he said, summoning to this vital moment all the inherent and acquired diplomatic skill that was his to command. "Of course I don't hate you. I can even remember times when we've had fun. But --- taking everything together and wrapping it all in one bundle, I'm afraid that I can't consider you an attractive companion."

Princess Umpo nodded.

"Nor I you, Paul," she said, with some bitterness.

Paul bridled in inward surprise. This was not according to the script! She found him repulsive?

"What you've said is also the way I feel," she went on before he could think of something to say. "And yet ---."

Again she paused, in distress for expression of her thoughts. What passed for womanly tears in the Princess Umpo's monstrous anatomy was quite alien to all human reference, but Paul was surprised to find that he perceived her emotion without difficulty, and that it aroused a sympathetic response within himself.

"Paul," she said in sudden determination, "I've received some very distressing news from home. I've learned that ---," he could see that she was both embarrassed and frightened, "--- that they're trying to make an arrangement between us. They've hatched an actual plan to marry us off to each other."

er! It's something to do with this new basic energy project Terra has started. Bringing you and me together is just one of their foul ways of greasing the channels of commerce, and your world is in it as deep as mine!"

Paul listened in stunned silence, his worst fears confirmed.

So this was the game! A marriage of convenience to set the stage for the impending commercialization of Terra's newly-discovered basic energy principles.

This was a case of stewing in the same pot now, after what Umpo had just told him, and called for nothing but a pooling of resources, a combining of talents, a meeting of the minds in order to avoid what could be construed as a merging of reluctant flesh.

But before he could perfect his thoughts to the point of expression, there was a deep-voiced "Hrrumph!" from the entrance. Paul looked up with annoyance to see a giant-statured, silver-furred, ape-like Capellan regarding them with that look of disdainful hauteur which was inborn, natural and permanent to that race's forbidding physiognomy. With a final piercing stare, it wheeled about and lumbered off without having spoken a word.

"Let's," said Paul, getting up, "Find a place where there aren't so many interruptions."

At her silent acquiescence, they moved through the French windows, down the broad balcony steps, across the terrace and over the greensward in the direction of the ledges of trees which began in the near distance.

The first deepening tints of the coming sunset were beginning to appear. Their way was noiseless, outside of the occasional song of a bird, or the distant shout of a figure in swimming or on the tennis courts. Even the Princess Umpo's normally hefty footfalls were stilled to a rustle in the heavy grass.

Not far under the trees they came upon a small cabin or summer house, one of many which were scattered over the embassy grounds. Paul, finding the door open and no one with a previous claim, let them in and flopped on a plushy settee and lit a cigarette.

Princess Umpo seated herself beside him and they sat in the gathering gloom,

THE WOOLING OF UMPO

silently communing.

Umpo sighed miserably. Paul, roused, waved the stub of his cigarette in perplexity.

"How could they ever hope to pull it off?" he said. "They certainly must know how we feel about it. And why us? You and me, I mean?"

"There have been other marriages of convenience between members of different planetary stock, Paul," she said. "And don't think they haven't been clever about it. I am chosen because of my lineage and my father's high position in the Hoobuan Empire. And I haven't yet attracted a mate from among my own kind," she added softly.

Her last words were like a window opening suddenly into her soul. Paul felt again, more strongly this time, that feeling of sympathy --- compassion, almost --- that had surprised him once before. Here was, he suddenly realized, one of those homely girls who had made the tragic mistake of trying to compensate for her unattractiveness by seeking superiority in other fields. Her excellence in sports, her unusually diverse education, and even her position in the diplomatic service --- the most sought-for career on any world --- had only accentuated her ugliness by piling racial anomalies on top of personal ones.

Princess Umpo was speaking again.

"The choice of you, Paul, was not of the same nature. Almost any Terran would have done. Inter-world marriages are uncommon enough, but any race that could manage a good match with a Terran --- well, you were also unattached, an eligible young male of your race. If not you, then someone else. The difference would be small."

Paul was thoughtful, still marveling at Umpo in this new light.

"Yes, I see," he said. "I can't understand, though, why of all people concerned we weren't let in on the arrangement. Did they imagine that we were just going to fall head over heels in love with each other? No offense, Umpy, but the differences between us are rather discouraging!"

"I'm not offended," she said. "After all, the matter of difference works both ways. I can't say how they expected to get our cooperation, although I

surmise that they were thinking of my inability to get myself a Hoobuan mate, and your to-be-assumed ambition to further your career --- it would probably mean an immediate Ambassadorship for you, you know. And as for the differences ---," she stopped, and to Paul it seemed as though she were trying to make up her mind about something.

Then she continued, and Paul was struck by the strange breathless quality of her speech.

"The differences are not necessarily disadvantageous," she said. "For instance ---."

Paul stared at her through the gloom, which was growing deep, and watched as from somewhere about her upper torso there appeared a thin, tentacle-like member, the tip of which brushed gently against the back of his neck.

Never had Paul suspected that his body was capable of such intense, ecstatic sensation. He bathed, he burned in pleasure. His nerves squirmed in delightful torment. He was on fire with rapture. He was ---.

"Well, well. Well, well, well! What have we here?"

Something collapsed under Paul and he came down, down through the pink clouds and found himself goggling into the beaky countenance of Uggerat.

Dumbly he stared at other faces, some human, over Uggerat's droopy feathered shoulders. They were distributed around between him and the door of the cottage, which must have been silently opened while ---.

A feeling of being smothered in ice clutched him. It swiftly changed into a hot burning, this time of rage and mortification.

"This is a frame-up!" he bellowed, leaping to his feet. The Princess Umpo remained motionless.

"My dear boy, I don't know what you mean," said Uggerat. "It certainly looked like quite a different sort of thing from where I was standing." And he giggled.

Paul was livid. "You do know what I mean, you --- you vulture!" he shouted. "This was planned --- it must have been planned. You were having us watched all the time!"

"Please, my dear boy ---."

"I'm not your dear boy!"

"Now, Paul --- I can't imagine why you're getting so excited about this. No sense in getting so excited. I'm terribly sorry if I've interrupted something, but I'm sure I didn't know anyone was in here, with the lights out and all ---. Anyway, I don't mind. Quite the contrary, I'm glad to see my guests enjoying themselves, especially two such nice young people. However ---," he hurried on with an injured air as Paul threatened to interrupt again "--- I was only letting people know that the entertainment will be starting in a short time, and if you'd care to join the others ---?"

Paul, red-faced, was speechless. Umpo was the one who answered.

"Thank you, Uggerat," she said. "We'll be there shortly."

Uggerat shooed the others out ahead of him and left, a well-veiled gleam of triumph in his beady eye.

Paul's outraged dudgeon left with him.

"That really wraps it up!" he groaned after the door had closed on the departing throng. "They've got us right in the palm of their hand now. This will be all over the place within a half hour --- and all over the city by tomorrow morning!"

"Yes," said Princess Umpo simply.

"What are we going to do, Umpy?"

"Psssst!"

The sound drew their attention to the door in the rear, opposite that through which Uggerat et al. had taken their leave. Somebody there was psssting! at them. It was too dark to see who.

Paul moved closer, peering.

"Mavis!" he bleated. "What in the world are you doing here?"

"Come on, you two, this way out," said Mavis from the dark rectangle of the back door, which she was holding open. "Hurry up."

Paul remembered his manners just in time to step aside and let Umpo precede him.

"Say," he said suddenly. "Were you there all the time --- watching?"

Mavis' look was lost in the dark-

ness.

"No, I wasn't," she said. "I didn't know where you were. I followed Ugerat here and came around to the back while he was busy in the front. Why, was there something to watch?"

Paul decided that no explanation was better than the best he could produce and ignored her question.

"You kids are in real trouble," Mavis continued. "I've been checking around and the whole department's in on this one. Hoobu has just opened up a planet loaded with heavy isotopes, and Terra is willing to consider trading concessions with them on the new basic energy process. This mixed marriage business is supposed to be a gesture of good will, to get both sides in the mood for round-table conferences. By the way, do you know who was in the gang that broke in on you just now, Paul?"

"No, who?"

"Toby! That's who. And if I know Tobias Townley, your touching little tete-a-tete is all down on film right this minute! You haven't got a breath left in your body as soon as they start turning the screws, and that won't take them long," she concluded on a ghoulish note.

"Kee-rist!" shuddered Paul. "This is awful!"

Princess Umpo broke in.

"Toby," she said. "Was that the tall, thin Terran in the red shorts and purple evening cape?"

"Yeah, that's him," said Mavis. "Did you see him?"

"Yes," said Umpo, "I saw him. He's cute!"

Mavis and Paul exchanged startled glances.

"Cute!" Paul exploded. "About as cute as a cobra!"

"I think he must remind me of a pet snarrel I had once," Umpo said.

"Say, Umpo," Mavis cut in. "How do you stand in this deal? Are you with the hare or the hounds?"

"I'm a hare, too," said Umpo. "I've talked with Paul, and he understands how I feel."

Paul nodded in confirmation. "Umpy doesn't like me either," he announced, and told Mavis what the Princess had

learned from her home world.

"That checks with what I know," Mavis said. "What a frame-up! You kids ought to be flattered, having two worlds play cupid for you!"

"Cupid, hell," said Paul, "More like Rasputin!"

"Should we go up to the house?" asked Umpo.

"Anyplace but," said Paul. "If we go up there together now, they'll give us orange blossoms and Lohengrin! We gotta get out of here and figure some way out of this mess."

"Paul," said Mavis. "I've got a department copter parked just over those trees. But ---"

"But, nothing. Let's go!"

"Wait a minute, you oaf! Let go my arm. What I was going to say was --- I can think of a way out of this right now."

"You can? Well. Well?! What is it?"

"Well, if you were already married," blurted Mavis, "They couldn't make you marry Umpo!"

"Already married?" said Paul quizzically. "But I'm not ---."

Umpo chuckled.

"Don't be obtuse, Paul," she said. "The young lady is asking you to propose."

Paul's stypified expression was not clearly visible in the dark, but it was an accurate measure of the state of his mind.

"Eh?" he said.

Mavis' lips compressed and her eyes glinted dangerously.

"Well," she snapped. "What's so bad about the idea?"

"Whu --- Whu --- Why, nothing --- I guess," said Paul. "Dh --- dh --- I accept --- I mean, Mavis, will you marry me?"

"Yes, darling," breathed Mavis.

There was a coming-together in the darkness, and while Umpo watched (in infra-red technicolor!), she sighed to herself.

But not in despair. A word from her in her father's ear and the pressure of two worlds would shift slightly --- just slightly. He was cute, no matter what Paul and Mavis thought.

They were married that evening in the capital by special license obtained under the aegis of Paul's blue Diplomatic Corps card.

Umppo saw them safely united in matrimony, and accompanied them to the waiting copter.

"G'bye, Umppo," said Mavis. "You've been swell."

"That goes double," seconded Paul. "I wish --- well, if things had been different. I mean, if ---."

"Yes, Paul," said Umppo. "But things are as they are, and neither of us are exactly unhappy."

Paul looked at Mavis, and Mavis looked at Paul, and their glances were agreement.

"Paul ---," said Umppo. "Where would I be apt to find --- er, Toby?"

Mavis giggled.

"Tobias Townely has an apartment,

bachelor style, in Sector D, Second Level," grinned Paul. "But you'd better not go there. He wouldn't let you in. Best to catch him at the office tomorrow. You know where it is. And good luck!"

"Thanks, Paul. Goodbye, both!"

Paul shot the copter up to traffic level and snapped on the automatics. Mavis Snuggled close.

Suddenly Paul guffawed.

"Boy!" he chortled. "Wait'll Toby knows we're married, right out from under his nose! And just wait 'til he gets a load of Umppo hot on his trail! Wow!"

He gripped Mavis tighter and breathed the aroma of her honey blonde curls.

"There's only one thing that could be better than watching that chase," he told her softly. "And this is it!"

-----  
The End

#### EDITORIAL

(continued from page 2)

-----  
as we can give it. Nothing childish here, but the tradition of those by-gone days of the hektograph, when Bradbury hitch-hiked his way from California to New York to attend a science fiction

convention, and Don Wollheim wrote that jet propulsion would never work because blowtorches don't fly, lives on in The Original SCIENCE FICTION STORIES, the son of The Purple Peril! -rvh

-----  
The End

#### THE LAST WORD

(continued from page 3)

-----  
I understand that you're planning to publish both stories by new writers and stories by regular pros of a sort that don't get published in the regular prozines for policy reasons. Well, I'm going to have to be convinced about that second kind. I don't think pro magazine policies are as rigid as all that; at least I've never seen a story that escaped publication just because it was controversial or different.

But in bringing forth the work of new writers you are going to be performing an invaluable service for all of us. Among the writers who are today just finishing their first fledgling stories are tomorrow's Heinleins, Bradburys, Asimovs and Sturgeons. Anything that will help them get started is going to benefit every editor, reader and fan. Good

luck! I'll be waiting eagerly for your first issue.

Best wishes,  
Frederik Pohl  
Editor  
Galaxy and If

-----  
Here's the issue, Fred; hope you enjoy it. No "policy rejects" this time, but I'll bet you a hat we get one before many more issues are put together. -rvh

-----  
New York, N. Y.

Mercury Press is happy to extend its best wishes to the gentlemen-publishers of SCIENCE FICTION STORIES (new series) in their bold venture and noble experiment, confident that it will become and remain, like its sister-magazine SCIENCE-FICTION TIMES, a landmark and a feature in the amateur periodical scene.

SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

Joseph W. Ferman, Publisher  
per Avram Davidson, editor,  
FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION

-----  
Thank you, gentlemen. We've tried to  
conduct SFT, Inc., as a sort of "service  
organization" to the science-fiction  
field, and to be recognized as such by  
others gives us a good feeling. -rvh

-----  
Elgin, Iowa

By now you probably have a title-  
picked out which you feel is just right  
for your publication. However, just in  
case you haven't received enough idiotic  
suggestions, I will suggest a couple.  
Both are considered "gag" titles ---  
mainly because you want to gag after  
hearing them.

Suggestion 1: SCIENCE FICTION TIMES  
ONE-SHOT SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE.

Suggestion 2: SCIENCE FICTION TIMES  
GALAXY ANALOG OF FANTASTIC, AMAZING,  
FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION --- IF you-  
don't mind the MAD title.

Incidentally, SCIENCE FICTION TIMES  
point about the use of the term "science  
fiction" on science fiction magazines  
seems to have been borne out by experi-  
ence. After twenty-two issues of ANALOG  
FACT-FICTION the title appears to have  
been switched to ANALOG SCIENCE FACT-  
SCIENCE FICTION.

Best of luck to you on the noble  
undertaking.

Sincerely,  
Robert E. Margroff

-----  
Yes, inclusion of the term "science fic-  
tion" in the title of a science fiction  
magazine does seem necessary for its  
success, and that is our title. An on-  
en, perhaps?? Suggestions noted (ugh!)  
and discarded, but your wishes for luck  
received with thanks. -rvh

-----  
New York, N. Y.

What exciting news! And momentous  
news, too! It's unbelievably wonderful  
and courageous of you and the boys to  
undertake the publishing of SCIENCE FIC-  
TION STORIES. I'm sure I do not have to  
tell you that my heartfelt good wishes  
walk with you in your new venture.

I can't wait to read the first is-  
sue. It's ironic that the fans step in  
where the pros fear to tread. It's hard  
to realize that only a short ten years  
ago there were thirty-plus science fic-  
tion magazines --- and now a bare six.  
No --- make that seven! Nobody knows  
better than I that from the fans come  
the Ray Bradburys and the San Moskowitzs  
of the future.

As ever,  
Leo Margulies

-----  
Many thanks for the best wishes, Leo ---  
they're much appreciated. And it's nice  
to see someone agreeing with what we've  
felt for many years, namely, that fandom  
does occasionally serve a useful purpose  
when some of us make up our minds to be  
useful. -rvh

COMING IN "SCIENCE FICTION STORIES":

# THE RECRUITS

BY WILLIAM BLACKBEARD

# SCAPEGOAT

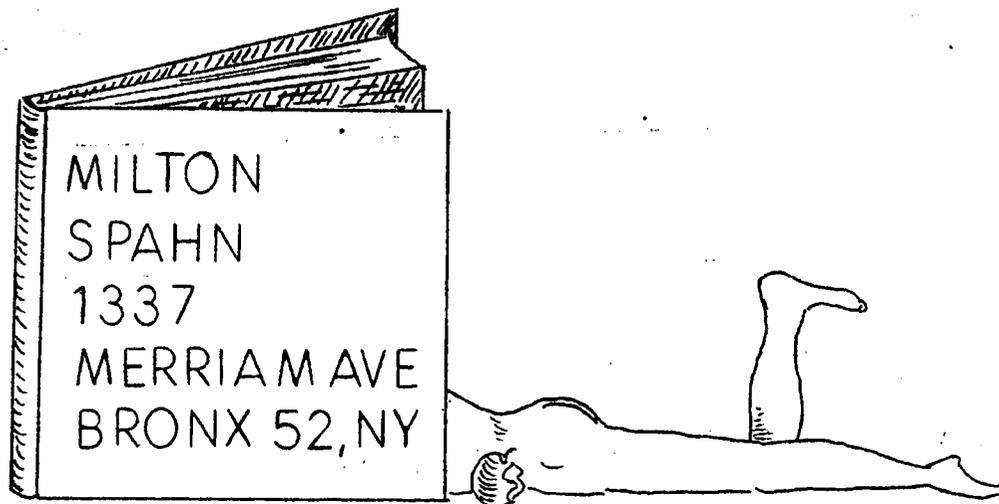
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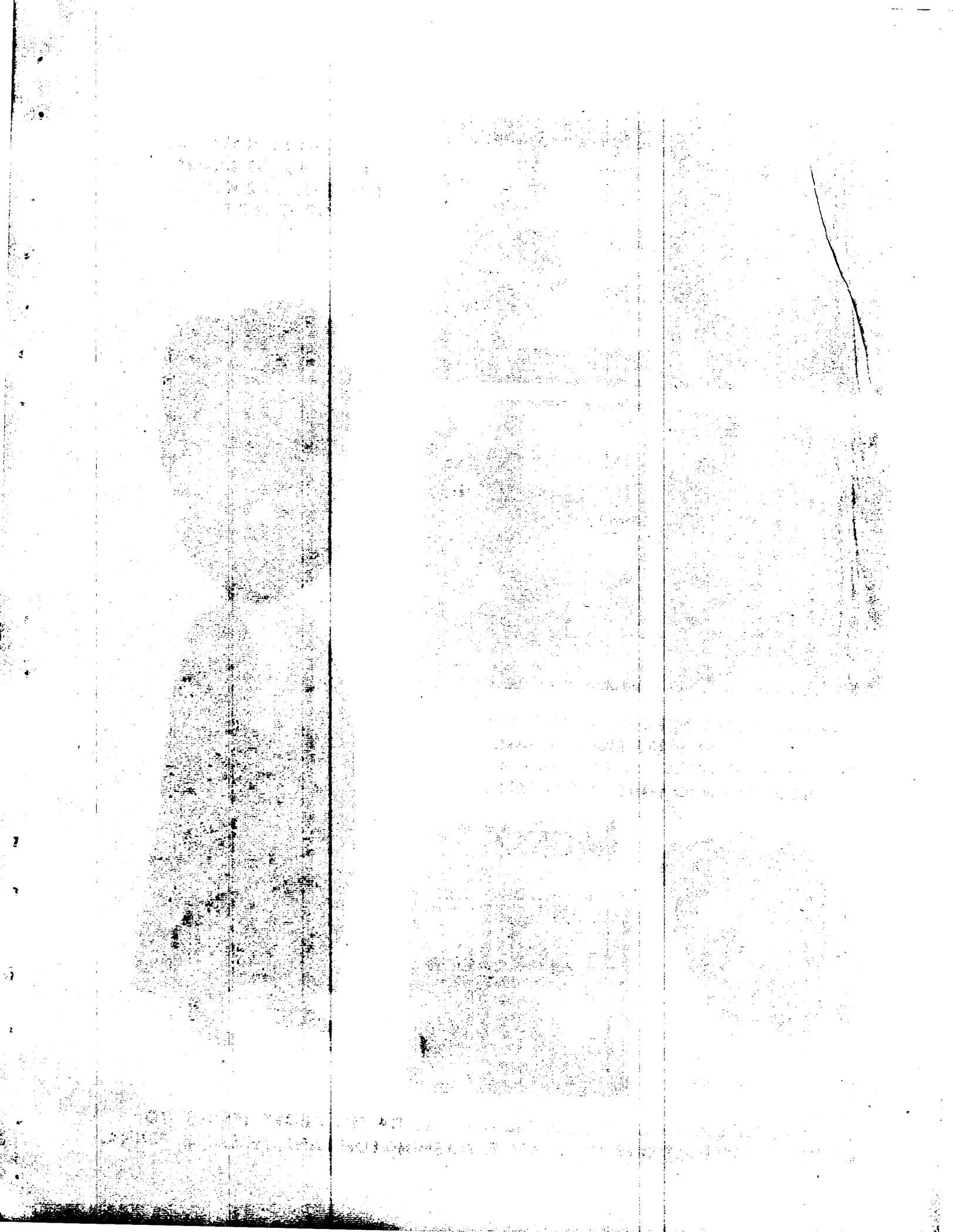
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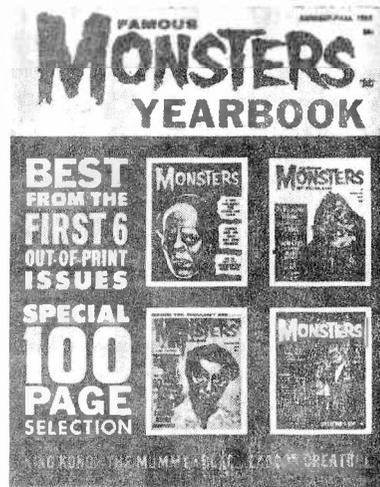
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