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VOID

WINTER

Vol. 1-Num. 1

FANZINE

◦ SERIAL ◦

HAMMER

AND

CYCLE

by STUART CORY — PART ONE —

STORIES BY —

ROTH
SHELDON
LAWRENCE

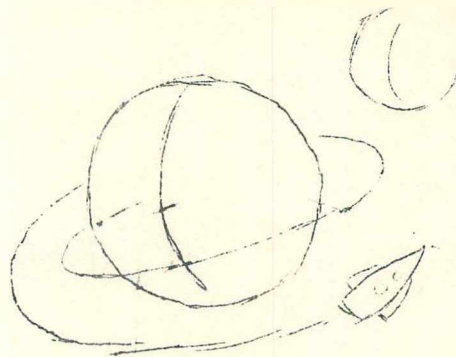
Beyond THE UNIVERSE
by
SCOTT CAMERON
AND
DRU MALAMOV III



Wilkie —

Wilkie —

VOID



CONTENTS

Vol 1 NUMBER 1

STORIES:-

PAGE:-

DEPARTMENTS:-

EDGE.....by Jacob Lawrence.....5

A long year in the jungles
of Venus did things to a man's
mind...(1500 words)

BEYOND THE UNIVERSE.....by
Scott Cameron and Dru
Malamov 111.....13

Lost in an alien universe,
the Earthmen wanted to commercial-
ize an alien product...(4500 words)

BACKWARDS IN TIME.....by Sal
Roth.....25

Seeing the sun rise in the
west was surprising enough, but
what followed was even more
surprising...(2500 words)

SERIAL

HAMMER AND CYCLE.....by Stuart
Cory.....33

When the enemy crushed Amer-
ica, they thought they had
crushed Americans...(10000 words)

SCIENTIFICALLY SPEAKING
by Carl Ridgeway....3

INTELLIGENCE VS S-F
by D.H. Stanley.....57

EDITORS' PAGE.....4

AUTHORS PRO AND CON.....10

BLAST OFF.....12

* * *

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THE TOWER OF SPACE

by

H. Reginald Rudolph

The tower of space reaches endlessly
Upward and outward and on,
On to the meeting of parallel lines,
On to the infinite dawn.

The tower of space is a challenge to man,
To climb its remarkable stair;
To cross its depths and stand erect
At the end of the universe there.

The tower of space is a ruthless thing,
A tower of lies and deceit,
A tower where man is pitted 'gainst man
As they rocket where parallels meet.

The tower of space is gigantic,
Each star is a room in the tower,
Our galaxy is its garden,
The Milky Way is a flower.

To conquer space is the purpose of Man,
To climb that tower so tall,
But hasten, Human, with your rocketing plan,
That tower is likely to fall!

The little dog was red



SCIENTIFICALLY SPEAKING...

by Carl Ridgeway

THIS BEING the initial issue of Void, I thought it might be proper in my first column to relate a few incidentals concerning the mag for the benefit of you readers. It is published quarterly by two young and quite interesting individuals who go by the names Charles Cook and Lew Gaff (not pseudo-nyms). They have worked hard and long to put the very best into the magazine that is available to their resources, and I am sure you will enjoy it. I, for one, am proud to be writing for them.

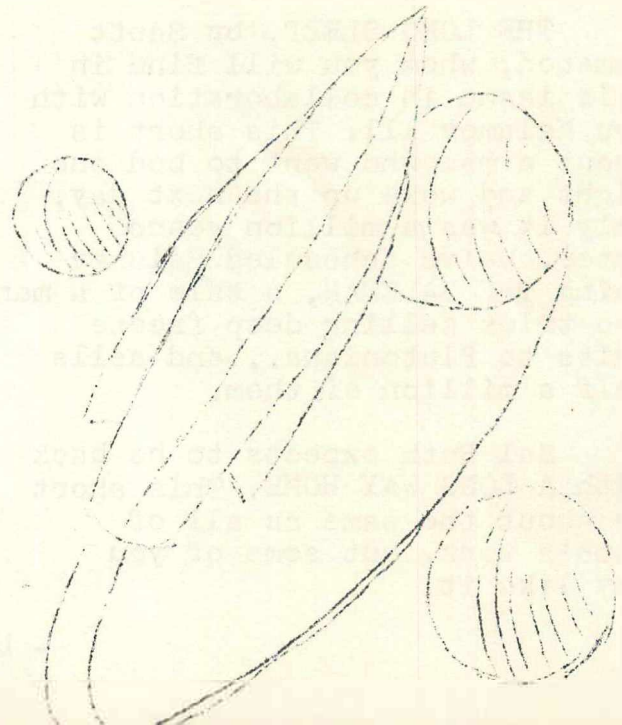
Gaff, who first got the inspiration for the magazine, is a tall, ugly, usually taciturn young man still in his teens. Besides handling half the editorial chores, he also helps with covers. After glancing over the material to go into the magazine, I was a little inclined to believe it was he and not Ed Talon who did most inside illos. You will, I think, notice the similarity of the two styles. However my theory was shattered when I was personally introduced to Mr. Talon.

Mr. Cook, a rather short and light-haired man of twenty-eight, is an avid fan of science-fiction, and he nur-

tures a tremendous dislike of the vaunted Ray Bradbury, who needs no introduction here, I am quite sure. For Cook's views on Bradbury, see the AUTHORS PRO AND CON section in this issue. When first introduced to Mr. Cook, he struck me as being somewhat pedantic, but after talking to him a short while, another of my theories fell into dust, which is the way with most of my theories.

I DO, HOWEVER, sometimes drum up after a fashion some ridiculous theory concerning the realm of science, et cetera; and that, primarily, is what will be dealt with in future Scientifically Speaking columns.

C. Ridgeway



EDITORS' PAGE

MR. RIDGEWAY having introduced VOID, we will dispense with formalities here and get down to brass tacks:

WE NEED MATERIAL!

Where have you heard that song before? There is a blanket solicitation for material on the last page of this zine, and you'll find our address there. So right here and now let me detail-ize what we want:

Our slogan is: "We'll take anything so long as it's fantastic." We should add to that: "But articles needn't be." In fact, shouldn't be...unless they're in fun.

Since we haven't any outside material at the moment, here is what we have slated for the Spring ish:

THE LONG SLEEP, by Scott Cameron, whom you will find in this issue in collaboration with Dru Malamov lll. This short is about a man who went to bed one night and woke up the next day, only it was a million years later. We've scheduled Malamov doing THE SALEMAN, a tale of a man who tries selling deep freeze units to Plutonians...and sells half a million of them.

Sal Roth expects to be back with A LONG WAY HOME. This short is about the same as all of Roth's work, but some of you may like it.

PART TWO of HAMMER AND CYCLE, by Stuart Cory will also be included. We deem it necessary to explain that this serial has been condensed with the consent of the author from a longer and more involved tale, entitled ANGEL WITH A PITCHFORK. The fact that it is future tense, in our estimation, places it in the category of stf.

Subscriptions to VOID are one buck per year. Single copies go for two bits. If you want to write something you're sure we'll except, write a check for a subscription. I don't know where that joke was born, but I'm pretty sure it just died.

That about wraps up everything for now, except that the editorial plural will probably be singular by the time the Spring ish rolls around.

So long till then.

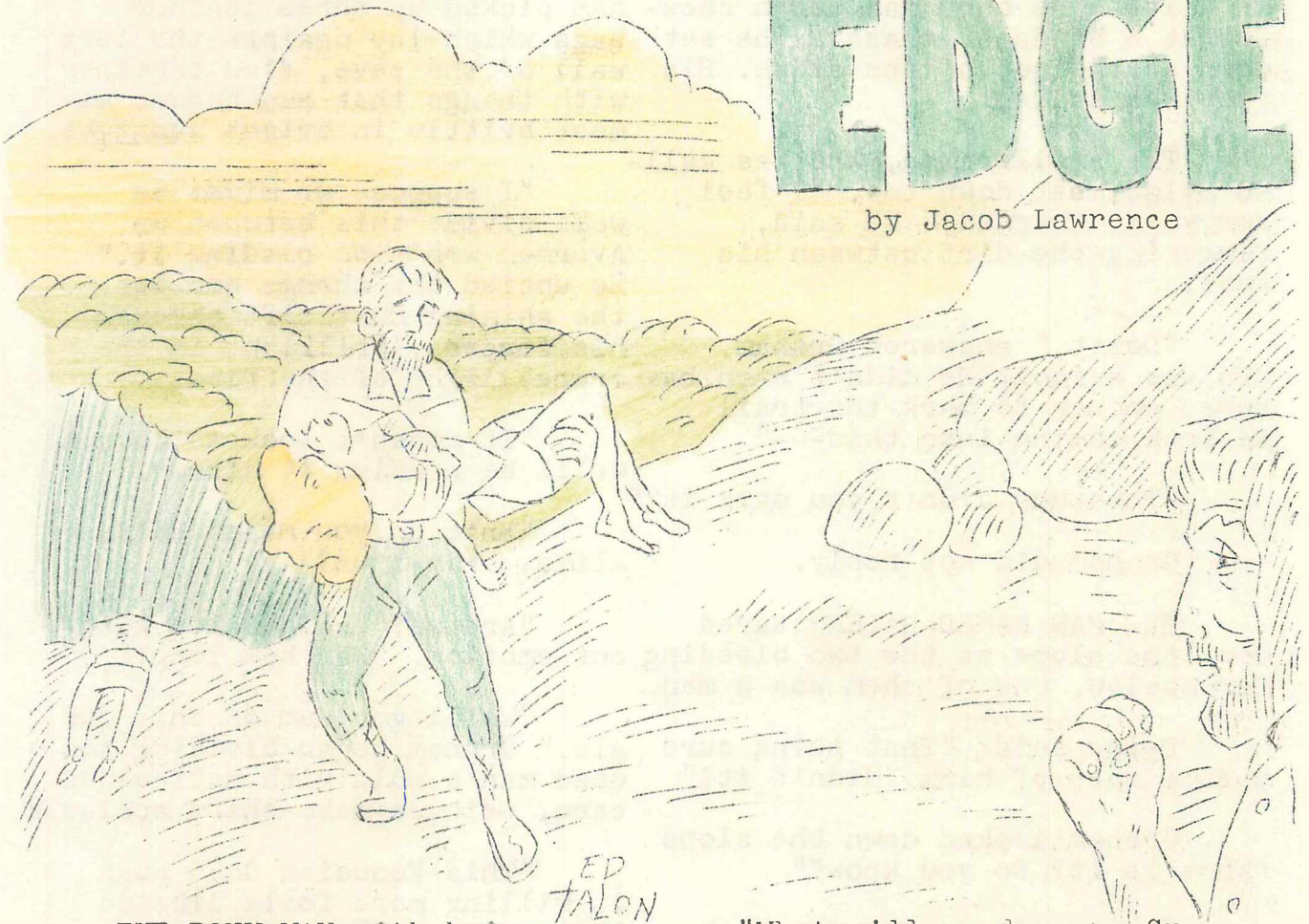
lag

BE SURE TO GET THE SPRING
ISH OF VOID. UNTIL CIRCUL*
ATION BUILDS UP AND WE HAVE
SOME IDEA OF A NUMBER TO
PRINT, SUPPLIES WILL BE
LIMITED.

A LONG YEAR IN THE JUNGLES OF VENUS
DID THINGS TO A MAN'S MIND...

EDGE

by Jacob Lawrence



THE BONY MAN with hairy arms
straightened up.

"Dead."

"He can't be dead!"

"He is," said the bony man
with the hairy arms, turning his
back. He started slowly up the
pebbled slope toward the cave.
He halted at the summit and sear-
ched without success for a pack
of cigarets in his pockets.
The smaller man came up beside
him.

"What will we do now, Gra-
ham?" There was fear in his eyes
and fear in the way he mouthed
his words.

"How should I know? With
Averman dead, our chances of
finding the trail are a million
to one. He had all the information
in his head."

"It must be around here
somewhere...I remember the cave."

"Great! This undergrowth is
so goddam thick we could be

standing right in the middle of the trail and we wouldn't even know it!" The bony man began chewing at a blade of grass as he sat down at the top of the slope. His face was sullen.

The smaller man, who was called Dalee, sat down too. "I feel sorry for Averman," he said, fingering the dirt between his feet.

"Don't," answered Graham. "He was a fool. He didn't even have sense enough to mark the trail we took coming into this---"

"Then why didn't you mark it?"

Graham did not reply.

THE MAN NAMED DALEE stared down the slope at the two bleeding forms below. One of them was a man.

Dalee said: "That thing sure made a mess of himm, didn't it?"

Graham looked down the slope. "What is it? Do you know?"

"Looks like a ground sloth of some kind. Might be what they call a Grey-Beast. I've lived on Venus for two years and never saw anything quite like it."

The sky above them was pallid with grey cloud. Everything was like that. Grey, lifeless, without color. The jungle which stretched about them was a tint of green that was so light it hurt the eyes to discern any color at all in it. The two men sat there on the slope watching rain gather in the pale clouds.

When the rain began slicing down out of the sky, they moved

wearily into the cave and built a fire near the entrance. Graham picked up three leather bags which lay against the left wall of the cave, tied together with thongs that had become almost brittle in bright sunlight.

"I suppose we might as well divide this between us. Averman won't be needing it." He untied the thongs and let the shining dust sift through his fingers, brilliant in the orange light of the fire.

"It doesn't look as though we'll be needing it either."

"What do you mean? We're alive, aren't we?"

"Are we?" said Dalee without emotion. "For how long?"

"We'll get out of this jungle." Graham began dividing the dead man's gold with meticulous care, using a make-shift scales.

"This Venusian Gold Rush is killing more fools like us than it is making anybody rich," pursued Dalee, the philosopher.

"We'll get out. Roosevelt City lies east of our mine, remember?"

"But which way is east? There is no sun to---"

"Our compasses," said Graham, measuring gold.

"They are useless. What about the electrical disturbances in the rainy season?"

Graham took his eyes from

the gold for the first time.

"You're right. I had forgotten."

They both fell silent, feeling the fire spin its warm blanket about the cave. Graham finished dividing the gold and he handed Dalee his share. He watched the rain slide down, hammering the long grass. Just that morning, this gold he held in his hands had been his only thought and reason for living; but now, with the death of Charlie Averman, the gold had suddenly lost its worth. If they couldn't find the trail, they would never be able to get back to Roosevelt City...

"What's the use of kidding ourselves, Graham?"

Graham jerked his head up and stared over the fire at his companion. "What?"

"There's no use kidding ourselves, Graham. We'll never get out of this jungle without Averman to guide us. We were fools..."

Graham exploded. "Alright! We were fools and we still are fools! But we got the gold, didn't we? Gold is scarce here on Venus, Dalee! We've both got a fortune."

Dalee spat into the fire. "Sure! So now we can both die millionaires! Great, Graham! Just swell!" He rose up, tossing his satchel of gold dust carelessly against the far wall of the cave. He started toward the mouth of the cave, and then he heard the noise.

He spun around. "What was that?"

Graham blinked and wagged his head, coming slowly to his feet. It had sounded exactly like the scream of a woman in terror. His ear-drums were ringing and echoing with the sound.

"I don't know. It sounded like..."

"A woman," finished Dalee, standing motionless, his mouth open.

"It might have been an animal of some kind. Where did it come from? What direction, could you tell?"

"I'm not sure. I can't be sure. Over there I think." He made a vague gesture with his left hand.

GRAHAM DREW HIS GUN and the two men stepped out into the hard rain.

From the top of the slope they saw the light-haired girl break from the underbrush and run panting into view. Then they saw the Grey-Beast behind her, and Graham pulled his gun up and fired. The Grey-Beast screamed and crumpled. The girl fell unconscious at the base of the pebbled slope, the rain tattooing little patterns about her.

Graham half-slid down the slope and lifted her gently into his arms. Her yellow hair shone with the rain and lay in little golden strings over Graham's furry arms. He struggled back to the cave.

Dalee had not moved from his position in front of the cave. Graham shoved past him with the girl.

Dalee did not follow him inside. He stood there with the rain striking his pale cheeks and running beneath his collar, getting very wet and not moving. There was a blank stare in his eyes, like two curtainless windows in a ghost town.

Graham lay the girl lightly by the warmth of the fire. He turned suddenly and saw Dalee outside in the downpour of rain.

"Dalee!"

The man did not seem to hear. He only stood erect, getting wetter and wetter, his hair pasted flat to his forehead with rain.

"Dalee!"

The man in the rain did not move.

GRAHAM STEPPED INTO the rain and shook Dalee by the shoulders. "What's the matter with you? Come into the cave!"

"Martha," said Dalee, flexing his fingers.

"What?"

"That was Martha. My wife."

"Your---" Graham blinked his eyes and stared at him.

"My wife."

The rain came down harder, but now neither man was aware of it. Graham looked into the black eyes of Joseph Dalee. "Are you insane! Your wife is on Earth!"

"I know my own wife when I see her," Dalee said simply, rain beating on his colorless face.

Graham's mind whirled. He knew Dalee was not well. A long year in the jungles of Venus did things to a man's mind. Dalee's mind undoubtedly had snapped as suddenly as the cold rain had snapped down from the grey sky.

"Dalee," began Graham, crossing his words slowly. "Dalee, that girl is Venusian. Didn't you see her antenna? She couldn't be your wife!"

"I saw no antenna," said Dalee.

"Growing from her forehead!" shouted Graham. "Here!" He pointed out the place on his own forehead.

Dalee didn't even raise his eyes. "There was nothing there."

Graham clasped a bony hand around Dalee's fore-arm and pulled him back into the cave. He pointed at the girl's antenna, curving gracefully from the center of her forehead.

"There!" His voice went up three tones. "There! Do you see it now?"

"I see nothing," replied Dalee.

"You're insa—"

"I am what?" asked Dalee.

Graham swore and turned his attention to reviving the girl. As he knelt and lifted the girl's head, he felt Dalee's hand touch his shoulder.

"She is my wife, Graham.

"I will take care of her."

Graham felt weak suddenly with hate. He rose to his feet and walked silently to the rear of the cave. He sat down in the semi-darkness and watched Dalee clumsily try to revive the girl.

Dalee pressed a canteen of water to the girl's lips, his hand shaking. When the girl opened her eyes, she screamed in a high Venusian note that hurt Graham's ears. Dalee tried to quiet her by stroking her long golden hair and saying over and over: "Martha, Martha, oh, my Martha."

The girl went on screaming.

Graham got up and stepped quickly across the cave floor and stood above the crouched figure of Dalee. He ran his tongue over his lips.

"I've had enough of this, Dalee. You'd better leave her alone."

Dalee twisted his head and looked from under his eyebrows at his intruding companion. "Go to hell," he said.

And then he stood up and tried to look menacing. "Get out of here! Leave me alone!" He started to reach for his pistol.

Graham hit him so quickly Dalee did not see him swing. He fell hard and sat on the floor a moment, breathing with difficulty. His eyes were full of surprise and fear and madness all at once. He caught his breath and leaped up, driving Graham backward. The Venusian girl scurried to one side of the cave, making strange noises.

The two men fought silently, with only loud grunting punctuating the struggle. Graham had the height advantage, but Dalee outweighed him by twenty pounds. For several minutes Graham took the worst beating he had ever received at the hand of any man. His right eye was blinded with blood and his lips were bleeding violently.

HE USED HIS GUN only because he knew he could not win the fight. He knew he would be knocked unconscious, and that then Dalee would surely kill him.

He shot Dalee three times in the face.

Dalee fell into the fire and died with his clothes flaming up about him. He had no chance to scream.

A string of smoke twisted from the gun and hung suspended near the ceiling, and Graham stared at it. He was aware of the girl sitting down beside him and making the strange sounds near his face.

He let the gun fall.

LAWRENCE WILL RETURN NEXT
ISSUE WITH HIS TIMELY TALE
OF A MAN'S SEARCH FOR HIS
LOVER IN AN ATOMIC-BOMBED
CITY-----

SHADOW IN THE SUN

AUTHOR →

PRO
AND
CON

by The Editors

SUBJECT: RAY BRADBURY

THIS CONTEMPORARY writer, whose curious style and new approach have brought a highly controversial item into the S-F field, has been the subject of many a current verbal battle among the science-fiction fans. The following discussion of your editors is not intended to be a spring board from which Bradbury might be sent spinning into literary oblivion, but only as the considered viewpoints of fellow fans.

COOK: I simply do not like Bradbury's style, because it seems to me he is striving too hard to bring into being a great deal, possibly too much, abstract thought on the part of the reader.

GAFF: My own personal feelings concerning Ray Bradbury have changed pro and con over the years until, at the present, I have become a good deal more conservative in my views than popular beliefs would seem to warrant. I agree with my co-editor that it seems Bradbury attempts, at times, to confuse his readers rather than enlighten them; but Bradbury has something, that much is evident; whether good or not is what we here are attempting to thresh out. Do you, Mr. Cook, ever enjoy Bradbury?

C: Mr. Gaff, I must admit you

leave me somewhat at a loss. On first reading a story by the esteemed writer, I found myself liking him. However, after reading him a number of times, I became lost in a limbo. He is, truly, a man of imaginative genius, and perhaps this is his greatest asset. Now, don't you think his stories enlighten the reader rather than place him in a quandry? Did you ever pick up his MARTIAN CHRONICLES and, after reading one of the stories therein, say to yourself: "What has he said?"

G: Again, I reluctantly am forced to agree with you. I have experienced the reaction you cite in your last sentence, but what Bradbury reader, PRO OR CON, has not experienced a like reaction? That, Mr. Cook, is Bradbury. A mind not necessarily above our own, but a style, a gift, to say a thing in highly subtle literary craft. In other words, Bradbury has the power to induce his collective reader to think profoundly on any subject for a moment; and that, often, his what his readers seek.

C: I, Mr. Gaff, must disagree with this last contribution to the limit of my own imagination. I can see the man, after ending one of his sentences, sitting back in his chair with a leer, saying to himself, "Just wait till my critics read that!" I can see him chuckling maliciously to himself as he contemplates

his next extreme. No, his ideas are much, too much, fraught with will-of-the-wisp adjectives, and far too illusionary.

G: I will, at this point, admit another item of controversy concerning this writer. Bradbury has been called a humanity-hater. His stories are saturated with what has been termed "Unrelieved morbidity." It is this which repels me against the man, in this one respect at least. I have never read a Bradbury story which did not have a tragic ending. He appears to be in a rut with the grim reaper as a companion. What are your views, my colleague?

C: Without compunction, I agree. However, I hold a certain reserve here; perhaps that is what his fans enjoy about the man and his works. His ability to morbidize his stories is as mysterious as space and time themselves. Bradbury sounds, as he should, as though he has lived in space and on worlds of our and other solar systems. But why can't he write on a little more illucidative score so that the reader, who is as I am, a layman, can understand. I suppose, however, the man must invent strong sentences to express his feelings as he sees them. Mr. Bradbury's adjectives, as he uses them, are a study in themselves; and only a professor of English could understand his use and therefore get the gist of his meanings.

G: You seem to look at Ray at rather an obtuse angle. However, knowing you as I do, a man who greatly dislikes Bradbury's "irrevelant reasoning" as you might term it, I can

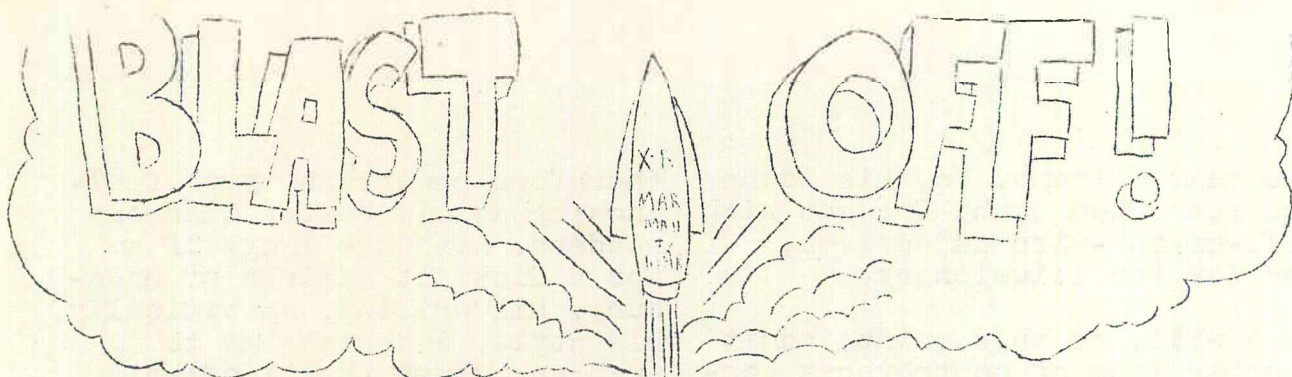
therefore understand your feelings; possibly better than our readers. Although I myself am not a distinct admirer of Bradbury, his writing, specifically, his style, interests me to such an extent that I often find myself, as now, upholding his ~~wright~~ to write the way he does. In this light, although your reasoning may be feasible enough, I do not except it with alacrity, nor anything bordering on alacrity. Do you, as a non-Bradburyist, feel that he strives too hard to create, shall I say, sensationalism?

C: As a sensationalist, Bradbury haunts my psychological attitude. As inept as I am, I hesitate to go into my feelings towards Bradbury and his obvious attempts at sensationalism, because of the far too controversial nature of the question. He seems to me to approach cynicism in his writing.

G: The general conception of a cynic seems to be a humanity-hater. Which throws us back to a former question. But rather than get wrapped up in all that again, I move we close the discussion.

C. Consider the motion seconded.

Letters agreeing or disagreeing with any point of this discussion would be welcomed and possibly printed for further discussion in this column and by our readers. Mailing address: 320 East Williams, Fort Wayne, Indiana; care of VOID Editors.



This page will later be concerned with letters from readers.
(Ed.)

I can hear, think, and speak,
But why, oh why, am I me?

The following are poems
which your editors thought worthy
of note in this section.

END

by Mark Jennings

BEGINNING

by Mark Jennings

Mighty are the forces of Man
As they trample this great land
From mountains to the desert's
sand,
To the cities tall and grand.
But Man in his thought
Dreams of that that ought,
Though at his gropings cannot be
caught;
For Man is all but naught.

In war's mad lust and degradation,
Where there is not elation,
Man's thoughts turn to higher
revelation
In his own, Man's, glorification.

How did I come to be?
I can smell, taste, and see,

It's hopes and fears so long since
gone,
Humanity stood and faced the dawn,
And watched the sun rise on a
world
On which not any flag unfurled.
Nearly barren and void of life,
It lay in the throes of worldly
strife;
Gunsmoke, blood, and dying men
Was all that remained of the
horrible din.

Eternity was close at hand,
Ready to tumble Man's castle of
sand;
Washed it away on a beach of
despair,
And the few men left were to weary
to care.

And then at last there in the sun,
The remaining few died one by one;
And the last man thought as his
spirit fled:

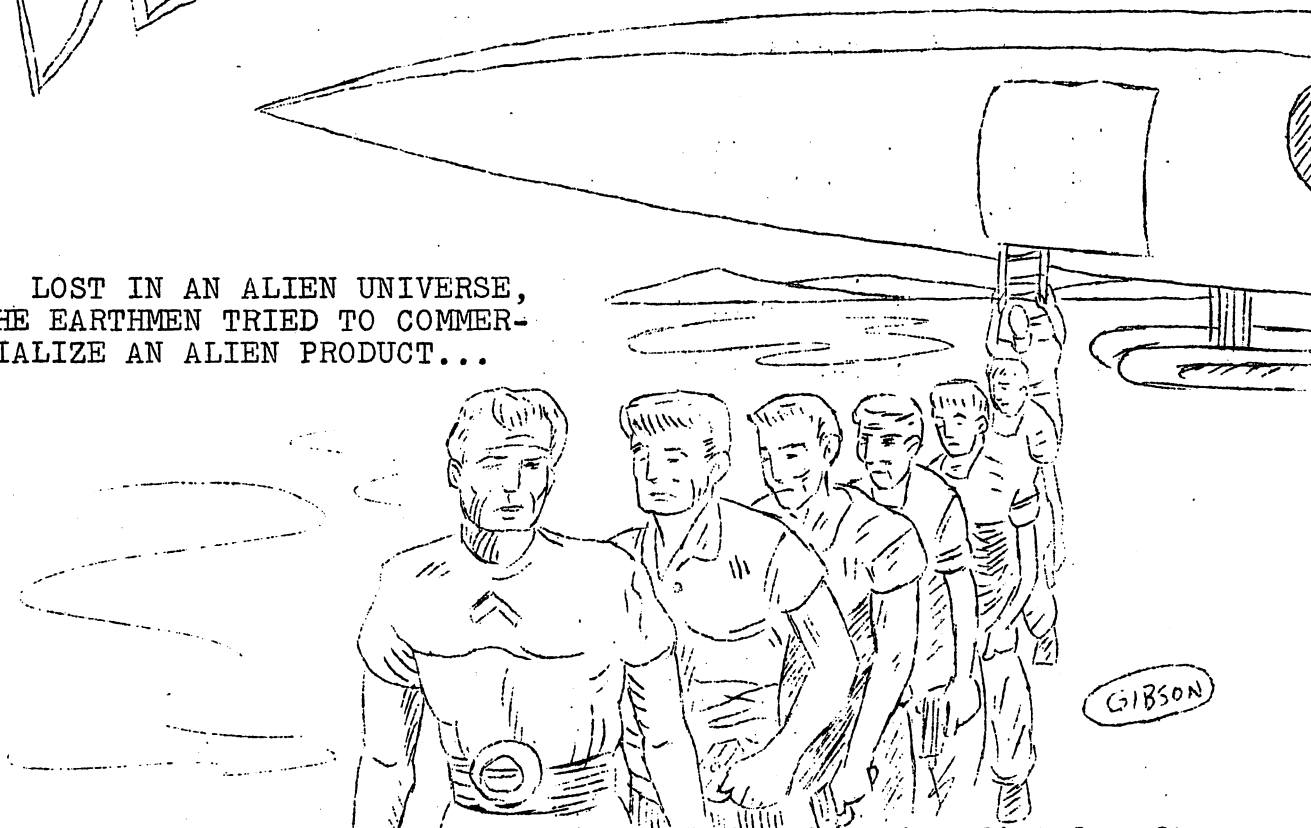
"Oh, God! Why not Peace instead?"

*

BEYOND THE UNIVERSE

by SCOTT
CAMERON
AND DRU
MALAMOV III

LOST IN AN ALIEN UNIVERSE,
THE EARTHMEN TRIED TO COMMER-
CIALIZE AN ALIEN PRODUCT...



BRUN TALABREE had opened his sealed orders immediately after blasting off from Aros, the cold blue planet which swung through space beyond Pluto. He sat down before the control panel in navigation with his second in command, listening to the faint clatter of the electro-calculator as it plotted their course. The man beside him, Ord Recuas, spoke above the chattering mechanism.

"How long, sir," he asked, intent on the tape from the calculator, "before we reach our destination?"

"A week, perhaps, barring trouble," replied Brun, peering up at the familiar star patterns showing on the space-scope screen. He adjusted a dial and the star Wolff 399 leaped into clarity. The calculator clacked merrily away in the cabin, spinning out

micro-tape, supplying new information to the automatic gyro. Check the calculator!"

Ord saw his commander's silent scrutiny of the screen above the console, but said nothing to interrupt the tableau. He had seen 399 leap into sharp focus and knew instinctively the man was worried. Well, he thought, why shouldn't he be worried? This was merely an experimental expedition to find the flaws, if any, in the extra solar drive which so recently had been discovered. The man was responsible not only to his superiors, but for every one of the ten members of his crew. Why the council had selected Wolff 399, Ord did not know, unless it was because that star was the nearest Earth of the known thirty-two which possessed solar systems.

AFTER A MOMENT, Ord cleared his throat and Brun looked at him quickly.

"It's kind of...well, frightening, isn't it, Brun?"

"You mean inter-solar flight?"

"Yes. Even to us old rocketeers."

"Oh, I don't think so, Ord. After all, it wasn't so long ago that Mars was a week away. If this drive pans out, it won't be so different. Now, perhaps, Vega, and even Remus, will only be a short voyage." He glanced back at the screen and fell silent again, studying its bright illumination against the back-drop of space. He stiffened suddenly in the cushioned bucket seat and leaned forward, peering with amazement at the place where Wolff 399 should have been.

ORD HAD BEEN watching the screen too, and he was already bent before the machine which was still frantically unrolling tape. He pressed a check-stud and grimaced as the mechanism chattered wildly. In a moment, Ord was reading the results of the machine's response. He handed the tape to Brun and pressed a recheck stud. The calculator rattled in his ears, screaming metallicly. He handed the second tape to the impatient Brun, still silent.

Wordlessly, the two men looked at each other, each lost in his own profound astonishment that the tapes Brun now held were anything but disputable in their calculations. As one, they turned to the still busy calculator, as though it could correct a mistake it had not made.

Brun glanced back to the screen, now empty of any starlight whatever. He reached toward the forward atomic searchlight switch and flipped it on. Nothing showed on the screen, even with the aid of the powerful searchlight, save a swirling grey mist which the light could not penetrate.

He swore gently and started his hand toward the general alarm button, when the meteor alarm began its raucous screeching. He looked quickly back at the screen, but could not see the space-wanderer. Ord, he saw, was at the meteor deflecting mechanism, depressing a stud. They felt the ship lurch at a right angle in space. The last thing Brun remembered was the terrific pull against his straining body as his consciousness was forced from him.

IT WAS THREE HOURS later, by the chronometer on the control panel, when the revived crew crowded about the space scope screen and gazed out of the drifting craft as it circled a white world none of them recognized. From 30, 000 miles out the planet looked barren and without life.

Brun gave a few curt orders and watched the men return to their stations. Then he sat down before the panel, making preparations for a landing. He cut off the inter-solar drive engines and closed the lever which controlled the forward conventional atomic drive rockets, for purposes of deceleration.

They circled the planet fifteen times before decelerating to a speed which would enable them to enter its atmosphere.

In the upper regions of the planet's atmosphere, the rocket decelerated with mechanical efficiency under the capable hands of the crew. Through steadily thickening air pressure, the rocket sped toward the colorless surface. The measuring device on the atmospheric control panel told the two men that the gaseous elements about this world extended approximately a thousand miles.

Brun set the ship down.

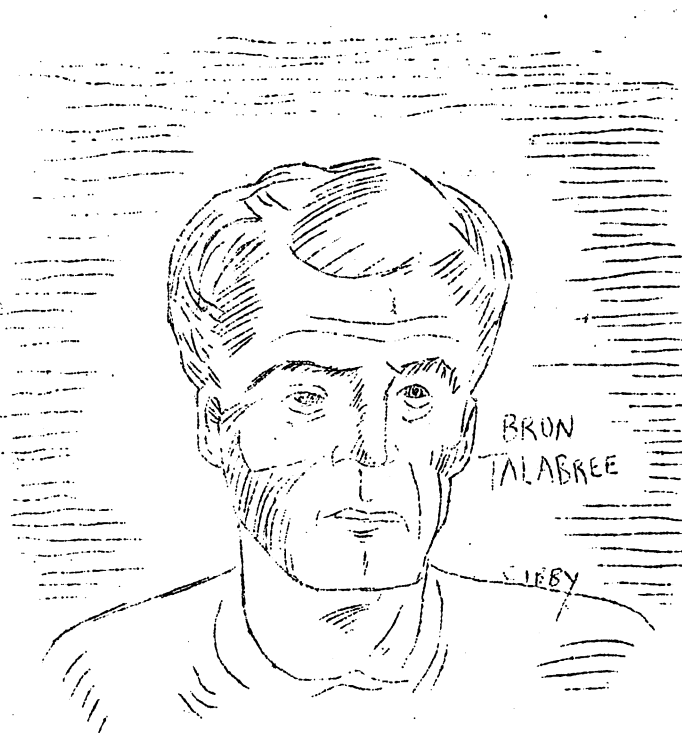
THE SHIP'S BIOLOGIST, Kenmore, made a quick test of the planet's atmosphere and found no poisonous elements in any great quantity. The air pressure proved to be 14-plus pounds per square inch. Easily capable of supporting man's life.

With impatience born of curiosity, the eleven Earthmen hurried into the pressure chamber leading to the air lock. Brun led the way with Ord at his heels. Within half an hour the men were opening the outer air lock, ready to step out onto alien soil.

Brun watched the air lock wheeze open and he prepared to step through the aperture. He drew his foot back suddenly onto the lock platform and gasped in amazement.

ORD, WHO WAS directly behind, was nearly unbalanced by his commander's sudden impromptu reversal of movement. He peered over Brun's shoulder and blurted: "Good Lord! What is this?"

Brun made an obvious attempt to control his voice. "I don't know, Ord. I distinctively remember that ladder striking something down there...but there's nothing there!"



There was an agitated murmur from the men behind. The ship's atomist, Jorlic, shoved his way through the press of men. He bent and looked down over the side of the platform.

"Donner! Was ist das?"

None of the men noticed his use of his native tongue, for their surprise was equal to his, having overheard the commander's speech.

BRUN TALABREE turned to his crew, his face grim. "Men, we seem to have landed on something which is invisible...undoubtedly of an alien substance." He paused almost dramatically, and then went on: "Our ship is two hundred feet above the surface!"

He looked at the varying degrees of astonishment on the faces of the men grouped about him. "Has anyone a suggestion?"

The German atomist cleared his throat and came toward the ladder. "Why not use gyro-gravs?"

Brun eyed the man's sullen, fat-lipped face and snapped his fingers. "That's it! Everyone into the pressure chamber and strap on a gyro."

The men poured back through the air lock and Ord began issuing the gyro-gravs. He turned to the commander beside him.

"Did you hear all that commotion when we were on the platform?"

Brun studied him a moment, then said: "I did, Ord, but what seemed more important at the time was that we were above the surface. What do you suppose it was?"

"I wish I could explain it," he paused ever so slightly. "sounded like Roosevelt City back on Venus at high noon." He strapped his gyro-grav across his wide chest.

Brun nodded thoughtfully, as he too donned his gyro-grav. He led the way back through the air-lock and pressed the take-off stud on his belt control. He leaped out into the phosphoric light from the planet's surface, and the other men followed. Moments later they were standing on the white substance which seemed to cover this entire world.

THE MEN HAD LANDED some distance apart, and as Brun watched them they seemed to have a great deal of trouble organizing. Two of them had fallen and were struggling to regain their feet. Looking to the left of where he stood, he saw the big scientist, Jorlic, battling mightily with some unseen adversary. He watched blood flow from Jorlic's cheek as the man reeled backward from an invisible blow. The German cursed fluently in his own tongue and lunged forward.

In that instant, comprehension dawned on Brun. They had landed upon a world of total invisibility save for the white sand-like substance upon which they now stood! Even to a man hardened by the many years of experience along the spaceways and familiar with alien life, this realization was dumbfounding.

Brun gazed up at the sunless sky. He could see the ship poised, as if ready for flight, on some material which was invisible to his Earthly eyes. Vaguely, he wondered about the elements of this planet. Being without a sun, the planet must suffuse its own

light and heat. Indeed, he determined, this must be the case, for the very ground itself was covered with almost unseen waves of heat.

His thoughts were suddenly interrupted by the big German as he came lumbering up. He had a long gash on his cheek from which blood was flowing in a steady stream. The man was wiping at it and cursing.

"Got your first aid kit, Commander?" Jorlic whipped blood from his fingers and watched it spatter on the ground.

Brun said: "Sorry, Jorlic, I left it aboard the ship."

The other men were approaching as he finished, and Kenmore, the ship's biologist, said: "What happened to you, Jorlic?"

"I got in a brawl."

Brun was not looking at the men who were now grouped about him. He was gazing with wonder at the first engineer. The man was walking toward them, only he was about two feet off the ground. Brun looked down and saw that he and the other men were standing on the white, sand-like substance. He concluded that the first engineer was on a paved street and the others and himself were standing on what would constitute 'lawn' back on Earth.

HE MOTIONED AND the little group followed him toward the levitated first engineer. They all watched the engineer take a step and fall suddenly forward. Brun stepped ahead of the

others and grabbed the man by the arm, helping him to his feet. Then he walked a few steps until he felt his boots collide with the low wall-like obstacle. He pulled himself up onto the invisible surface.

"Let's take a look around, men." He stood waiting for them to join him. When they were all together, they began walking very slowly, arms out-thrust.

Again Jorlic exploded into a storm of cursing. He had been walking to one side of the group, and had smacked into an unseen wall. He sagged against the obstruction and tightened one hand over the wound on his cheek.

"Gott in Himmel!" He flurled more blood to the ground. "I've need of something to stop this goddam bleeding, Commander!"

BRUN TURNED, his face florid. He had been discussing the improbabilities of their predicament with Ord, and the German had interrupted their conversation. "What are you hollering about now?"

"Haven't you some cloth or something I can bind this cut with?" asked Jorlic testily.

Brun drew up the hem of his cloak and tried unsuccessfully to tear a strip from the metallic garment. "I'm afraid I can't help you, Jorlic." He was becoming slightly irked at the atomist's whining lack of discipline.

"Why the hell didn't you bring the first aid kit along? You might have known we would

run into something." He was still leaning against the invisible wall.

BRUN SWORE and drew his pistol. He triggered it and smelled the vapor roll back into his face. He bent forward at the place in the street before him, reached through the cracked surface, and brought out a handful of the white substance. He straightened and held it out to the German. "Here, maybe you can cake this over your wound to clot the blood." Jorlic accepted the chalk-like material and watched Brun turn away.

The commander could now see a greyish tint appear where he had blasted through the street. Even as he watched, it turned to a deep black and a vapor swirled and eddied from it. Then he swung himself about as the other men gasped with surprise. Everyone was looking at Jorlic. Jorlic's wound had disappeared! Where it had been was only unbroken skin. No scar was visible nor even a hint that he had been injured.

A sudden noise broke out about the group of men, but none of them, not even Brun, seemed to notice. There was a sound like running feet on concrete, but the Earthmen only stood staring at the German atomist. Jorlic raised his eyes in surprise. "What is wrong?" he asked.

ORD, AT HIS SIDE, exclaimed: "Something just ran into me!" He glanced about at the other men, who also seemed to be surrounded by invisible beings. Kenmore had fallen to the ground and was struggling to regain his feet.

They felt themselves being forced close together, as if caught in a surging crowd. Tighter and tighter they were pressed until they were struggling for breath, and yet they could see nothing at all.

Suddenly Brun was aware of a strange sensation, as though a long-fingered hand were kneading his brain. He knew then that the creatures surrounding them were possessed of telepathic powers, and were searching his mind for information. After a time, the invisible crowd moved back a few feet, and a voice said: "Why have you come to Cyxell, Earthlings?"

SOME OF THE MEN gasped as full realization struck them. Brun neither knew how to answer nor if he should answer. He wasn't sure if the question had an answer. The insidious fingering in his mind had not lessened, and it felt slimy and dirty to him.

The voice that had no body repeated its question.

"We were trying for the planetary system of Wolff 399 when suddenly it disappeared from our view screen." He gave the space co-ordinates of the star and waited for a reply.

"There is no such body in our universe." There was a pause. "Tell me, Earthling, what is a 'star'?"

"A star, Cyxellian, is a heavenly body usually referred to as a sun, with or without a planetary system." Brun gave as brief a description as he could.

"You speak in riddles, Earth-

"How are these bodies called?"
"They are gigantic balls of fire, tremendously larger than your world. Their purpose is to furnish light and heat to planets in its solar system and to bring the seasons."

At this, an agitated murmur arose from the invisible crowd and an uncomfortable shifting of feet could be heard.

"Seasons? Light and heat not furnished by the planets themselves? What universe of black magic are you from? What manner of creatures are you that we can only sense your presence here but not see you?"

BRUN WAS STUNNED. Not see them! Then they were as invisible to the Cyxellians as the Cyxellians were to them! It was uncanny. It was like being in a dark room and knowing someone or something was with you, but not seeing. It was like being blind. Brun was aware of Kenmore stepping forward and speaking in his ear.

"Sir, I've been doing a little thinking. Perhaps if I could fashion some infra-red lenses from the material in the cosmic filter—"

Talabree looked at the biologist for some moments before answering. "Doesn't sound very plausible, Kenmore. However, you are certainly welcome to try. You may return to the ship right now and use anything available for your purposes. I must impress upon you the need for haste. Frankly, I don't know if the beings of this world are going to be friendly."

Kenmore switched on his gyro-compass and gave a little jump peculiar to those who were unused to this form of individual form of transportation.
AS BRUN WATCHED Kenmore swing aloft, his attention was arrested by Ord, who had been talking with the Cyxellian.

"This being has informed me, commander, that our ship is perched atop one of their temples. He seems most interested in our removing it."

Jorlic perked up his ears. "Vell, vot do you know!"

There was a cautious bit of laughter from the group of men behind. Brun swung his gaze from Jorlic's florid face to where he supposed the Cyxellian to be, but he spoke to the men: "Strange... they can see our ship, but not us."

The Cyxellian's voice was in his ear then, louder, and ominous with authority. "As Priest of Yroc, Earthman, I order you to drive your vehicle from the top of my temple."

Brun issued a terse order to Ord, who motioned for the first engineer and the communications officer to follow him. The three men leaped into the air.

Talabree glanced in the direction of the ship, which was quite visible from his position. It looked somewhat forlorn poised there two hundred feet above the ground, like a gigantic fire-fly.

A solemn murmur was slowly arising from the group of invis-

ible beings about them. And again they felt themselves being herded together into a small compact group.

Dinast, the geologist, spoke to the commander: "These things seem to be getting all wrought up again, sir."

"The ship will be moved as soon as Ord can get their. If only they will be patient a moment longer." He turned again in the direction of the ship and was astonished to see its sleek nose slanting at a forty-five degree angle, and even as he looked, it tilted more. "The ship!" he screamed.

THE INVISIBLE CROWD opened its collective mouth and Brun heard a sound like the wail of a siren as the rocket began to fall. The roof of the temple collapsed under the enormous pressure and the commander and his crew watched helplessly as the ship settled through the various floors of the invisible temple and came to rest on the ground, still tilted at an angle, held in place by one of the remaining walls of the temple.

A voice which Brun's confused mind identified as that of the Priest of Yroc screamed a command, and the next instant the Earthmen were captives.

"To the citadel with them!" The Priest's command was taken up in a shout and the crowd roared. The Earthmen felt rough hands dragging them away. Brun remembered an invisible fist colliding against his face, and that was all. He fell backwards into someone's arms, his eyes staring unseeingly at the sunless sky.

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THE MEN WERE GROUPED around the commander and Jorlic was bending over him. No one spoke as Brun sat up. He rubbed his swollen jaw and spat blood. The scarlet blot hung, or seemed to hang, two feet above the ground. Damn these invisible floors. Damn the whole business. Brun exchanged glances with each of the six men seated about him.

"Well," he said.

Jorlic replied, his usually jovial tone replaced by one of serious briskness. "I've made contact with the rocketship..."

Brun raised an eyebrow.

"...With my belt radio," finished the atomist.

Dinast nearly cut Jorlic off: "What value might that be?" His voice was deep and sarcastic.

Upon first entering their place of imprisonment, Dinast had investigated the small invisible room. It was circular, he discovered, with a diameter of fourteen paces. There were no aperatures, save the entrance through which they had been thrown, and that had been securely sealed by a process unknown to the geologist.

"Dinast, our only hope lies with the ship. If they can't help us, we're beyond help."

DINAST MUTTERED something unintelligible and sank back to the floor. Jorlic eyed the geologist a moment, making no comment. Then he turned to his commander.

"So was?" he inquired in his native tongue.

Brun regarded him disinterest-

edly, his mind fogged. The German words hadn't registered.

"Commander?"

"What did you learn from the ship?"

Jorlic cleared his throat preemptorily. "They have escaped to the stratosphere."

"They?"

"Ord, Tamerlane, and Kuttner gained entrance to the ship with Kenmore's help. They are orbiting this planet now, approximately 260 miles from its surface."

BRUN THOUGHT A MOMENT, then reached for the switch of his own belt radio. Ord's voice came through a moment later, strained with emotion.

"Any orders, commander?" Brun could picture beads of sweat on the man's words.

The commander chewed his lip in thought. He glanced up as Ackerman, the meteorologist, called to him. Brun felt the fingering in his mind and knew that one of the aliens had entered the room.

"You will be brought before a council of Priests to be executed in the presence of His Most Holy Omnipotence, Yroc."

The Earthmen stared at one another in dismayed disbelief that their misdemeanor in landing upon the temple could be a felony. The thoughts in Brun's mind were premeditated arguments.

The Cyxellian resumed: "At the third gong from the tower,

you will be transported to the Council room in the third temple of Yroc, the Most Holy." He departed and the invisible portal whoosed shut behind him.

IN THE SILENCE which followed, there was a sudden shattering sound similar to breaking glass, and the Earthmen knew the first 'gong' had been sounded.

"One," counted Jorlic, serious.

The humming of the radios brought Brun back to their need for immediate escape. He flipped the switch on his belt and spoke to Ord: "Did you hear what our visitor had to say just now?"

"I heard, sir. We have a monitoring tracer on your sets; leave the beam open and we can take the co-ordinates of your position. We're coming in."

"Make it as quick as possible, Ord. We here have no way of knowing how long it will be between gongs." His eyes strayed to Jorlic, whose upraised arm and moving lips told Brun that the man was counting the passage of time until the next gong.

Leaving his set open, Brun leaned his two-hundred pound bulk against the unseen wall, his eyes searching each man's face with earnest concentration. !

Ackerman was knelt in an attitude of worship and his lips were moving silently. Brun knew he was praying. Jorlic was busy with his counting. Dinast was muttering incoherently. Fear was very evident in his demeanor. Shavely, the geneologist, was smiling whimsically. The fatalist. The romantic fatalist, thought

The romantic fatalist, thought Brun. Mitchel Cayenne, the linguist, was fingering a small photograph and whispering so softly that Brun could not hear the words, but he knew they were not English. The dreamer, he thought. Perry had his rations between his feet and was plucking a blue-tinted food capsule from the midst of the group of them. The realist, Brun decided.

For the first time, Brun saw the men as men and not just robots under his command.

THE GONG, WHICH WAS a shattering sound to his Earthly ears, came again; interrupting his train of thought. His gaze swept toward Jorlic's hulking figure.

"Nine minutes, thirty-one seconds," said the atomist, his lips hardly moving.

Brun relayed this information to Ord, and was amazed at the response:

"It will take us fourteen minutes, commander, to arrive at your present position." There was a pause, and then, "Any further orders, sir?"

"Use whatever methods necessary for your purposes."

"How about the atomic cannon...we could stir up a little panic with it..."

"Of course...anything."

Jorlic spoke: "Seven minutes, commander."

Silence. A soft whispering from Cayenne. A rumble of meaningless words from Dinast. Silence.

"FIVE MINUTES," said Jorlic, consulting his chronometer.

Brun rose, wiping his palms against his trouser-legs.

Shavely began an aria from Lunar opera.

"Shut up, Shavely."

The humming stopped.

Shavely sat regarding the floor between his legs, smiling.

Dinast leaped up, confronting his commander. Panic glazed his eyes.

Brun stood tall and calm before the fear-mad man, awaiting the outburst he had been expecting.

Suddenly, Jorlic said: "We have five seconds."

PERRY POPPED another food capsule into his mouth and gazed about the room.

Shavely leaned back, putting his weight on his hands, and crossed his legs, beaming at his companions.

Ackerman and Cayenne stood up, ready.

Dinast's long jaw fell.

Jorlic spat contemptuously after the manner of his people.

The Earthmen heard the door of the cell swing open at the same moment the final gong sounded.

Through the aperture came the clamoring of the mob outside.

Rough hands were shoving them toward the door, or where they supposed the door to be. Then they were in the midst of a group of howling invisible beings.

Brun's eyes swept the sky. Nothing. Then he was forced on after his command. Fingers tore at his tunic and it was ripped from his shoulders. He tripped and fell, then scrambled to his feet, spitting white sand from his mouth. Bitter resentment rose in his mind, as he thought of dying, leaving a world whose very substance could be commercialized to the benefit of mankind.

A loud explosion came over the voices of the crowd, and Brun knew that Ord was close by. He glanced about swiftly, eyes narrowed. A thin finger of flame appeared overhead and he followed its trail. He sensed the crowd dispersing as another explosion sounded a hundred yards behind them. He watched the graceful sweep of the ship as it swung around for the remaining two blast, one on either side. When they came, he knew Ord had accomplished his purpose. The holocaust was complete. Visible flame sprang from invisible buildings. The crowd, screaming its fear, pounded down the street.

THE EARTHMEN KEPT their eyes on the ship. It landed a moment later, five hundred yards to the right of their position. They shoved their way through the invisible crowd until they felt their feet touch the white sand, and they knew they were approaching open country. Then they ran.

Behind came the hoard of invisible Cyxellians, voices loud and raucous in the Earthmen's ears.

Brun yelled into the radio, "Ord, get that airlock open!"

"Better hurry, sir, that mob is directly behind you and they seem to be gaining."

Kenmore must have perfected his infra-red glasses, Talabree decided. He spoke again to Ord: "Fire another round in front of them, Ord."

Jorlic came wheezing up beside him. His fat jowls were ~~h~~ bouncing in rythem with his stride. His words came in gasps of breath, "Gott! This running. For inter-planetary. Olympis runners. Not. Likes of me."

An atomic blast from the ship's forward gun erupted behind them, the sound severing Jorlic's sentence.

There was horrified screaming from the Cyxellians, and then the Earthmen were inside the rocket.

Within minutes they blasted off, and the might~~y~~ space craft began circling the world of Cyxell, gathering speed.

BRUN AND ORD stood before the space-scope screen in navigation, gazing at the colorless world from which they had just escaped. It was as a snowball on black velvet.

"Perhaps someday we can find our way back to this place," spoke Brun, his eyes unfocused. "Think of it: think of the medicinal value of that white substance. It's worthless to them, priceless to us."

Ord glanced at his commander

He said cautiously, as if expecting a reprimand: "But the holds are full of the Cyxellian sand, sir."

BRUN SNAPPED ERECT. "No one gave you orders to load the ship!"

Ord stood abashed, slightly taken aback by the tone his commander used. "I realize that, sir. But, you see, I thought of its value and——"

His commander interrupted: "But the extra weight! Are atomic fuel might not carry us far enough from Cyxell to switch to extra-solar drive."

Ord Recuas was silent before his commander's authority. He surveyed the calculator's tape, then the atomic fuel guage. Finally, he spoke, "In my opinion, sir, our atomic fuel will be ample."

Brun turned to the space-scope screen, wondering what possible catastrophe might occur, transporting portions of one universe into another. He flipped a switch. The world to their stern was fast receding, and was the size of a golf ball. He smiled to himself, inwardly proud of the fact that Ord had thought to load the ship. It would mean money...fame...

The ship slid on through the void.

ORD SAT QUIETLY before the control panel, waiting for the signal from the calculator, giving him authorization to switch on the extra-solar drive.

Brun had retired to the hold to estimate the tonnage of the

Cyxellian sand. The rest of the crew were busy at their respective posts.

Upon receiving the signal from the calculator, Ord immediately switched to extra-solar drive and relaxed in his seat. Above the console, he watched the clean clearness of space become hazy mist as the rocket increased speed.

Back in the hold, Brun felt the sudden lurch and knew they were approaching the speed of light. Soon they would be home to Aros. He felt confident they would have no trouble reaching their own universe once attaining the speed which had flung them into this alien universe. Such passages as they had made through the space-warp were not unheard of in the annals of space flight.

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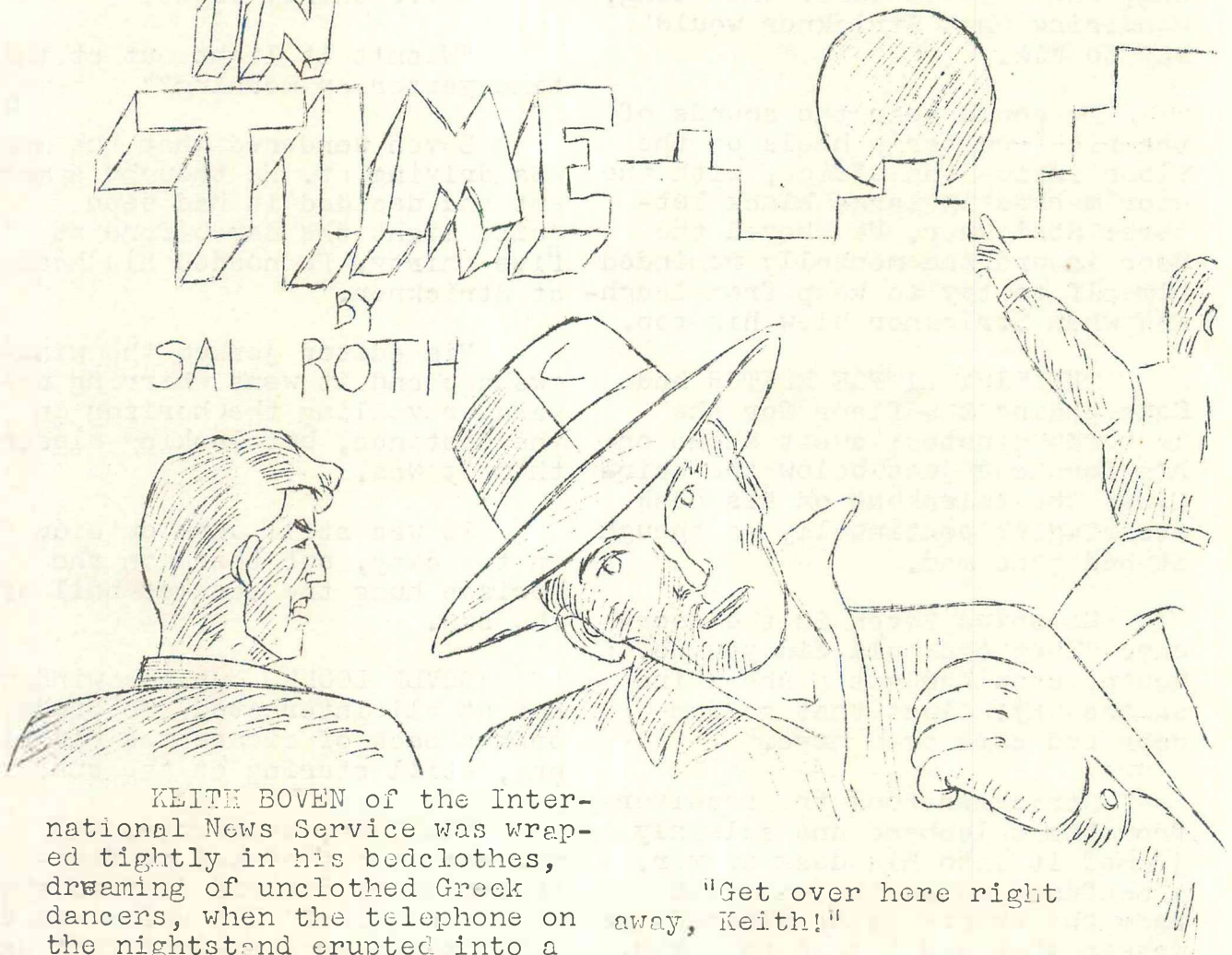
ORD LOOKED BACK at the gleaming hull of the mighty inter-solar rocket. He was grateful that the atomic fuel had lasted long enough to brake the tremendous speed of the extra-solar drive, and bring the ship into an orbit about Aros. It had been only minutes since he had left the mother ship on his fuel errand in one of the space-boats.

A sudden flicker on the screen before him brought Ord's eyes towards its shiny surface. A great nova of light exploded into being where the rocket had been. Great forces of energy made the small space-boat pitch and toss.

SEEING THE SUN RISE IN THE WEST WAS
SURPRISING ENOUGH, BUT WHAT FOLLOWED WAS EVEN
MORE SURPRISING...

BACKWARDS IN TIME

BY
SAL ROTH



KEITH BOVEN of the International News Service was wrapped tightly in his bedclothes, dreaming of unclothed Greek dancers, when the telephone on the nightstand erupted into a series of jangles. Boven snorted himself out of his sleep and jerked up the receiver.

"Boven," he said, rubbing his eyes with the back of one hand. He knew almost instantly that the person at the other end of the line was Eric Strickner, the night editor.

"Get over here right away, Keith!"

Boven thought of giving Strickner a sarcastic answer, but he decided against it.

"What time is it, Eric?"

"It's five-twenty. Be here in five minutes or you're fired!" Boven heard the receiver slam against the cradle on Strickner's desk. He knew something big was up, or coming up, he could tell

by the tone of the editor's usually quiet voice. But Boven took his time getting dressed; he knew he would not be fired. Boven was the best reporter INS had, and Boven knew it. It was only a three minute walk to the newspaper building, but he took twice that long, wondering what Strickner would say to him.

He could hear the sounds of the night editor's heels on the floor inside the office, with the door marked in large black letters: Strickner. He shoved the door inward and mentally reminded himself to try to keep from laughing when Strickner blew his top.

THE TINY LITTLE EDITOR had been pacing the floor for the last ten minutes; sweat shone on his forehead just below the hairline; the telephone on his desk was ringing continually as though it had gone mad.

He spied Boven in the doorway. "What the hell did you do, Boven, stop and get a shoeshine on the way! Close that goddam door and come over here."

Strickner took the receiver from the telephone and solemnly jammed it into his desk drawer. A confused squawking emanated from the object as he slammed the drawer shut and turned to Boven, who remained standing across the desk.

Boven opened his mouth. "Mind telling me what's up?"

Strickner moved to the window, over which the blind had been drawn. He paused a little dramatically before it. "Didn't you notice anything strange on your way over here?"

Boven shook his head slowly in the negative, not speaking. Strickner made a motion towards the reporter's left wrist.

"What's your watch say?"

"Five-thirty-eight."

"Wasn't it light out at this time yesterday morning?"

Boven wandered what the man was driving at. He thought a moment and decided it had been quite light the day before at five-thirty. He nodded his head at Strickner.

His editor jerked the windowshade and it went whirring upward, revealing the horizon in the distance, but looking closer than it was.

It was still dark outside in the city, but there on the horizon hung the scarlet ball of the sun.

BOVEN LOOKED out the window, not at all interested. He broke open a pack of cigarettes and lit one, still staring at the sun.

"Tell me, Strickner, did you get me out of bed at five-thirty on my day off just to show me the sunrise?" His voice was dry like handfuls of sawdust that have lain in the sunlight for a long time.

"This may be the last sunrise you'll ever see, Boven," Strickner said, the quietness back in his voice.

Boven drew smoke into his lungs and exhaled. "What do you mean?"

Strickner forced himself to keep his voice steady, but there was a tremble in it. "Keith," he began, "The sun has stopped. It's been hanging there for the past half hour."

IT TOOK A moment for the words to soak in. Boven blinked his eyes, cigarette smoke drifting very slowly from his lips. His words were a whisper in the quiet room.

"It isn't possible."

"No," replied Strickner. "It isn't possible; but it's happening."

"How can you be sure?"

"I've already checked by phone with most of the astronomical laboratories in the vicinity. I even placed a call to an amateur astronomer I know in Florida, thinking perhaps it might be an illusion caused by some atmospheric condition, and visible only from this one particular point..." His voice trailed off, and Boven knew his theory had been wrong. He had thought of the same thing as soon as Strickner had mentioned the phenomenon. But this was no illusion.

Boven sat down and stood again almost in the same movement. He smashed his cigarette into the metal ash-tray on the editor's desk. "What do you suppose it means, Eric?" He paused. "Is this the end of the world or something? Somehow I did not have it pictured quite this way."

Strickner gestured toward the phone. "Fifty or more people have telephoned already in half an hour. They all asked me that same question." He sat down sud-

denly and cushioned his face against his palms. He spoke through his fingers. "Christ, Keith, how am I supposed to know what is happening? It frightens me just like it frightens everyone else. I'm a newspaperman, not a scientist."

"What do you want me to do, Eric?"

Strickner sighed and got to his feet. He searched a moment and then handed Boven a small slip of paper on which he had scrawled an address earlier. "This is the address of the planetarium; the new one on High and Thirty-second. I called them earlier, but they refused to talk about it then. I want you to get out there and get us a story. Something we can print. Facts."

"This thing is too fantastic for facts," said Boven. "Like something out of a dime novel." He turned to leave.

Halfway to the door, he stopped and looked back. Eric Strickner was staring out the window at the red globe of fire burning in the east. He brought his eyes to Boven's. "It scares hell out of me, Keith," he said.

"It scares hell out of both of us," said Boven, and he left the room.

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OUTSIDE IN THE STREET there were a few people with puzzled looks on their faces, on their way to their jobs. Most of them seemed to sense that there was something wrong this particular morning, but Keith knew they did not know exactly what it was.

It took him nearly thirty minutes to get to the planetarium, but it was no lighter in the city than it had been when he first got out of bed after Strickner had phoned him.

There was a man in a blue uniform at the door, and a small crowd around him. The reporter shoved through the group and started past the policeman. The officer stopped him.

"Sorry, bud. I've got orders to keep everyone out."

Keith flashed his press card. "Boven, of the INS."

The officer looked at the bit of cardboard and pulled at his nose. Finally, he stepped back and opened the door. "I guess it's okay."

He allowed Boven to slip through the door, and then he shut it quickly before the impatient crowd could shove their way past him.

Boven found himself in a high-ceilinged vestibule with an archway at the far end. He crossed the carpeted floor into the next room.

He could hear voices somewhere but could not decide from where they had come. After a moment a long-legged man with a thin bony face appeared from a doorway ahead of Boven. He seemed astonished to find a person in the room.

Coming forward, he took Boven by the elbow as though intending to drag him to the door. "You'll have to leave. I'm sorry. We're working on this thing now, and we will release our findings at

the earliest possible——"

Boven jerked his arm free and straightened his coat collar. "I'm a newspaperman. The name's Boven, of the International News Service."

The thin man chewed his lips as though he were irritated. "I suppose you're here for an explanation of this incident?"

"Incident?" said Boven, "That is putting it rather mildly, isn't it?"

"Never-the-less, there is nothing we can tell you here."

"This thing must have an explanation."

"I'm afraid it hasn't," said the scientist drily, turning toward the wall.

"You've got to give us something to print! This is the biggest story since the birth of Jesus Christ!" Boven was losing his temper over the cold and impersonal manner of the scientist, and he made no attempt to conceal his anger.

"What do you want me to do," began the scientist, turning back to Boven, "Quote a paragraph for you from some science-fiction yarn? I can't explain. The Earth has stopped spinning on its axis. It's as simple as that."

"Simple!" exploded Boven. "You call that simple?"

"It's simple in its vastness," replied the long-legged man without emotion.

"For that to happen——the world to stop spinning, I mean——

wouldn't everything on it, because of inertia or what-not, go spinning off into space?"

"According to all the laws of science and nature, that is exactly what should have happened," replied the lean scientist, putting a match to a cigarette.

"Then how do you explain that?" asked Boven.

"I can't explain it."

Boven threw up his hands and cursed. "Is there anyone else here I could talk to?"

The scientist sighed. "There is no one here who can tell you anything. Call this thing a miracle or phenomenon or whatever you choose. You'll come as close to explaining it as we here at the planetarium." He dropped his partly-smoked cigarette into an ash-receptacle in one corner of the room, and then turned as though intending to leave. Boven thought of stopping him, but changed his mind.

Muttering to himself, the newspaperman left the planetarium. He shoved his way through the ever-thickening crowd in front of the building. It was still as dark outside the planetarium as it had been earlier. Boven started walking. He walked almost three blocks before noticing that the darkness seemed to be deepening.

When he was sure of it, he began running, a thought hammering at the back of his brain. He kept repeating over and over to himself as he ran: It can't be...it can't be...it can't be...

He darted into an all-night hotel and took its elevator to

the top floor. It took him but a moment to find a hall window facing east, and to confirm his fears.

The sun was setting in the east. Boven stood at the window watching it until it had disappeared completely. Then he went back to the newspaper office.

New York lay huge and quiet and frightened under the dim stars, and the strangest night in history began.

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THEY'RE BLAMING IT on the atomic bomb explosions," Eric Strickner was saying. "How ridiculous can theories become?"

"Next they'll be accusing the Martians," Boven observed.

"That's as plausible as the next thing. Maybe God has a finger in this pie somewhere."

Boven raised his eyebrows at his editor. It was the first time he had ever heard Strickner mention God other than in a moment of profanity. He said: "You're serious about that, aren't you?"

There was something like bitterness in Strickner's face, and his eyes were squinted and staring at nothing at all. "Of course. There is still a God around somewhere, isn't there?"

Boven did not answer. He had been an atheist for as long as he could remember, and he had been fifty-two in July. He decided to change the subject.

"There's going to be a lot of panic, Eric."

"Why shouldn't there be? For as long as the world has stood, the sun has been rising in the east and setting in the west; so all of a sudden it stops in the sky as though its shifting gears and starts going the other way around. Why shouldn't there be panic, Keith? It's been this way exactly—" he glanced at his watch, "—sixteen hours. You know how many suicides there have been?"

Boven shook his head so slowly so slightly the movement was almost imperceptible.

Strickner allowed a pause while he started up a cigarette. He was halfway through his fourth pack since the thing began. "There has been almost five-hundred suicides phoned in. And that's in New York alone."

Boven shuddered. There was something he had been meaning to tell Strickner. He decided to get it over with.

"Look at my face, Eric."

The night editor stared at him puzzled. "Whats wrong?"

"I had a day old beard when I went home last night. I needed a shave."

"What are you driving at?"

"Look close. I'm clean shaven."

"What the hell are you trying to say, Keith?"

"I didn't shave."

STRICKNER PUT HIS hand to his cheek remembering. "I didn't shave either, now that I think about it; but my face is smooth."

The two men sat regarding one another for a moment.

"Maybe this thing is worse than it appeared at first even," Said Strickner, forgetting grammatical construction in his emotion. "I got some phone calls people telling me about dead men suddenly appearing at their homes ones who died within the last sixteen hours, I mean. I thought it was just hoax."

"We might as well face this thing, Eric. Something fantastic is happening to our world. Something so crazy I don't want to think about it...but we have to because its here and we've got to accept it."

"Go on," said the editor, his head down, knowing what Boven was going to say.

"It all adds up to one thing, Time is running backwards."

Strickner nodded several times without looking up, feeling as though he were going insane.

"Know what that means?"

Again Strickner nodded.

It meant a lot of things. Things he didn't like to think about. But he thought of them anyway while he sat staring at the red glow of his cigarette. Babies born today—tomorrow, back in the womb. Let a year pass, and they would not even have been conceived. There would be no births. No deaths—not really death, unless by suicide or violence. Perhaps living backwards and dying that way wouldn't be so bad. After becoming young enough, say a year old, a few months, there would be no pain, no remembrance, no

anything. Perhaps that was the perfect way of dying.

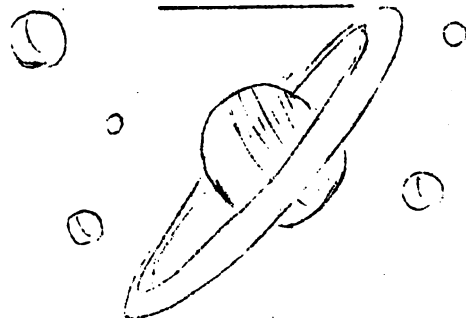
Then he thought of the other side of it. Yes, there would be births. Births from the grave. Buried today, tomorrow alive and ready to live life over... in reverse. It was terribly frightening. It meant every man would know exactly how long he had to live. Boven had fifty-two years to live. He, Strickner, had sixty-one years of life remaining.

AND HE THOUGHT: suicide would not be a way out. If I shot myself now, tonight, tomorrow I would be ressurected, because tomorrow is really yesterday and yesterday is tomorrow.

Christ, why was I born?

Strickner put his head in his hands and cried for a long long time. Boven waited quietly. Finally the two newspapermen returned to their work.

Far out in space, a child-god named Wog giggled for one million years and went for a billion century walk among the universes, looking for a new top to spin.



S=F Book Reviews

LEW GAFF

THE ILLUSTRATED MAN, by Ray Bradbury, Doubleday.

Since my viewpoint concerning Ray Bradbury appears elsewhere in this tome, I suppose it isn't quite fair for me to review this particular book. However, with as open a mind as possible, I shall try.

One reviewer said of this latest contribution of Bradbury's "Even better than his 'The Martian Chronicles,'" I heartily disagree with that statement. This book has its moments, to be true, but does not approach the Chronicles in downright philosophy and genius in assembling.

I suppose it goes without saying that this, like the Chronicles, is nothing more than a collection of previously printed Bradbury excursions, with necessary changes to fit the theme suggested by the title. There were tales in this book which I had read before; more that I had never seen. There were one or two with such ridiculous themes, and at times ridiculous writing, that I wondered how even Bradbury got them printed. The one particular tale which affected me thus was, 'The Cement Mixer'. It read like a third grade composition. If you like Bradbury you'll like the 'Illustrated Man'. If you've never heard of Bradbury buy this and get acquainted with

his best and worst. If you have no up to that high-sounding title. taste for Bradbury, save your money. The stories are of the type

BURN, WITCH, BURN, by A. Merritt, Liveright.

A reprint, typical of the Merritt we all know so well, but a trifle above average in his particular field. It has to do with a gay creature named Madame Mandilip who owns a doll shop. The story is weird, suspenseful, and often horrifying. If you happen to be a fan of Merritt's, you have undoubtedly already read this book. If you're of the younger set, Perhaps you've missed out on this highly exciting work, by the man called the daddy of fantasy and horror. If you're in that latter class, by all means scrounge up some dough and buy this tale (you can get it in the paper-back pocket size for two-bits). If you want something more sturdy to keep in your library, go whole hawg and procure the cloth bound edition. It goes for around two bucks.

If you want the other famous fantasy tales of Merritt, in the paper-back editions, quarter size Avon books has published besides Burn, Witch, Burn, these: THE SHIP OF ISHTAR, CREEP, SHADOW, CREEP, THE METAL MONSTER, SEVEN FOOT* PRINTS TO SATAN, THE FOX WOMAN, THE MOONPOOL, DWELLERS IN THE MIR* AGE, and THE FACE IN THE ABYSS.

Some of these are due to be reviewed in future issues of VOID, in case you happen to be interested in this column.

BEYOND THE END OF TIME, edited by Fredrick Pohl, Doubleday.

A collection, once again. It doesn't, however, quite live

you can get by the dozen in any twenty-cent pulp. This thing of gathering together a flock of S*F and fantasy tales into one volume is becoming increasingly frequent, and undoubtedly profitable, from the number I've seen in bookstores and on news-stands.

This particular one contains nineteen stories, all of which were written by authors whose names you'll have no trouble recognizing, if you're a fan and you probably are or you wouldn't be reading this. You will find Leinster, Asimov, Van Vogt, Heinlein, Gallum, and of course Ray Bradbury. Compiling an anthology of S-F without including something by Bradbury ranks along with naming the presidents of Our United States and omitting George Washington. Anyway, I've yet to see an anthology without Bradbury somewhere in it. If they reprint Mars Is Heaven many more times, it is very liable to replace the Bible.

My blue ribbon for the best story in the book goes to Jack Finney, for a subtle little thing called Such Interesting Neighbors.

Before this becomes too individualistic, maybe I'd better say that the anthology as a whole is good for a few enjoyable evenings to most anyone, fan or no. A non-fan will appreciate the introduction by Mr. Pohl, in which he takes a stab at defining science-fiction, and with a goodly measure of success.

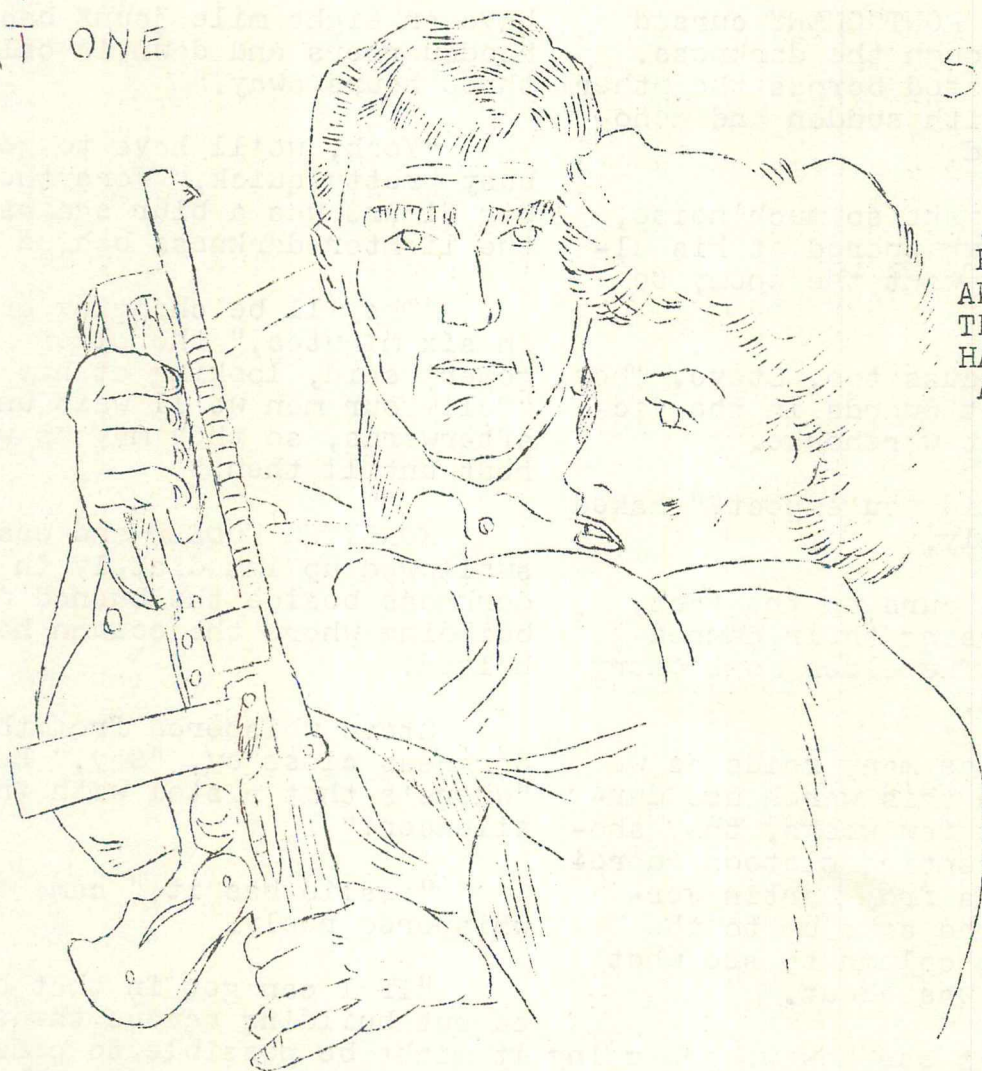
148

HAMMER AND CYCLE

SERIAL —
PART ONE

by
STUART
CORY

....WHEN THE
ENEMY CRUSHED
AMERICA, THEY
THOUGHT THEY
HAD CRUSHED
AMERICANS....



ED
TALON

MEN AND WOMEN IN A BEATEN COUNTRY FIGHTING
DESPARATELY FOR THEIR LIVES

HAMMER AND CYCLE

STUART CORY

CHAPTER 1.

THE IRON HEEL

RICHARD MONTGOMERY cursed hoarsely through the darkness. His voice grated across the other mens' ears with sudden and monosyllabic sound.

"Don't make so much noise, Dad," Steve whispered at his elbow. "Do you want the enemy to hear us?"

"You'd cuss too, Steve. They've got eight guards in the vicinity of that warehouse."

"What did you expect?" asked Jonnie quietly.

"I'm not cursing the fact, I'm only cursing their damned foresight," The elder Montgomery expostulated.

"Well, as many raids as we have made on this warehouse during the past few weeks, they should have an entire platoon guarding it." This from Martin Forsythe, who had come up to the front of the column to see what the hold-up was about.

"I don't see how we are going to get anything done if all we do is stand here and argue," complained Steve.

"We certainly have not got all night," Jonnie agreed. "We

have an eight mile jaunt back to headquarters and dawn is only three hours away."

"Yeah, we'll have to get busy pretty quick," Forsythe's big figure was a blur against the lighter darkness behind him.

"They'll be changing guard in six minutes," the elder Montgomery said, looking at his watch. "Tell your men we'll wait until afterwards, so they may as well rest untill then."

FORSYTHE NODDED and was swallowed up immediately in the darkness beside the burned out building where the column had halted.

Steve whispered from the darkness close by, "Say," he said, "Where's that pistol with the silencer?"

"Leslie has it," came the whispered reply.

"If I can get in that burned out building across the street, it might be possible to pick off those guards one by one. They'll not even know what is happening." He pointed to a building some distance away. Its front was well-lighted by the illumination from the lights about the guarded warehouse.

"How in hell are you going to get over there, Steve? That place is as light as day, not to say anything about the ground between here and there." The elder Montgomery sounded skeptical as he surveyed the possibilities.

"The position is vulnerable from the back."

"Okay Steve." He turned to the men behind him. "Pass the word back for Leslie to bring his silencer up here."

They could hear a faint ripple of whispering voices as the word was passed along. Only minutes later Leslie came forward, slipping and sliding through the darkness.

"Here, Montgomery," he said hoarsely, his deep bass voice rumbling softly in the night.

"Give it to Steve, Frank. We'll give you ten minutes, Steve. Get going, the guard will be changing any minute now."

"I'm going with you, Steve." Jonnie came forward as Steve turned to go.

"Well, come on."

He seemed a little peeved at her as he loped off into the darkness back the way they had come.

MOMENTS LATER THEY WERE inside the crumbling waste of the burned out building. They had a good view of the warehouse now, for the electric lights surrounding it were just across the street, less than one hundred feet away. The guard had changed and they could hear

freshly-awakened men mumbling softly between themselves.

He spoke in her ear so suddenly it startled her. "Hold my machine gun, Jonnie." He handed her the weapon and she almost dropped her own as she reached for it. She watched him silently as he raised the old single-action .38 and sighted along the barrel. The slight of the silencer and the clicking of mechanism sounded extremely loud in the quiet of the building. She watched him aim again, hearing no sound from across the street, and smelling the acrid smell of burnt powder. As a faint breeze fanned it back into her face. With his third bullet a low sound was heard from the direction of the warehouse. A hoarse yell burst through the muttering, then Steve began firing rapidly.

Strangely, Jonnie thought of Edison, who had been killed, it seemed, so long ago. She almost sobbed then, Eddie, Eddie. Why did you have to die? Why couldn't it have been someone else? Oh, Edison, I love you, love you. Tears dimmed her vision but she brushed them aside a little contemptuously. She looked down morosely at her cracked, dirty hands.

She glanced up to see Steve had gone through the window and was standing a few feet below on a pile of rubble, motioning at her frantically. She dropped to his side and peered about. She saw the still figures of enemy guards lying where they had fallen about the entrance to the huge warehouse.

ALREADY FIGURES of the resistance group were running into the square. Sub-machine guns were held ready, along with machine-pistols and rifles.

Steve, with Jonnie at his heels, ran swiftly across the street and tore frantically at the lock which held the corrugated metal door closed.

ONCE INSIDE he leaped into the cab of the lead truck which their contact had informed them was already loaded. He heard his father issuing orders for the loading of the other truck. The operations were half-completed when someone came running into the warehouse. He heard them shouting that someone was coming, and he ground down on the accelerator of the truck. Martin Forsythe dived for the cab of the nearest truck, and Jonnie readied the .50 caliber machine gun for action, above Steve. He watched as men piled into Forsythe's truck, arms swinging with their weapons and legs flying. He saw his father racing toward Martin's truck, which was moving now. His glance shifted to the big open door. He caught his breath and pounded Jonnie on the shin.

"They're at the door, Jonnie!"

The motor caught and he crammed the lever back into low. Forsythe's gunner was already firing the heavy fifty caliber into the mass of enemy soldiers as the truck got under way. Steve let the clutch out all the way and roared after.

He watched the tail-lights swing into the street, and he turned on his headlights. Exhaust and powder smoke made the light dim as he swung his truck into the street. Gunfire roared at them and bullets screamed above the deep rumble of the big motors. Then he saw the half-track down

the block coming at them, its guns blazing. He glanced up at Jonnie and saw her lips drawn in a straight line and hate flashing from her dark eyes. He saw the big fifty caliber jump in her hands as tracers and armor-piercing bullets left its muzzle. He watched her swing the heavy gun on its turret, and was amazed at the strength she displayed.

BEHIND HIM HE HEARD the men in the rear firing back toward the enemy soldiers at the warehouse. The windshield smashed in his face, showering him with broken glass. He glanced again at the half-track and sat that it had run into the side of a burned out building amid dust and flying bits of concrete. His gaze swept up the wall and he froze to the wheel. The wall was crumbling toward them.

He honked the horn desperately to the other truck, but evidently Forsythe had already seen the danger. He dodged into a side street, bumping and swerving from side to side. Steve whipped in behind him and felt the surge of air and smelled the thick choking dust as the caving wall slammed into the street behind.

The street they had turned into was cluttered with debris but Forsythe had the big truck ahead in four-wheel drive, and was making swift progress down its deserted length. Steve shoved the clutch in and threw his truck into four-wheel drive and roared after. All firing had stopped now, but Steve knew they had gained but short respite. He glanced up at Jonnie and saw her fumbling with the bolt on the fifty caliber.

She kicked him in the thigh

and screamed down at him above the roar of motors and wind: "This gun has jammed, Steve!"

He grimaced but did not reply. They probably wouldn't need it again anyway, he thought. He glanced through the smashed windshield to the truck ahead. It had halted and he knew Forsythe had come to another street. It was Engle Blvd. He honked his horn and came to a stop beside Forsythe's truck. "Take Engle out!" he screamed.

He watched as Forsythe turned his big truck into the wide, clear street. Then he swung in behind him, his headlights flashing on ravaged and devastated houses. Then they were roaring along again in a silence broken only by the motors of the trucks. Steve glanced out the side window and saw a row of vehicles on their tail. His eyes came back to the truck ahead, and then traveled up Jonnie's trouser-covered leg. She evidently had the fifty caliber cleared, for she was smiling grimly as she reached for another can of ammunition. He nudged her again on the shin, and as she glanced down he waved his hand frantically to the rear. He watched her throw the big gun around on its rollers, and then he drove on, listening to the guns staccato. His gaze traveled again out the window to the rear-view mirror. Devastation had been wrought back there by the fifty caliber slugs. Two vehicles had turned over directly in the path of the others following. A gasoline tank exploded and a heap of burning vehicles greeted his eyes.

MINUTES LATER they were at the rendezvous point and he drew sharply to a halt beside Forsythe. He climbed stiffly from the cab

after shutting off the motor and extinguishing the headlights. He watched Forsythe signal with his lights and then turn them out. Moments later the main body of the resistance group were running into the street, and then they were unloading the big trucks. Jonnie came down from the fifty caliber as Steve strung fuse from the dynamite in the open gas tank.

"Got the fifty all ready to be dismantled." She started passing cans of ammunition down to him. Her face was smeared with dirt and grease, but there was a happy smile on her lips. Two Resistance men climbed to the top of the cab and began dismantling the fifty caliber machine gun. Steve watched them a moment, then, as Jonnie passed the last can of ammo down, he went around to the tailgate, his big body a dim outline in the faint illumination of flickering flashlights.

THE UNLOADING was going smoothly with speed and practiced ease. Forsythe's truck was already unloaded and he was waiting for the signal to touch off the fuse to the dynamite in the gas tank. He glanced at the long column of the resistance group, making off toward headquarters, loaded with provisions of every description. Jonnie came up beside him, her heavy .45 caliber hanging by its sling across her shoulders, carrying a heavy truck battery balanced between her hands. She bent beneath the weight and smiled up at him.

As the last big carton left the truck Steve turned and signaled to Forsythe, his heavy gun raised above his head. He went back to the cab. Lighting a match on the door, he set it to the fuse and watched as the tiny flame

started flickering up the length of dangling fuse.

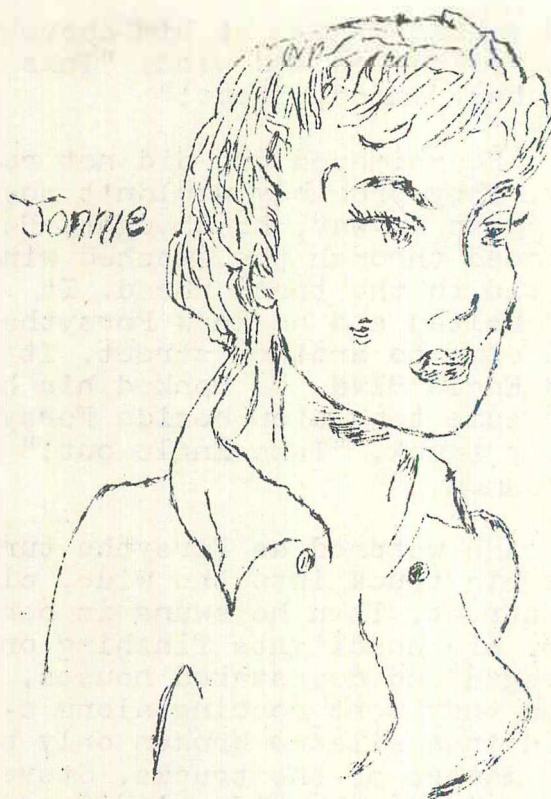
"Let's go," he called to Forsythe, running around to the front of the truck. He picked up what remained of the gun assembly and threw it across his shoulders. He spied Forsythe coming around the front of the other truck with a similar piece of fifty-caliber mechanism.

Together the two men raced after the retreating figures of the fast disappearing group. They had gone less than a hundred yards when the dynamite exploded with a blue flash of light and a fearful noise. They glanced back and saw flames in the empty eyes of the houses as the trucks started burning. They turned back and hurried after the column before they were lost in the darkness.

Just at dawn they arrived at the old, rotting mansion that was the group headquarters. It was nearly five miles from the place where they had burned the trucks. All were staggering beneath the loads they were carrying for they had not stopped to rest during the entire trip from the rendezvous point.

Supply men were on hand and directed each person to deposit his load wherever it belonged in the basement store-room.

STEVE SMILED AT the ease with which the group disposed of the fruits of the night's work. Indeed organization was at its peak. Everyone knew exactly what he was to do and did it without wasted time or labor. Many of the men had been in service in the second war and discipline was outstanding among their characteristics.



Richard Montgomery came up to him with Frank Leslie beside him. "Let's go up and report to Camerle, Steve." He looked at Forsythe and Jonnie. He laughed heartily at Jonnie's smoke blackened face. She smiled back and they followed him up the basement and down the hall to Camerle's headquarters office.

Leader Camerle glanced up as they entered the room. He smiled at them briefly and put a pistol he had been cleaning to one side.

"Mission completed, Camerle," the elder Montgomery reported.

"Good, good, Richard. Did you people have fun?"

"Not too much. The goddam enemy was all asleep, blast their dirty, stinking hides." His gaze shifted as Toni Reynolds came out of the other room with Marcella Montgomery following closely.

"You folks had better get some breakfast and then get some sleep. We have another little job tonight. I'll give you all a little briefing after you've eaten." He raised his eyes to Tony, who had come over and placed her hand on his shoulder. "Incidentally," he looked back at the little group facing him, "You all did a very good job. Did anyone get hurt?"

"Two wounded slightly and one dead," Richard Montgomery replied laconically. He glanced at Marcella who had gone over to Forsythe. "We got a good many supplies, Camerle," his gaze switched back to the leader's stony face, "and two fifty caliburs with lots of ammo."

"You did a magnificent job, men, and I will say I'm proud of you. Steve, have our armory mount them both on the half-track. We'll use that tonight." His gaze swept over the group facing him. "Gentlemen, good-night, and may you rest well. Richard, give me a written report on this tonight. Forsythe, have supply give you an inventory on the supplies and ammo we obtained. That's all. Dismissed."

*

CHAPTER TWO

FIRE OF THE ENEMY

MARTIN FORSYTHE of St. Louis was a man who believed in anything, just so long as he was assured of a future in whatever project seemed of the greatest value. He was, however, a firm believer in the famous stripes of red and white and the field of blue. With all his heart he believed in the greatest government that

had ever imposed itself upon the peoples of the world. To him, who had put in three years as a marine for the United States, Democracy was the most wonderful thing that could ever happen to man.

He had seen what had happened to other members of the country to which he belonged during the occupation, and he desired very much that the same thing would not happen to him. Perhaps this was his main reason for joining the St. Louis Resistance Group. No, it wasn't, Don't kid yourself, he said. You joined the resistance because you thought it was better than spending your time in a concentration camp. It was true. You didn't have to fight for what food you got. You didn't have to worry about breaking out with some deadly disease. You didn't have to smell the filthy smell of sweat and slime and fellow prisoners. You didn't have to worry about digging your own grave. He would like a nice clean wound. One that would kill instantly and without pain. He wouldn't like to see his life's blood scattering to be soaked up by a seemingly thirsty earth. He wasn't afraid of death. He just didn't like the prospect.

He tried to change the subject in his mind. Sex. Now, sex was a different matter. If a guy could accomplish the making of a girl, more power to him. If he could defeat someone to such a low thing, Forsythe was with him. Bless that man's heart. It was a defeat. He had defeated her powers of resistance. His thoughts stopped.

He glanced up. There she was. What was her name? Riviera, Jonnie Riviera, that was her. He glanced at her swiftly moving

hands. What was she doing? Oh, yes, buckling up her pants. His lips curled in contempt and his thoughts drifted off.

Hours later, sunshine was in his eyes. Damn, he thought. Turn the light out. He felt someone's hand on his arm. He flinched and sat up. Leslie, Oh, leave me sleep. Leave me die. I ain't fit to live in this world with the lousy people we have for bosses. Get out of here.

"Wake up, Forsythe, Chow time. It'll be all et up in a minute."

FORSYTHE RUBBED HIS EYES and said nothing. Leslie had gone back to his own bunk. He was pulling on his pants as Forsythe looked again. God, he was skinny. How could a man breed such a skinny kid? He yawned. He looked at the figures of the other men dressing in the sunlight-filled room. He saw Steve Montgomery. God, what a build. Then he moved his eyes away and wished he had something to drink.

He pulled his trousers on over his sleep-stiff legs. Here comes that insufferable girl he had met upstairs. Not bad looking. In fact, damn good looking. What was her name? Oh, yes, that was Steve's sister, Marcella. Good old Marc. He tied his shoes.

"Aren't you ready for chow yet, Martin?" She was standing at the foot of his bed. Damn, she was beautiful.

"Yes, yes, be right down." He pulled his shirt over his shoulders and stood up. He followed her out of the dormitory.

The long table was nearly

empty when he sat down. Just the men and women who had been on last night's mission. That seemed a long time ago. Where had they gone? Oh, yes, the warehouse. God, I wish I could get the cobwebs out of my brain. He took a long drink of the weak coffee. Hmmm. Must be getting short on coffee again, he muttered.

"What did you say, Martin?" Marcella was sitting beside him. Evidently she had already eaten, for her plate was empty before her. She was smoking a cigarette.

"I said must be a long time till dark," he lied. He sort of resented her presence.

"Not so long. Did you sleep well?" Her voice sounded interested.

Why the hell was she interested in him? "Yes, slept very well, thank you." He stuffed a large leaf of lettuce in his mouth and started chewing. He added some beans to his already-filled mouth and looked away.

"Martin."

"Yes?"

"You're a funny guy."

"Why?"

"So silent."

"What do you mean? Here it comes, he thought.

"You never take me outside to talk."

Uh huh, he thought. "You mean to talk in private?"

"Yes."



HE WATCHED THE TALL, BRIGHTLY CLAD MAN FALL IN THE
BEAMS FROM THE HEADLIGHTS OF THE HALF-TRACK.

What in hell was she leading her? He looked at her. Yes, he decided, it could be done. He tried. It worked. She fairly melted into his arms. It wasn't bad, he admitted to himself. This was the first time he had kissed her. He glanced about the mess room. Oh, oh. The guys were watching him. He had better break off this clinch. He looked down at the shingng face. He said: "Don't be absurd. I'm not as dumb as I look."

She smiled. She thought he was joking. "Martin, you surprise me. I thought you spent some time in the marines?"

"I did. But with girls? No, I am entirely dumb when it comes to the opposite sex." Oh, oh. Had he said something wrong? Her eyes glashed a warning.

"Don't be naive, Martin. The marines don't teach you to be an idiot. True, I was never in ent that I thought any different?" SHE GLANCED up at him, eyes twinkling. "Do you think for a moment that I thought any different?"

Yes, she was onto him. He would have to change his approach. "Golly, am I tired," he yawned, stretching his arms over his head. "Hope this mission don't take long tonight." He glanced at her. Yes, that seemed to change the look on her face. The storm clouds had left. He sat back and finished his coffee. He was glad she was young, but she was funny. She wanted to be vulgar, but didn't quite know how. Too much graceful living; too much discipline.

"You are a strage man, Martin."

"Is that a compliment or a slam?"

"Take it either way." Her eyes belied the pout of her lips.

Good thing she can't read my thoughts, he said to himself. This thing is silly. Why carry on a duel of words like this? Why don't you reach over and kiss

He was slightly taken aback. Looking deep into her eyes, he was a trifle puzzled as to her intentions. He had to change the answer he was on the verge of making: "Let's go to the briefing. Camerle will be wondering what's happened to his right hand man." He got to his feet and led the way out of the mess room.

HE WATCHED THE TALL, BRIGHTLY clad man fall in the beams from the headlights of the half-track. Something about the figure made him start forward in the hard seat. The chattering of the forward fifty calibbur let up as he brought the roaring vehicle to a halt beside the prone figure. He glanced at the silent man beside him. Cal Wylie was a coward. No he wasn't. He was a fool. Oh, the hell with him. Forsythe opened the heavily-armored door and jumped to the hard ground. Blood covered the tall man's face and shoulder. Forsythe looked at him in the light from the head-lamps of the half-track. Looks enemy, he muttered.

"What's wrong down there,

Forsythe?" Leslie called.

"This man is no enemy. Who the hell shot him?"

"I did," Leslie replied.

Leslie! You dumb son-of-a-bitch. He lifted the heavy body of the unconscious and held him up to the men in the rear of the half-track. Aloud he said, "We'll take him home with us."

Two trucks, loaded with the rest of the patrol, came lumbering up their motors rumbling in the night.

"What's wrong?" Steve was standing on the running board of the lead vehicle.

An anti-tank shell of about the size of a fifty millimeter chugged into the ground some twenty yards away and exploded. Pandemonium broke out. The lights on the half-track dissolved, and the night was black as the truck lights were doused.

FORSYTHE DIVED FOR the protection of the cab as another shell pounded into the earth. The motor roared as he surged back on the gears.

The half-track shot sparks as it left the dry river bed. He could hear the roar of the two trucks close behind. A shell burst just in front of him and the brilliant light hurt his eyes. He stomped down on the accelerator and the half-track made a rumbling noise deep in its engine and sprang up the embankment.

Forsythe heard the fifty-calibre over his head let go as he plowed through a big clump

of bushes. A fence he could not see was directly in his path. With a zinging of breaking wire, and the screaming of tearing metal, he found himself on the highway.

The motor rumbled as he plunged in on the clutch and shifted to high. Frowning, he saw the muzzle flash of an anti-tank gun in front of him. He felt the half-track jump as the shell burst almost beneath the wheels. He flashed the lights once. The machine gun over his head fired a challenge that wasn't answered.

Wylie was muttering beside him as he turned the light switch off and pulled to a halt beside the silent 50 millimeter anti-tank gun.

"Shut up, Wylie," he said as he climbed from the cab.

Steve pulled to a halt behind the half-track. "What the hell is wrong, Forsythe? Don't you know we've got artillery shooting at us?"

"So what? Here's a fifty mm. That's a nice piece of shooting. Do we want it?"

Steve thought. "Douse your lights. Pull off the road. Perimeter defense." The commands were passed back.

Forsythe had one trail of the fifty mm slammed shut when Steve joined him. A dead man lay across the other trail, and Forsythe kicked him off nonchalantly. Steve glanced at the ammo truck ten yards away.

Small arms fire hit his ears as he glanced back at Forsythe. "There's a truck load of ammo."

"Tell Wylie to get in it and follow me." He surged up on the trails of the fifty-mm. and pulled it up behind the half-track, skinning his knuckles and bringing a curse to his lips. He slipped the hitches together and heard the steel clang home. He could see Wylie already in the cab of the ammo truck and heard the engine cough as Wylie stepped on the starter. He ran for the cab of the half-track.

"Wind 'er up," called Steve over the tumult of small arms fire and roar of the ammo truck.

Men started pouring into the three vehicles and Forsythe put the half-track into low gear. He could feel the sharp tug of the fifty mm. as he released the clutch. He muttered to himself as the car started forward. "That fifty mm. is a nice piece of equipment. Comforting. God, it's dark. Glad that white line hasn't been worn from the center of the highway." He threw the shift into third.

Twelve miles. He reached down and flipped the light switch. Damn, what is that headlight shining up in the trees for? Oh, that goddam fence. He glanced at the speedometer. Half an hour. Half an hour and they would be home. I wonder who the hell that guy is we picked up? Looked enemy as hell. He swung the half-track around a curve and heard the tracks whine on the pavement. Dam, pavement, hard on track. Dam that headlight. Dam the whole rotten business. Over there was the concentration camp, dam it, too. Dam the poor miserable bastards in it. Look at that headlight. Looks like an airplane beacon. His foot crammed down on the dimmers and the light snapped down to the highway. That's better, he thought. Boy, what I'd give to get out of this

goddam mess. Damn, I like this half-track. Stay alive a little longer behind these steel walls. He patted the cold steel beside him and grinned. Take a good bullet to go through that. Six miles. Six miles yet to go. He glanced at the sky ahead. Brightening. Damn. He plowed down on the accelerator.

JONNIE LOOKED DOWN at the hard muscles of the wounded man's chest. She had washed the blood off and had bandaged the wound to the best of her ability. The bleeding had stopped, but as Forsythe had said, he had been shot with a fifty caliber machine gun. She glanced up at the white bandages on his head, then her eyes slid down to his face. It was pale she saw. Probably from loss of blood. He had a handsome face framed with long blue-black hair. She supposed his eyes to be steel grey and piercing. He looked like a man with hard and unyielding character.

They didn't know what his name was, for they had found no identification upon him. Camerle was afraid of enemy agents, but she had the feeling that this man was no enemy. His cheeks were covered with long black whiskers.

Her thoughts were interrupted by Toni from the door to the small second floor dormitory used as a sick bay. "You'd better come down and eat, Jonnie. He will be alright that long," she indicated the man on the bed.

"Yes, Toni. I'll be right down." She pulled the blanket up over the man's chest and picked up the basin of bloody water. She glanced back at him and quietly

closed the door. Toni stood in the short corridor waiting for her.

"He's a handsome brute, Jonnie. Wonder what his name is?"

"I haven't the faintest idea, Toni." She felt a little sorry for Toni. She hadn't seen Flame Harvey for over six months. She didn't know if he was dead or alive. Jonnie had mentioned his name once. That time she had seen pain and resentment rise in the beautiful girl's eyes, and so had never mentioned him again. This thought had brought back to her the mind-image of Eddie. She grimaced and started down the stairs to the main floor. Yesterday she had tried to burn that picture out of her system. It hadn't worked.

FORSYTHE AND WYLIE were still in the mess room as she and Toni entered. Wylie looked up and smiled at her gently, his awkwardness gone. She returned his smile briefly. She felt no resentment toward the big young man for what had happened yesterday and she was not sorry now because he did not speak to her. Forsythe only glanced at them, then returned his gaze to his plate.

Jonnie poured the water out into the sink and turned on the faucet, washing the blood down the drain. She set the empty pan down and walked over toward Forsythe.

"How'd you do last night, Martin?"

He glanced up at her as she put her hand on his shoulder. He remembered yesterday when she had looked into the men's dormitory while buckling up her trousers.

"Did fine, Miss Riviera." He smiled a little thinly.

"You may call me Jonnie."

God, she's trying to get familiar with me now. "Thank you, Jonnie." He went back to his plate and wiped up the last bit of gravy with a thin slice of bread. Deliberately, he stuck it in his mouth and began chewing. God, he thought, this war is sure hard on women. He was reminded of the first time he had seen Jonnie in the concentration camp. Shanges them, too. The once beautiful hand, this same one here on his shoulder, was a cracked, blackened paw. The nails were split and grimy. Yes, this life is hard on women in more ways than one.

He swallowed the last drop of coffee and got to his feet. "You'll excuse me, girls. I'm tired and sleepy." He glanced at Cal Wylie. What the hell was that smug look on his face for? He looked from Cal to Jonnie and he knew. He left the room.

Toni was sitting on the bench across the table from where Forsythe had been seated. She looked up at the other girl and smiled.

Cal Wylie got to his feet and came down the room toward them. "You'll have to excuse Forsythe, girls. We ran into a little trouble last night and I guess it scared him."

Scared him, hell, thought Jonnie. He's got more guts in his little finger than you have in your entire anatomy. Aloud, she said: "Yes, I suppose he is rather tired. Blowing up a railroad trestle takes a lot of preparation." She turned and began clearing up the plate-littered table.

This was when they heard the behind Wylie. "What's going on distant pom-pom of anti-aircraft here, Cal? Those sound like shells!" fire and the soft thunder of planes. Cal grabbed his machine-pistol from the floor and ran down the room to the back door, the girls at his heels. They saw a plane far off coming from the east. It was high up and they could see the anti-aircraft shells bursting all about it in sudden puffs of white smoke. This was the first aircraft of any description they had seen for several days.

"They'll never hit him," muttered Cal. He turned to go back in the house when his steps were halted by the swift whine and rush of air as a shell whoosed past the house and exploded with terrific noise against a tree two or three hundred yards away. The girls jumped instinctively and looked at Cal, who had stopped and was listening intently. Another shell came surging at them.

"Into the house, you girls." He shoved them into the house ahead of him as yet another shell exploded to their right in a pile of lumber, sending boards flying in every direction. "Jonnie, go tell Camerle someone has this place zeroed in." He glanced toward the back door as another shell pounded into the ground behind the house, sending dirt and small stones rattling against the weather-beaten siding. "Toni, get everyone up. This looks big." He ran back to the window and looked out. Long streamers of dust and smoke filled the back yard. He was glad the vehicles were safe. Another shell exploded and sent a geyser of dirt high into the air.

CAMERLE BURST into the room

"Those are shells, Camerle. Someone has found our headquarters and is zeroeing in on it."

Running feet sounded behind Camerle and men came barging into the room, the sharp clang of firearms accompanying them.

Camerle's voice was powerful and confident above the tumult, "Plan number two, Cal. Get two men and get the anti-tank gun ready for action."

Cal chose two men and they ran out the back door, guns ready, faces grim. Around the corner of the house they poured, to a little shed backed up against the side of the building. Cal threw the door open and rushed inside, the two men following. Down the hill at the front of the house they could hear the half-track whining as someone tried to start it. They saw two olive-drab trucks come rolling up the hill as they pulled the fifty mm from its hiding place. Off to the right Wylie saw movement in the bushes and a moment later two men came bursting into view, guns swinging in their hands, fear marked on their faces. They saw Cal at the fifty mm and came running up, breathing hard.

"They've got two half-tracks and a TD over that little rise," one of the men panted. "The TD was throwing those shells."

"Okay. Go in the house and report to your section leader." A truck ground to a halt beside Cal and he recognized it as the ammo truck for the fifty mm. He glanced at the driver and was

surprised as Forsythe swung to the ground.

"What's the dope, Wylie?" He sounded brusque and business-like. His jaw was set like a steel trap and his eyes held a hard glare.

"Two half-tracks and a TD over that rise," he pointed. "You stay here, Forsythe, and get this thing in action. I'll go up to those trees and observe." He ran to a group of trees bent low, for the TD was firing again. He sank down behind a tree and looked around. Yes, there they were. Boy, they sure had guts, right out in the open. He motioned to Forsythe, giving directions as best he could. The muzzle blast of the fifty mm nearly deafened him as he watched for its shell to land. Nice shot, Forsythe, he whispered, as he saw dirt fly into the air barely fifty yards from one of the half-tracks. Another muzzle blast shook the air about him as he again signaled. Nice shooting, Forsythe. We'll have to sign you up. Tight on him. He signaled again. The leaves of the trees shook as another shell swished by. That's it, get that TD, boy. He waved with his arms as the remaining half-track opened up with its fifty caliber to the right of the TD.

A LONG STREAM of heavy .50 caliber machine gun bullets slammed into the side of the house, sending dust and pieces of masonry flying. The fifty mm drowned the sound of the fifty caliber and Forsythe threw another shell into the breach. Wylie looked again. Damn, he muttered, that TD is coming this way. He ran back to the fifty mm position. Sliding to a halt beside Forsythe, he said: "That goddam TD is coming this way, Forsythe. Get ready for flat trajectory fire."

Forsythe grimaced and brought the muzzle of the fifty mm down.

"Get ready to swing her, boys, but watch me." Forsythe could hear the steady roar of the TD's big motor and motioned for his men to swing the trails a little. Then he saw it nosing up over the rise a little distance away and he adjusted the sights....he jerked the lanyard and knew he had missed. A shell from the TD burst into the roof of the house, throwing pieces of slate down on them.

FORSYTHE THREW open the breech and in another moment another shell exploded from the gun's muzzle. The TD was almost upon them and they could see its long radio antenna waving with its motion. Hit him! He watched the TD swing half around as the heavy shell caught it in the tread.

Its fifty was still firing, but they were out of immediate danger. Another shell was thrust into the fifty mm. The shot brought success, for it caught the TD where the turret met the body. The motor died and they could hear screams of pain from inside. Two figures scrambled from the wreckage and tried to get behind it for protection. Forsythe watched as Cal raised his machine pistol and shot them down with a burst of steel jacketed shells.

Steve came rushing up, his face bathed in perspiration. "Get ready to roll, Forsythe. Hitch that gun behind this truck and let's go."

They slammed the trails shut and hitched it behind the ammo truck. As the hitches slammed home, Forsythe had the motor going and Cal jumped to the high

seat beside him.

He wiped dust and sweat from his face and said, "They are down on the road in front of the house, Forsythe."

Forsythe threw the truck into gear and swung it around. He felt the tug of the fifty mm as he fed gas to the big motor. Glancing up he saw Cal at the fifty caliber ready for action. He plowed through a straggly rose arbor and nosed down the hill to the other eight trucks already lined up on the road.

Camerle was way down at the front of the column waving his arms as a signal to wind 'er up.

FORSYTHE JOUNCED through a little ditch and spun the wheel. Cal was standing up on the seat threading a belt of ammunition into the loading breach of the fifty.

Cal was an nice boy, he thought, nice and steady.

West and south the trucks rolled, motors grinding, gears clashing, eyes alert.

Twenty miles, Forsythe cursed silently. Tenty miles of enemy territory. It's a wonder they haven't got planes up. Dammit, I hope they don't think of it. This is going to be bad. Damn this dust.

They made the alternate headquarters without incident.

CHAPTER THREE

TAKE WHAT OPPORTUNITY OFFERS

The two men looked down at the large enemy patrol on the road below, lined up in rows of two abreast. The uniformed soldiers were standing about in groups talking and waving their arms at each other.

"Wish to hell I had a bazooka," whispered one of the dirty bewhiskered men.

"Probably couldn't hit anything if you had one," came the brief reply. Anyway that would tend to get us in a lot of trouble. I admit I would like to have one of those recon cars or even a half-track." He eyed the line of vehicles hungrily.

"Well, just go down and tell them you'd like to have one. I'm sure they'll be glad to give you your pick."

"What are you trying to be, a comedian?"

"No, but you'd stand just as much of a chance of getting it that way as any other." He sighed and got to his feet. "Soon be dark, Sattle, then we can start on."

"Yeah," was the unenthusiastic reply. He stood up beside the tall red-haired figure. "Washington to St. Louis, walking. Damn, Flame, I'm not used to this much walking." He spat into the brushy hillside.

"You should have been in the infantry. Besides, you ought to be thankful that we managed

to escape from that concentration camp. Me, I'm proud to be walking! He glanced down at the little figure thoughtfully. "Golly, Sattle, we must have come a long way. We must be nearly across Tennessee by now. Just think, we're almost halfway there." He shifted the gun on his lean hips and looped his fingers through the pistol belt.

"Hooray," was Sattle's sarcastic rejoinder.

They looked down at the patrol and knew that it was getting ready to move on. The drivers were getting back into their vehicles, and as they listened the motors broke into the silence of the afternoon. Dust and exhaust fumes drifted up to them as the outfit moved off.

After it was out of sight, the two bedraggled figures returned to the trees and sat down. Sattle wiped sweat from his face onto the sleeve of his field jacket and spat a stream of saliva at the ground.

"Damn, this war has turned out to be really something, eh, Flame?" He swatted at a fly and looked at his companion. "To think that military intelligence knew of this seditious organization and failed to do anything about it galls me. Of course, we were not aware of its strength. Damn their dirty stinking hides to hell. This was even more sneaking than the attack on Pearl Harbor back in '41. Hmmm, we're a beaten and thoroughly cowed nation, Flame. We can't even work out a satisfactory resistance. Imagine, Harvey, in the six months the war has been over, we couldn't find enough men to plow a field. Even if we found the men we couldn't supply them with the

weapons and other necessities to give battle to this stinking enemy."

Flame Harvey got to his feet. "We better be moving on, Leonard, the sun is down."

They started down the hill, their boots making very little noise in the deep, virgin grass of the hillside. On the road they stopped and looked at the deep ruts left by the patrol.

The dust had settled, now it rose again as their boots disturbed it.

They resumed their way across the road and into the fields beyond.

THE WHOLE WORLD had become a deep black. It seemed filled with grotesque shadows which howled and waved at them silently. The ground was a hard, visious enemy who beat at their feet with long strips of steel.

The one thought in their befogged minds was to keep going. It seemed of the greatest importance that they dedicate their lives to the very definite and eternal problem of placing one foot ahead of the other. Then the other ahead of that.

Sweat and dust. Walk, walk. Blood and fire. Walk, walk. Walk, you son-of-a-bitch, the shadows screamed. Mind and matter, walk, walk. Keep those feet slogging, you bastard. Eyes and ears, nose and mouth, walk, walk. Ocean and desert, walk, walk. Oh, damn you walk.

Sattle nearly fell down when he ran into the broad back of the

redheaded man.

"Damn, you give a man warning, Harvey."

Flame said nothing. He was gazing at a group of lights about three-quarters of a mile away. There were buildings there and a tall tower-like projection nosing up into the dark night sky. He could make out a long concrete strip beneath the lights running out into the darkness. For a moment he couldn't decide what it was. His mind couldn't understand what his eyes registered.

Sattle stood beside him looking at the lights. "An airfield," he breathed. "We'd better dodge that, Harvey."

"No, wait a minute, Leonard. I'd much sooner ride a plane than walk." He shifted his weight from one foot to the other, a new light in his eyes. "Let's get us a plane and fly the rest of the way."

Leonard Sattle studied him a moment his face drawn up in a sneer. "You talk like a damn fool, Harvey."

"We could be in St Louis by morning."

"Wishful thinking. Come on let's go." He started off at an angle which would give the airfield a wide berth.

Flame grabbed him by the sleeve of the worn field-jacket and nearly tore the garment from his back. "What is to keep us from it, Sattle?"

"Only about 200 enemy guards with guns." His ugly face still sneered at Harvey. "Do you want a belly full of lead?"

"So it's crawling with enemy guards. Are you scared?"

Sattle studied the redhead before him in the dim light. "Humph," he said. "This thing is just foolhardy enough to work." He turned back to the well lighted, silent airfield. "I'm with you Harvey. Let's go."

They struck out toward the lighted area, anticipation making their feet lose some of the heavy soggiess that had made them curse before.

THE TWO MEN STOPPED as they came to a darkened building at the edge of the field. Seeing no one, they surveyed the silent scene before them. Off to the left a big hanger stood and through its dark doorway they could make out the outlines of a big two motored transport plane.

An enemy soldier suddenly appeared in the hanger door and pitched a cigarette butt into the air. He was carrying a machine pistol in one hand.

A rumble of voices brought the two men back into the deeper shadows of the building. Four other soldiers appeared in the hanger door with either rifles or machine pistols.

"Golly, Sattle, that transport would be just the thing." Harvey said, glancing at the little man beside him.

"Don't be foolish, it would take ten minutes to warm the damn thing up. What do you think these guards are going to be doing during this time, picking daisies?"

"Well, we could just start the motors and take off. That wouldn't take over two minutes."

"But you can't do that, man. A plane has to be warmed up before its taken into the air. Besides, it's too dangerous."

"Well, even living now is dangerous. What do you say, Sattle, shall it be the transport?"

Sattle grinned at him, a devil may care look on his ugly little face. "You win, Harvey. Wait till some of those men clear out. I'd like to be in the damn thing before they know anything about our even being here."

THEY WAITED IN THE shadows of the darkened building. Then, finally, two of the guards doused their cigarettes and, with a small rumble of voices, struck off for a big, well lighted building some distance from the hanger. Presently two others walked toward the tower, their boots slapping the concrete of the apron before the hanger with sharp, staccato throbs. The remaining guard stood a few moments then turned and disappeared into the dimness of the hanger.

"Well," Sattle muttered, "We may as well get on with this. I only hope that plane has a tankfull of gas." He led the way, sticking to the shadows of the buildings and vehicles, littering the apron before the hanger. Small planes stood about, their props looking like arms in the dim light.

As they came to the hanger door, Sattle turned to his companion and said, "Stay here and watch while I take care of that guard."

Flame Harvey had his Service automatic in his hand and was watching the area about them alertly. "Okay, Sattle, but don't spare the horses."

He stepped behind a big oil drum as Sattle disappeared into the hanger. His nerves were tense and screaming within him. Already it seemed as though Sattle had been gone for ages yet it had only been moments. The butt of the Army automatic was damp and clammy in his hand. He looked about the empty field, eyes alert, heart pounding. Goddamn you, Sattle, come on.

He watched some bugs flying around a light over where the first two guards had gone. He could see them inside setting on a bench talking. He muttered, "Talk you sons of bitches. I hope you choke on your words. Come on, Sattle, what the hell are you doing?" He wiped sweat from his brow and glanced over toward the tower.

"Lets go, Harvey." Sattle had come up so silently Flame had not heard him.

They entered the hanger together, their shadows preceeding them across the hanger floor.

"Knock those chocks out, Harvey," Sattle motioned toward the wheels of the big transport plane. "I'll see you inside in a moment. Make it snappy."

Sattle had the instrument panel lights on when Harvey joined him in the pilots compartment.

"Already outside, Leonard, let's go."

"Well, Harvey, here goes nothing." His ugly face was dim in the cabin and he was glad Harvey could not see him to well.

Flame Harvey watched in

silence as Sattle set the gas on 'Idle Lean' and started the 'Fuel Booster' pumps for both engines. He listened to the dull high whine as Sattle turned both motors over, and saw his hand glide up to the 'Magnito' control dial. The indicator showed that he had put it into 'Both Engines' position. He heard the cough and sputter as juice was fed into the big Wright engines. Immediately, Sattle set the 'mixture control' to full rich. Both engines were now making a dull thundering roar. The throttle came back slowly as Sattle revved the engines.

HARVEY GLANCED out the windshield and saw dark figures running towards the hangar. Already the plane was rolling over the concrete floor. He saw muzzle flashes outside and heard the hiss of bullets.

The transport began to sway and Flame knew they were moving faster. Then the edge of the door faded behind them.

Sattle opened the throttle and cursed softly as his eyes sought the 'Manifold Pressure' guage. It read only 25 inches. "Damn," he muttered. His eyes shifted to the 'RPM' guage, which read 1600. Not bad. He glanced down the run-way. Lots of room. 'Level Flight' indicator? Okay. He eased back on the stick and felt the ship sway as the wings were given the attitude of lift. Reaching down, he closed the flaps. The plane surged into the air as the stick came back into his stomach. He fed more gas into the already laboring engines. He looked at the fuel guage. Almost a thousand gallons in the tanks.

HE FLIPPED THE toggle on the landing gear control. They were airborne. He eased the stick forward and the engines ceased their laboring thunder.

"We're in the air, Flame," he yelled, reaching for the mixture control and setting it on 'Auto Lean.' He leaned back in the seat and heaved a sigh.

'Manifold Pressure,' 35. Good. Damn, this thing is complicated. He wiped sweat out of his eyes and looked out the windshield. The Altometer gave a reading of two thousand feet. The engines threw long flashes of flame into the darkness of night. He threw the mixture control back to full rich and the fire ceased. No use blowing us to hell now, he thought. Shouldn't have started out cold like that. His eyes shifted to the Magnito Control indicators. Right engine was a little slow, Air speed, 140. Good. Oil temperature, 1200 degrees. He set the mixture control back to Auto Lean and the engines hummed as he tried for altitude. He watched the compass as he swung the plane around into a westward course. He leveled off at 6000 feet. The Magnito indicators were alright at 2400 RPM. The tense look left his face and his body slowly relaxed.

Flame had seated himself in the co-pilots seat and was watching the guages and indicators a little anxiously. He smiled wanly as Sattle glanced across at him.

"You'd better go back and get some sleep, Harvey. It'll be daylight before we get there."

Flame got to his feet and

left the pilots' compartment, his face-tired and glistening with perspiration in the glow of the instrument panel lights. He fumbled with a bunk and at last managed to swing it down from the wall. He lay there a long time listening to the dull throbbing of the R-1830 engines and thinking of the predicament they were in. He thought of Toni and wondered if she were alive and free. "Poor girl," he muttered sleepily. He tossed briefly on the hard canvas of the bunk. Her beautiful face haunted him there in the dim light of the ship. He could hear her tinkling laughter in the roar of the big engines. He sighed and sincerely hoped he would find her tomorrow safe and sound. His heart grew heavy as a picture of her dead rose in his mind. He could not imagine the dark-haired, beautiful girl as being a member of the deceased. At long last, his eyelids became heavy and he could no longer hold them up.

THE COLD, DEVASTATED wreckage of St. Louis reflected the light of a wicked red sun into the sky. Even at this height, the two men could see the ravages which had made a desolation of a once proud and beautiful city. Smoke stacks, like skeleton fingers, pointed impotently at the sky. Crumbling walls that from this height were almost indistinguishable reminded them of a thorough and heartless enemy. They could see many enemy trucks in the streets, crawling like ants in and out of the ruins. To the northwest a great area filled with long low buildings gleamed redly in the morning sun. To the southward, another group of white buildings which they guessed to be the Military

Prison.

As Sattle banked sharply they saw a burst of white smoke and felt the air shudder about them. Flame watched other bursts of the white smoke and could not immediately arrive at a conclusion as to what they were. They looked beautiful in a wild sort of way and he was fascinated by the red sun shining through them. He glanced at Sattle as the ugly little man muttered:

"Anti-aircraft fire." He looked about at Harvey and went on, raising his voice above the sound of the engines: "We've got to find a place to set this plane down, Harvey, and quick. They'll have fighters up here soon...if they don't get us with one of those shells first." He shifted his gaze to the Altometer, which gave a reading of 17,500 feet. He shivered slightly in the cold of the higher air and cursed sharply as a shell burst came nearby. When next he looked at Harvey he saw that he had fastened his safety belt.

"Hold your hat, Harvey. Here we go." He shoved the stick forward against the instrument panel and watched the level flight indicator dance in dismay. The air outside had risen to a high, thin, angry whine and the altometer needle steadily dropped down the graduated scale. At 10,000 feet he began coming back on the stick, and the engines groaned as the propellers again pulled at the air. As he leveled out he searched sharply about for a place to land the ship.

They were about twenty miles southwest of the city now, and well beyond the range of the battery of anti-aircraft guns.

Nevertheless, they had been sighted by the enemy, and Sattle was surprised that no fighters had followed them. He was glad it was daylight, for he would not have enjoyed setting the big plane down at night.

THEY WERE IN fairly open country where only a few woods dotted the panoramic view. Sattle soon found a likely spot and he lost altitude in preparation for circling the area. After flipping the toggle on the landing gear control, he cut his air speed to a bare minimum. Harvey smiled at him a little grimly as he shoved the stick forward again.

A long line of trees were rushing at them and he pulled the transport to a stall over them and felt it settle beneath him. He let the flaps down and revved the engines as the wheels touched the uneven ground. It was a rough landing, but it was a safe landing, for the plane only slewed a bit as he braked it gently to a halt. He breathed a relieved sigh and threw the magnito control into the off position.

"Safe and sound, Flame," he said, his ugly face breaking into a grin that was more a grimace. He unbuckled his own safety belt and climbed wearily to his feet. "Come on. We may as well get out and get some fresh air."

Flame expelled a breath in a long sigh and followed the little man from the plane. They had come to a halt about three hundred yards from a small woods whose shadows the sun could not penetrate completely.

"Hope we don't run into a patrol of some sort," Flame said critically, eyeing the surround-

ing landscape. "This is sure out in the wide open spaces, Sattle. Why didn't you pick a nice safe airfield somewhere?"

Sattle returned to his side, ducking under a wing. He had kicked a couple of large stones underneath the wheels. "If there is a patrol about, Flame, they must have seen us. I must say, I don't particularly relish the idea of their finding me anywhere near this monstrosity." He indicated the plane with a wave of his hand. "It looks bigger the more I look at it. Let's go over to those trees and watch things for a while."

"Good idea, Leonard." Flame started off toward the distant woodland. "Gosh, I wish we could have landed closer to St. Louis. Must be twenty miles away. Damn it, Sattle, I hate to think of walking twenty miles in this country on an empty stomach."

"Why don't you just lay down and die?"

"Now that is intelligent." He spat on the ground and resumed: "Only trouble is, we don't know where to find this resistance group even if there is one. Right now we have neither eats nor a place to hide. And another thing, what the hell are you going to do with that C-47? A thing that size wouldn't fit into one's hip pocket very easily, and we can't leave it here in the middle of this big field. How could we hide it?"

"If I knew the answers to that heap of questions, I'd try my damndest to become a quiz-kid. I admit I'm smart, Harvey, at least I know what two and two is; but when it comes to calculus, I'm in

the dark. What we need is one of those electronic brains they started putting out before the war." He seated himself on the ground and leaned back against a big tree trunk. Sighing contentedly, he plucked a blade of grass which he put in his mouth and began chewing.

Harvey sat down beside him, saying, "I wonder what boiled grass would taste like?"

"I don't know, but we haven't got a match to light a fire even if we had the water to boil it in. Truly, I feel as though I could eat the ass out of a dead skunk." He stopped a moment then resumed, "Tell you what, though, Harvey, I'd be satisfied with a little old T-bone smothered in mushrooms with peas and creamy mashed potatoes. Beer for a chaser would go mighty fine, but I think I could get along without that. I'd eat the cherry ice-cream dessert, and drink the cocktail for an appetizer for the second course." He sighed with disgust.

"You talk like a fool, Sattle," Flame stretched on his back and gazed into the trees overhead. "I'll take a fillet mignon, waiter, after I've had a Champagne Cocktail. The best in the house, waiter. Here's a twenty buck tip. No, wait a minute, waiter, bring me the seven course Special. No, not that; how about the blue plate job." He scratched his knee. "Oh, hell, waiter, bring me a hamburger and a short beer."

"God, you're cute, Harvey. You kill me. Watch awhile, I need some sleep. Wake me up in three-four hours." He rolled over and his legs thumped heavily as he pushed himself away from the tree. "Goodnight, Harvey."

"Goodnight, sweetheart."

"You ought to marry me, Flame. I'd make you a hell of a good wife. Now shut up and leave me alone." His snores soon filled the bright morning sunlight.

HARVEY WATCHED HIM a few moments then got to his feet and began eyes alert and watchful, hand ever close to the open flap of his holster where the automatic nestled in readiness. He stopped at the edge of the woods and stood looking at the bright, shining sides of the plane.

"That damn thing sticks out like a sore thumb," he muttered. He was about to turn back when a sharp thought came to him. Maybe there's food of some sort on it. He rubbed his stomach in anticipation, and, as if being drawn by a magnet, left the cover of the trees. As he neared the big plane Harvey kept a close watch for any sign of the enemy. It was a good thing they were well away from any road, he thought grimly.

He clambered in the plane's belly and began a systematic search of the fuselage. In a little while far toward the back he found a carton with the indelible inscriptions of the enemy. Of course he couldn't read it but, nevertheless, he carried it to the light and started ripping it open. Tin cans met his eyes and he grabbed one. He saw the picture of a fish on the label and was not surprised at its rather strange proportions. He reached for his knife and began cutting at the lid with the dull point.

Moments later he was eating of the contents with his bare fingers. His memory told him he had a very distinctive dislike of fish, but, now, they tasted good to him. He ate the entire can. Throwing the empty can out the

door, Flame was just about to turn back into the plane in search of water when he saw it. A half-track was sitting in a little copse of trees about two hundred yards away. It must have come up during the time he was searching the plane for food. Fear leaped into him, and the fish made a heavy spot in the pit of his stomach. They felt like they were crawling around. The big vehicle was sitting silently, its headlights a shining gleam where the sun reflected from them. He could see two water-cooled fifty calibers mounted in the rear. He studied it in silence a moment. Had it been there all this time? Had it been abandoned at the close of the war and set here since? No, he decided it had not been there when he had entered the plane. He knew the occupants of the half-track could not have failed to see the plane. Where were they? He glanced about, eyeing every hiding place large enough to conceal a man. He had been standing up here a long time; surely during this time anyone could have shot him down even before he could get the automatic from its holster. Why hadn't he heard the half-track when it came up? A vehicle that size made enough noise to be heard a good distance away. Why hadn't Sattle heard it? Sattle, he remembered, was a very light sleeper and could be awakened by a fly buzzing around his head.

He shot his gaze back to the half-track. No movement. What should he do? He couldn't throw caution to the winds and run back to where Sattle was sleeping. That was three hundred yards away. He cursed and reached for his automatic. A shot in the air might bring a hail of bullets at him, but it would also warn Sattle

and he would have a chance to get away. He raised the weapon, then lowered it without firing. These people couldn't have helped but see him there, and if they were enemy they would have shot him down the moment he had shown his face. Hell, he had been standing here a good five minutes. What would happen if he called out? If they were enemy, he might get a dose of lead he would get anyway. If they were friendly, they might shoot and ask questions at a more convenient time. He spat. He had decided to call out.

"Hello, there!" His voice echoed a little on the still air. I'm scared to death, he thought. At least it sounds that way. Only silence greeted his words, but his ever alert eyes had picked out a slight movement near the half-track. Well, he thought, unless that was a bird, we've got company.

He raised his voice again. He was surprised to hear an answering call, and then he saw Steve Montgomery stand up and start toward him. Disregarding his sore feet and tired muscles, Flame jumped to the ground and ran to meet him.

"Steve! You old son-of-a-gun!" They caught each other and embraced happily as the other members of the group came up.

"It's a good thing you have red hair, Flame," Steve was saying. "You nearly got shot at. Damn it, man, it's good to see you." He stopped a moment and stepped back, surveying the man before him. "God, you're dirty. We'll fix that up though, soon as we get back to headquarters." He glanced by Flame at the big transport plane. "You mean you

flew that down here?"

"No. I couldn't fly a kite. Didn't you meet Leonard Sattle? He's the man you want to talk to about that." He slipped the automatic back into its holster and let the flap fall shut.

"I met him only briefly and that's been so long ago I'd almost forgotten him." He slapped Harvey on the back and turned to the men crowding about them. "Forsythe, come here. I want you to meet Richard Harvey...Martin Forsythe."

Flame saw Forsythe as a man of nearly thirty years. He had long brown hair and a solemn though good-looking saturnine face. He was nearly as tall as Steve, though not nearly so heavily proportioned. His long muscular arms were terminated by wide, well-calloused hands. His lean face was tanned to a deep brown and, though he had the air of being frail, Flame was not misled, for he saw his body as hard as steel and wiry as a coil spring. His sharp eyes were dark and piercing as they bored into his own. As he gripped the man's hand, Flame was startled by the wide, full-lipped smile the man gave him. Harvey wondered how a man with such a solemn countenance could produce a smile with all the infinite meaning of a person in love. Flame immediately liked him and knew he would never be sorry, for the man had an intuitive air which one felt on meeting him.

"Flame," Steve spoke as Flame acknowledged the introduction, "Tell me where Sattle is holed up, and I'll see if he can be found." He glanced again at the plane. "We'll have to do something about that plane, too. A landmark like that is liable to draw flies."

AS STEVE LEFT the little group, Forsythe spoke. "How did you get ahold of the plane?"

Flame told him of their procurement of the plane, and how they had been shot at earlier that morning when they had come in over St. Louis.

"That's a nice plane, Harvey, but I don't see how we can use it. Anyway, we could hardly hide as big a thing as that in country like this." He looked from Harvey to the plane and back. "We had better pull it over behind the woods out of this field until we can talk to Camerle about it."

"Camerle?" Flame didn't even know the man was alive. Though he had met the man only once, he was assured of the man's ability as a leader.

"Hart Camerle. Do you know him?" Forsythe smiled.

"Only vaguely. I met him once before all this started. A fine man."

A few moments later, after hiding the plane, the entire group was loaded into the half-track and it was speeding away for the Resistance Headquarters five or six miles away.

TO BE CONTINUED...

INTELLIGENCE

V.S. S-F

by DAVID
H.
STANLEY

COULD YOU, as an intelligent person, consider SF as important to any of the factions of literature?

To SF fans, science-fiction has a very definite value which to them, and only them, is a spice to their existence. To men of science it offers ideas for possible construction of imaginative creations which would seem out of this world to the man on the street.

As creations of art, SF is not as classic as it should be. As unfortunate as it must seem to the fan, one couldn't place this form of literature along with the works of Byron, etc., unless he were extremely ardent.

IS SCIENCE-FICTION intelligent? Some of the best writers in the field are scientists themselves. Does this make it good? Not necessarily, but if things of this nature are written by men familiar with the field and known for their intelligence in that field, one is more apt to give it more credibility.

Does it take an extremely intelligent person to understand SF? Of course not. To be sure, the meat of the scientific theory in a tale may be above the heads of some, but enjoyment can still be culled from the tale by those individuals.

WHO READS SF? Everyone who dreams and desires stimulate for

his or her imagination.

IS SF IMPORTANT to us in this day and age? I must remind you that the Atom was written about long before its use came to the world. That Television and even Radar was used in SF tales before their actual discovery and assimilation. We are living in a world of tomorrow today, and because of that, SF plays an important part in preparing us for everyday living. To SF fans, Atomic Power was nothing new. To anyone else, the atom seemed fantastic and awesome. Of course, many people take this attitude: So they discovered an atom's power...so what? Tomorrow, this might be extremely important to these nomads should they break out with some disastrous disease. In this day, with space travel the next thing on the agenda, perhaps your sons will have gained a grain of reason from travel in the pages of SF.

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NOTE:

THE BLAST OFF SECTION WILL, OF COURSE, BE LONGER THAN JUST ONE PAGE IN LATER ISSUES, ACCORDING TO AMOUNT OF MAIL RECEIVED. (ED.)