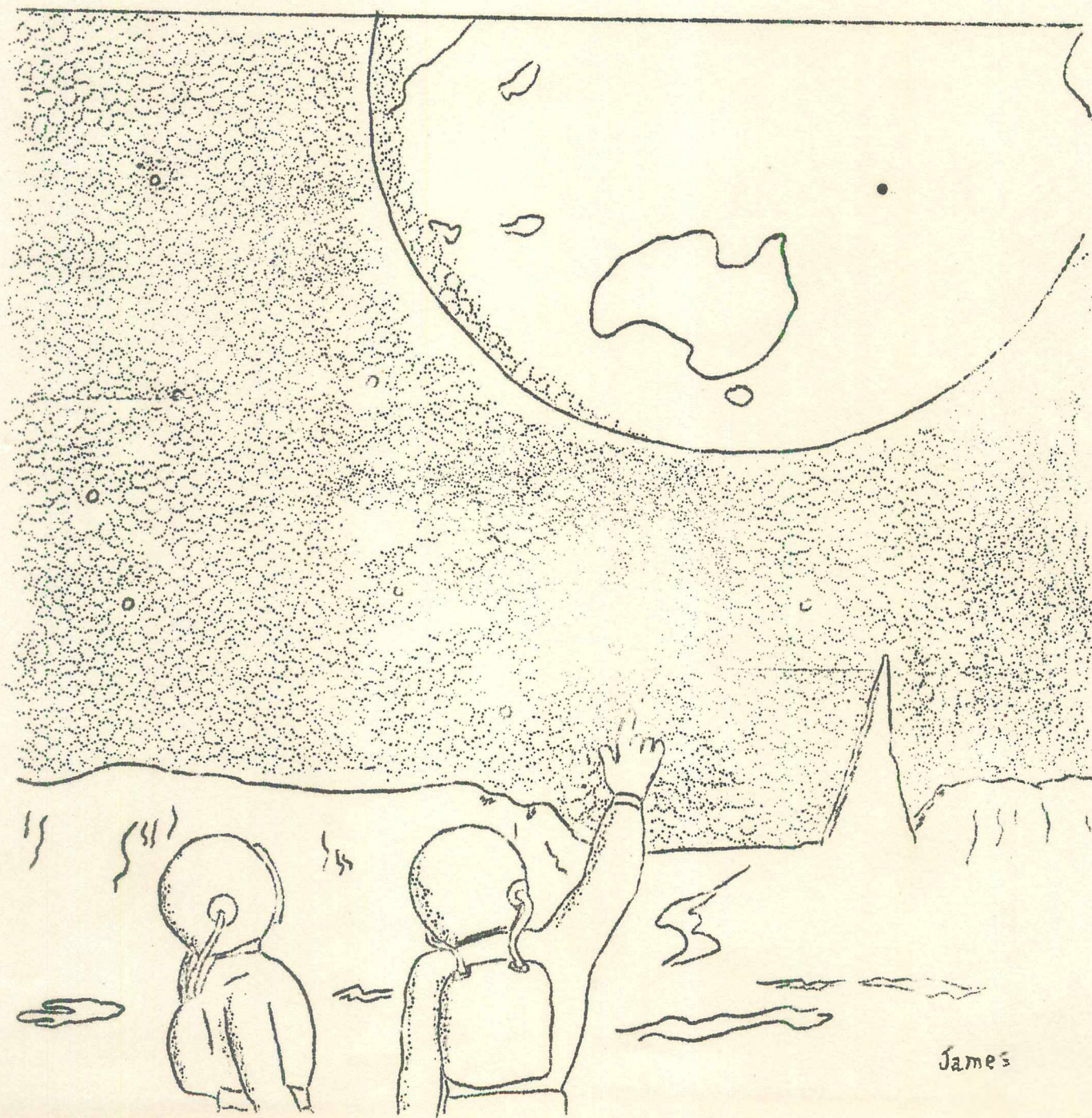


# MUTANT

JUNE

1949



James







As this is being written, we are informed the April issue of Mutant has just hit the mail. We sincerely hope you will be reading these words within a month of the time you received the April issue.

Last issue we said we planned to catch up to schedule "if the Gremlins stay out of our hair". They didn't. Not only were the normal impediments to fanfiction activity placed in our path, but to top it all off we caught the flu! As a result we're about a month behind on our new schedule.

We'll have a few surprises in store for you on future issues if things work out as planned. We're not going to give you any hints at present, however, until we're really sure we can pull them off. But keep your eyes on the mailbox!

We think we have a fairly good line-up of material in this issue. Ashfield, Nelson, Ed Cox, Mortimer, Baldwin, Appelman and Dinwiddie. Oh yes, and us too. Don't look too hard at that cover, though. The reason such a horror was perpetrated on you folks was because we had nothing on hand that even resembled a cover drawing. You can heave a hearty sigh of relief right now, however; for next issue we have a beautiful piece of artwork by Rick Sneary. Very decorative. If only that gal could step right out of the picture...

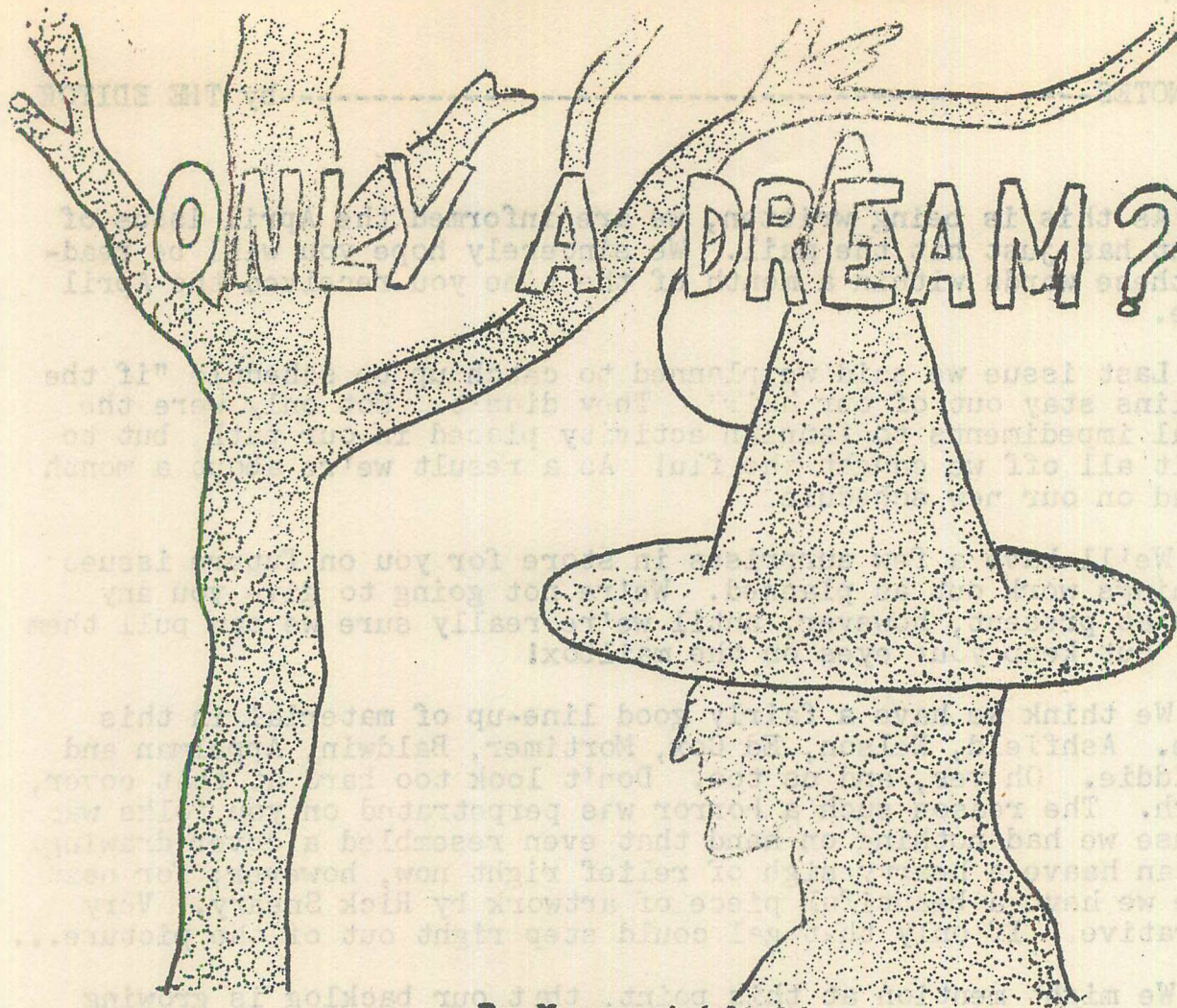
We might mention at this point, that our backlog is growing mighty slim. One more issue will just about clean it out. So come on, folks, send us something. We'll treat you right. Anything we can't use will be returned to you in good shape at our expense, or, if you prefer, mailed to the NFFF Manuscript Bureau.

For next issue we have--to be seen--"Medea" reviewed by H. S. Weatherby--and wait'll you see the illustration Ray Nelson drew for this! It's terrific! Oh, yes, and "Byron's Blackout" by Arthur H. Rapp. Rapp is always good, as you probably know without our telling you. We're hoping he'll break down and write us one of his famous Morgan Botts yarns one of these days. How about it, Art? But to get back to the subject, in the fiction line we'll have "Conked by the Condor" by Raymond L. Clancy, "Mutant" (no relation to the magazine by the same name) by Bill Groover, "A Matter of Knowledge" by Bill Warren, and perchance a tale by Jim Harmon. Also miscellaneous other material.

There is no letter department in this issue, just as there was none in last issue, due to a lack of letters. Come on, chums, surely you can find something in the magazine to write in about! Put your deathless words down on paper so we can print 'em. Write, even if only to call us names. How are we going to give you the kind of material you want if you don't let us know what you want?

Now go ahead and read the rest of this issue and let us know whether you liked or disliked it. See you next time.





By Norman Ashfield

Jack Southerton lived on the outskirts of London in a typical dormitory area of houses built in the past twenty years. There was nothing outre about his way of life; he was a normal suburbanite, traveling to the city each day to work and filling his evenings by gardening, listening to the radio, playing tennis, and attending occasional bridge parties.

One night after he had had a tiring day, Jack felt that he would sleep like a log, but he hadn't long put his head to the pillow when he woke up with a start and found himself in the middle of a dark wood. The night was clear and the pale moonlight made the scene an eerie one. The trees seemed to be imbued with life -- alien life. He could hear strange bird sounds from afar; in his youth Jack had been a half-hearted rambler, but he had never heard such unearthly sounds as these. Occasionally a light breeze stirred the bare branches of the trees and the sound set his nerves on edge. The slowly swaying tops of the trees seemed like fingers pointing to Heaven, but in such a way that they conveyed animosity and hatred. The whole wood was in an evil mood, and as he grew more aware of his surroundings, a fear took hold of him....

As Jack watched, the trees seemed to close in on him, leaving only one way open to him. Very fearful and not of his own volition, he moved along the path and gradually approached what seemed to be the centre of attraction. The sense of evil grew as he came nearer



and he felt more and more the presence of unearthly things. Through the trees Jack could see a dim light, and as he came to the edge of a clearing, he could distinguish a dull fire burning under a cauldron.

The smell of the cauldron was what first impressed him, and it seemed to evoke some phrases from a Shakespeare play: "Fillet of a fenny snake, in the cauldron boil and bake; eye of newt and toe of dog..." He couldn't quite get the context, but he remembered learning it at school -- "Macbeth", that was the play. But what was the connection? Oh well, he'd remember later....

Awareness of the meaning of the scene came upon him as he saw many black-dressed figures with queerly pointed hats standing about the fire. Many of them had black cats on their shoulders and several goats were amongst the crowd. They must be witches, Jack felt, and he grew more fearful, but although he wanted to run away something stronger than himself kept him there. As he watched he could hear a low murmuring, of which he could distinguish only a few words: "Baal", "Beezelbub", and "He Who will Come". He felt that something was in the air all around him, something evil.

AT ONE SIDE of the clearing there was a flat stone, in front of which was standing a particularly tall witch who seemed to be conducting a service. Creeping nearer, Jack could distinguish speech; but it was once again ununderstandable and seemed to be in an alien tongue. He listened with fearful heart for the sense of overbearing evil was all around him. Several times he heard something that harked back to the days of his youth when he had surreptitiously read something about the black arts. "Mena reved nar ever of yrolg..." As he pondered, memory returned with spine-chilling clarity. It was the Lord's Prayer said backwards -- part of the Black Mass.

At last some of the compelling power seemed to leave him and he exclaimed: "A witches' Sabbath!" Immediately he regretted his outburst, for the denizens of the clearing all dropped their occupations and turned towards the intruder with evident evil intent. Turning, Jack tried to flee; but it seemed the very forest was against him. He could feel the presence of misbegotten spawn of alien space. He was trapped and knew not which way to turn.

The witches gradually came towards him, their stick-like arms outstretched to grasp him, their toothless gums moving in anticipation, their feline familiars screeching and standing up on their hosts' shoulders with clawing forelegs outspread, while even the goats seemed to be full of hatred for the intruder.

As the ungodly crew advanced Jack felt other pressures, not material but of greater spiritual danger, increasing and moving upon him from the rear. The elementals of the forest, the spirits called up by the witches, the hellish brood of inter-space were preparing to battle with the witches for possession of the interloper.

Automatically Jack crossed himself and said some half-remembered prayers of his childhood, but it seemed he was too late. The witches and their familiars crowded upon him to tear him physically, whilst the spiritual forces of evil tried to swamp his soul with loathsome, foul, unmentionable thoughts. They were on him, and



screaming, he clutched at one outstretched arm, intent to defend himself in what seemed such an unequal battle. He fell down under the assault and -- with a terrific bump woke up to find himself on his bedroom floor, having fallen out of bed. His heart was beating rapidly and he was perspiring freely. Struggling out of the bedclothes in which he was entangled, he switched on the light, but it was several hours later, and only after taking a sedative, that he was able to get to sleep again. Needless to say the electric light was left on.

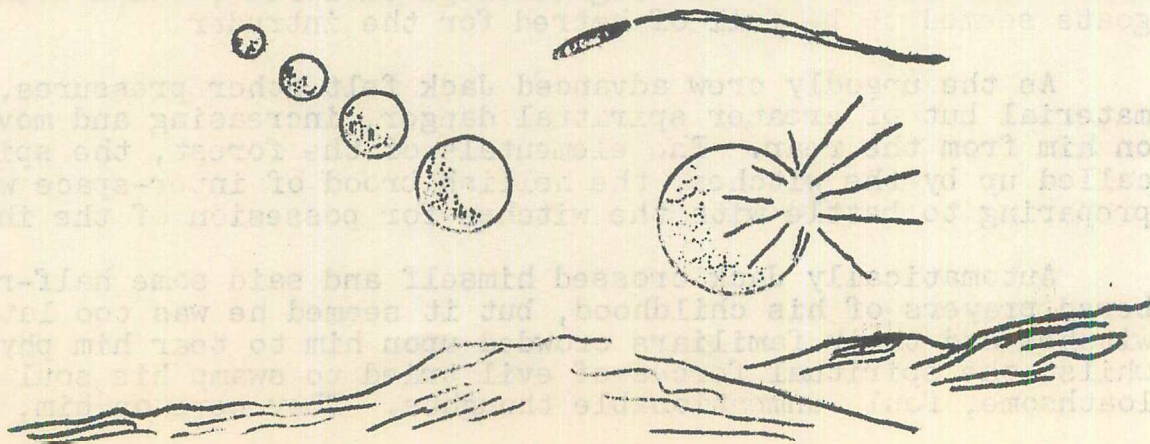
THE HORROR of his night's experience weighed so heavily on him the next day that Jack felt too unwell to go to the city, and later in the day he called upon a friend of his, a Doctor Allcott, and told him the story. Allcott was a student of the local history of the town and was regarded as something of an expert by his fellow townsmen. The story seemed to strike a chord in his memory, and going to his files of local history, he made a short search and produced an extract from an old book dated 1605, titled "An Accounte Of Certayne Trialls Of Witches And Soothsayers In The Countie Of Kente".

The account contained a reference to a witch trial in 1567, when a certain Mother Smythe had been burnt at the stake after having been denounced as a witch; it was stated that she had been surprised at a Witches Sabbath on Walpurgis Night. It was alleged that she had conducted many such sabbaths, and that the place of the meetings was usually in an "Olde Spinney" near Hetheringsham, the name of the town where Jack lived. The doctor pointed out that Jack lived in Olde Spinney Road, so it seemed clear that his house was in the area in question. The night before had been Walpurgis Night, and in view of Jack's dream, they both agreed that it seemed probable that his house was built on the actual site. The evil power of the sabbaths must have been extremely strong to have persisted over several centuries, and his friend advised him to sleep away from home on such nights in future.

Jack fervently agreed and his spirit was rather easier when he returned home. But one thing he had failed to tell his friend, and the question still worried him:

Whence had come the piece of black material he had found clenched in his hand when he awoke from his dream?

THE END





NFFF  
MSS.  
BUREAU

## HOMO SAPIEN: MATHEMATICAL IMPOSSIBILITY

By Evan H. Appelman

As the overlong reign of the dinosaurs drew to its close a strange new creature first made its appearance on the earth. Heaven only knows what it looked like, but in all probability it must have had a pretty hard time of it, with titanic creatures ten or more times its size wandering around. Under these conditions it was only natural that it should develop natural defenses and, over a period of time, into another type of creature that was better suited to fend for itself in a hostile world than its predecessor had been. The present-day armadillo of South America is a relic of this type of animal.

However, while the mammals were mutation and improving their various speci, the dinosaurs were doing the exact opposite and were rapidly succumbing to their own ponderousness. And then, in some unknown prehistoric era, the last dinosaur's carcass thudded to the earth and mammalia came into its own.

It was quite a while before our earliest forebears developed into anything at all recognizable to us, but in the end they did. There finally came into being a not too weird looking creature that was the remote ancestor of the ape and monkeys -- and us.

For dozens of generations this being continued to improve itself, resulting in the present day monkey family which is fairly capable of taking care of itself.

But somewhere along the line there was a slip. Somewhere there was a retrograde offshot that should never have come into existence in the first place, and if it did it should never have endured as long as it has. For that offshoot was primitive man.

At first there was nothing unusual about the new species, for early man was a strong brute who seemed to be an improvement over his predecessor. But then something went haywire. Instead of improving physically, man began to gradually lose those potent weapons which a kind and considerate nature had bestowed upon his kind.

Look at man today. Admit that physically he is the most helpless animal in existence of all those anywhere near his size. Where are the sharp teeth and claws, and the tremendous arm strength which have distinguished his forebears and his contemporaries of the ape family? They are hopelessly lost.

Instead, man has been given a strange, abstract power with which nature has striven to correct her error in creating mankind. That power, something which has been granted to no other animal, is the power to reason.

AS MAN RETROGRADED and lost, one by one, his natural means of defense, nature gave him the power to reason. As a result man did not die out, as by rights he should have; but he continued to live and develop his new power to the extent that you see today.



The very fact that there is, as far as we can tell, only one reasoning species of animal on the earth today, shows that an intelligent being is quite a rare specimen. The chances are that no other will be found in our solar system, although it is fairly possible that, in the vast expanses of the galaxy, there could be several other reasoning speci.

But in spite of his power to reason, man has inherited from his stronger ancestors a characteristic of animalistic savagery which makes him at times little more than an intelligent beast. This characteristic has been responsible for all the wars engaged in by man since the beginning of civilization. Had it not been for the counteracting force of man's extraordinary intelligence, it is doubtful if we would exist today.

But our intelligence is also a disadvantage in wars; for while lower animals and savage man can fight and perhaps kill each other, the damage would seldom be other than individual and would not cover any great area. However civilized man, first with slings and bows, then with gunpowder, and now with atomic energy, has spread this danger zone until it covers the entire globe.

At this moment man, the most spectacular freak that has ever existed (for it is obvious that he is a freak), is facing the most severe test that he has ever been up against in his entire history. Should a Third World War break out, man would no doubt be eliminated from the face of the earth. And he would not be missed. Why should a break in the smooth, normal run of things be missed when it has been removed?

Man was a mistake. Nature has tried to correct that mistake by giving him the power to reason that he needed to survive. But it may be that this power is too much for man to handle; for after all he is still only an animal, just as a monkey in a formal dinner suit is still a monkey. Perhaps nature's endeavors have only prolonged the end for mankind. Or worse, perhaps it will backfire altogether and man will take with him when he goes all of the life on the planet, destroying all living things in toto.

Man is now about to pit his intelligence against his natural savagery, and only time will tell the outcome.

THE END

Some years ago the wife of a local storekeeper asked me what this club I belonged to was and what those books I read were about. I tried to explain fans and collectors and started to describe science-fiction, using typical s-f plots as examples. When I finished there was a hushed pause and then she quavered, "Geel! You mean--you're one of them that believes in planets--and evolution, and atoms, and stuff?"

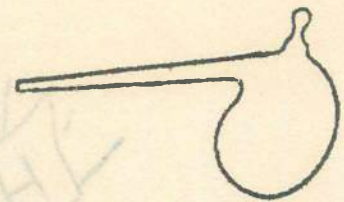
---MARTIN E. ALGER





## L I F E C Y C L E

By Rad Nelson



Boris Fatch, the synthetics baron, carefully placed his massive end on the couch and settled slowly into its softness. He grasped a knife and fork in his pudgy paws and dug eagerly into the thick, juicy steak on the low table before him.

"Synthetic steak," he mumbled thru this cud. "Why I'll bet the real ones they had in the old days weren't as good as this."

The door chimes toned softly.

"Come in!" thundered Mister Fatch. The door panel slid silently open to admit two of the lab men from the steak factory. They looked worried.

"Sid'down, boys. Sample some of your product." Fatch waved a hunk of meat at them.

"No thanks, Mister Fatch," said the first lab man. "There's some trouble down at the plant."

Fatch grunted.

"That's right, sir," said the second man. "We're not turning out enough to fill the consumers' demands. I'm afraid we may have to take desparate measures. As the world's only remainigg meat producers, we sort of get put on the spot when something like this happens."

"It does you good to be put on the spot," said Fatch. "You never would have invented the synthetic steak if you hadn't been put on the spot. Remember how that happened? Back around 1950 the medicos cooked up a type of sonic ray that killed all bacteria. It was so cheap and easy to make that by 1951 everybody was using it to ungerm everything, and by 1958 there just weren't any germs left. Everybody was happy until they saw that dead things didn't rot anymore; they just sat there and did nobody any good. Pretty soon the plants began to die too, because nothing was rotting to supply them with food. That's when my father made his pile by starting as a poor mortician and working up to Founder of the World Clearance Company, the world's greatest and only funeral parlor!

"About the time father died the world's animals began to die, too, because there weren't any more plants for them to eak. This was a major catastrophe to all the people, for when the plants stopped growing they had all become meat eaters; and now when the meat, too, was vanishing, they literally didn't know where their next meal was coming from."

Boris Fatch swallowed his cud and took another bite.

"Then," he continued, "I took you boys out of the World Clearance Company's lab and put you in charge of the world's most important project: the invention of a synthetic substitute for food. I backed you with every cent of my fortune and promised you a lifetime

(Continued on Page 11)





Wilfred Timkin's family sat in a quiet group around the television, not looking at the screen but just listening to the sound. For they, like the hundreds of millions of other people on the earth, could not stomach the sight of what was in the screen. And they could just tolerate the "voice".

They, like the rest, still hadn't come out of the dull, shocked condition which they had been thrown into during the last few days. It had come so suddenly; so devastatingly. So irrevocably.

"....the planet Earth to the vast galactic empire of Thool N'ylr Koom of Glanerpool (Antares)," said the "voice" on the television. "Your world is but one of many to come under the benevolent and beneficial rule of Thool N'ylr Koom, the most High and Greatest Ruler of the Empire of Glanerpool. We of...."

We didn't stand a chance. Nothing we had did. It happened so suddenly anyway, and atomic bombs were no good against the tremendously swift fighting ships they have. Our jets were like leaves trembling in the wake of a great wind. Our nations just didn't....

"....culture is seriously hindered by your utterly silly and needless wars; therefore we, after considering and debating for many of your decades, decided to take you into our beneficial Empire. We had to show you our invincible power to convince you of the futility of resisting, for it would only be foolish to resist the hand that will help you advance to...."

And then we were herded into our homes while all resistance was brutally and bloodily wiped out. Ground out like a cigarette butt. Then we were all taken into their laboratories and given tests, and had our brains cleaned out of thoughts of rebellion. So no underground could form. Their organization sprang up in a network all over the world so soon that they had everything under control and smoothly running in two days. They did away with excess and backwardness. What they did to the natives of Africa and South America was....

"....a united world government advised by officials who are specially trained in helping new governments grow strong and wisely. Your industries shall benefit from our new system of world trade without the binding and restricting tariffs, taxes and other impediments heretofore exercised by individual nations. There will be no need of such things under our wise and benevolent...."

....SO NOW WE don't dare make a wrong move because they have our brain patterns all recorded. In each city and town they have their hellish machines that can make a man drop dead in his tracks



if certain indications are registered on the main boards that show rebellion and subversive thoughts. They press a button....

"....we do not wish to change your religions and beliefs, nor your customs. Not entirely. But some things must go which should have been dispensed with centuries ago. Those you shall know soon when we begin instruction in the new social system and order of things. Broadcasts later will start the complex machinery going and each of you will live a new and refreshing and useful life, which will be beneficial both to you and to the Empire of Glanerool. And though we dislike it immensely, we must be certain that no human will go astray from the new path which we...."

And we were all happy at Christmas. Even if the world situation wasn't so hot, we were happy in our own human way. Now here it is the last of the year, the last of an at least semi-free human race. I still can't comprehend it all yet. Nobody can. We're still in a horrible dream that will be reality when we wake up. I wish I....

"....so in accordance with our policy, I, Llyan D'yrl Zram, Representative of His Most August Highness, Thoom N'ylr Koom, to the planet Earth, wish you all a very Happy New Year."

THE END

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LIFE CYCLE (Continued from Page 9)

of leisure if you came thru."

"Your fortune?" interrupted the first lab man. "Your father's, you mean."

"With my fortune," growled Fatch, "I backed you, and you did it. When you were on the spot you invented the synthetic steak."

The two lab men laughed.

"What's so funny?" snarled Fatch.

"You think the meat we've been making is synthetic," chuckled the second lab man.

"ISN'T IT?" gasped Fatch.

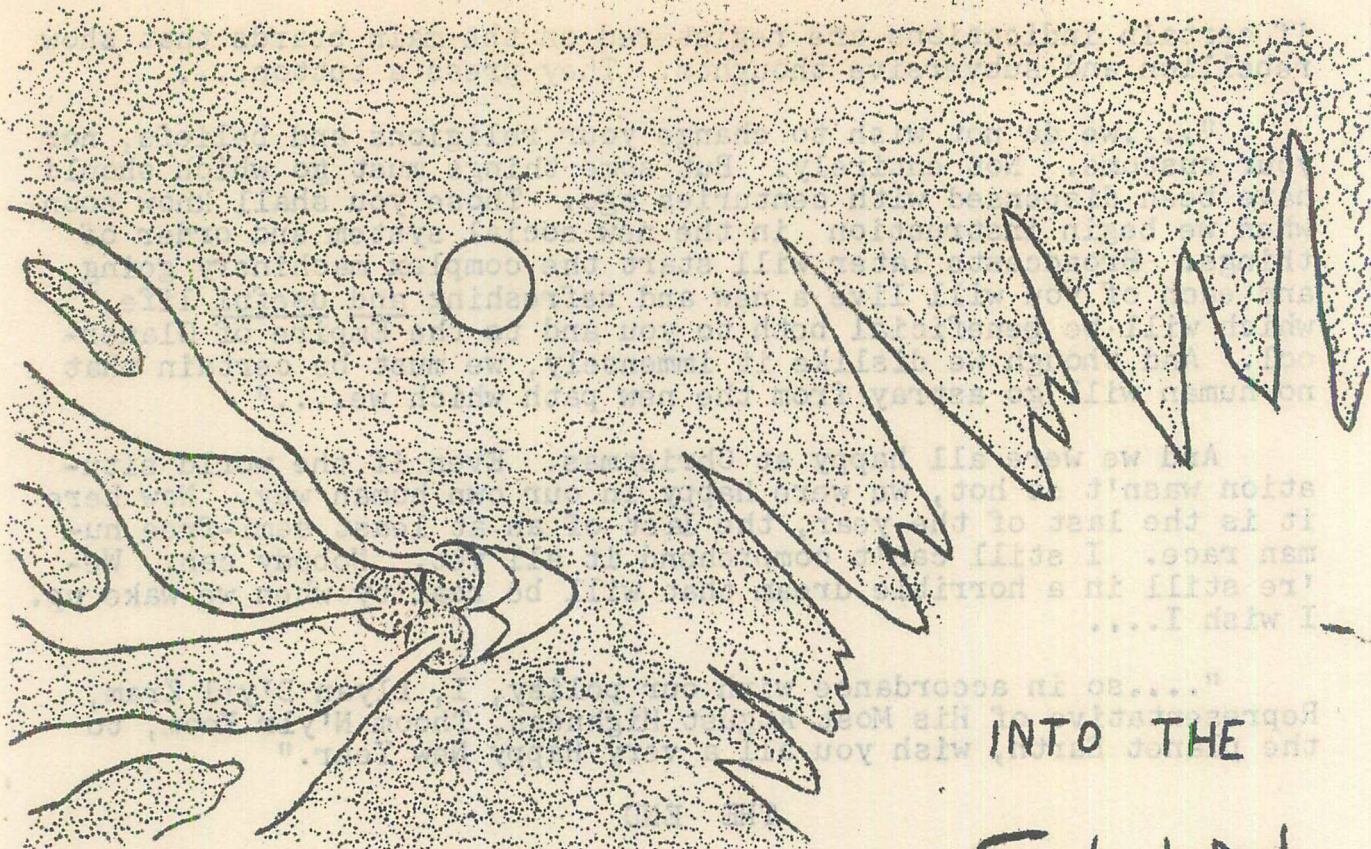
"Ha, ha," laughed the first lab man.

"Ha, ha," laughed the second lab man.

Fatch stared at them thru fear glazed eyes as they pulled out their long glistening knives and closed in on him.

THE END





INTO THE

SUN

NFFF Mss. Bureau

I haven't much time, so I must write this fast.

By Rexford F. Mortimer

This was one helluva time for a rocket tube to conk out! I sat and stared at the video screen, watching the gleaming rocket edging closer to cripple us completely or blast us into eternity.

Jack, my co-pilot and navigator on this XBR-29, was in the port engine room trying to repair the damage to the port tube. How were we to know that a little piece of space debris could lead us into so much trouble.

We were up here in space testing out a new hull design for outer space -- a hull made of the same osmium alloy that is used in the rocket tubes. The craft is a little heavy and not so easily handled, but it didn't seem to heat as much as former models in going through the Earth's atmosphere. But now the sly Kilio-vitch was out to put our craft out of commission so that he could prosper with his theft -- his theft of the rocket design that we had slaved for years to perfect.

I didn't have time for much reflection. The ship was coming at us and seemed to anticipate every move that I made. He meant to blast us out of the sky. I was hoping that Jack would be able



to do a little patching on the motor and tube as I zig-zagged right and ahead -- right and ahead -- right and ahead. It was an ever-tightening large circle. Kiliovitch knew our ship was in trouble and he was taking advantage of it. He slowly maneuvered in on the starboard side so as to blast that steering tube and have us completely at his mercy. He was going to play with us as a cat plays with a mouse before the fatal blow. He sneaked in and then I felt rather than heard a steady hum.

"Hey, Orin, what in Hades is going on out there?" Jack asked as he stuck his thatch of red hair out of the engine room opening and stared about him. From the look of fear that I saw cross his face -- a face that always seemed so immobile and emotionless -- I knew it had dawned on him what had happened. "Felt like a beta ray. Hey, hurry up and try the starboard tube. See if that works." He was up in the pit and sitting in the other chair watching the video screen with as much anxiety as I.

I flipped the switches on the starboard bank and nothing happened! I twisted up more power and still nothing happened. Then I saw the output meter registered only five kilos! Only a tenth of the power that we should have been getting from the fuel that I was pouring into the ignitor. I upped the input another thousand Geigers and then I could feel a response; it was slow and sluggish, but nevertheless it was a response.

As I looked at Jack and he looked at me, there seemed to be a mutual feeling in the unspoken remark: "God! Both steering tubes conked out! And that devil has us at his mercy." I was silently praying -- for what I don't know as it looked so futile -- when Jack yelled:

"My God, Orin, look! What is that damn fool trying to do?"

AS I LOOKED into the video screen Kiliovitch's rocket was coming into our forward segment. Right into a ray-gunner's dream -- where he could train the dis ray on him with little effort and blast him to Kingdom Come. Jack was at the dis gun before I could collect my thoughts. There was a blur of whirling white light as the radar screen came into focus. The slowness with which Kiliovitch was coming into range was sheer agony. He must have been hoping to sneak into position and annihilate us with a stern blast on the nose of our ship. That would really fix us! It was foolhardy and we couldn't figure out what he had in mind to try such suicide tactics. But we weren't asking questions; we were just waiting.

The nose of his ship touched the cross-hairs on the radar screen. It was terrifying how slowly he edged into the segment. Then before I had a chance to take a second look into the video screen to see what he was doing, I felt a shudder in our ship. I dreaded to look around; but when I heard Jack's cynical chuckle I knew it was all over and he had scored a direct hit. Knowing Jack as I did, that chuckle spoke of beating an opponent at his own game and winning out over Death.

Sure enough! The video-screen showed that he had hit the atomic fuel tank on the craft and had blasted it into another bit of metallic space debris.



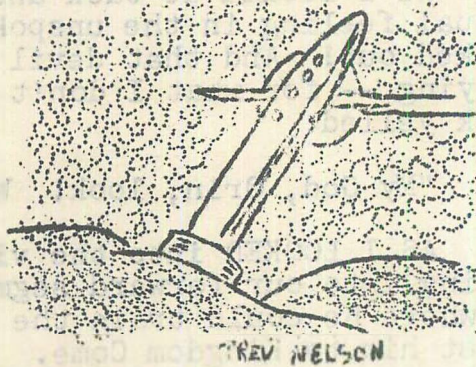
d Jack sighed with relief; to him the terror was over. Kilio-  
vitch had been asking for what he got! But what was to happen to  
us? We were helpless and couldn't turn back to Terra. If we could  
only see the Tellurian cloud bank again!

Those were questions that would have to wait until I could get  
some sleep. I had been at the control board for a solid thirty  
hours while Jack was getting some shut-eye. It must have been dur-  
ing that time that the motors had lulled me to sleep, because I  
hadn't seen the warning lights which indicated that we were in a  
danger zone of space debris. The sudden jolt of being hit by some-  
thing was what had awakened me. And so our port tube got conked  
out. But that wasn't enough; Kiliovitch -- who else could it have  
been? -- came gliding in with a rocket that was the exact duplicate  
of ours. But now I had to get some sleep.

"Hey, Jack," I said, "sit here at the controls for a while so  
that I can grab me some shut-eye." If I had had any premonition  
as to what was to happen next, I wouldn't have left the pit to go  
lie down on my bunk. But then what else could possibly happen to  
us! Yes, what else!

HOW LONG I had been sleeping I don't know, but what warned me  
of danger was that I was getting warm -- unusually warm. I glanced  
at the little thermometer on the wall over my bunk -- it registered  
one hundred and thirteen! I didn't stop to ponder why, but plunged  
into the pit to see what was hap-  
pening.

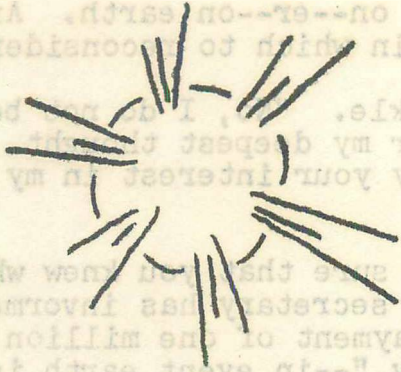
Jack was flopped over the  
control panel; the heat in the  
control room was getting opres-  
sive. I looked at the video  
screen which was still on and it  
showed just a big blaze of light.  
It looked like the sun, but that  
couldn't be! But there under  
Jack's hand was a little slip of  
paper to prove just that! He had been charting our course; a course  
of destruction! We were drifting into the sun! Somehow we had  
slipped into a negative space-warp and were fast being attracted to  
the sun.



The temperature is climbing now inside. The thermometer at-  
tached to the outside of the hull registers 2000 degrees and is  
steadily climbing...I don't know how long I will be able to write  
this, but I must...must tell the world what happened to us...I am  
getting so weak now...it seems that everything I touch singes my  
fingers...I am placing this in an emergency space message container  
...temperature inside is now two hundred and three...I can hardly  
breathe...must seal this in the message tube. ...If this reaches  
Earth, I was thinking of you to the last, Lois, my love....Now,  
goodbye.....We may never live through this.....The metal hull works,  
dad.....Goodbye.....just strength enough left to.....seal this  
.....and.....tosssss it out the.....emergen.....exit  
.....Your.....Or.....i.....n.

THE END





## HUMOR

by WARREN BALDWIN

Jason Harth was a shrewd man. He knew the insurance business inside-out. That was why he was what he was: chief interrogator of applicants for Thirtieth-Century Insurance, Limited. If anyone could spot a professional insurance collector, he was that person.

"Well, well, Mr. Tobor, so you have applied for a policy from our company, have you?" The booming voice could be heard even in the distant confines of the outer offices.

"That is correct, Mr. Harth," was the quiet reply. "I have been led to understand that Thirtieth-Century Insurance will insure against anything, anything at all. For a proportionate fee, naturally. That is why I have come here."

"Certainly, certainly, Mr. Tobor. You were not misled in your understanding on that point. Indeed not. However, for the protection of the company and in the best interests of our millions of policy holders, I take it you will not feel it an unwarranted waste of your valuable time if I explain to you, briefly, how our system operates."

"Not at all, Mr. Harth."

"Thank you, thank you. I am glad that you can see my position in the matter. So many applicants do not, you know. Think they know it all, and-- But I digress. I was going to explain, wasn't I? Yes. Well, you know, of course, that insurance has changed quite a bit from what it was in Terra's old days. One then could only procure policies for such inevitables as death and sickness. And at such ridiculously low rates of compensation for the beneficiary! Very rarely did the element of chance enter into those old transactions, very rarely. But science has changed all that. Now we insure anyone against--as you so aptly put it--anything, anything at all. The only string--if you care to view it in that light--attached is that our marvelously efficient proton computers can calculate the odds against the probable occurrence of any event to such a nicety, and so fix our premium rates with such accuracy, that outside of policies covering the near-inevitable happenings, we lose in fewer than one out of a million cases. Just one out of a million, sir. So you can see--" Harth lowered his voice to a confidential tone and leaned forward in his chair to emphasize his argument "--you can see why it is that we hesitated to give you the policy for which you have applied. The odds against the development of the circumstance toward which you wish to be insured are infinite, and the benefits which would accrue to you if it should



develop would make you the richest entity on--er--on earth. Are you sure you wouldn't like a little time in which to reconsider?"

Tobor startled the other with a chuckle. "No, I do not believe so. I have already given the matter my deepest thought. And I realize your intentions were prompted by your interest in my welfare, but if you will...."

"Very well. I merely wished to make sure that you knew what you were about. Here is your policy. My secretary has informed me that you have made the first premium payment of one million dollars and in event--" this sarcastically "--in event earth is totally destroyed before the next is due, you will receive one hundred billion dollars. Good day."

AFTER LEAVING the TCI Building, Tobor rented a robocab from a dealer's lot down the street and hurriedly flew to a remote wooded section fifty miles from the city. As he stepped from the cab at his destination, he was hailed loudly by a figure standing along the outer fringe of trees through which a sivery-white missile-shaped object could be seen towering into the air.

"Hurry, Xanthar! You've delayed our blast-off time by seven minutes already! Ray that warped sense of humor of yours! Why, if that insurance interrogator had been even half intelligent he might have guessed...."

THE END

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### COBRA SONG

by Isabelle E. Dinwiddie

Pipe!

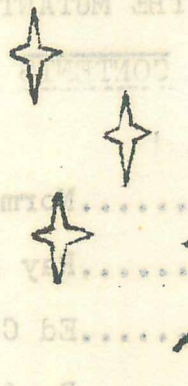
The fakir pipes a mytic tune  
Based on an Eastern scale.  
Weird and death-compelling,  
With your basket placed before him  
While the dark spirits  
Stand near.

Sway!

Sway that evil inflating head,  
Flick out that slitted tongue,  
Fix your dull, unblinking eyes  
On your master's pipe.  
Uncoil and rise and sway  
To honor your god  
Shaitan!



# MERRY CHRISTMAS



FROM  
THE  
MICHIGAN  
SCIENCE-FANTASY  
SOCIETY

ALSO: HAPPY NEW YEAR

Annim  
17



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