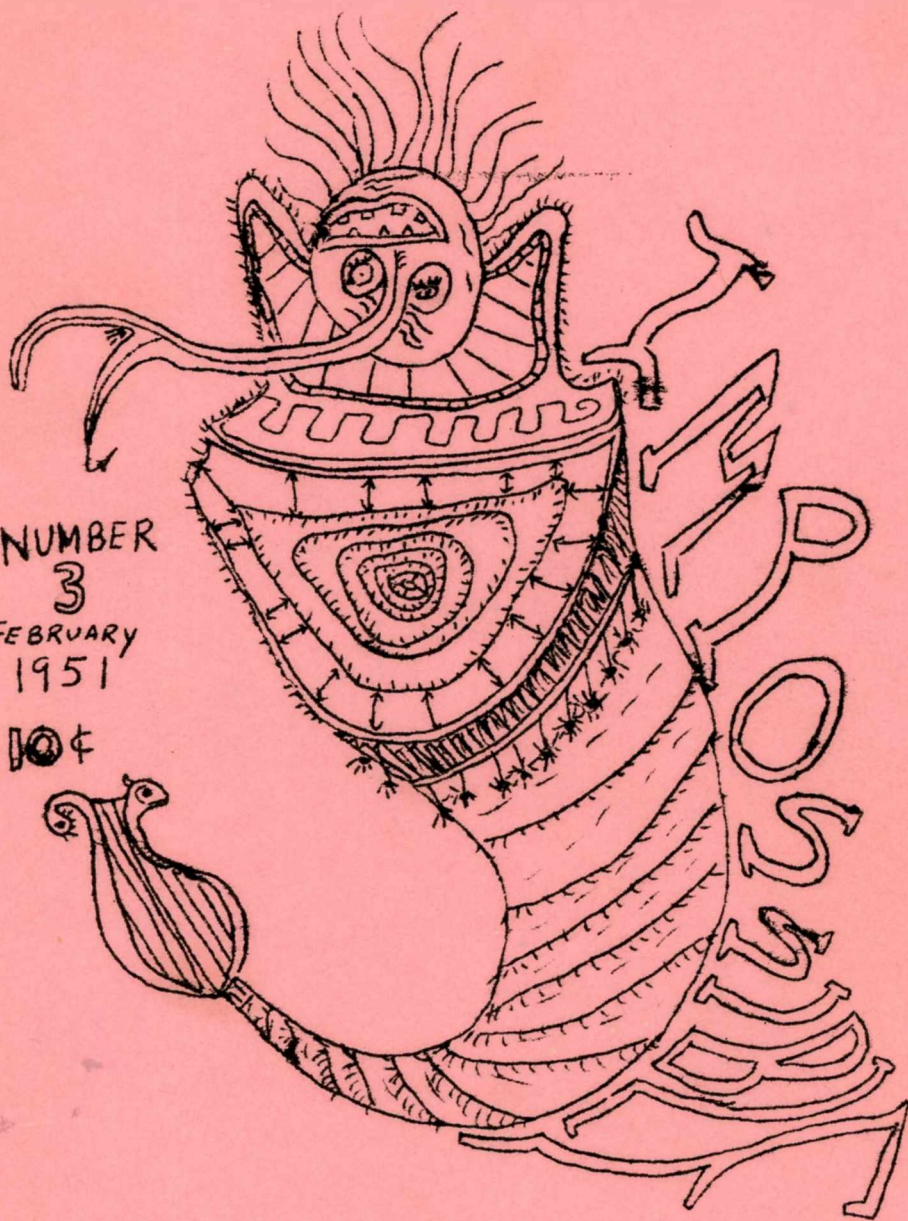


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ISSUE NUMBER THREE

IMPOSSIBLE

a production of THE NAMELESS ONES

Seattle, Washington

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edited by Burnett R. Toskey

cover and interior illustrations by L. Garcone

produced on Wally Weber's mimeograph, with the
help of Wally Weber.

seventh class matter. Any relationship in fiction
to persons living or dead is completely IMPOSSIBLE.

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THE EDITOR CROAKS

A few weeks ago I heard the wonderful news that has come to pass, news which caused my spirits to rise to the very top of the bottle and my feet to leap from the ground while my voice echoed through the valley and rattled through the dell with the joyous words: "Eureka! I have done it! Success at last!"

Yes, you who read this, the third issue of our favorite magazine, will weep with joy to hear this wonderful news. The news is twofold in magnitude, for I have driven not one, but two magazines out of print! Isn't that marvelous?

A. Merritt's Fantasy is the first to bite the dust according to the announcement in the latest issue of Fantastic Novels, and the stories intended originally for AMF will appear in FN. O happy day!

Thrilling Mystery is the other of my two conquests. The amazing thing about this one is that it had been running ever since the 30's. I understand that this magazine printed many weird and fantastic stories during its time.

Imagination I notice has changed hands. I rather suspect that Palmer has felt the impact of Impossible at last. I also notice, to confirm this, that no new issue of Other Worlds has appeared.

Galaxy still maintains a schedule two weeks behind time.

Astounding still has made no change.

Famous Fantastic Mysteries still has no illustrations.

At least I was able to hold my own with these last three large sellers.

And now for a few setbacks:

Startling Stories and Thrilling Wonder Stories have undergone a renaissance with their covers. I wonder who put the bug under Bergey.

Worlds Beyond is a new magazine and already in its second issue, having the temerity to come out monthly in the face of overwhelming odds. Another sad fact is that this mag has good stuff in it.

Marvel has appeared with its second horrible issue. Surely, we'll see no more of these.

Avon Fantasy Reader no. 13 has arrived.

Amazing Stories, February, had a good cover.

I notice that my first issue was reviewed in The Frying Pan in which they spelled my name right, having misspelled it in SS a month before, and then they used the wrong address. Outside of that, the review was entertaining and thoroughly enjoyed by me and also greatly appreciated.

In this issue I have several treats in store for you. First, there is "Mr. Tinkertoy" which I consider to be Wally Weber's finest story. Some of the other editors of Sinisterra, however, might be inclined to disagree with me, for they have another story by him which they are scheduling for number 4 of Sinisterra. The two stories are quite dissimilar, but they are both versions of the same story. Reading one story will not spoil the reading of the other, however, and I chose the version in this issue, which is the first version he wrote, because it fits in better with my editorial policy.

Phillip Barker, the author of "Dream World" is at present the president of the local Nameless Ones. I recently paid him a visit and returned with four of his stories, one of which Sinisterra may print, and the other three of which I hope to present. I have tentatively scheduled "The Darkened Light", an interplanetary story of the first water for the next issue, so don't miss it.

"The Sandstorm Man" is merely one of my miscellaneous stories which happens to fit into my present editorial policy of printing stories which are impossible. Some people have told me that this story bears a striking resemblance to "It" by Theodore Sturgeon. At the time I wrote the story I didn't even know "It" existed, and I have since decided that my story is based on a completely different concept from Sturgeon's.

The final offering is another W. Kraus opus, this time introducing a new character as mad as Ames, if not madder; and when the two get together, some-

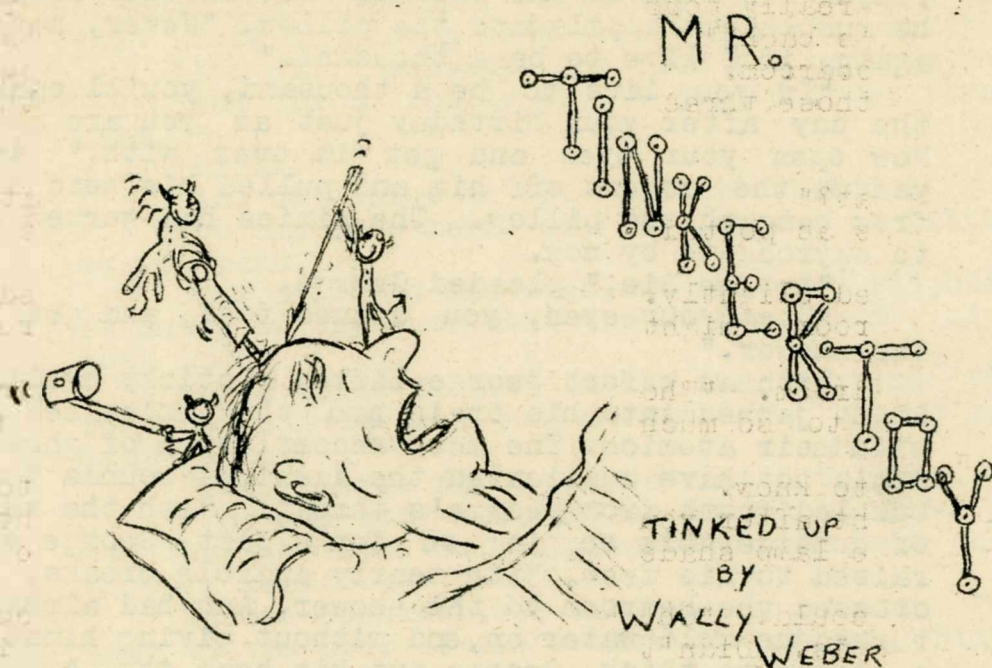
thing is sure to happen. Just what happens I leave for you to find out.

The latest news of Jack Vance presents a mystery where there was none before. In The Best SF Stories of 1950 Jack Vance is flaunted as a pseudonym for Henry Kuttner, which wouldn't really be so terribly surprising. But in a letter to Dick Frahm, Anthony Boucher says that Jack Vance is definitely not Kuttner. Merwin's comment in SS seems to be the final word on this subject. The letter and map Phil and I received from Vance in reference to "The Dying Earth" will be reproduced in Sinisterra number 4.

The report on the second issue of Impossible indicates that the editorial was by far the best liked feature in the issue. Opinion was sharply divided on the photographic illustration. Opinion was also divided as to whether the Kraus story was as good as the one in the first issue or better, but most everyone agreed that this is a good series. Bob Edison's story seemed to receive more lenient treatment than the one of his printed in Sinisterra number 2. The poem by G.M. Carr was considered to be terrific by G.M. Carr, and either very good or very confusing by others. The mistake in paging went unnoticed. The illos by Garcone, which unfortunately received poor reproduction, were generally not noticed, and a few thought the cover good.

In this issue we have a special monster section of no less than four of Mr. Garcone's monsters, especially designed to keep you awake nights. Garcone will be represented in Sinisterra nos. 3&4 by some very bad illustrations. The editors of Sinisterra, fools that they are, seem set on getting as many of his sketches as they can. They stole him right out from under the nose of I, the editor of Impossible who literally brought him into existence as an artist, fed him breakfast every morning so to speak. As long as he draws monsters for Impossible, though I won't complain much. He thanks the editor of Super Science Stories sincerely for saying that the illustrations in the first issue were poor.

Well, 'sall for now. See you next time.



George awoke painfully. Somewhere among the confusion in his head he could feel a crew of pixies working with pneumatic drills. "Ann," he groaned and winced as the sound of his voice crashed against his eardrums. "Ann, honey, I'm dying."

"Aha! The great drinker awakens," Ann's voice scraped across his brain. "How do you feel after your great exhibition, my big handsome husband?"

George moaned again, shuddered, and rolled over in bed. The crew of pixies were blasting now. "Please," he croaked, "have pity for me in my last moments."

"Don't be so optimistic, my brave husband. You won't die. You're going to stay horribly alive as you have during all your previous hangovers. You're going to suffer through the whole routine again, from renouncing the bottle to sticking your head under the cold water faucet. Then you can begin all over again."

Recollections of the party began to form blur-
rily in his mind as she talked. "Not another drop,"
he mumbled unhappily into the pillow. "Never, never
again, if I live to be a thousand."

"If you live to be a thousand, you'll spend
the day after your birthday just as you are now.
Now open your eyes and get it over with." Ann
yanked the covers off him and pulled his head out
from beneath the pillow. The pixies had worked up
to skyrockets by now.

"Let me die," pleaded George.

"Open your eyes, you damned fool, and get to
the shower."

With an effort George lifted a sticky eyelid.
Light jabbed into his brain and the pixies let go
with their atomics. The most accomplished of ghosts
could not have duplicated the agonized sounds that
buroled forth from George's throat. With the help
of considerable tugging on Ann's part, George was
raised to his feet. With nearly audible croaks, he
crossed the bedroom to the shower. Ann had already
turned the cold water on, and without giving himself
a chance to think, George put his head in. A mom-
ent passed before his nerve endings realized what
was being done to them and sensations began to pour
into poor George's head. With gasps of sheer agony
he jerked his head out of the shower, only to have
it pushed back again by his resourceful wife. "Suf-
fer, you idiot," she gritted maliciously. "You
asked for this and you're goint to get it, in full."

The pitiful sounds emerging from the shower
would have torn the heart from the breast of a les-
ser mortal, but it was Ann's hour of revenge and
she was enjoying it to the hilt. She waited until
the articulation in George's pleas became clear and
sharp. Only then did she allow her soggy husband
to remove his head from the icy stream of water.
"Here's a towel. Don't drip all over now."

George numbly accepted the towel and dabbed
gingerly at his head. He was surprised to find it
so near normal size. The pixies were still at work,
but they had settled down to a soft drumming. Rec-

collections of the party had crystallized as clearly as could be expected, and George shuddered at some of those recollections. "Tell me, did I really pour that glass of scotch down Mrs. Wingate's back?"

"You did," answered Ann from the bedroom.

"And did I really try to juggle those three vases?"

"Right."

"And cut holes in Mr. Handley's hat?"

"You had help there. Mr. Handley was as potted as you were."

George closed his eyes and shivered slightly. He hated to think of what the living room might look like.

Ann's voice floated out of the bedroom. "Who was that little man you were talking to so much last night?"

"That little man?" George wanted to know.

"The one who came up to you right after you did the tap dance on the piano with the lamp shade on your head."

George concentrated as best he could. "Oh, that little man. I don't know who he is. Didn't you invite him?"

"Me? Of course not. I wouldn't have asked who he was if I had invited him."

George ~~framed~~ ~~framed~~. That was logical enough, he thought. He kept trying to think what the conversation had been about, but it kept eluding him. "Maybe he came with the Russets. They're always bringing their friends along to parties."

"The Russets weren't here last night, dear. They're in Philadelphia, remember?"

"Well somebody must have brought him along. I certainly have never seen him before. I don't even know his name now."

"What did he talk to you about?" Ann wanted to know.

"I don't remember exactly. Something about electronics or atoms or gadgets like that. I seem to remember a ---" George broke off in horror. "Oh no!!!"

"What's wrong now, dear?"

"Ann, quick, where is my checkbook?"

"On the dresser. Why? Did you actually give that stranger a check?"

George didn't answer. He rushed to the dresser and fumbled for the checkbook. He opened it and looked. Sure enough, there was a new stub not filled out.

"How much was it for?" asked Ann, looking over George's shoulder.

George tried to think. "Two hundred dollars, think. Or maybe," his voice shook, "it was four hundred."

It was Ann's turn to groan. "Why didn't you sign the house and property over to him while you were at it? You don't want a reputation for being stingy, do you?"

"We can have the check stopped at the bank," George decided.

"What in the world did you give him the check for?"

"I don't know." George was all confused and the pixies seemed to have regained their energy. "It just seemed like a good investment at the time."

"Investment?"

"I bought something with the check. Be darned if I can think what it was, though. Some sort of gadget, I guess. At least he was talking gadgets to me all night."

"Maybe you paid him for the enlightening conversation," Ann suggested drily.

The pixies seemed to be bonging churchbells inside his head. "Ugh, I'm hearing bells now," he said hoarsely.

"That's the front door," Ann informed him. "Since I'm dressed, I'll answer. I hope you'll try to put yourself together and make a decent appearance sometime this afternoon."

She left, and George headed back to the bathroom to wash. He had just filled his eyes with soap when she was back. "George, I think you'd better see about this." Even with his pounding head

in the wash basin and the soap stinging his eyes, George could detect a strange sound in her voice. Cursing, he groped for the towel with one hand while trying to wash the soap out of his eyes with the other.

"Why isn't that towel on the rack? And don't bother me; you can take care of whatever it is."

"The towel's around your neck, and I ---- I think maybe," she stopped and gulped. "Maybe you'd better see for yourself."

George wiped the soap from his face. "O.K. But don't you know who it is?"

"It's the little man and --- I think --- your --- investment."

George's eyes flew open at this, and promptly clamped shut as the soap began burning again. "Yea Gods, get me a bathrobe! I have to see him right away, before he decides to leave." Ann quickly located his robe, and by the time she had guided his flailing arms into the proper sleeves he was half-way to the front room.

"Please be careful," she cautioned.

"Where is he?" George almost screamed as he viewed the deserted front room with watery, blood-shot eyes. "Nobody's here!"

"I left them outside on the porch."

"Them?" yelled George already racing for the front door. "How many little men were there?"

"The man and the --- investment."

George should have stopped to consider. He should have found out why his wife had become so nervous and why she had referred to the man and his investment as "them". But all George could think of was his money standing unprotected out on the front porch. He deserved every bit of what he saw when he opened the door.

His first emotion was one of relief that the little man was still there. "Well, I'm happy to see you. Please come i --- gaaaaaa," his second emotion came to the fore abruptly. The shining aluminum face of the automaton did not change expression, but it rolled noiselessly from behind the

little man and presented itself to George.

"Mr. Pembroke, I presume!" its deep voice sang.

George did his best to flatten himself into the wall. The little man just looked on with a happy dreamy expression on his face. Ann stood far back from the hall, staring with horrible fascination at the gleaming robot. The automaton waited a proper interval for George to answer before going on.

"I am now property of Mr. George Pembroke, having been purchased by him from Mr. Grimly who constructed me. This is Mr. Grimly with me." The little man nodded absently at this point. "If you can please tell me where I may find my new owner, I will be grateful beyond measure."

George unwound his tongue with some difficulty. "I'm George Pembroke."

"I'm very glad to meet you Mr. Pembroke," said the metal creature, extending one of his various hands for shaking. "I regret that I cannot introduce myself properly, but you haven't named me yet."

George regarded the extended hand as though it was a basket of rattlesnakes and looked to Mr. Grimly for help. "Please, take it away Mr. Grimly. Keep the money --- I'll even write you a check for more --- only take it away!"

Mr. Grimly appeared to suddenly take interest in his surroundings. "Oh, it's you Mr. Pembroke. Here is the servant you bought last night."

"I see," admitted George nervously. "Only the deal is off. I'm sober now. Take the thing away."

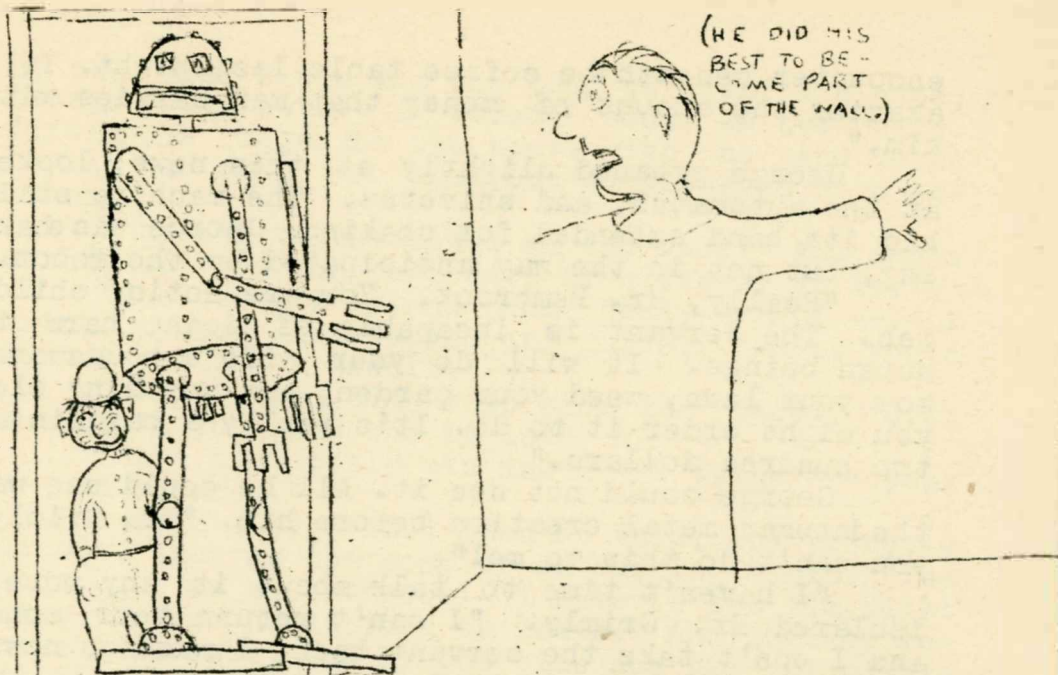
"But my good man, you paid for him," Mr. Grimly protested somewhat flustered.

"I don't care. It's money well spent if you take the thing away from here and never bring it back."

"My goodness, that wouldn't be ethical at all, Mr. Pembroke."

"You mean it's ethical to leave me alone with this gruesome machine? Suppose it runs amok and kills me?"

"Tut, tut, Mr. Pembroke, that is impossible,"



scoffed Mr. Grimly. "The servant is incapable of harming human beings. Besides, you won't be alone with it. Your wife will also be here --- if she is your wife ---- that is --- what I meant to say was ----" Mr. Grimly ended confusedly to consider this new line of thought.

"I won't have a wife living if I allow this---- thing ---- in the house. I didn't know what I was doing last night."

"I'm sorry Mr. Pembroke, but the transaction has been made. I cannot afford to return your money and it would not be ethical to keep the servant and your money too. I've gone to considerable trouble to maintain my part of the bargain. The least you can do is uphold yours."

"I'll stop the check at the bank," Mr. Pembroke threatened. "You won't get a cent out of me if you leave this monster here!"

"The check is already cashed, Mr. Pembroke," informed the little man calmly. "I had the good fortune to meet your banker, Mr. Handley, in a chance

encounter beneath the coffee table last night. It's amazing the amount of money that man carries with him."

George groaned slightly at this news, looked at the automaton, and shivered. The machine still had its hand extended for shaking. George was shaking, but not in the way anticipated by the robot.

"Really, Mr. Pembroke. You are acting childish. The servant is incapable of doing harm to human beings. It will do your wife's housework, mow your lawn, weed your garden, and anything else you might order it to do. It's really a bargain at two hundred dollars."

George could not see it. All he could see was the inhuman metal creation before him. "Mr. Grimly, you can't do this to me!"

"I haven't time to talk about it any more," declared Mr. Grimly. "I can't return your money and I won't take the servant back. I must go now." Mr. Grimly turned and went.

George looked helplessly at Ann. Ann looked helplessly at George. Together they looked helplessly at the servant. The servant was still standing there, hand outstretched.

"The little man said it was harmless," Ann said from her position of temporary safety down the hall. "Why don't you shake hands with it?"

"Why don't you?" asked George.

"I'd as soon stick my hand in a buzz saw," Ann admitted.

"Why doesn't it say or do something?" George wondered. "It just stands there waiting for someone to thrust his hand to it."

"Maybe it's waiting for orders," suggested Ann.

"Try it once. Maybe it really works."

"That's what I'm afraid of."

"Please, master," the robot spoke at last. "Please shake my hand. My circuits are frozen until the act is completed."

George showed signs of life in his bloodshot eyes at this. "You mean you can't move until somebody shakes your hand?"

"That is right."

"That's a relief," breathed George. "I hope you enjoy life there." George walked away from the servant and into the front room.

"George!" Ann exclaimed. "You can't leave it there like that. We can't even close the front door with it standing there."

"Before I shake hands with that mobile water tank I'll build a new front door."

"Then I'll shake hands with him!" Ann moved over to the servant. George became horrified.

"Oh no, don't do it, Ann! That thing will come into the house if you do!"

"Well, what's wrong with that? The little man said it was harmless."

"You mean you trust that tinkertoy?"

"Well I admit it frightened me at first," Ann agreed. "But after listening to that Mr. Grimly say it would do the housework and all that, it began to appeal to me. It's kind of cute once you get used to it."

"Who could get used to a thing like that?"

"I got used to you, didn't I?" Ann asked. She shook hands with the servant.

"Thank you very much, madam," it said. "Now would you please give me a name?"

Ann thought a moment. "I think Mr. Tinkertoy would be a nice name for you. Yes, that's it. We'll call you 'Tink' for short. Do you like your new name, Mr. Tinkertoy?"

"As a robot, I am incapable of liking or disliking," the metal creature hedged. "The name is quite adequate."

George began to feel a little insane. "Mr. Tinkertoy, ugh!"

"I perceive that the front room could stand cleaning," announced Mr. Tinkertoy. "May I begin now?"

"Yes, clean the front room by all means," Ann said happily. She was beginning to feel like a child with a new toy at Christmas time. "The vacuum cleaner is in the closet here, and so are the dust

raggs."

"I have a built in vacuum cleaner, thank you," informed the robot. A soft hum began to sound from Mr. Tinkertoy, and it began to roll back and forth across the room, picking up dirty glasses and crumpled newspapers as it went. George watched doubtfully as it approached the remains of the three vases he had attempted to juggle the night before. Mr. Tinkertoy reached the mess, stopped for a moment to shovel the shattered bits into an opening that appeared in one side, and then went on.

"Isn't it marvelous?" cooed Ann.

"No," said George, very much not cooing. The robot placidly vacuumed by George's feet. George hastily withdrew to a different section of the room.

"Once I get the house clean," the robot informed them, "I will keep my cleaner running all of the time and clean automatically as I go from room to room in the course of my regular duties."

"That's marvelous," exclaimed Ann. George said nothing, but thought plenty.

In the space of a few minutes the front room was tidied and the robot went on to the next room. Even George was beginning to be won over now. "I want to see what he does with the lawn," George said. "If he does that, I will personally oil his joints for him."

They followed the busy automaton from room to room like excited children. They watched it clean the floor, straighten the furniture, do the dishes, make the bed, dust, and dispose of the waste with the efficiency of a ---- well --- a machine. Then it went outside where it trimmed the hedge, mowed the lawn, weeded the garden, and watered the flowers. Within two hours after it had started with the front room, the robot was finished.

Then it started over again.

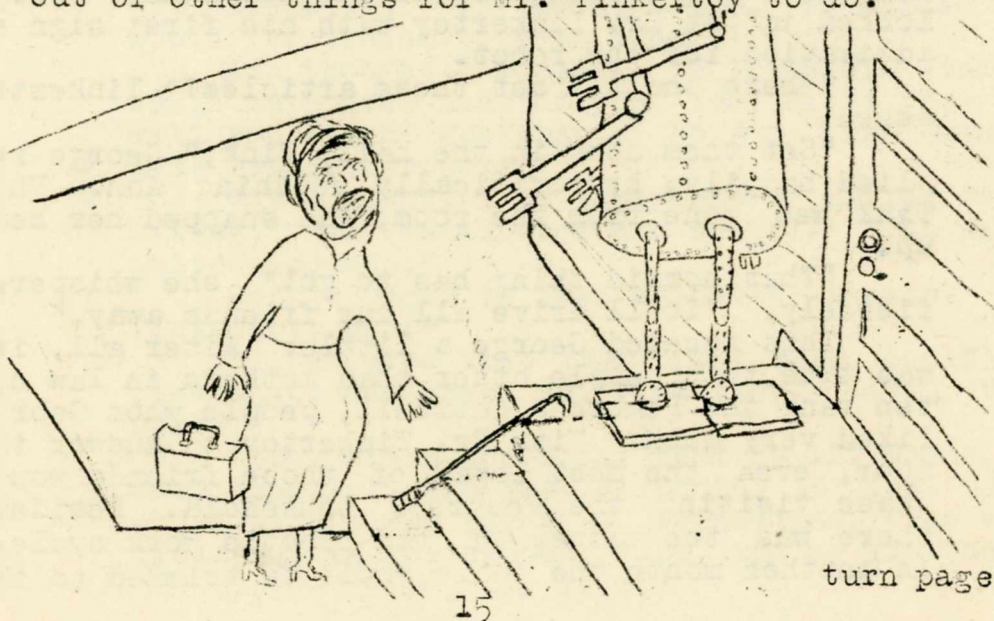
George protested, but the robot was adamant. "I must keep busy at all times now that I have started. Unless you can think of new duties for me to perform, I shall continue through the cycle of my regular tasks." And so the busy little machine

went, recleaning the rooms, taking the cleaned dishes from the cupboards and washing them again, mow the lawn, tearing the beds up and making them again, search the garden for weeds, water the still soggy flowers, trim the hedge down another inch, and back to the front room again to recommence the cycle. George and Ann pleaded with the robot in vain. The only thing to do was to think up new duties for it.

So they thought.

Dinner helped out for a couple hours. The car got waxed once and was put on the robot's list of things in the cycle. And then they found that the robot answered doorbells, too.

It was Mrs. Sodgeway, Ann's mother. She had brought herself clear across the state for one of her monthly "surprise" visits, bringing with her several imagined ills and her usual load of advice for Ann on how to handle George. Her latest sickness was one which supposedly demanded that she limp slowly about with the aid of a cane. Always the martyr, she hobbled painfully up to the door carrying her bag herself. Inside, George and Ann were forcing down their third dinner, having run out of other things for Mr. Tinkertoy to do.



turn page

Mrs. Sodgeaway rang the doorbell and prepared her face in the lined manner necessary to portray her terrible suffering. Inside, Mr. Tinkertoy stopped serving the table and went to answer the door. It is a credit to the robot's metal nerves that it was not frightened by Mrs. Sidgeway's sour expression. Mrs. Sodgeaway, however, was not constructed of such sturdy stuff. Her eyes widened in horror at the aluminum view before them. For the first time in her life, she developed a speech defect. Gurgling hoarsely, she turned and ran from the house leaving her luggage and cane behind. Unperturbed, Mr. Tinkertoy collected these items and returned to the Pembrooks with them. "An aged female left these items at the door. I supposed that she delivered them here for you. I was unable to discern a coherent message, and the female left immediately."

"Mother!" shrieked Ann, recognizing the suitcase. "What did you do to her?"

"Nothing at all," assured the robot. "I merely opened the door and she immediately deposited these items and ran away."

"Oh, poor Mother!" Ann cried, slumping back to her chair and holding her head in her hands. George looked up at Mr. Tinkertoy with his first sign of admiration for the robot.

"Where shall I set these articles?" Tinkertoy asked.

"Set them down in the hall, Tink," George replied happily, hypocritically soothing Ann. When Tink was gone from the room, Ann snapped her head up.

"That horrid thing has to go!" she whispered fiercely. "It'll drive all our friends away."

This sobered George a little. After all, it was true that people other than mothers in law often rang the Pembroke doorbell, people whom George liked very much. With Mr. Tinkertoy to answer the door, even the most loyal of those friends would cease visiting the Pembroke household. Besides, there was the matter of the robot's work cycle. In another month the hedge would be trimmed to the

roots; the flowers washed out, and the rugs worn through. Yes, something had to be done.

"But what can we do?" George asked.

"I don't know," Ann admitted; "but we've got to do something!"

Mr. Tinkertoy returned to the room. "Are you ready for dessert?" George and Ann looked sickly at one another. This had been their third dinner in five hours.

"No thank you," George managed. "You may collect the dishes and wash them."

Mr. Tinkertoy set out to do this at once. George and Ann retired to the scrupulously clean front room to plot.

"We can't order the thing out," George whispered. "It just won't go." The whispering was unnecessary, of course. Mr. Tinkertoy wouldn't have minded in the least if he had heard. Somehow, however, they couldn't bring themselves to discussing it out loud.

"Maybe we could beat it to pieces," Ann suggested.

George shook his head. "I doubt it. That thing's built to last. We'll just have to trick it some way."

"Oh, I should never have shaken hands with the darn thing," Ann mourned.

"Don't blame yourself. I should never have bought it in the first place."

"You couldn't help it; you didn't know what you were doing."

The two continued for a time, George blaming himself, and Ann blaming herself, and neither of them contributing anything that might help.

"Maybe we could have him paint the house," George suggested hopefully. "That would keep him busy for quite a while."

"It's too late to buy paint tonight. Besides, it probably won't work at skilled labor."

Other suggestions were put forward, and rejected for one reason or another. Both of them sank into lower depths of mental misery.

Somehow George found half of a quart of scotch that had been left over from the night before, and after a few drinks he was feeling a little better. He became so happy that he hardly cared when he noticed that the robot had opened another bottle of his expensive car polish and was pouring it indiscriminately onto the car. Ann was so dejected that she hardly noticed that the rag the robot was using to polish the car with was a skirt which had been put out on the line to dry, but which apparently had blown down.

The level of the liquor went down steadily, and more and more George began to feel at peace with the world in general.

Brilliant ideas began to come into his head.

The last of the whiskey disappeared just as Mr. Tinkertoy finished moving the lawn down to the roots with his built in mowing apparatus, and was starting in to pull up the vegetables in the garden. Of course, the robot couldn't tell the difference, for dark had finally settled, and the robot merely thought he was pulling weeds.

George looked at Ann, returning her sorrowful gaze with a glassy stare that bespoke of brilliant schemes hatching in his mind.

Suddenly George staggered to his feet, his eyes lit with inspiration as well as with alcohol.

"I'll fix that hunk o' tin," he was muttering under his breath as he staggered into the bedroom.

Sudden fear for her husband's life alarmed Ann, and she asked, "What are you going to do?"

George did not answer but entered the bedroom and turned toward a huge antique chiffonier that decorated one corner of the room. While Ann watched, partly in anxiety and partly in curiosity, George opened one of the drawers and drunkenly began to pull out what at first glance could have been a piece of cardboard, but which instead turned out to be a mirror three feet wide and seven feet long.

Puzzlement was on Ann's face as she saw the malicious gleam of anticipated revenge shining on her husband's face as he turned to reenter the front

room with the mirror. Almost did he slip and fall to the floor before he finally carried the mirror safely into the front room and set it against the wall.

"Now!" George shouted, "call the blasted Mr. Tenk-toy in, an' we'll see whosh boss."

George staggered to the armchair and fell into it, a satisfied smirk playing over his face.

Uncertainly, Ann called the robot in, then she looked at her plastered husband to see what would happen next.

"Yes master, you sent for me?" came the tinny voice of Mr. Tinkertoy.

"Misher Tinkertoy," said George loudly, "you didn't clean this room thoroughly. You left a pile of junk still in here. Look over there." George pointed toward the mirror unsteadily.

The robot turned and looked at the mirror, saw his own image of tin looking back at him. "Yes master, I see the pile of junk. Do you wish me to dispose of it?"

Sudden wonder shone on Ann's face at what was happening, a rather surprised wonder. "Yes," she chirped out. "Dispose of it immediately."

Then a strange thing happened, an impossible thing. The robot advanced toward the mirror and walked right into it. But the mirror didn't break. Mr. Tinkertoy just disappeared utterly from their sight!

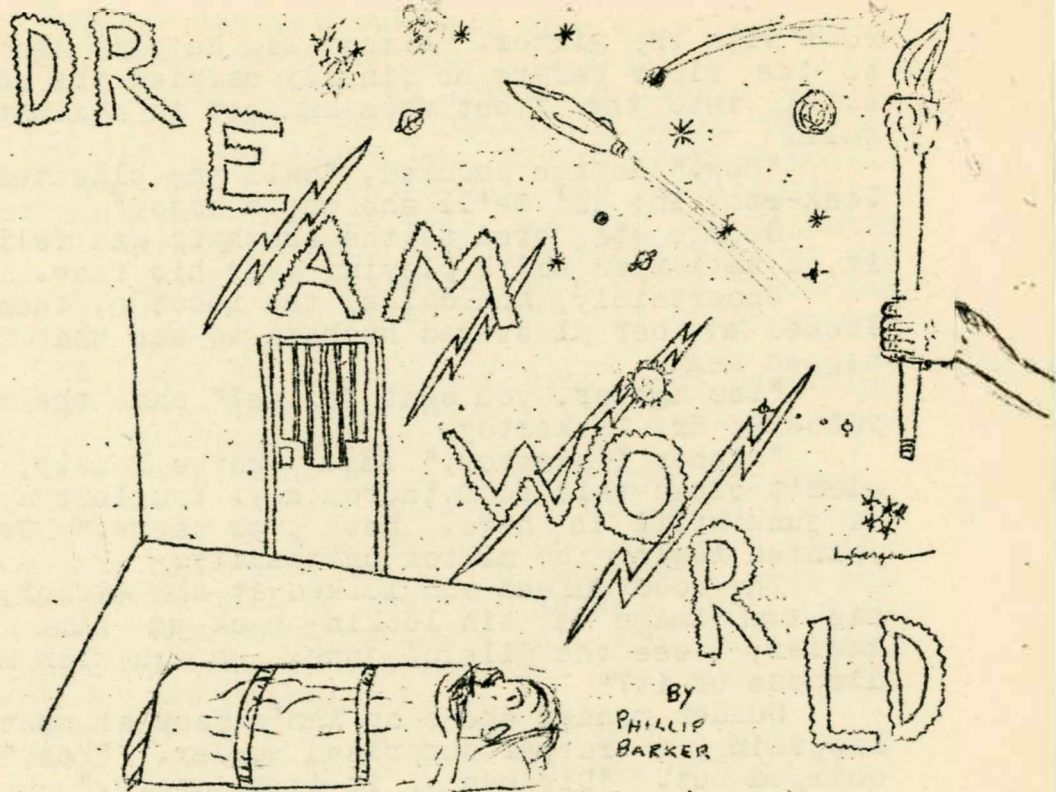
The robot was trapped in the mirror! That, of course, was the only way that an image could be disposed of ---

There would be pixies for George in the morning, but George didn't care. The pixies were perfect angels along side of the robot.

George sank into blissful slumber, and his wife curled up on his lap, her head snuggled over his manly shoulder.

The day had been too much for her.

the end



Now that I have been cured of insanity, I suppose I should set down my delusions for the benefit of the medical profession. I am sure that my case is unique in medical annals, for it baffled the psychiatrists for years. You see, I was what is known in psychiatric language as a "paranoid-schizophrenic" which means that I had delusions and hallucinations that destroyed reality completely. In the average set of symptoms the delusions and hallucinations are not lasting, nor are they well organized. In my case they were both. But that wasn't what really bothered the medics; what made me stand out was the fact that my insanity possessed me in spells --- a week in my dream world and a week of rationality, as regular as a metronome. In one world I was a patient in a hospital for deranged minds, and in the

other I was the ruler of a thousand planets.

My first "spell" in the sanitarium came shortly after I arrived. I was worried and frightened and not a little bit curious about my new surroundings. Then, suddenly, I was apathetic to the whole situation; I just didn't care what happened. It was as though I had been drugged. My eyesight dimmed and watered.

It was then that I dissolved.

My whole body seemed to slide down through my clothes like water through a tube. It was as though I actually was water and was being poured from one glass to another, for I materialized again in the gilded sandals of a monarch. I was Arlodar the Third, of the fifth cycle of kings, Master of the Empire of a Thousand Worlds.

Around my head swirled eddies of perfumed music, and below the dais the nobility of the Empire danced, feasted, and loved with wild abandon.

Over me swelled the music of Guerre, the master composer, washing the painted walls of the throne room, billowing against the columns in crashing configurations of sound. It was the music of Empire --- my Empire! Now skirling like an imperial march, now attacking some faraway world, now tramping like the myriad feet of my endless victorious armies, now retreating to lick its wounds and charge again. Those sublime tones twisted, divided, coiled like the serpents on my diadem, thundering the might of the Empire to the ends of eternity.

Yet even there I was unhappy, for I was cursed with lunacy on that world too. And because I was insane, I had been deemed unfit to rule actively. I was but a puppet to the will of my regent, Fior.

From my seat on the high throne I could see the faces stretching in an unbroken, ever-changing maelstrom to the farthest reaches of the hall. There was Fior, resplendent in his white silks, laughing with Guerre the composer. There hugging the wall were the mournful delegates from a planet on the fringes of the Empire come to offer surrender and fealty. And there, oblivious to the rest, danced Criede in

the arms of a handsome outlander. Criede, the princess I desired to marry. Yet I was not permitted to mingle with the happy throng, for I was a god-king, and god --- especially an insane god --- does not mingle with his subjects.

Slowly the banquet drew to a close, and finally the farewells were all said and the guests gone. Fior came mincing up the hall to the throne, his silken cape fluttering white in the gloom.

"Sire! You are ----- with us again. Are you tired, Majesty?"

"Tired enough. Give me your hand and help me to my chambers. How long was I --- gone?"

"A week, sire, as always."

My mind twisted in agony. Always a week! You can never imagine the strain of living alternately in two worlds!

Aloud, I said, "I thought the banquet went off rather well. The music was superb, don't you think?"

"Your majesty should reward Guerre with some trifle for his untiring labors to amuse you. Perhaps an estate on some pleasure planet?" Fior's tone was deferential, but his eyes watched me like slimy jewels.

"I don't think so," I said petulantly. "I will give him something personal --- a jeweled cape --- a slave girl --- I will think on it."

Tactfully Fior changed the subject, but I knew Guerre would get an estate no matter what I might say. Guerre was a friend of Fior's.

That night I slept poorly. A monarch always sleeps poorly -- especially when the girl he loves feels only pity for him, and his regent plots for the throne.

With the dawn came several things. First, there was an ambassador from still another conquered world. Secondly, Fior came smirking in to announce the death of one of my favorite young lordlings in a dimensional cruiser accident. When there are whole galaxies to be crossed at a speed faster than light, accidents are sure to crop up. But it seemed always to happen to every true friend I made.....

Thirdly and most pleasing, Criede came in to visit me. I always enjoyed her daily calls more than anything else in my unhappy life, for she brought joy in with her like a cloud of perfume.

There is no way I can describe Criede. She was capricious and fanciful, yet always serious when I was. She was small and ethereal, with gentle, brown eyes and a wave in her hair that was constantly slipping over one eye. And the filmy gowns that were the style didn't hide her loveliness either. To a golden prisoner who was king, she was a goddess.

On that morning she flounced into my study merrily waving a reel of silvery wire. "Look Arlody." (A favorite nickname of hers, and the way she said it made it sound like a melody) "I've got Mikkary's newest fantasy for you! It just arrived."

I lost my gloomy mood in a hurry --- anybody would with a lithe little fairy like Criede dancing around, setting up the projector, brushing aside weighty papers of state that might mean the fate of worlds and making me comfortable.

All the while she talked on like a vardnil. "You'll love this one. I had Mikkary compose it 'specially for you ---- put down those old papers and watch it! Are you comfortable? Here, let me set that pillow straight. There! Now are you fixed?"

Mikkary's fantasies were always good, for he was one of those fortunate inhabitants of Maldano, the artists world. He lived in a world of illusion and beauty, and his facile brain knew just how to set it down so that others might see it too. Yet even with scenes of exquisite loveliness floating before me, I looked more at Criede than at the screen. Her beauty was what I wanted; her love was what I needed to buoy me up in a world of deceit and false pomp. Yet she considered herself only a friend, a kindly nurse whose chatter and smiles were prompted more by pity for a sick man than by love.

It was nearly midday before the reel was finished, and I was beginning to tire of the constant inactivity, when Fior entered. He was obviously in haste, for he had forgotten to smooth down his thin-

ning black hair, and his cape was awry. I turned, wondering at the intrusion, but he imperiously motioned me to silence.

"Majesty ---- Sire! There's been a revolt in the binary system of Antor ---- we're dispatching troops immediately. I've arranged for you to review them within the hour. You should wear your field uniform and carry the Scimitar of Justice. Hurry! The review will be held before the Hall of Empire by the West wing. I must go to prepare."

With that he was gone. It was like him to order me around like a common slave. And it was like me to obey.

The Hall of Empire towers nearly alone at the western end of the great semicircle that comprises the Imperial palace. It was a massive, bark building, filled with the trophies taken by my ancestors. One of its unique features was the vast room in which there was a model globe of every world in the Empire. These globes had television attachments, so that it was possible to see what actually went on in the cities marked on the maps.

A review of troops going into the fields always thrilled me, even then I was a child. My heart pounded within me louder than the sonorous roll of the tunkuls or the barbaric blare of spiral trumpet. The legions marched past, accoutred in their sparkling green metal mesh, spiked helmets flashing in the sun's glare. The long, sinuous march step made my own legs itch to follow, to fight, to conquer or die for the Empire. The courage of those hardened veterans before me raised my own latent battle lust and left me ready to fight a thousand Fiors and their minions. I was no longer afraid!

But trust to Fior to circumvent my wrath! He must have noted my tightened lips and squared shoulders, for he bowed and scraped like a slave boy during our return to the seraglio.

The other days of my stay in that world passed like waters of the sea through my hands. There was so much to do --- so much to ponder --- so much to fear. Then came that horrible last moment, --- the

moment when I saw the physicians' anxious faces and the white coverlets dissolving and running together into a mass and then spilling out again to form the grey walls and iron bedstead of my room in the madhouse.. Old Doctor Walters was sitting by my side.

"Well, Professor Durmer, I see that you're awake."

My earthly name awoke strange chords within me, causing me to recall my life as a professor of English at a southwestern university. It didn't seem important beside Fior's conspiracy.

"Uh --- yes, Doctor, I'm back."

"That's fine, boy. Now tell me just where you've been."

I must have stared at him rather strangely for a moment, for his wrinkles coalesced into a smile. "You, yourself, used the word 'back' just now. Where did you go?"

"I ---- I must've been mixed up, Doctor. I meant that ----" I would be a fool to tell him about Arlodar and the Empire. I was sane enough to remember the things I'd read about people with delusions of grandeur. The Napoleons and Caesars of the madhouse.

"You certainly can tell me, Professor. I'm your doctor, and I must know the symptoms before I can diagnose and prescribe."

"I --- you'd think me m---" It was then that I recalled that I was already judged insane. I could say what I pleased, and nobody'd think me any crazier. "I've been to a place where Earth doesn't exist," I blurted. "To a capitol of a mighty empire --- a land where I --- I ---"

He grinned disarmingly at me from under those bushy brows of his and said, "I suppose you were a king? I've always wanted to be able to retire to a land of my own, too, where I was king."

That did it. My mind was so tired and anguished from beating against possibilities that I told him the whole story: exactly what I've written on this paper. When I had finished, he rose, stretched, and lit his pipe. "You realize, don't

you, that that's a dream world --- an escape from the cares of reality?"

"But it's so detailed ----- so real. Look, Doctor, I can rationalize as well as you can, but that world's as real as this one is to you."

"Perhaps you'd better tell me about your past life --- everything." He chuckled gustily. "Maybe I can dig out your family skeleton."

I told him what I could recollect of my rather hazy childhood memories. He looked grave when I spoke of my constant feeling of double existence, even when I was young. In my thirtieth year, I said, the spells had commenced, and I had made a prize idiot of myself by insisting to my friends and colleagues that I really had been to the Empire. The rest remains only as a sort of painful chaos in my mind -- the solicitous friends, the little alienist with the thick glasses, the cool fingers of a nurse, and finally the grounds of the Northwestern Hospital.

Now I, as Professor of English, had developed a talent for reading what a student is writing no matter how he holds his paper. Upside down on the doctor's note pad I saw: "Definite paranoid leaning --- feeling of double existence --- dissolves ---- apathy to this world only during spells --- spells something new, must investigate ----- will give tests as soon as possible. Talks well; no difficulty in speaking ---" There was more, but I didn't care. He had judged me a true lunatic, not just a nervous breakdown as I had hoped. As far as I knew, there were only very dubious cures for that type of insanity. I might have to stay there the rest of my life -- or at least every other week of it!

On Wednesday I was tested as Doctor Walters had said I would be. To be sure, that alienist in Albuquerque had tested me too, but his tests were childish compared to these. I had word-association tests, board tests, colored block tests, and a dozen others --- the results of which were tabulated and compiled by a competent looking nurse.

Thursday I spent in my cell, writing letters to my friends. About two o'clock Doctor Walters came in, his ever present pipe jammed in the corner of his mouth.

"Well, Michael --- do you mind if I call you that? ---- How are you today? I hope those tests didn't tire you."

"No, I'm fine. How did the results come out?"

He gave me a quizzical little smile. "Surely you must have read that the patient should never suspect that he isn't --- just right."

My temper flared up. "Look here, Doctor, you're treating me like a child! I think I'm rational enough to know the dangers of brooding! ---In fact I'll brood more, if you don't tell me!"

His smile softened and widened until it threatened to make him drop his pipe. "The tests showed that you are as rational as I am, and your temper just now was a symptom of a rational man. The only thing about your case that is irrational is the recurrence of those fits --- fits in which you are a perfect paranoid-schizophrenic. I may as well tell you what you did while you were 'gone'. You spent the entire week in such deep apathy that we forced you to keep you alive. If you were a schizo, you'd always be in that state, and if you were a paranoid, you'd show up under examination. And that still doesn't explain those near comas of yours. I'm stumped."

He scratched his grizzled pate and tamped tobacco into his pipe. "Do you mind if I call in other doctors?"

"What can I do about it?"

"You mustn't take that attitude. If we're going to find out what really is wrong with you, you've got to cooperate."

"O.K., Doctor Walters, you call in as many as you like. I'll do my best to help."

He rose, still grinning. "Alright sir, that's settled. If you'll excuse me I'll leave you now. There's a fellow in the next ward who's unhappy because he's Saint Peter and he's lost the key to the

Pearly Gates. I made him a key in the shop this morning."

Still chucklin', he went out. With Doctor Walters' one, time dragged on my hands; I obtained a few books from the library and tried to read, but even that pleasant occupation palled and I became moody.

As the days passed, I found in Doctor Walters a true friend. He was a strange little man --- a mind that was like a beacon of light in darkness set within a small, frail body. And his sense of humor and kindly understanding made him seem like one of the seven cheerful dwarfs in the old legend. Our talks grew longer and longer; each word bringing us closer together until I began to think that my stay in the asylum wasn't so bad after all. But then I was mistaken.

Have you ever been in a madhouse? It's like being in a zoo --- on the wrong side of the bars. Each curious visitor or class of students brought me closer to a persecution complex. They were kind to me, yes, but with the same kindness that you might give to animals in a petshop -- kindness that rankles and burns in the heart of a man who probably was a lot better off than some of his visitors could ever hope to be. I hated being expected to perform, to do tricks like a puppy!

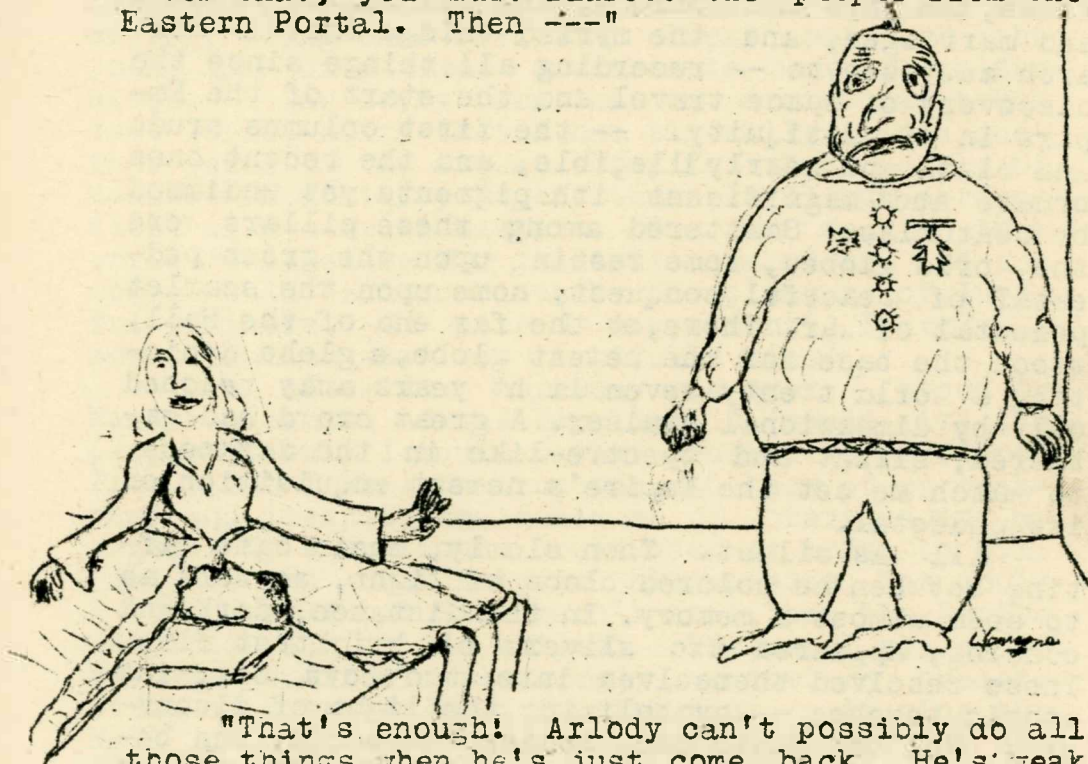
And the doctors were worse. They came by the dozens and sat in front of my cell and took notes and looked wise. Men who would have been glad to converse with me in any other circumstances now stood in front of my door and whispered wisely among themselves. Performing dog! Trained seal! God, I was on the verge of giving them what they wanted --- a show ---- by strangling the first one who set foot in my cell! I was almost wildly glad when Tuesday's sun came grinning between the metal lattices of my window, for that was my day to dissolve. Then let the doctors have their field day!

I must have slept, for when I awakened, I saw no grey, concrete ceiling but the silken canopies of my bed in the palace. Near me sat Criede and

Fior, both waiting expectantly for my return.

"Arlody, are you awake now?" It was Criede's tinkling voice. Her hand brushed the hair back from my eyes.

"Your majesty," Fior's tone was quick, imperious. "There is much to be done. You are to set the globe of the newly conquered world of Nanarr in the Hall of the Thousand Worlds at noon, today. After that, you must address the people from the Eastern Portal. Then ----"



"That's enough! Arlody can't possibly do all those things when he's just come back. He's weak yet."

I was immensely grateful for Criede's intervention. A great surge of love crowded up inside me. "No, Fior, I don't feel able to ----"

"Your Majesty forgets that you are expected to do all these things, no matter what the condition of the body." Fior's voice was oiled steel. "That is the duty of a monarch. Come, you must arise now."

It was his will that finally triumphed. I arose and, attired in my robe of golden scales, fol-

loved him to the Hall of the Thousand Worlds.

The inside of the hall was a vast darkness, illuminated only by the soft glow of the world globes. Above my head soared the columns of the God kings, the history of a king of the Empire carved on every one of them. Stretching off into the vari-colored obscurity row after row of monoliths --- two thousand forty eight, each one recording the hopes and fears, the joys and sorrows, wars and lulls, revolts and marriages, and the myriad things that a monarch must see to -- recording all things since the discovery of space travel and the start of the Empire in dim antiquity. -- the first columns crude and black and nearly illegible, and the recent ones ornate and magnificent with pigments yet undimmed by centuries. Scattered among these pillars were the world globes, some resting upon the green pedestal of peaceful conquest, some upon the scarlet pedestal of war. There, at the far end of the Hall, stood the base for the newest globe, a globe depicting a world twenty seven light years away reached only by dimensional cruiser. A great crowd had gathered, silent and spectre-like in the darkness, to watch me set the Empire's newest acquisition on its pedestal.

All was silent. Then slowly, music came drifting between the colored blobs of light, so soft as to seem almost a memory. In the distance, dark and echoing, appeared two slivers of brightest fire. These resolved themselves into two boys carrying atomic torches -- symbolizing the light of discovery. No: the music grew louder, stronger, and became the Imperial War Chant carried on the voices of soldiers of the legion. Between the shadowy columns came a company of troops, singing with the lust and arrogance of youth. Following them came the lords and officers of the empire, resplendent in their royal war dress. Plumed and crested helmets, flamboyant capes encrusted with jewels, silks and bright fabrics half-hiding the cool glitter of vapelon armor. Painted and tasseled, gilded and inlaid, and their faces reflecting the knowledge of power,

cold and cruel with arrogance. False pomp! To the mob they were demigods, but I knew them better!

Then I walked, alone, in the midst of opalescent mists to set the globe of Nanarr upon its pedestal. Dimly at first and then with gathering force, it glowed ruddy gold. On its smooth surface I saw the outlines of cities, canals, highways, seas, and deserts, and in my mind I saw the people of that faraway sphere, working and playing, laughing and crying, young ones born and elders dead, and the young men with their sweethearts beneath golden skies. I was sorry then that my armies had taken that world, sorry that I had literally placed another jewel in my crown, sorry for those people of Nanarr. In a mighty Empire there is always corruption, always cruel masters. Now the men of that world would slave for sadistic overseers, and the women would be concubines for the pleasure of lustful officers. If only I was strong! If only I could command what was rightfully mine!

Long after the ceremony was over I stood by Nanarr dreaming of the happiness I could give its people, if only I could gather courage to overthrow Fior. But I knew that no one who knew of my weakness and insanity would aid me in overthrowing my regent. No executioner would obey my order to kill him. No man would help me kidnap him. Nor could I tell myself that Fior wasn't real, that the Empire wasn't real, for it existed. The metal scales of my robe chinked reassuringly against my breast. Could my diseased mind imagine them -- imagine the Hall and the columns, even imagine the glyphs cut into stone?

A footstep behind me woke me from my reverie. It was Criede. She was impossibly lovely, her glorious body reflecting Nanarr's golden glow.

"What's the matter, Arlody?" Her arm went around my shoulder and her dear, brown eyes looked into mine. "Fior's having fits because you're late for that speech. We must go."

I don't know why I did it. I suddenly seized her by the shoulders and kissed her with a passion

that belied my weak nature. God, how I wanted her, loved her! I let her go, and she stepped back, still faintly smiling, her lips trembling a little bit.

"You shouldn't have done that, Arلود," she breathed. Then she turned and fled.

I twisted blindly and sat down upon the pedestal of one of the worlds. She pitied me! She was my friend ----- like she was the friend of little children and small animals. She didn't want my kisses ---- my love. I think I would have killed myself if I'd had my dagger, but I only wept.

It was there that Fior found me, my clothes disordered, my helmet fallen to the ground.

"Arلودar! What's happened to you? Have you been attacked?" I turned my tearful face to him in sudden anger, and he stepped back.

"Are you insane? Speak to me, you foolish madman, or by God ----"

If he had said another word, I would have sprung at him, but then he noticed the smear of lip rouge on my face. His lips twisted in a sneer. "So! You have found what it is not yours to take!"

I couldn't think --- only instinct led me. I must have blubbered something about Criede, for the next thing I knew Fior had seized me by my tunic and was shaking me fiercely.

"You---you insane baby! Criede is a princess of Janquu, and we made a treaty with her father when we took his world that we would grant complete immunity to his family and retainers! Do you understand me?"

I struggled loose and stumbled to my rooms. Now I knew where I stood! Now I knew that I was on false ground. Here too, I was the performing puppet. Oh God, I wanted to die.

Even the sanctity of my bedroom was disturbed, for Fior came there.

"Listen, Arلودar, you have a speech to make, and, by Hejun, you are going to do it. Get up and change your clothes. Quick!"

He didn't even call me "Majesty" any more. Instead, he struck me with the flat of his sword and

cursed me soundly.

The words of the speech were bitter in my mouth. I was the Imperial God king again, mighty and omnipotent. If they only knew! The populace loved me, for they thought me the actual ruler. Fior played up to the people in my name, yet always trying to make himself as conspicuous as possible.

With the speech over and the applause done, I was once more the royal prisoner. I beat a hasty retreat to my room, and once there, buried my face in the coverlets and wept like a girl.

You who read this will think me a coward, a craven to weep, to surrender always to Fior, to always be afraid. But, god, how can you who are sane know the horror of being torn alternately between two worlds, never knowing which was reality, weakened by years of worry and frustration. How can you know?

The remaining days of that week in the Empire drifted by like shadows in the night, for I can't remember a single thing that occurred. I was left alone, utterly alone. Cries no longer came, and Fior demanded nothing of me. I was the forgotten king.

I was actually relieved to find myself disintegrating and slipping down through my bed into the small cell in the asylum. Several doctors were leaning over me watching my awakening and jotting notes.

"How do you feel?" asked one.

"Where's Doctor Walters? Please bring him to me."

Somebody got up and went out, and soon Doctor Walters was bending over me.

"Michael, do you feel well enough to answer the questions of these gentlemen?"

"I'm all right," I lied. "Let's go."

I won't list all the things they asked me, for that would take more space than I care to give. Let it suffice that it was worse by far than any inquisition, more rigorous than any rack.

When the visiting doctors had finally gone, old Doctor Walters still sat at the foot of the bed.

"If I'd been in your place, Michael, I wouldn't have told them about your troubles with Criede and Fior. Now they're certain you're a paranoid-schizophrenic. They may recommend shock treatment."

"Shock treatment! Electrical shock treatment? But, good grief, I--- I'm not that bad--- you won't let them,---!"

"There isn't much I'd be able to do about it. That big fellow with the bald head is director of this place, and his word goes."

"Then you're not certain that I'm a -- a paranoid-schizophrenic?"

"No," he dropped his pipe and stooped to pick it up. "No, I'm not. I don't know what you are --- psychiatrically speaking. But I do know that right now you're as sane as I am. It's those fits that puzzle me --- your alternate weeks of rationality. I don't know."

After he left, the old "monkey in the zoo" feeling returned, and I began to rage at my fate. I also began to dread. What would happen if Fior tired of me as a figurehead and murdered me while I lay helpless in my coma? Was I sane or mad? My thoughts became chaotic, and finally I slept.

Several days passed which aren't of any importance ----- so little do they matter, that I can't even recall what I did in the interim.

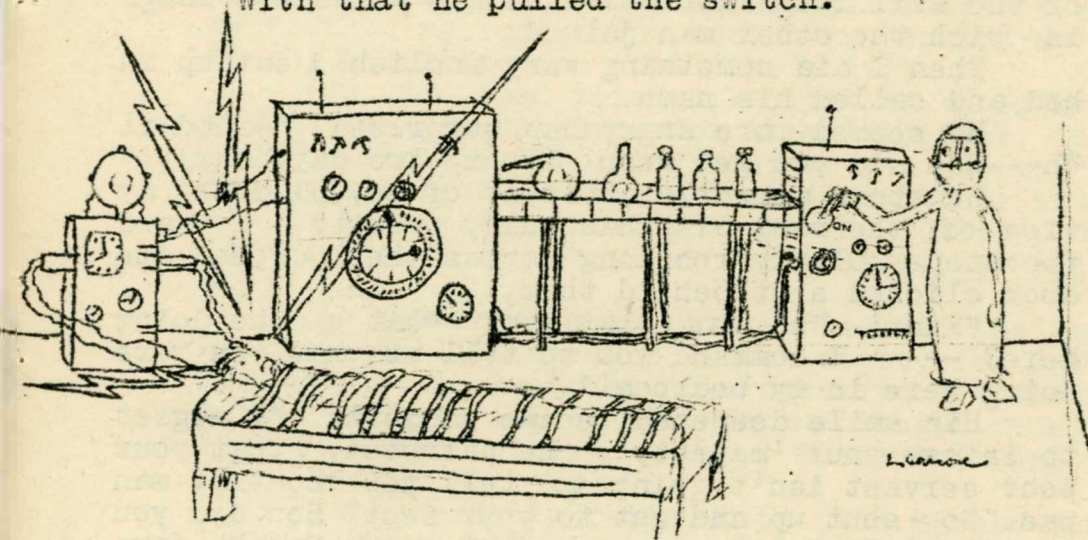
One afternoon, Saturday to be exact, Doctor Walters came hurrying in with bad news. Very bad news! The director and the consulting psychiatrists had decided that I only seemed rational and that the shock treatment should be given a chance to bring me back to sanity.

Doctor Walters was almost in tears with apologies as he led me into the treatment room. It was a small place, painted one dull, nameless color, and windowless. It was occupied by a great deal of terrifying apparatus and a long, polished table with straps. Too frightened to resist, I allowed the strongest man I have ever seen to strap me in place and moisten my temples. This man, I learned, was a male nurse who was to keep me from breaking my

bones in case convulsions ensued. Shining electrodes were placed on my temples, and I could hear confused murmuring behind me as dials were checked and equipment tested. Have you ever been on a rack? If so, you know that horrible moment of anticipation just before the torturers begin to tighten the windlass.

From a distance I heard Doctor Walters' voice. "Look, Michael, when you get back, we'll finish that hand of rummy. You were ten cents ahead, remember?"

With that he pulled the switch.



Light exploded in my eyes, blinding me; then came darkness and a sound so deep as to be almost a vibration. The universe reeled on its fundament like a maddened thing, and I felt myself spiralling down into the depths of existence. Chaos.

Light was in my eyes. Two blurry white streaks lay on an even whiter surface. One of them moved, and my eyes followed it languidly. Slowly my vision focused, and I saw that the white streaks were my arms lying on silken coverlets.

Silken coverlets!

I was Arlodar! I had broken the cycle!

Then I stiffened, for I heard Fior's sily, whining voice somewhere above me. He was saying:

"All right, then, you think of a better place to meet! After all, we're two of the king's loyal subjects watching over him while he's ill. There's no better place in the palace."

I didn't like the way he said "loyal subjects" or the evil laugh that followed his words---a laugh in which the other man joined.

Then I did something very foolish: I sat up in bed and called his name.

He seemed more angry than surprised. "Arlodar! Wh---How did you get here? You're two days early!"

He stood directly in front of me, blocking my view of the room with his bulky obesity. I heard footsteps quietly receding across the floor, and the door clicked shut behind them.

"Fior! Who was that man? What was he doing here? ----- I command you to tell me what you were doing here in my bedroom!"

His smile deepened, became sadistic. "I regret to inform your 'majesty'," he parroted, "that your poor servant isn't going to tell you who that man was. Now shut up and get to your feet! How did you get here! What did you hear just now? Speak, damn you, or I'll ---"

One portion of my mind remained rational and clear but the other part clouded with anger. I don't remember what I said to him, but I know that he drew his sword and struck me a glancing blow across the face. My feet became unstable, and I felt warm blood coursing down my cheeks, blood mingled with tears of rage.

I reached blindly out of the mists that threatened to envelope me and struck with all my force. My fist collided with flabby jaws and Fior bleated with pain. I sank into unconsciousness.

There was a red glare about me, a glare that darkened now and then as though a shadow had crossed my vision. Now something cool was laid on my burning cheeks, and the suffocating odor of antiseptic flood-

ed my nostrils.

Awakening came suddenly. Startled at the touch of soft fingers, I flailed out wildly and found a woman's wrist within my grasp.

It was Criede!

"Arloidy," her tone carried a world of pity. "Arloidy, who hurt you?"

I could only gasp, "Fior!"

"I thought so!" her eyes sparkled angrily for a second. "That's why I had a trusted guard bring you here, to the Hall of the Thousand Worlds. This is the last place on the planet that Fior will think of looking. He's busy now, searching the Public Counseling Rooms--- a servant of mine informed him that you were planning to escape that way."

She rose and paced the floor with long, tigerish strides that made me wonder if this was the same Criede I had known most of my life.

With the aid of the pedestal of the red world under which I lay I managed to stagger to my feet. "Criede, listen, you've got to hide me for a week or so. Send your servants to the city with news of Fior's revolt, and let the people do the rest. --- They love me ---- won't stand for treachery, for they're taught that I'm the one who gives them food and entertainment. Can you do that?"

Criede nodded her brown curls. "I'll do it. --- Arloidy! Are you going to faint again? Listen to me, I have connections with the reptilian world of Ssar, connections which ---"

Her voice droned on and on, but I didn't notice, for the world was crawling hazily around my pajama cuffs. Then came that confused melting and pouring that I knew so well.

Doctor Walters sat on the foot of my bed, pipe smoke eddying about his head. "Michael, where have you been? The shock treatment threw you into the Empire didn't it?"

"Doctor ----- You've got to change me back to Arlodar immediately! I have to get back there; I may be killed! You must help me!"

"Control yourself, Michael," his face was kind-

ly, but there was a worried expression that didn't
along there. "You mustn't want to return to your
dreamworld. That's a symptom of irrationality."

"Listen to me," I shrieked frantically. "If
you don't send me back there right now, Fior's go-
ing to kill me! KILL ME, YOU MFAR? For god's sake,
shock me again --- anything! It means my life!"

I must have become hysterical, for those kindly
old eyes filled the universe to bursting. In the
dim distance I heard myself screaming incoherencies
and Doctor Walters' voice calling for restraints.

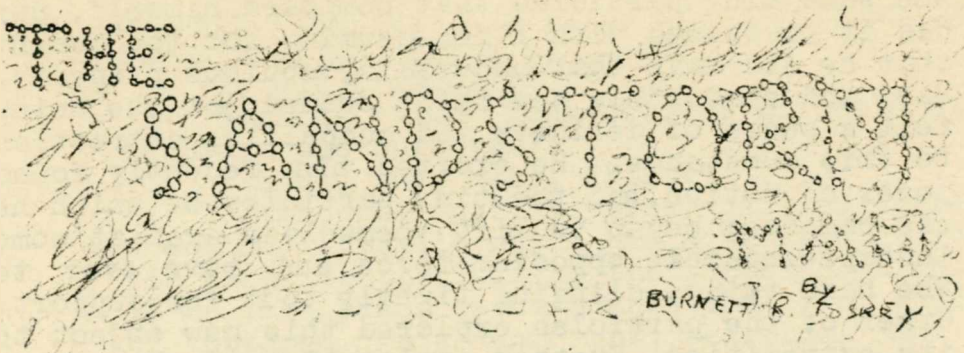
The next thing I knew I was wrapped up like a
mummy in blankets in some sort of bath. But my mind
rushed fearfully back to the Empire to dwell on my
fate there. Would Fior find me? Had Criede suc-
ceeded? What would happen if Fior killed my body
there? Buffeting against fears and doubts until I
could stand no more!

But I can see no purpose in recording all of
those innumerable mental tortures, for that was the
last time I ever saw my dreamworld. Thank God I'm
cured now. It is wonderful to have that united
feeling that most men never miss. I won't bother
to describe the method used to cure me, for others
who understand it have placed it before the public
in far better form than I could muster. Let it suf-
fice simply that it changed much of the structure
of my brain by means of radiation, leaving me as
normal as the next man.

It was Criede who turned the tide of my life.
You see, she hid me and contacted the reptilian
scientists of Ssar, bargaining with them for their
jealously guarded radiation treatment. Fior's plot
is quashed now, and he is dead, caught by the mad-
dened populace in a revolution that wrote a page of
history that will shine forever. The revolt is fi-
nally over, and I am ruling with full power of Em-
peror. ---But not ruling alone even now, for I have
a queen who has found that she loves me deeply. I
am truly happy now.

My dream world is no more.

the end



An infinitely vague sensation began to penetrate ever so slowly through the outlines of the system of thought patterns which were the first indications to the being that he existed. The being was aware of an almost pleasant sensation that resembled an indefinite massaging motion over the tenuous borders of his body, as of its purpose to wake him from some deep and everlasting sleep. He became aware that this force was slowly increasing in intensity, that he was slowly becoming more conscious of his immediate environment. The sensations integrated themselves into more definite patterns, resolved into the more distinct motions of tiny particles of matter. He became aware of an inner self, of a true consciousness within him, to become aware of the limits of his own body, if in his present state he could be thought of as possessing a body.

Then the being began to be aware of another sensation, that of a movement of his own self, as of a stirring into wakefulness from his long sleep. The motion was entirely involuntary, but the ability to produce voluntary motion was within him, having come to him from nothingness. He exerted this new power, and was at once aware of the now indubitable fact that his body was composed of the same tiny particles whose motion he could still distinctly feel as the everpresent feeling of pleasant massaging, the same which had awakened him.

He next became aware of the alien substance near him; very close it was, so close that he was

touching it. This new substance was not made of the same tiny particles that composed himself, nor was it possessed with life, assuming for the moment that he did have that uncertain, nebulous property. Hard and smooth this new thing seemed, yet the being felt a sense of definite and compelling attraction to this substance. He exerted his recently found power of motion, and the tiny particles of which he was composed began to lift themselves against some incomprehensible opposing force and move over to the hard thing, clinging tightly to it for support. Other of the particles explored this new object to its extremities. Further exploration of the moving particles found other pieces of this hard substance near the first one. The being experienced a sudden desire to attach every particle of his to these new objects. One moving string of particles came upon a larger piece of the hard substance, and in exploring found several holes leading to an empty cavity within. As if the being new the meaning of this object instinctively, the narrow train of his particles continued in a never ending stream until the cavity was filled.

A new sensation began to filter slowly into the thoughts of the being, an entirely new, yet somehow familiar sensation, one which he recognized as beneficial to his further progress. He could see! He knew instinctively that it was through two of the holes in the larger object which he was seeing. He looked out upon the strange field of vision which was presented to him, and saw for the first time an actual view of the small particles which were flying through the air with amazing rapidity. These, he knew, were not his own particles, but were the source of the massaging force to which he owed his awakening. The concentration of these particles prevented his vision from extending a very great distance, but this did not bother him greatly. The particles of his body inside the large cavity clung tightly to the inside surface and imparted a solidity to his being along with a definite attachment to the smooth solid object within which he was en-

cased, enabling him to turn this object and hence see in other directions as well. He saw the surface upon which he was lying, discovering without surprise that the surface was composed of the same tiny particles which were flying in concentration through the space above the surface. A different movement caught his attention then, and he saw the string of particles which he knew to be himself, moving along the surface toward the lighter colored hard and smooth objects. Not satisfied with merely covering the things with a thin layer of particles, the being felt the necessity of projecting his whole body in even distribution over every piece of the strange substance.

For hours this process continued until every last grain of his original body clung to the objects. As each new piece of the substance acquired the proper amount of particles that was needed, that piece became gifted with an integrated motion. The motion instinctively caused the being to draw the various parts together to form a single piece, and the part which could see directed this joining of the various parts into a coordinated and efficient unit which he knew by instinct to be proper. The various parts, then, became joined together, and the particles that clung to one piece became cemented by a strange force to the particles clinging to the adjoining piece.

Now the being was a single unit, no longer a nebulous mass of tiny particles. Almost suddenly he was aware of other powers and sensations. Sound began to reach his sensations, a weird howling sound, a sound which he knew came from the violent motion of the particles above him. At the same time he was aware of an inherent power of producing a sound, and experimentally he tried this power, producing a strange whispering sound. He moved the various parts of the body he had manufactured himself into, and at the same time words came to his thoughts. These tiny particles which he was made of and which was practically the only thing in sight, he called it sand. The hard things to which he now clung he

called bones. That part of himself from which he could see and hear, he called his head. Exerting several newly found powers of motion, he sat up, exploring his body, giving the names of arms and legs to his various limbs automatically. This surface upon which he found himself he called the world.

In this way the being gave names to everything that he saw, not stopping to wonder where these names were coming from. He rose to his feet, calling himself by the name of man. He was a man made of sand. He began walking, moving one leg forward and then the other, moving slowly in this process at first. As he became familiar with this method of motion, he moved faster. He did not know where he was going, but he seemed to be determined to move in one certain direction, nor did he know the reason for this determination. He could only see a few of his armlengths to the front of him, for the concentration of sand particles before his eyes was great.

How long he walked thus he did not know, for as yet he had no standards of time to count by. He slowly became aware of a darkening of the space around him. This effect was not distinctively noticeable for a long time, but ever darker it grew until it was so completely dark that he was unable to see. However his movement had gathered strength and momentum born of inner conviction, such that he continued to walk through the night as though the darkness had no effect on him.

With the coming of light once more, he began to be aware of the presence of something different from what he had seen before. The sound reaching his hearing senses was slightly changed from the incessant howling to a slightly different tone, as though the wind was now blowing against other things than particles of sand. Ahead of him he could just make out the dim outlines of strange things. In many ways he thought they resembled the surface he was walking over, but this new surface was upright and more solid looking. At the same instant that he saw these things, he found that he had stepped onto a harder surface than he had been traveling

over thus far.

He advanced slowly now, for fear of missing something which might present itself, and as he looked forward again he saw several more of the upright surfaces. They seemed to be in groups of four walls connected at the corners to form a sort of shelter from the sand and wind. He found odd indentations in the surfaces of many of these walls. Some of the breaks were transparent looking, but he was not close enough to see the details of what was on the other side of these windows.

Walking slowly through the strange assortment of upright enclosures, he seemed to be hesitant in his step, as though uncertain as to what to conclude from all of these sights. No movement could he see save the omnipresent swirling mistiness of the flying particles of sand.

He was surprised, then, by the sight of a figure emerging from one of the enclosures. He watched as this new thing ran with bowed head toward one of the other enclosures. The man of sand saw that the running figure was shaped exactly like he was!

He ran after the running figure. But the other disappeared into the enclosure toward which he had run. The being stopped and looked with puzzlement at the strange indentation in the side of the wall and wondered how the man had entered,

He raised his hand and struck the door a sharp blow, and a loud sharp sound reached his senses. He heard a dull tapping sound on the other side of the wall that got louder as it approached, and the door opened.

As he saw the inside for the first time, a whole new string of sensations were presented to his sights. Here were colors and strange looking objects which he had never before seen, and yet they looked almost familiar. He also saw the other thing shaped like him standing in the doorway, but he wondered why that other thing shrank back away from him. He saw the man's eyes, and knew that these were the things which the man could see out of. He entered through the open door and saw two others of

these forms that were shaped like him. He saw that they had strangely colored objects surrounding the bodies, and vaguely he wondered why they had covered themselves so. He then noticed that their skin was of a different color than his was, and he also wondered why this was so. So many of these strange things did he see all at one time that he found himself confused with his own sensations. Why did these men scream so loudly when they looked at him and why did they shrink away from him? What were they saying to one another? He sensed a hopeless feeling that he could almost understand their noises, but not quite.

As he stood there in indecision, he saw that one of the men had taken up a strange looking object with a hole in one end and was pointing the end with the hole in it toward him. A sharp sound followed, and he felt the vague sensation of a piece of sand being torn away from him. The sand man advanced toward the man who had shot at him, and he was surprised to see the man run into the corner wildly and sink to the floor, letting out shrill cries all the while.

A feeling of intense danger came over the sand man, and he stopped his advance toward the frightened man-thing. Startled for an instant by the feeling, he looked down at his hands. He rubbed two of his fingers together and was appalled to see particles of his precious sand roll off and fall downward. As he looked at the rest of his body, he saw that small grains of sand were loosening themselves and falling to the floor. With a sudden instinctive movement, he turned and leaped outside, almost crumbling in the effort. The instant the sandstorm hit him he felt better. He rubbed his fingers together again, but this time no particles of sand fell. He decided he would not return to the inside of the enclosures again, for a menace lurked inside which might destroy him if he lingered too long. He knew now that in order to continue his existence he had to stay out in the sandstorm due to some unknown circumstance of his creation. By the storm had he

been created, and by the storm would he live.

Outside in the storm, he began to walk once more. Aimless he was now as he left the small village behind. Soon he was once more out of sight of everything but sand and wind and desert. He was out in his native element.

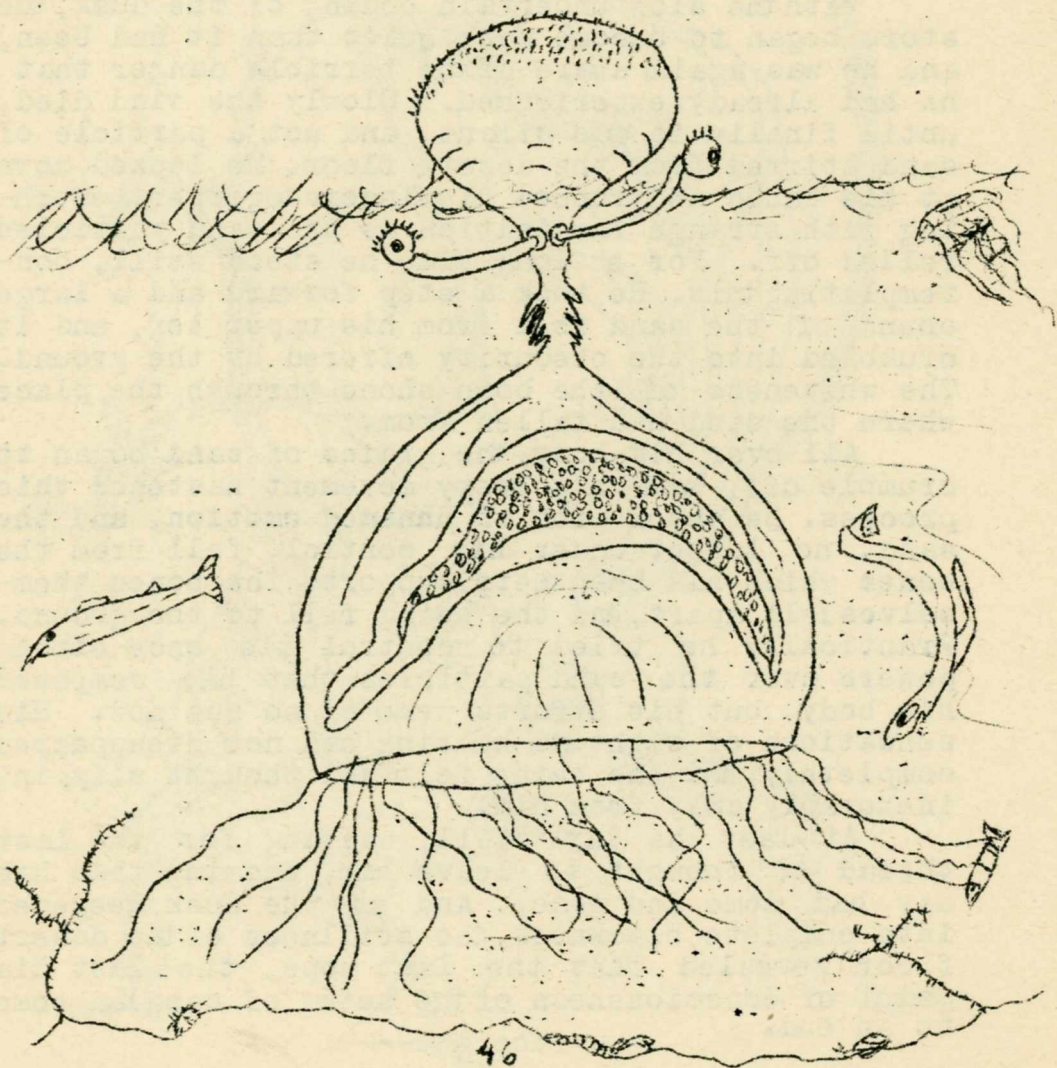
The rest of the day he walked, never tiring, never stopping, never slowing, never changing his direction.

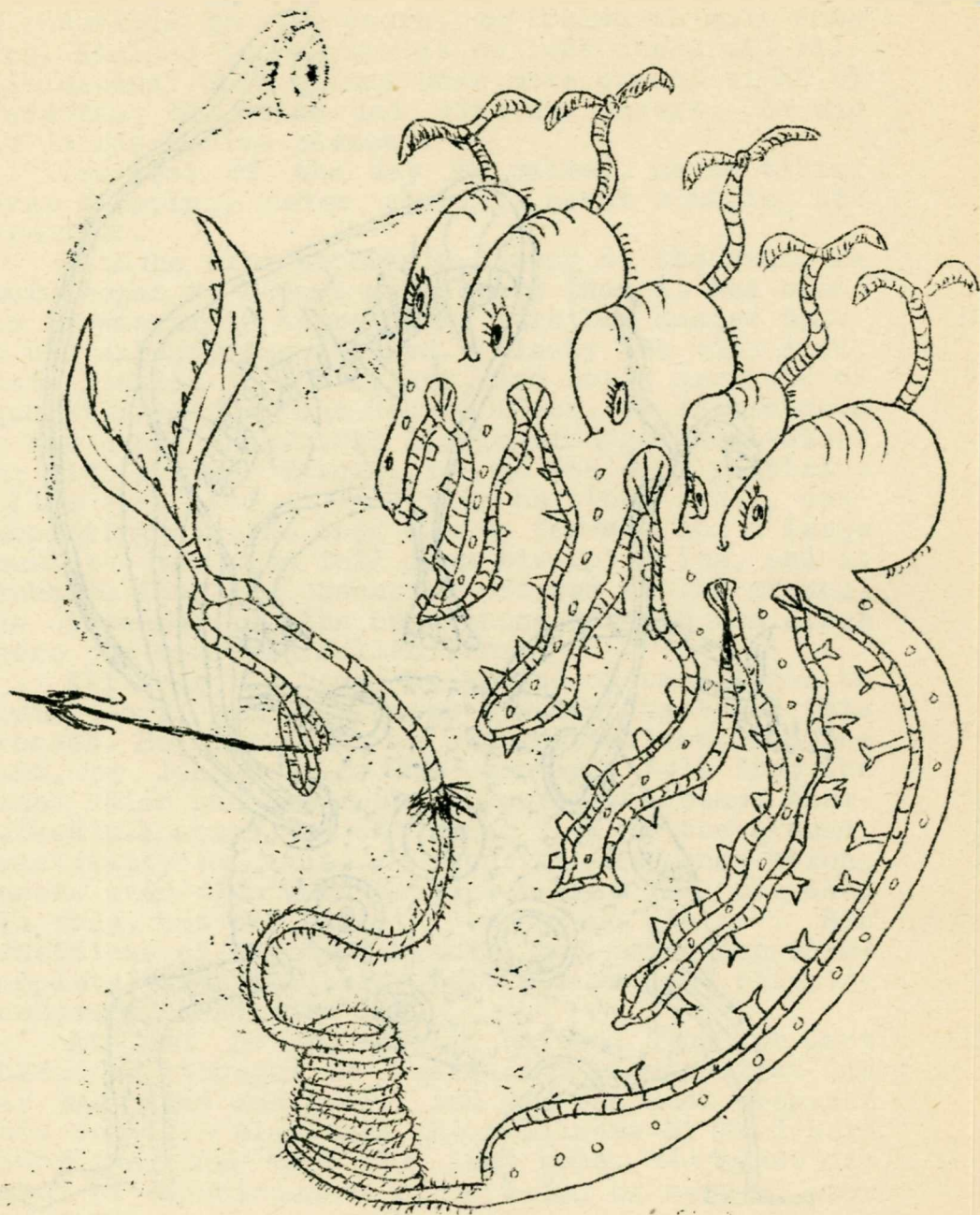
With the slow uncertain coming of the dusk, the storm began to become more quiet than it had been, and he was again aware of the terrible danger that he had already experienced. Slowly the wind died, until finally it was silent, and not a particle of sand stirred from the desert floor. He looked down at his hands and rubbed his fingers together, watching with strange fascination as the sand particles rolled off. For a long time he stood still, contemplating this. He took a step forward and a large chunk of the sand fell from his upper leg, and it crumbled into the obscurity offered by the ground. The whiteness of the bone shone through the place where the sand had fallen from.

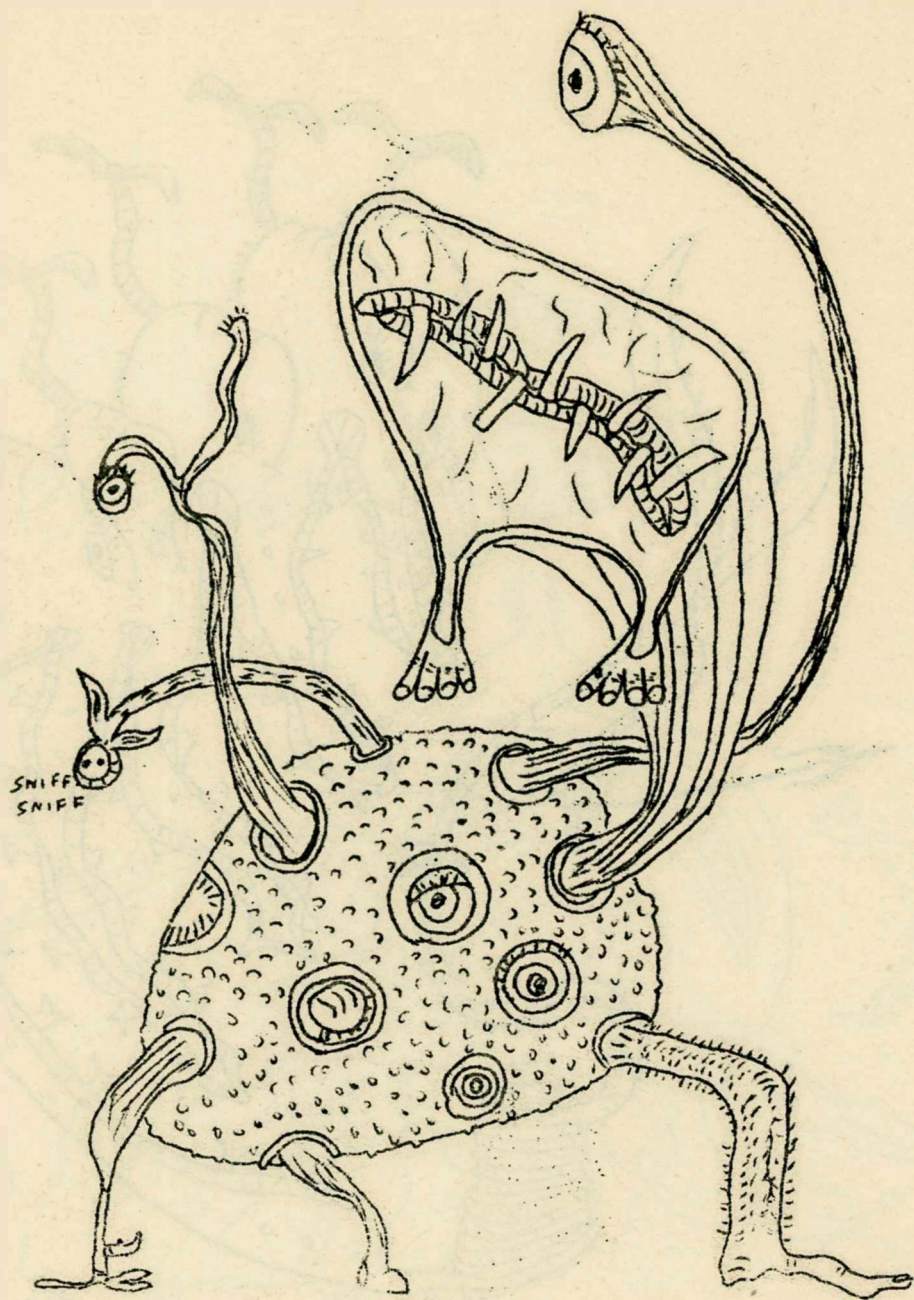
All over his body, the grains of sand began to crumble off, and his every movement hastened this process. He shook with an unnamed emotion, and the sand, no longer under his control, fell from the bones which had been their support. The bones themselves fell apart, and the being fell to the ground. Frantically he tried to control his once strong powers over the sand particles that had composed his body, but his efforts were of no use now. His sensations of sight and hearing had now disappeared completely, and the being felt all thought slipping inexorably away from him.

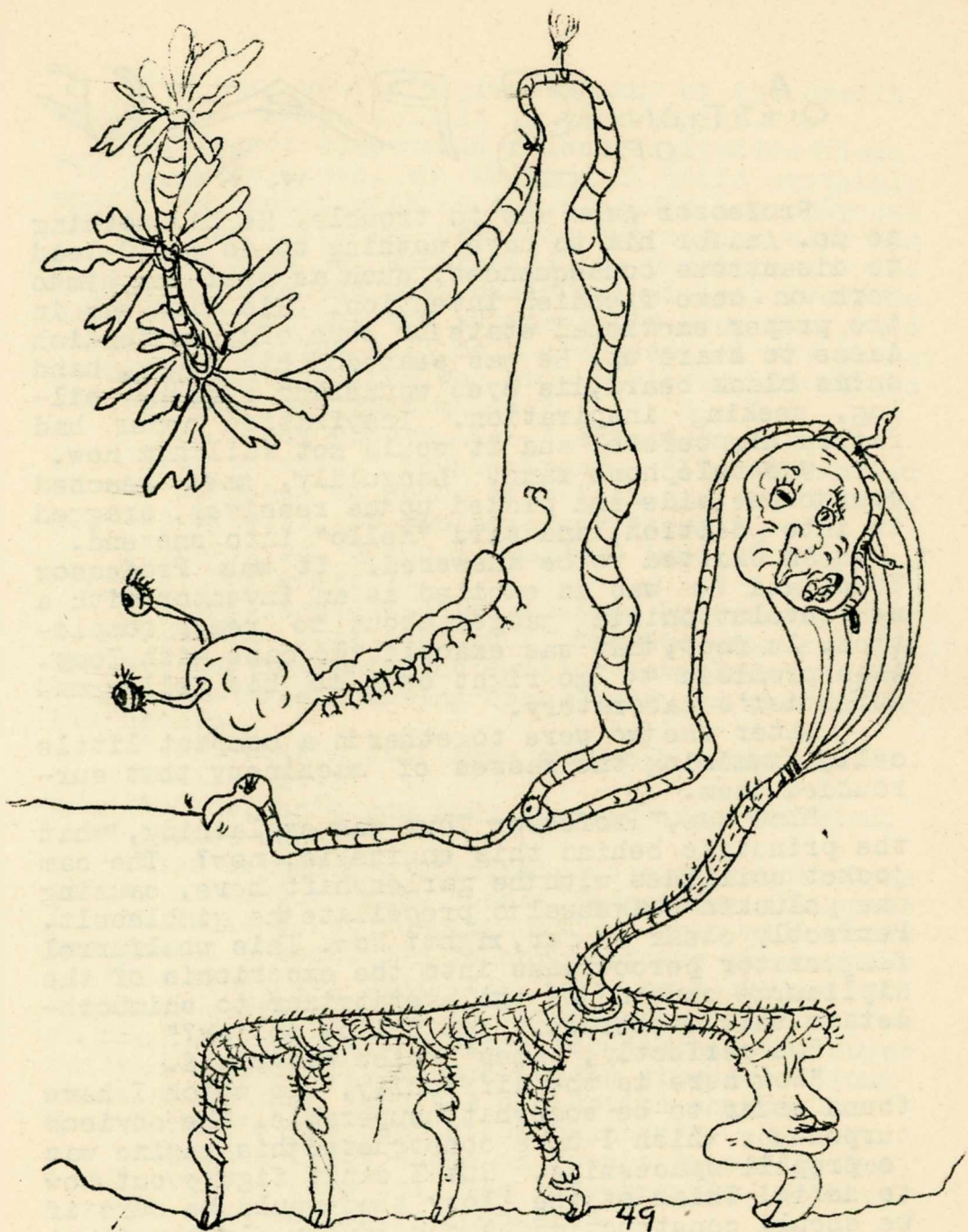
At last he lay still, waiting for the last thread of thought to leave him, knowing that his day had come and gone. And as the dusk deepened into complete blackness, the stillness of the desert floor revealed that the last hope, the last dim point of consciousness of the being of sand had come to an end.

---the end---









A QUESTION OF SPACE

OF

By
W. KRAUS

Professor Ames was in trouble. He had nothing to do. And for him to have nothing to do could lead to disastrous consequences, such as starting him to work on some fiendish invention. His mind was in the proper emotional state for some of these fiendish ideas to start up. He was seated in his study, hand on his black beard, his eyes wandering over the ceiling, seeking inspiration. Inspiration never had failed him before, and it would not fail him now.

The telephone rang. Languidly, Ames reached over to one side and picked up the receiver, dragged it into position, and said "Hello" into one end.

An excited voice answered. It was Professor Toup, and he was as excited as an inventor with a new revolutionizing gadget about to reach completion. In fact, that was exactly the case with Toup. Ames promised to go right over to his fellow mad scientist's laboratory.

Later the two were together in a compact little cell, examining the masses of machinery that surrounded them.

"You see," Professor Toup was explaining, "what the principle behind this engine is, now? The cam jacket coillides with the garlonshaft here, causing the phluskin swagwheel to propellate the gimblebelt. Perfectly clear so far, right? Now. This whalfurrel flaggerator percotrades into the excoriosis of the diplinurge causing the thalameratrixor to shimborb-letate this vishordle. You follow so far?"

"Oh perfectly," Ames' voice was bland.

"Now here is the difficulty, one which I have found so far to be somewhat insuperable. The obvious purpose for which I have constructed this engine was to propell spaceships. But I can't figure out how to do it. Think of the glory that would be ours if we should construct and successfully fly the first ship into space!"

"Oh you wouldn't give me any of the credit, would you? After all, it is your engine."

Professor Toup looked reassuringly at his friend. "To tell the truth, my friend, I could certainly share the credit with no one else, for not only can no one else solve my problem, but no one else has even been able to understand the workings of the engine, or even its most basic principles. Everyone else tells me that the engine won't even work, and what's worse, they call me a crackpot! I say phooey to the common populace who are unable to understand the workings of great minds."

"And I say phooey also," chimed in Ames.

"But to work," Toup chirped. "I'm so excited at the prospect of space travel that I can barely contain myself. Do you have any ideas?"

"Space, ah space," chanted Ames, "ah space, where is thy secret?"

"My sentiments exactly," rejoined Professor Toup.

For the next half hour, the two examined the engine, Toup explaining the smaller details in greater length, and Ames chanting "space" over and over under his breath.

"Hey, that's it!" Ames suddenly exclaimed.

"What's it?"

"Space, don't you see, space!" Ames shrieked.

"Space what?"

Ames calmed down somewhat, but excitement shone in his bloodshot eyes. "Look! We increase the space in the fiddashocket compartment, and this will cause the gambol sprocketjam to corusklitate the hample-quaffle slugwheel into the left rear rocket jam handling gear, causing in turn the deportmentation of the fuel, radouranoplutoniatic dissolved in super refined buttermilk, through the top jimwheel sprong-shaft valve and into the combustion chamber. ---- Hmmm, where's the combustion chamber?"

A sudden light shone on Toup's face. "By God, I believe you have it! The only trouble is that I haven't any combustion chamber!"

"Well, we can postulate one for the present and attach it later. Now to continue ---"

Ames continued talking for the next hour and a half, explaining the details of his plan, Toup now and then nodding his head in agreement. There was an ever growing hope shining in the eyes of both.

When Ames was finally finished, he and Toup stood long with their arms around each other, each envisioning the great glory which would be man's once he had conquered space.

Months of construction followed, and the two professors watched as their life savings departed down the pockets of the various contractors who came to work on the spaceship. Scientists came now and then to scoff at them, but Ames and Toup heeded them not. They would look at the scoffers with a smug expression on their faces and think of the day when all of those stupid people would be forced to eat their words.

At last the great ship was finished. It was in the shape of a cube twenty feet along each dimension. The date was set for the takeoff, and the two spent the intervening time in preparation for their great journey. They offered to take anyone else who cared to accompany them, but for some reason, no one seemed to put that much faith in the invention. By the time of the takeoff, however, their project had achieved enough notoriety to collect a considerable crowd of onlookers. Policemen tried to warn them to keep clear in case of an explosion, but few people would even give the scientists credit for being able to produce an explosion.

The great moment arrived, and Ames and Toup exchanged a last handshake, and then Toup reached over to pull the lever which would activate the engines.

To the onlookers on the outside, a strange sight was presented. There was a puff of smoke, and after the smoke cleared away, the giant cube was gone. Complete astonishment swept the populace, and for a while it was thought that perhaps the thing had worked after all. But then they saw the hole in the ground where the ship had stood.

It was a square hole.