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The Original

SCIENCE FICTION

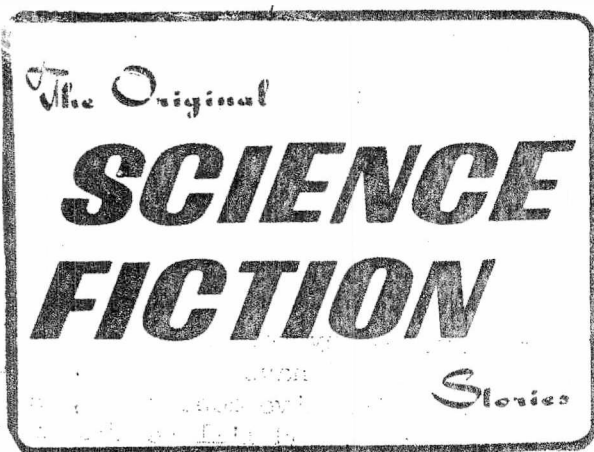
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EDITORIAL

THIS ISSUE I'D LIKE to comment on the stories which I've selected for the first two issues of SFS, but first I've a little business to take care of.

TO THE EDITORS OF THE PAYING PROFESSIONAL MAGAZINES: I respectfully remind you that all the stories we publish are for sale. We will be happy to put you in touch with any of our authors, and will immediately release copyright to the author of any story which you might like to publish.

TO AUTHORS AND ILLUSTRATORS, both amateur and professional: Your work is earnestly solicited for publication in these pages. Amateurs are assured of sympathetic consideration. The encouragement of apprentice authors is the reason SFS is published. Professionals are invited to submit stories which they think deserve publication, but which for some reason (other than being a punk story, that is) no pro editor will accept.

TO OUR READERS: We hope you've enjoyed every story we've published, but if not, bear with us --- we'll do better. In either case, your comments and criticisms are the very lifeblood of this venture. An author is a performer; applause for his efforts to entertain you will spur him to higher accomplishment --- criticism where he fails will (hopefully) lead him to do better next time. Your collective interest in our work may well be the determining factor in building a significant part of the s-f field of the future.

And don't forget that I'm an amateur at this editing bit, too --- I'm also eligible for lumps. That's why I'd

like to give you my reasons for publishing the stories I have up to now. Tell me what you think I've done right, where I've gone wrong, and I'll be able to do a better job for our authors.

AS WITH ALL editors, of course, I can pick stories only from those submitted to me. No editor has ever seen the perfect story.

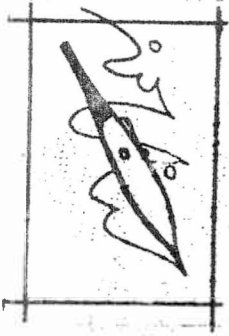
But each story I've chosen has some quality which I think entitles it to a showing, and I believe each story I've published is well above that threshold of readability and interest which makes it worth your time and effort to read.

In my opinion, "Flowers On The Moon" by Aldo Giunta, in this issue, is the best one I've picked so far. The telepathic backtalk between Landry and Cogan has a ring of authenticity about it that puts you right into the story. This one must have been submitted to the pro mags, and I would be interested to know why it was turned down. How about it, Cele, John, Fred and Avram?

"Fishfood" is science-adventure, and I believe would have clicked in the old PLANET STORIES. Its fast pace, with one dire emergency after another, and its good-taste-in-the-mouth (no pun intended) ending, makes it enjoyable reading.

Sam Moskowitz's "Outcasts Of Light" might be a throwback --- Sam says it was written about twenty years ago --- but it has an atmosphere which seems sadly lacking in today's s-f. It has that quality of exploring strange new worlds which originally drew many of us to s-f in the old days.

(Concluded on Page 33)



THE LAST WORD

Long Beach, Calif.

Now the first issue of the new SFS:

1. "Fishfood"
2. "Man Of The Multiman"
3. "The Wooing Of Umpo"

Although the writing of "Fishfood" is consistently just below professional level and the story is consistently improbable, I liked it. They don't make stories of this kind any more. I'm rather sorry they don't. "Man Of The Multiman" was more professionally written (which, note, doesn't mean I think it was necessarily more well-written) than "Fishfood", but I can't say I enjoyed it; I was on Slagger's side. John Campbell doesn't make enough distinction these days between "loner-ism" and individualism; I rather think Jack Donohue doesn't make enough distinction between "co-operative-ism" and collectivism. Still, whether I liked it or not, it was by no means a poor story, and I suspect there's just a chance it might have appeared in the old SFS. "The Wooing Of Umpo" struck me as being overly cute and generally dreadful.

The departments were excellent. Sam Moskowitz's column was exceptionally good, and I hope he'll be with you regularly. I'd suggest you run at least one other fan feature to give the book a shade more balance.

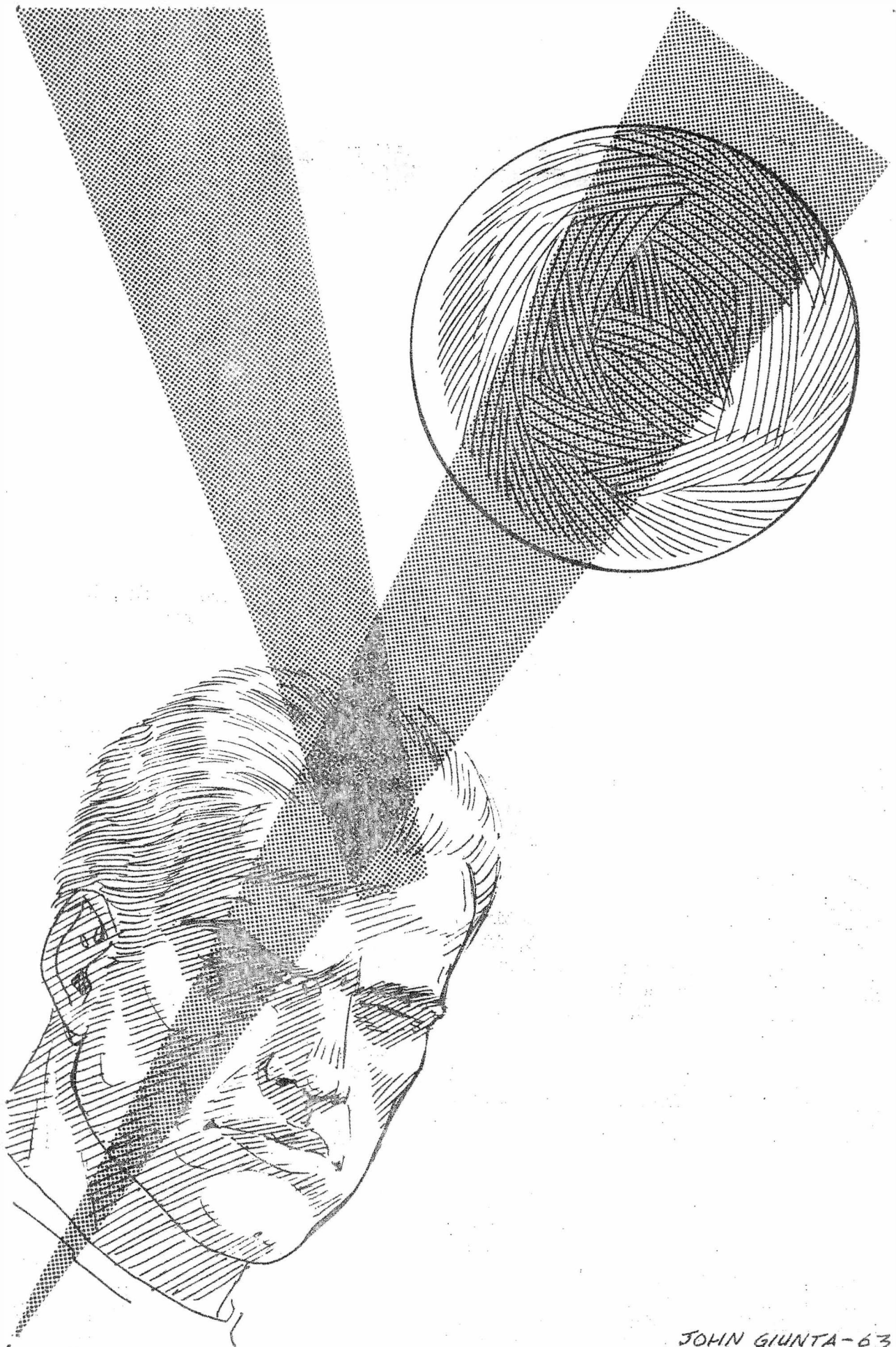
John Giunta's cover was superb. I have not seen a better illustration in any sf magazine this year. There's a reason, I suppose, but I've never been able to figure out why he hasn't been a regular in the magazines. His interior illustration suffered from a poor printing of the large black areas (at least in my copy) but it looks as if it would

have been very effective. Cinfa took up a page and didn't tell me anything about the story, or, really, whether he can draw or not; I think illustrations should illustrate as well as make nice decorations. Perhaps I'm stepping on some editorial toes, because I notice his work in SFT frequently, but I do not feel there is any excuse for using Herman Von Tokken's artwork. It is utterly without merit. It is hopelessly amateurish. "The Wooing Of Umpo", poor as I think it was, was seriously injured by his drawing; the story would have done better without it. In fact, the use of this illustration is your only mistake of consequence in the first issue. Sorry, but that's the way it seems to me.

Mimeography (except as noted on Giunta's interior illustration) was very good and the general appearance of the magazine is excellent. I do think that the lettering in the logotype would be more effective if it were larger; it doesn't seem to fill the rectangle quite as much as it should. However, that's a minor matter. Of more consequence, I think, is your interior layout for the stories. It is neat, to be sure, and it is certainly not objectionable. However, considering all of the possibilities available, it seems to be restrictive to limit the openings to a full-page illustration and a rigid title and blurb arrangement. It soon becomes boring.

I like your plan for quarterly publication. However, if that proves too frequent for you to handle easily, by all means go to a three-times-a-year schedule. The main thing, I think, is to have a schedule and adhere to it rigidly. This will not only build readers,

(Concluded on Page 23)



JOHN GIUNTA-63

THERE ARE FLOWERS ON THE MOON

BY ALDO GIUNTA

THE DARK AND THE ALIEN-NESS had put Cogan over the brink --- that was the only logical explanation. But he kept insisting that they were real. He did his best to prove what he said was true, which is not the act of an irrational man. He could even show Cogan that there were flowers on the Moon, but only crazy people see what isn't there.

THEY HAD KNOWN that it would be lonely up there. They had known it would be dark and frightening for the first to go, and so, before they had sent Cogan up, they had searched for a set of twins, psychic telepathic twins, and Cogan had been one of a pair. The other was Landry, and now while Cogan was up there on the Moon, Landry sat down here in the observatory, waiting for Cogan to wake up and begin work and contact with him again.

Landry sat smoking, a thick surly-looking man, facing the gigantic viewing plate of the telescope which projected out of the observatory's roof toward the Moon, sighting in on it like a great gun barrel, and flashing back what it saw into the room onto the observer-plate at the viewing end of the telescope. The plate was circular, filling one entire wall, and Landry sat before it, smoking darkly and looking up at the rills, clefts, ring-walls, bays, craters and mountain-chains of the Moon. Behind him, Professor Gruenther made a creaking sound as he rose from his chair and

crossed to where Landry was sitting.

"Anything yet?" he asked.

"Not yet, no," said Landry.

"Don't you think perhaps that you could use more sleep between contacts?" asked the Professor. Landry looked up at him and his face, generally wood-still, broke into a smile. Landry liked the Professor as he liked few of the men around the Observatory, and so the Government had assigned the Professor to work with him and be with him while he communicated with Cogan.

"Do you need more sleep, Professor?" asked Landry quietly, and the Professor laughed gently.

"I suppose I could use more --- are you suggesting I'm simply transferring a desire?"

Landry shrugged, still smiling. The Professor yawned and looked up at Moon-plate, rubbed his eyes, and looked at it again. Then he looked at Landry.

"Do you receive impressions from Cogan while he sleeps, Landry?"

Landry shook his head.

"No, I try not to. Sometimes, if I

tune in on him, though, I can, if he's dreaming strong enough. But otherwise, no, I can't interpret the garble of the unconscious, and as I see it, that's private territory, anyhow."

Professor Gruenther nodded slowly, taking out his pipe and working tobacco down into it.

"If he dreams fear-dreams, then--- you don't know it?"

Landry hunched his shoulders. "I'd rather not know it, Professor --- it's tough enough the way it is, when he's conscious."

"Yes, of course --- I'm sorry. I apologize for being a little stupid. I suppose my scientific curiosity overwhelms sensitivity sometimes, and I'm compelled to ask ---."

Landry waved it away with a small flick of his hand, a small smile on his face as if he didn't mind at all.

The Professor laughed.

"You people, you psychics --- you understand of course that to a cosmologist, you're enigma?"

Landry grinned. "And you cosmologists," he said, "You understand that to psychics you're enigma?"

The Professor looked startled a moment and then broke out into laughter at Landry's joke. He was about to say something when he was stopped by a quick jerk of Landry's head toward the viewing plate.

Cogan, on the Moon, had awakened.

...Lo, Landry.

---Hello, Cogan. How is it up there?

...Okay, it's fine. Had a pretty thick snooze. The exertion just knocks me dead up here, and I guess the purity of the air in the cabin conks me cold.

---What's happening?

...Nothing much. She's pretty bright up here tonight. Old Earth is glowing up a storm.

---Yeh, well I guess you know I can't say the same for the Moon.

IMPRESSION: LAUGHTER. IT'S GOOD TO LAUGH, GOOD TO FEEL SOMEBODY ELSE AROUND.

---The little ship's loaded, isn't it, Cogan?

...Yeh, loaded her --- say, what the hell Landry? You know damn well I loaded her!

---Just making talk, Cogan. Can I help it if I'm lonely down here?

IMPRESSION: STRONG LAUGHTER. THAT LANDRY'S A FUNNY BASTARD, ALRIGHT. THEN QUIET. QUIET. EXERTION-QUIET.

---What you doing, Cogan?

...Getting out to the ship. Gotta concentrate on walking. This goddam low gravity is okay for work when you get used to her, but it's a damn shame when I wake up and try getting around in it. Gotta get used to it all over again.

IMPRESSION: CLIMBING. IN. UP. IN FURTHER. STEEL. CABIN. CONTROLS. MOVEMENT. MOUNTAINS. BLACK-GREY MOUNTAINS, BIG-SHAPED. LIKE BIG GREY RATS, READY TO SPRING. DUST-SWIRLS, SUCKING UP AFTER...FUNNY DRIVE. FUNNY IDEA, REVERSED IDEA. CRAZY-BASTARD INVENTOR. NOT PUSH-DRIVE. PULL-DRIVE. FUNNY IDEA. ATOMAG DRIVE. FIX FOR THE MOST POWERFUL MAGNETIC ATTRACTION AND WWOOP...UP. FUNNY IDEA. NOT PUSH. PULL.

---How's she look from up there, Cogan?

...Who, Landry?

SEND-IMPRESSION: LAUGHTER. NOW'S NOT THE TIME FOR FOOLING.

...Who says so, Landry?...you think you're the only one with a sense of humor?

---That's right, Cogan, that's what I think. Any objections?

...Take that!

IMPRESSION: UNCLEAR FORM OF A MAN IN A SPACE-SUIT KICKING LANDRY IN THE SEAT.

---Wise guy.

...Can you see this?

IMPRESSION: DEEP, BLACK RIFT. LIKE A JAGGED SCAR GOING DOWN AND DOWN IN BLACK ROCK, BLACK ROCK AND BLACKER ROCK AND BLACKER ROCK.

---How far you figure it goes down, Cogan?

...Few miles, I guess. Easy a few miles.

IMPRESSION: FALLING. BLACK FALLING. SHUT AWAY FROM THE SKY...FEAR. FEAR.

---You ever hear the one about the travelling spaceman, Cogan?

...What?

---A joke. There's this Space-man, see ---

...Gotta concentrate, Landry. I'm heading toward the darkside and I gotta concentrate as I go over the top. Mountains. They're hard to see against the

sky.

---Sure kid. Yell if you want me.

Landry blinked his eyes and rubbed them with the flats of his palms. Professor Gruenther handed him a towel from a laundry-package and Landry wiped the sweat off his brow. He wound the towel around his throat and fished in his pockets for a cigarette.

"Exhausting, eh?" asked Gruenther, and Landry grunted as he lit the cigarette.

"Is he going over to the darkside now?"

Landry nodded, smoking thoughtfully at the cigarette. Then he looked up at the Professor.

"What happens if he breaks a leg, Professor? Have you people thought of that?"

The Professor looked at him dry-eyed.

"We've thought of it," he said flatly.

"Well, what happens?" pressed Landry. The Professor looked up at the viewing-plate and then back at Landry.

"We tried to get the funds, you see, for a two-man ship --- it would have been quite a bit more expensive, building for two rather than one. There would be a tremendous displacement of equipment, the ship would have to be much larger, and the costs would have been tremendously high --- so what we had to do was plan it for one man, and showed the Government those plans ---."

"What happens?" asked Landry quietly.

The Professor's eyes flicked around the room and he went on talking, looking away from Landry's face.

"---When we proved that in the circumstance of one-sixth gravity of the Earth, a man working alone could set up observation equipment, provided it was light enough for him to handle ---."

"Professor ---" said Landry through tight-gritted teeth "---What happens if Cogan breaks a leg?"

The Professor looked at him, a dark angry edge to his eyes.

"You know what happens, Landry. There's no good reason for you to ask what happens, because you know..."

"That's it, huh? If he breaks a

leg or busts a rib and can't navigate under his own power --- that's it, huh?"

"Yes, Landry, that's it. He knew it and you knew it when this started. Cogan would not have been sent without knowing all the facts." The Professor walked to the desk across the room and pulled a drawer open. He took out a flask, uncorked the top, and unfolded two telescoping metal jiggers pressed into the top. He looked up at Landry.

"Would you like some?"

Landry nodded and the Professor poured. They clinked jiggers in silence and drank them off. Landry wiped his mouth.

"Sorry, Professor," he said. "I was just a little nettled, I guess, by Cogan being up there, and me down here, safe and sound..."

"Perhaps they should have sent you, then. You've always struck me as the more stable one of the pair, anyway."

Landry shook his head, watching the viewing-plate.

"No, don't get Cogan wrong --- he's alright, tough as steel. Besides which he's a trained engineer and geologist, whereas all I am is a heavy with a psychic twist to my brain."

The Professor held out the flask again to Landry, who took it and poured himself one.

"Where did you meet Cogan?" asked the Professor as he poured for himself.

"In Arabia. We were working on a highway job, building through some mountains --- they'd imported Cogan from an oil-drilling job and he came up to build a span across a rough gorge. I was a supervisor, and suddenly we began to find out that I was not only able to anticipate a lot of his ideas, but carry them out before he could have them drafted up or even tell me about them. It was a funny kind of freak accident at first, and then Cogan began to get sore about it. So we fought it out and after that we became pretty thick friends, operating as a team ever since. We've hired out together on all sorts of jobs, from tunnels to bridges to you-name-it, him as topkick engineer and me as his supervisor. We were pretty good at it, too --- everything we did always seemed to work out right."

The Professor had been nodding with

interest.

"So you've been a kind of professional adventuring team ever since?" he asked.

"Kind of --- but with the accent on the 'professional'," said Landry with a grin.

"And now this, eh?"

"And now this --- yes, seems like we were almost built for the job. Cogan's training, for instance, is just what you people wanted, with some extra-added frills. And me, well, I wish to hell I'd had Cogan's background for a deal like this, and he had mine!"

"I understand you're self-taught?"

Landry nodded.

"Which is another way of saying I qualify perfectly for the job, except I don't have the papers to prove it."

"Well --- perhaps the next trip out ---."

Landry suddenly held up his hand and, facing the view-plate, knotted his forehead in concentration, his body tensed in the mental effort of communicating with Cogan up there.

The Professor finished his drink and shuddered.

"Brrr! --- afraid I'll never be a drinking man!" he said, but he was talking to himself.

...Landry?

---I read you, boy.

...I'm down.

---How is it over there?

...Dark, boy. Real dark. But there's some light. Spill-over, I guess it is, from Earth. But mostly pretty dark.

---Where'd you set down, Cogan?

...In a Mare-basin. Got the cameras going on it.

---Mountain ranges around you?

...Yeah. I'm actually just a little ways over the terminator. It's beautiful up there, but it's dark down here.

---That where you're going to set her up?

...No. Further toward the center, I think. Just stopped for a rest. It gets darker in there, and I can't see the old homestead.

---Scary?

...A little. That's why I hadda

rest up. What you doing?

---Guzzling a little bit of booze.

...I could use a shot right now. Got any left?

---Yeah. Want a little?

...Thanks.

SEND-IMPRESSION: BOTTOMS UP.

IMPRESSION: DRINK HEARTY. WHOOF! THAT'S POWERFUL STUFF.

...What kind of crap you feeding me, Landry?

---Rye. What's the matter, don't you like rye?

...For the birds, rye. For the crows.

---The hell with it. If you can't appreciate good old-fashioned rot-gut, the hell with it. I'll drink with somebody else.

...Yeh, you do that, Landry --- I'm driving anyway.

---Don't hit any pedestrians.

...The only pedestrian up here is the driver --- which is maybe the way things ought to be.

---Well, you take it slow.

...Yeah, and for Christ's sake --- make it Scotch next time, will you?

---Okay, Cogan. I'll send the bell hop down right now.

IMPRESSION: RISING, TILTING. ATOMAGNETIC DRIVE FIXED FOR A STAR; A BLUE, POPULATION I STAR. MASSES, BLACK, FALLING AWAY. MOON-DUST, IRON-RICH, MINERAL-RICH DUST SIFTING UP, UP WITH THE SMALL SHIP, TOWARD THE STARS, SUCKED UP AND UP ON THAT FUNNY PULL-DRIVE, UP...

Landry wiped his face.

"How is he?" asked the Professor.

"Little scared. He's going down into the center of the other side, and it's dark over there, he can't see Earth ...it's logical that he'd be scared."

"Do you suppose I should start making out the report now?"

"No, Professor. Christ knows we give them enough reports and information when I'm not talking to him. The idea is to concentrate and stay loose and ready to receive him when he wants me. Isn't it?"

The Professor nodded.

"I was thinking of the people outside of this room, I suppose. There are many of my colleagues all but dying to know what's going on."

"We'll tell them later," said Landry irritably. "Besides which they know he's supposed to go over to the darkside anyway, don't they?"

The Professor nodded, watching Landry wipe with the towel down inside his shirt. Landry thought Bernard Gruenther was a hard man. But soft, too. His every thought had been, in these days, of helping and protecting his friend Cogan --- and he was quick to flash to bitter anger when he was in any way annoyed or irritated by the others. There was no doubt in Gruenther's mind that though Cogan was up there, Landry was suffering more, and to keep him occupied would be the greatest kindness that could be offered.

"He has had no difficulty with the equipment so far, has he?"

Landry shook his head.

"Been pretty easy to handle. I guess your engineers knew what they were doing when they put it together --- it's all light and portable, and the only difficulty's been with locating a place to set it up on the earthside."

Gruenther looked up at the viewing plate and laughed involuntarily. "When he's set up over there, and starts to activate the equipment --- that'll be something! That'll be the moment we've all been waiting for! Think, Landry, of what fantastic things there will be to learn about the Universe! Think of all that equipment up there, recording, filming, computing, relaying all that information to us..." he laughed again pleasantly "...the doorstep of space, of exploration. In a few years...in a few years we'll be up there in force, probably, mining the Moon. With our new drive principle, as we perfect it, we'll be able to go anywhere we please. We're at the very doorstep of space, Landry, and you and your friend Cogan are making history!"

Landry looked at him slowly, a smile on his face. He enjoyed the good Professor, did Landry. He liked his joy of life and his optimistic enthusiasm. It made him feel good, as if Cogan's being up there was backed by the future, somehow. Cogan was sending again and Landry turned to face the viewing-plate.

...Found a place, Landry. Setting her down.

---Good boy, Coge, good boy.

IMPRESSION: TREMBLING. ACHING IN THE STOMACH, WET ON THE HANDS. DARK BELOW. DARK. FLAT AND DARK. LIGHTS. THE BOTTOM OF THE SHIP LIGHTING UP THE DARK, THE LANDING GEAR SPIDERING OUT, DRUMMING OF THE ATOMAG CUTTING DOWN TO A LOW HOWL, GEAR-GAUGE REGISTERING 'TOUCH', THE SHIP LURCHING LEVEL, LOWERING, LOWERING, LOWERING. SILENCE. SILENCE. STILLNESS AS THE ENGINES SPUN TO QUIET. LIGHT BELOW, AROUND THE SHIP. DUST MOVING. OUTSIDE DARK. INSIDE --- TREMBLING. ACHING IN THE STOMACH, WET ON THE HANDS. DARK OUT THERE, BEYOND THE SPLAY OF LIGHT. DARK.

...Down, Landry. Touched down.

---How you feel?

...Pretty good. Pretty good. I'll start unloading her. Stand by.

Landry had to switch back, switch away from the reeling, uncontrolled impressions whipping across Cogan's mind. He bent, picked up the flask sitting on the floor next to him, and poured a quick shot, his hands shaking.

"Is something wrong?" asked the Professor. Landry shook his head.

"Where is he? Has he set down?"

Landry nodded.

"It's dark up there, Professor. Dark, and Cogan's afraid because he can't see Earth."

"Can you talk to him? Can you divert his attention?"

"I could, maybe...if it only weren't so dark outside of the light he's operating in..." said Landry desperately, and he turned back to concentrate his attention on the Moon.

---Coge? How you doing, boy?

IMPRESSION: BEWILDERMENT. FLIGHTING SHAPE OF FEAR.

...Doing? I'm doing okay --- oh, that you, Landry?

SEND-IMPRESSION: LAUGHTER. DERISION.

---Course it's me, jerk! Who'd you think it was, some goddam Moon-maiden?

...No. I thought it was you, Landry. I just forgot for the moment.

---What you doing?

...Setting up. I've got most of

the equipment swung out of the ship now. Any minute now I'll be setting it up. Resting now. Wish I could smoke, goddam it.

---Why don't you step back into the ship and grab one?

...The ship...?

IMPRESSION: FEAR OF GOING IN. FEAR OF NEVER COMING OUT, OF RUNNING, OF FIXING IT FOR A BLUE POP I STAR, TAKING OFF, RIPPING OFF IN THE BIG SHIP BACK FOR HOME. SWEATING. FEAR OF BEING ALONE OUT THERE. DARK OUT THERE. QUIET.

...No. I want to get some work done first.

---Okay, kid. Settle down. Sit on your nerves and settle down.

...You reading me, Landry?

---Only part. I know it's pretty dark out there, and scary...but just sit on your nerves and settle down, huh, boy?

IMPRESSION: LAUGHTER. A SMALL, NERVOUS RILL OF LAUGHTER.

...Remember that chick in Buenos Aires, Landry?...the one with the beauty mark on her thigh?

---Now how would I know about any goddam beauty mark on her thigh, Cogan? I didn't drink with her, you did!

...Nah, nah, nah, you slob!...the one when you sent to me just as I was--- you REMEMBER, you slob!

SEND-IMPRESSION: WARM CHUCKLE.

---That was a beautiful beauty mark I got to admit, Cogan.

...Yeah, wasn't it, though? I can never get over the way you sent to me just then...like as if you were reading me right down the line, all the way --- Tell me something, Landry?

---What, Cogan?

...How'd you know when to send when you did?...I mean, were you tracing me all that time?

SEND-IMPRESSION: SLY, SECRET LAUGHTER.

---Can't reveal trade secrets, kid.

...You slob. I always suspected you could read me forty times deeper than I could read you --- you can, can't you, Landry?

---I don't know, Cogan.

...Yes you do, yes you do. You can read me real deep, can't you? Tell me the truth.

---Pretty deep, yeah.

...Right down to the core?

---No. Only the surface. But I can read a lot of it.

...More'n you've ever let on?

---No, Cogan.

...You're lying, slob. Aren't you?

---No, Cogan.

...Sure you are. But it's okay. You'd be pretty scared too, if you were up here.

---You bet your A I would, Cogan. I'd be scarder than a whole pack of coyotes when the bounty-hunters come.

...No you wouldn't, you bastard. You wouldn't be scared at all.

IMPRESSION: OF A STEEL WALL DROPPING HEAVY AND SOLID OVER THE MIND.

---Cogan! Cogan! Read me, Cogan! Don't shut out. Come on, Cogan. Don't shut me out! Read me, Cogan. Read me!

IMPRESSION: THE WALL SLIDING UP AN INCH.

...Screw, you bastard.

IMPRESSION: THE WALL SLIDING DOWN, TIGHT, LOCKED, IMMOVABLE.

Landry swore at the viewing-plate, wiping the sweat from his face.

"What is it? What's the matter?" pressed the alarmed Professor Gruenther.

Something's gone wrong. Something's the matter with him. He's getting ticklish about sending. Afraid I'll read too much of his fear. He's shut me out, Professor. He won't send, and he won't receive."

"But why? WHY?"

"I don't know --- I think that he's afraid I'll find out how scared he really is, down underneath --- wait! Hold it!"

IMPRESSION: POWERFUL FEAR, BEATING LIKE WAVES OF SICKNESS ACROSS THE GULF OF EMPTY. LIGHT. LIGHT-DARK. SHAPES.

...LANDRY! LANDRY! Did you see that, Landry?

---What, Cogan? What is it?

...THERE! There, outside the light. Something moved, Landry.

---Show me. Show me, Cogan, let me see it.

IMPRESSION: FEAR-SICK, GARBLE, LIGHT-DARK. LIGHT SPINNING. BLACK MOVING. BLACK-SHAPE BLACKLY MOVING.

...Did you see? Did you see?

---Where, Cogan? Where?

...In the dark. In the dark, outside the light.

---What was it?

...Something --- something...

IMPRESSION: ANIMAL - DARK. A CORNER. SOMETHING CROUCHED, BREATHING, WAITING TO SPRING, BLOOD-EYED, HOT-BREATHED.

...SEE? See, Landry?

---How could there be something, Cogan? It's just the dark. That's all, just the dark. There's nothing there, just the dark.

...No, no. Listen! Listen, you can hear it breathe...

IMPRESSION: HEAT QUIVERING. SOMETHING SHUFFLING, SUCKING, BREATHING HOT ACRID SMELLS OF SULPHUR, CROUCHING IN THE DARK.

...Did you hear it?

---Calm down, boy, calm down, it's only the dark, it's only the dark out there. There can't be anything moving.

IMPRESSION: SOUNDS. SOUNDS OF SKITTERING FEET, RATTLING QUICK AMONGST THE BLACK BROKEN SHALE-PIECES.

...Hear that? Hear that?

---But, Cogan. Cogan, listen. There's nothing to hear up there. There is nothing to hear, there's no sound, Cogan. It's dead up there, Cogan!

...Dead?

---There's nothing there, Cogan. There's nothing. Only the dark, only you, you're the only living thing, there's no animals, no nothing, only you...

...Only me.

---That's right, only you.

IMPRESSION: LAUGHTER.

...I almost forgot. I almost forgot there's only me.

---Look, Cogan --- go into the ship for a smoke. Better still, leave a beacon out there and go on back to the big ship. Run a movie, relax...what say you do that, Cogan?

...No. No, I'll stay and work. But I'll have the cigarette, Landry. You're right about the cigarette I should have the cigarette.

---That's the way. Treat yourself to a nice long smoke. Take it easy a while, huh, till you feel like working, okay?

...Yeah, I'll have the cigarette. Then I'll go back to work. Yeah, Landry, that's a good idea, I'll have the cigarette...

Landry came back to the room, his

THERE ARE FLOWERS ON THE MOON

chest heaving, sweat and trembling pouring over him. Suddenly he blanked out and pitched almost to the floor, but Gruenther caught him, set him upright in the chair, and ran for the door. In a moment he came back with the doctor assigned to round-the-clock duty in the hall, who brought Landry to consciousness with salts, vigorously stimulating his flesh with rapid-small slaps.

Landry started shivering, his teeth chattering violently. Professor Gruenther threw a coat over him. In a few moments, Landry was pale, but alright.

"Feeling a little better now, Mister Landry?" said the doctor.

"Fine," said Landry, "I'm feeling real good." And his teeth began to chatter again.

"What's wrong, Landry? What's happening?" asked Gruenther.

"I can tell you that, Professor," said the doctor. "He needs rest. He's running himself ragged, and the man simply needs more rest --- emotional as well as physical."

"Okay, now, Doc...you earned your three bucks. Thanks very much --- and please scram."

"I'll have to report this, Landry. The proper notification ---."

"Report it, then! Report it to the President, for all I give a hoot ... but SCRAM! QUICK!"

The doctor looked at Professor Gruenther, who nodded subtly, and he left. Landry looked up at the viewing-plate.

"Jesus Christ, Professor --- something weird's happening to him up there! He's beginning to SEE things, HEAR things!"

"What do you mean?"

"His imagination's beginning to play tricks on him. He imagined he saw something move, and then he imagined he heard it breathing, and something else making a skittering sound..."

"But how can that be?--- what can we do? Can you help him? Is there any way of helping him?"

"I don't know ... I don't know. He keeps me hopping all the time. I'm getting worn out sending and receiving and thinking so goddam fast ... I don't know what to do!"

"Can we send for anybody? How

about a psychiatrist?"

"What good would that do? He can't help me think from second to second. All we've got to do is hope he snaps out of it... or maybe... maybe we can try to get him to come back before he cracks wide open..." Landry turned to the viewing plate and tuned across the void as quickly as possible, to get the jump on Cogan, to catch him unawares...

IMPRESSION: A FIELD OF FLOWERS. OUT THERE. BLUE. WAVING. DELICATE. GENTLE FLOWERS. SOFT FLOWERS. BLOOMING FLOWERS. QUIET AND TENDER FLOWERS. WAVING OUT THERE IN THE DARK.

---Cogan? Where are you, boy?

...Here, Landry. Finished my smoke.

---Finished? That was a quick one, huh?

...What?

---I said that was a

IMPRESSION: WALKING. LIGHT-DARK. MOVEMENT DIFFICULT. FLOUNCY, LIKE A FLOPPY PANCAKE BEING SWUNG THROUGH THE AIR...

---quick one. Where you going, Cogan?

...Out there.

---Where, Cogan?

...Out there.

SEND-SUGGESTION: BACK TO THE SHIP!

---Where, Cogan? What's out there?

SEND-SUGGESTION: BACK TO THE SHIP!

...Flowers, Landry. Isn't that funny? Flowers out here on the Moon. A whole goddam field full of them. Beautiful ones.

---You're leaving the light?

...Sure. Almost. There's flowers out there. Blue, they are.

---But, Cogan. Cogan, there can't be any flowers on the Moon. The Moon's dead. There's nothing on the Moon but those minerals you told us about.

IMPRESSION: LAUGHTER.

...Don't be stupid, Landry. How would you know what's out here on the Moon? Have you been here?

---Scientifically. Cogan, there can't be anything on the Moon...

...How the hell do you know, Landry? I'm here, aren't I? And I tell you there's FLOWERS on the Moon!

IMPRESSION: LIGHT - CONE DIMINISHED. BLINKING. BLINKING IN THE BLACK. FLOWERS THERE. FLOWERS. BLUE. GREEN ONES TOO. A WHOLE FIELD OF THEM. AND THERE!

SOMETHING MOVING. SOMETHING MOVING THRU THE FLOWERS. LOW-BACKED, CLOSE TO THE GROUND. HOW THE HELL DOES HE KNOW THERE ARE NO FLOWERS ON THE MOON?

...Let me tell you about the Moon, Landry-boy...there's flowers here. You tell that to your boys down there, put it in your report. Cogan says there's flowers on the Moon...Hey, wait a minute!...Landry, there's something --- a dip. I guess a kind of shallow rift in the ground ahead of me, around that rockwall... Well, I be damned!... Know what it is, Landry? Know what?

---No, Cogan. What is it?

...A VALLEY, Landry. A valley. Beautiful! Just beautiful. Grass. Trees...spiny-looking trees, they are, like a cross between cactus and palm... I be damned!

---Why don't you go back to the ship, Cogan?

...Huh? You crazy? You want me to go back NOW? Man, I'm just beginning to ENJOY myself!

IMPRESSION: A RIOTING SURGE OF HAPPINESS, SOARING, SOARING.

---What else do you see, Cogan?

...Now there's a beautiful sight! I see a --- hey, but wait a minute!... What's wrong, Landry? What's the matter with you?

---What do you mean, Cogan?

...You're DEPRESSED, boy!... Your whole insides are caving in on you! Man, you're transmitting sadness LIKE CRAZY! What's the matter, kid?

---Tired, I guess. Just tired.

...Well, what you need is some exercise, Landry... living too much of the sedentary life, that's your problem!

---Yeah. Maybe one time I'll come out and take a look at those pretty flowers you see out there on the Moon.

...You don't believe me, do you?

---Sure. Sure I believe you, Cogan. I believe you.

...You think I'm crazy, huh?

---I never said that, Cogan. Now did I ever say that?

IMPRESSION: STEEL-COLD: LAUGHTER, HARD, HARD.

...Sure you do. You think I've flipped my wig because I was scared before. Well I wanna tell you something, Landry... I was scared for a reason. It wasn't my imagination playing tricks.

There WERE things outside of the light. I can see them moving around in the valley below me right now.

---Then how come you were able to HEAR them, kid? Sound doesn't carry on the Moon.

...How the hell do you know THAT? Landry? You read that in a text-book someplace? Look --- I'm up here! I tell you sound CARRIES up here!

---Why don't you go back to the ship, Cogan?

...Still humoring me, huh?

---Now for Christ's sake, Cogan!

...You know something, Landry? I can almost SMELL those flowers up here --- isn't that funny? I can almost SMELL them.

---How do they smell, Cogan?

...Heady. Like some kind of strong wine. Strong as hell, strong enough to make a man drunk on them, dizzy on them ... but the hell! ... you don't believe me anyway, so what's the use of shooting my mouth off?

---Look, Cogan... why don't you go back to the ship? You don't want to walk out too far, you know, you might get lost or something...

IMPRESSION: MUFFLED LAUGHTER. MUFFLED THOUGHTS, HALF-SPRUNG FROM SECRECY.

...Yeah, Landry. Yeahhhh. I'll go back to the ship. Better still, Landry --- you must be real worried about getting her back by now, because you figure I've flipped, right? ... So you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to send her back with a load. A load, but you know what of? ... FLOWERS, Landry, FLOWERS!

IMPRESSION: LAUGHTER. DIABOLICAL JEST-LAUGHTER. MOVEMENT. PLUNGING, TEETERING, FORWARD MOVEMENT.

---Cogan! Cogan, where are you?

IMPRESSION: JEERING LAUGHTER. JEERING.

---Cogan! Look, Cogan ... forget this gag stuff, will you? Just get in the ship and come home! You hear me, Cogan?

IMPRESSION: A TOOTHLESS WITCH IN A SPACE SUIT, CACKLING AT LANDRY.

---Cogan, for Christsake listen to me ---.

...Like wine, Landry ... they'll smell like wine...

IMPRESSION: LAUGHTER. SOLID STEEL-RIVETED WALL CLANKING DOWN TIGHT OVER THE

PORTALS OF THE MIND.

When Landry told Professor Gruenther what was going on, Gruenther walked out of the room and told his colleagues. When he came back, Landry was just finishing off the last of the flask whiskey. The Professor had a look of deep perplexed concern on his face.

"What is it, Landry? Is it the Moon? Or the loneliness?"

"Both, I think. I think in part it's the darkness, and the fear of what might be lurking out there. It's like he's been confronted with his own worst enemy --- himself. His own imagination."

"Do you think you can get him to come back?"

"He said he's going back to the ship to send it back with a load of flowers. Maybe I can persuade him then."

"I want you to know this honestly, Landry --- our people are worried about what happens to Cogan. But if there's any possibility of saving the ship and the effort and money put into it --- I wish you would do your utmost to save it. If Cogan's set on sending it back without returning in it himself --- let him do so, please. If we can't save them both, we at least may be able to salvage one of them. You understand?"

Landry nodded.

"It may seem calculating of us, Landry, but you see --- we went through considerable effort to make this expedition possible --- we had to prove a negative point first, and that was that it would be unfeasible for anybody to build a large-scale satellite-station when here we had the Moon sitting out there all ready for us to use as a jump-off point into space. It took lots of planning and calculation for us to negate the one idea in order to make the other possible, for it had seemed to us then that unless we could prove to the government and private enterprise that there was good reason for making the trip, it would never be done. Money, you see, is a hard-to-come-by commodity."

Landry nodded, saying, "I understand, Professor, you don't have to explain..." But the Professor shook his head.

"No, Landry, I feel it's necessary to make you understand what was and is at stake, since you're the only man in a position right now to save this entire project... we conceived the idea of a one-man ship simply because it would seem, to the agencies we were asking to support us, that we were not at any point being unreasonable or unreal in our grasp of the costs of things. We presented the most economical ship possible, when in fact it probably would have been more economical to build a two or three-man ship in order to insure success. But...we had no choice. There were millions and millions of dollars to be asked for, and we had to be practical to the point of penury. And now we're asking you --- if it's possible to save our ship, please do so --- even at the expense, if necessary, of Cogan."

Landry nodded grimly, looking at the viewing-plate.

"I'll try to reach him now, Professor..." he said, and he sent out across the voided wastes of dark...

IMPRESSION: OF SINGING. OF HUMMING.
MOVEMENT. EXERTION.

---What you doing, Cogan?

...Hah! Read me, boy, read me!

---Can't, Cogan. Can't if you won't let me.

...Loading the ship, kid. Loading the ship with flowers.

---They won't live, Cogan. They'll die. They'll never get here.

...Now aren't you the logical one, Landry? How come you're always so bloody logical, Landry? Is it because you read the text-books?

---Why you sore at me, Cogan? What did I do to you?

...You didn't believe me, Landry. You didn't believe me when I told you about the flowers, and about the things moving around out there.

---Okay. I didn't believe you. If you want it straight from the shoulder, Cogan, I think you're cracking, and I think you'll die up there on the Moon if you send that ship off without getting into it. I guess you know you'll die, don't you, Cogan? I guess you know you'll run out of oxygen and just strangle to death, don't you?

IMPRESSION: LAUGHTER. TAUNT-LAUGHTER.

...Maybe, Landry. Maybe.

---No maybe, Cogan. If there's a speck of sanity left in you, you'll realize you'll die.

IMPRESSION: OF A CHILD COGAN IN A SPACE-SUIT, PEEKING AROUND THE CORNER OF A ROOM.

...Maybe noootttt, Landry...maybe nooottttt...HAR!

IMPRESSION: CLIMBING IN. UP. IN DEEP-ER. METAL CORRIDOR - WAYS. CONTROLS. EQUIPMENT. HANDS FLASHING ON DIALS, ON GAUGES.

---Cogan. Cogan, listen to me! Don't set her on auto yet. Cogan, you'll die up there. You'll die, all alone, in the dark, with nobody around you, you'll die, Cogan.

IMPRESSION: OF A BLURTING BRONX CHEER.

...Let me tell you about the dark now, Landry. While I'm setting the auto, let me tell you about the dark...you get used to it, you see? It doesn't seem so dark, after a while, it seems to get pretty light, as if it's REALLY your element after all...and there are living things around here, Landry --- or at least, over on the other side there are. It's a beautiful place, the Moon. It's a beautiful place, serene and more beautiful than you can imagine --- and you, Landry, you can't imagine anything, because you have all those little text-books burned into your skull...well, there she is, kid...all set. She'll be lifting off in a couple of minutes, and I've got to scramoola out of here...

IMPRESSION: HASTE. HEART-HASTE. CORRIDORS, THE STEEL OF THEM MOVING BACK, TOWARD THE PAST.

---Cogan, Cogan, don't leave her! Stay on her, Cogan! Cogan?

SEND-SUGGESTION: YOU CAN'T MOVE, COGAN! YOUR LIMBS WON'T CARRY YOU OUT! YOU CAN'T MOVE!

...Don't be silly, Landry, of course I can move!

IMPRESSION: DOWN. OUT. QUICKLY TOWARD THE OTHER SHIP, THE SMALL ONE RESERVED FOR GETTING ABOUT THE MOON.

---Goddam you, Cogan! Don't be a fool!

IMPRESSION: LAUGHTER.

...Am I the fool, Landry?

IMPRESSION: TAKE-OFF. THE GROUND LIFTING AWAY, DARKMASSSED, BELOW. THE GROUND. HOME - GROUND. MOON-GROUND. BEAUTIFUL

FUTURE-GROUND.

...Landry?...Tell your boys down there that I'll set up the other station over on the darkside, just so they don't come up here too soon...I'll keep them both in good working order, don't you worry.

---Cogan, for God's sake, before it's too late...

...Woops. WOOPS! Too late already Landry. Too late already. There she goes. There she goes, home-bound...

---Goddam you! Is this a joke?

...Don't worry, Landry, it'll land safely. That automatic set is a charmer. The only thing it won't do is wax your moustache.

---Jesus Christ, Cogan. Jesus Christ. I'm sorry.

...Yeah? You ought to be, having to live out the rest of your life down there on Earth, kid. Now if you're smart, what you'll do is come on out here next trip up...and live amongst the winey Moon-flowers with me...got to cut it off, now, boy...mountains again. Gotta concentrate. See you. I'll report to you soon's I land down in the flowers, Landry --- just one more time.

"He's sent it back," said Landry. The Professor nodded grimly, and Landry went on... "He said he'll set up the other station, and activate them both. Just to keep us from sending anyone else out too soon."

"Poor man," said the Professor sadly. He touched Landry's shoulder. "I'm sorry, Landry ... I know this has been harder for you than for anyone..."

Landry looked up at him, a sick look on his face.

"Except Cogan," he said.

Gruenther shook his head.

"No, Cogan's in a half-state of pain..." he said, looking into Landry's face with dark-bright eyes. "Would it perhaps be kinder if you found some way --- some way to ---." He gestured fumblingly in the air, and Landry looked away, knowing what he meant.

"I almost feel like the goddam fool's private executioner..." said Landry, and he became aware of Cogan again, sending from across there, for the last time...

IMPRESSION: FLOWERS. SOFT - PETALLED. LUMINOUS. BLUE-FLESHED.

...You see them, Landry? You see them?

---Yeah, Cogan. Yeah, I see them.

...Can you appreciate their beauty, Landry? Or does the text-book say nix to that?

---The text-book says flowers are beautiful, Cogan.

...Like wine, that's what they're like, Landry. The smell like some powerful wine.

---How do you know, Cogan? You can't smell 'em.

...No?

---No. Nobody ever smelled flowers through any space helmet. Nobody, Cogan.

...Well, you know what I'm going to do, Landry? I'm going to SMELL those flowers, that's what I'm going to do.

---How, Cogan? You can't smell flowers on the Moon. There's no atmosphere to smell 'em on.

...Still the little scholar, huh, you sonofabitch? Still the little scholar?

---That's right. Still the little scholar. But you can't smell flowers through a goddam space-piece...

...Well, who says I have to keep it on? Who says I have to keep it on, Landry?

---Nobody. Nobody says so, Cogan.

It's the only way to smell flowers by taking it off...

IMPRESSION: HANDS FUMBLING AT THE LOCKS, WORKING AT THE LOCKS. HANDS. NOT GLOVES. HANDS.

---You got your gloves on, Cogan?

...Gloves? No. No gloves. They're in the ship, and my hands haven't frozen off like they're supposed to, either ... AH! There! It's off, Landry, UHHHH-HUNH! Smell those flowers, Landry! Take a deep breath and SMELL, man!

---How do they smell, Cogan?

...Like wine, Landry...like wine... heady wine...make you dizzy, Landry... thick...clogging the senses ... drunk. Drunk. Whooo, man! The sky's spinning! The sky's spinning, over and over, round and round! Man! Man, they smell beautiful. Man, they're beautiful...goodbye Landry...goodbye, kid...I'm off for that

(Concluded on Page 23)



THE RECRUITS

BY WILLIAM BLACKBEARD

T HERE WERE MONSTERS everywhere! Monsters in the sky, monsters on television, monsters for breakfast --- You just couldn't tell any more where a monster might be. There might, even, be a monster in BED with you --- !!

"NERTZ," SAID THE UGLY little package. "THE BREAKFAST FOOD OF MONSTERS."

Mrs. Merriwell was appalled.

How long had this been going on?

She picked a gaudily-wrapped package gingerly off the shelf and noticed there were scarcely half-a-dozen left. Apparently the stuff was selling very well, but where on Earth had Bobby heard about it? She was certain she had never seen it advertised, never seen it in the grocery before.

Obviously the manufacturers were capitalizing on the current monster craze among children. But the enterprise was certainly in poor taste, and she was surprised a market this size would stock it.

There must have been objections from parents by now --- but still it was evident the cereal had been bought in quantities, and mothers like herself made up the great bulk of shoppers. If they saw no harm in it, had been taking it home, perhaps she was being unduly conservative.

Examining the package more closely, she saw the two of little figures under the lurid slogan. They had looked like an abstract design from a distance; now she could see they were little --- little --- .

Little demons.

Little grinning demons.

She had never seen anything so horrible in her life.

Repressing a shudder, she pushed the box back on the shelf, already turning over in her mind the hot words of protest she would give the store manager, but saw that she had turned the package around in replacing it.

The screaming red words on the back leaped at her:

"NERTZ IS NOURISHING!"

"This Package Supplies

A HEAD!"

This was the worst yet. But she hesitated, the words reminding her of what Bobby had said that morning, before leaving for school.

It seemed all the kids were collecting something that came with the cereal, packed in the box, like little whistles and bird calls and whirligigs she had been digging out of Bobby's cereals for years. It seemed that the kid who didn't have a complete set of "Nertz parts" was almost a social outcast.

A complete set. She recalled it all now. There were seven different packages of Nertz you had to buy to get them all. Bobby had put up a dreadful fuss to convince her of that fact.

She saw that the package she had handled bore a large number ONE.

Oh, dear.

Well, she knew she was an indulgent mother, and that she should know better than to take such a thing home --- but she would buy just the one package; put it out of sight, and talk the whole thing over with Ross when he got home that evening. If he thought it was all right, she'd let Bobby have the nasty stuff and whatever that nasty prize was inside, and she could pick up the other six packages later. ::

She felt relieved now.

It was up to Ross to make the decision on this.

It was so very good to have a man like her husband to turn to when this sort of thing came up.

Returning her mind to the day's shopping, she loaded her cart and trundled it to the check-out counter.

She was a little surprised to find the package of Nertz cost only twenty cents.

Ross Merriwell tore his attention reluctantly from Arnold Palmer's amazing performance in the Masters and let the evening paper sprawl in his lap as he opened a little of his mind to his wife's problem.

"This is it, Ross", she said. "Look at it."

He looked at the box, turned it over, thumped it, shook it and handed it back.

"What's so blamed awful about that?" he asked.

"Didn't you see those little monsters on the front? Did you look at them?"

"Oh, not intently, darling. But I

noticed them. Worse stuff in the Sunday comics. I remember something called Lena the Hyena that was a real shocker, and that was years ago. What bothers you about it? Is the stuff poison or something?"

"Don't be silly, Ross. But do you think it's healthy for Bobby to want to buy something like this? What's happened to the Bobbsey Twins and Buster Brown and the things we liked to think about when we were children? Today, it's monsters ---."

"Darling, there's a big red book upstairs in Bobby's room, the one Aunt Edith brought him two years ago. He learned to read with that book. Remember the name? It's Grimm's Fairy Tales; we all read it when we were kids and couldn't get enough. We loved it because it was full of horror and monsters and splashing gore, just as we loved the Saturday matinees with the Karloff pictures and the Flash Gordon serials. Kids are little barbarians; they live for shocks and thrills, for sensations. It's normal and it's healthy. Forget about it."

"All right. I suppose it's harmless. But if he wakes up with nightmares again, you'll have to ---."

"Mary, please."

"Don't 'Mary, please' me. You don't have to sit up with him in the middle of the night and talk the shadows away. Anyway, Bobby wanted me to buy seven packages of this, and I only got one. He'll fuss about that in the morning --- as if I ever bought seven packages of any cereal at once."

"If it wasn't that, it would be something else. Bobby's all boy, thank the Lord. What's for dinner?"

"Food," Mrs. Merriwell said, smiling bleakly. "Same as always."

Bobby Merriwell looked at the long, green, curling strands in his cereal bowl, and poked at the little rust-colored particles mixed in. He frowned as his mother poured milk over the mess.

"This it?" he asked.

"Good heavens, yes," Mrs. Merriwell said. "It's the most awful-looking stuff I ever saw. But you asked for it, and you'd better eat it."

"Yeah, no matter how it tastes, I gotta eat it. Head Geezer says so."

"Head who?"

"Never mind."

"Never mind what? I think you'd better explain that one."

"Not suppose to. Secret."

Chewing industriously at his first mouthful, the boy was barely audible. He made a horrific face as his taste buds reacted to the cereal, but immediately straightened it into a ludicrous mask of nonchalance as he tried to meet his mother's eyes squarely.

"No secrets in this house, Bobby," she said firmly. "I want to know who told you and all the other kids about this cereal."

"Who?"

"Who."

"A guy on TV, that's all. It's a commercial. You know."

He swallowed the mouthful with an effort.

"I don't know. Which show was it? When is it on? What channel?"

Bobby brought up a phony chuckle. "I forget. Maybe it's off the air now."

"And maybe it's not. Now ---."

"Mom, did you mix some of all seven packages in this bowl like you were supposed to?"

"Of course not. One box of cereal at a time is enough. You'll be sick and tired of this stuff before ---."

"My gosh, Mom! If it's just one box, it's only for one thing, a head, or an arm, or a leg or something! I won't be ready, maybe. Gee, can't I depend on you for anything?!"

He stared ~~dismally~~ at the cereal, spooned a last straggly mouthful, gulped.

"What are you talking about! Prizes you're supposed to assemble? There was nothing in the box but this little plastic monster head about the right size for a charm bracelet --- a bogeyman's charm bracelet, at that."

"Never mind, Mom. I shouldn't have let myself get shook. Hey, it's time for school."

He pushed the empty bowl back, grabbed his books and bolted for the door.

"You're not getting out of this so easily, young man," his mother called. "We'll go into this again tonight!"

But the front door had thumped shut and her son's feet were a swift tattoo

down the sidewalk.

By evening, Mrs. Merriwell had forgotten about the cereal. Bobby brought home a bloody nose and was sent straight to bed for fighting. In due time, everyone went to bed. But Mrs. Merriwell felt perfectly ridiculous pangs of guilt for having sent Bobby to his room, and she had difficulty getting to sleep.

In the smallest hours of the morning, she had an unpleasant dream and woke up. She heard the floorboards in the hall squeak.

"House settling," she told herself drowsily.

After a moment, she heard a click. It was a click she had heard from this part of the house before. It was the TV being turned on.

Bobby. He had had a nightmare, just as she had suspected, was afraid to go back to sleep. She looked across the bedroom at the bright numbers of the clock. Three A.M. Bobby'd be back up the hall in a minute; even the late late movies were over by three.

But the hall boards did not creak again.

Perhaps he was walking in his sleep. He might be sitting in front of the bright, empty TV tube dreaming he was seeing --- what? Sky King? Superman? The show sponsored by that cereal?

She had to get up. Her head throbbed as she sought with her toes for her slippers, couldn't find them, and padded across the cold floor to the door.

As she had suspected, there was a flicker of light at the end of the hall, from the TV. She moved swiftly toward the living room. Her ankle thudded into a footstool invisible in the darkness, a footstool ordinarily in front of Ross's favorite chair. She cried out with the sharp pain, leaned against the wall to feel her ankle.

With a click, the light from the TV vanished.

"Bobby!" Mrs. Merriwell hissed. She limped angrily into the living room, saw her son staring round-eyed at her in the thin moonlight.

She seized him by the narrow white shoulders of his T-shirt, trying to repress her fury. "Did you put that footstool in the hall for me to fall over?"

she asked:

"Mom, I --- just woke up. I --- must have been sleepwalking."

"That's w h a t I thought until I whacked my ankle. Bobby Merriwell, you deliberately put that stool in the hall so you'd know if anyone heard you at the TV. Don't deny it. Now what did you expect to see at three in the morning?"

Bobby knew that tone of voice. He was within an ace of getting backhanded across the room, of being turned over to his father. One more lie, anything that sounded like a lie, would d o it. Yet the Head Geezer had said that parents must never know.

Still --- what could his parents do to stop the Grand Plan now? After all, there was only a day left. Best thing to do was tell the truth.

But the truth was too fantastic for adults to believe.

Abruptly, h e knew what he had to do.

"I'll s h o w you, Mom," he said. "Watch."

He turned on the TV, grasped t h e channel selector, twisted it carefully to a point between eight and nine, held it tight.

A picture billowed out of the whirling electrons.

Mrs. Merriwell sucked shock into her throat.

For what seemed eternity, a face too horrible to believe stared at her out of the flickering screen, then it was gone and the picture with it.

"It's over, Mom," Bobby said. "But did you see it? Did you?"

Mrs. Merriwell carved reason out of her frozen mind. I t must have been a horror movie, she thought. O r --- or technicians at the studio were having fun and didn't know they were on the air. Whatever it was, she realized, it had built a brushfire in the dry weeds of Bobby's eight-year-old imagination.

"Yes," she said in a small voice. "I saw it." S h e didn't feel angry at Bobby now, but worried and puzzled.

"Please, tell m e about it," she said.

"Well," Bobby said, and swallowed --- it felt strange telling a n adult about Gowka at all, let alone in a cold, dark living room at three-fifteen A.M.

"Well, somebody told Jim Dietz about the show and he told me and Petey and Dave, and I told the Cox kids and Roger and even those spassy Simpsons up the street. Most everybody knows about it at school now except the teachers. Of course, the girls think it's all silly like they do everything that's fun, but they've been keeping it secret too. So it's mostly-us fellas that's after the Nertz parts now."

"Never mind the cereal. What about the show?"

"Well, it comes on at three every morning ---."

"Three? Are you out of your mind, Bobby Merriwell? Do y o u mean to say you've been doing this every night?"

"For a week, Mom. All the fellas have. The show's only fifteen minutes at a time and there isn't any sound, so parents won't wake up. They have to put it on so late so the kids won't be seen watching it, and i t comes in between channels eight and nine s o adults up late will switch right past it --- you have to hold the selector all the time to keep the picture steady, and ---."

"Wait a minute." Mrs. Merriwell had found the flaw in Bobby's fantasy, the crusher that would e n d this nonsense. "If there's no sound, how do you know what's going on, what the program is about?"

"Well, t h e show tells about the progress of the Great War of Gowka in the spaces between the stars, and a lot of it shows the big battles that are going on, but every so often the Head Geezer comes on and looks at you and somehow you know exactly what he's thinking at you. If the show hadn't ended just now, you'd have ---."

"That's enough, Bobby Merriwell! You march straight to bed and get your sleep. Tomorrow at school, you think about the comic book stuff you're trying to feed me and what your father's going to do about it. You and he are going to have a long session after school."

That was the end of Mrs. Merriwell's sleep for the night. She lay awake for the remainder of the interminable dusky morning hours thinking about the cost of psychiatrists.

And trying to forget the horrible face that had glowered at her for a san-

ity-rocking second from that shimmering, silent TV tube --- .

"Now", said Ross Merriwell to his son as they faced each other from easy chairs in the living room. "Is this Head Geezer the monster who wants you kids to eat this Nertz breakfast food?"

Bobby felt impatient and restless having to talk to his father about it. Tonight was The Night. But he was determined to stick to the truth, especially since it was evident that his parents weren't going to believe a word of it.

"Sure, Dad," he said. "But let me start at the start. I don't know what Mom told you this morning."

"Well, it was pretty upsetting, son, but I'll try to listen with an open mind. Go ahead and unreel."

Bobby told him about the kids' secret and the TV show and how you had to hold the dial, but Mr. Merriwell didn't interrupt or even smile. Bobby began to feel faintly surprised at his father's patience.

"Anyway, all us fellas put our alarm clocks under our pillows set for three like we were told on the show, and when they go off, we tip-toe to the TV and get the in-between channel. We didn't feel sleepy in the morning because the Head Geezer would look at us real hard and tell us we wouldn't. At first, the show told us about the history of Gowka and how the war between the Geezers and the Slizzards started, and later on it brough us up to date."

"The Slizzards? Are they monsters too?"

"Not just monsters. Demons. Cannibals, too. There's pictures of 'em on the Nertz box, sort of to remind you what the enemy looks like."

"Only they don't always look like Slizzards when they're disguised. You see, hu --- humanity, that's us, is a kind of big, uh, cosmic experiment, and Geezers were cre --- created to guard us against any outside invaders we might be too weak to fight."

"The Slizzards are invaders who turned up about ten years ago. The Geezers have outposts on Mars and the Moon and tried to hold them back out there, but a lot of the Slizzards have managed to slip through to Earth, and they're

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all organized and they may try to pull a, uh, fifth colyum deal anytime and take over. What they want to do is eat humans. That's because --- ."

"Ross, do you want milk or coffee tonight?" Mrs. Merriwell called from the kitchen.

"Better make it bourbon, darling -- straight," Mr. Merriwell said, grinning at his son.

"You want me to go on, Dad?"

"Sure, this is darned entertaining!"

"Well, where was I? Oh, yeah. So many of the Geezers have been killed fighting the Slizzards that they need new fighting troops right away, especially to drive the new faster-than-light scout ships they've been building. The Geezers have to mount a major counter-attack tonight. And since they're allowed to take emergency steps to get recruits --- that means new soldiers --- they started this TV show and spread the word among kids with Geezer agents and put the Nertz cereal on sale. Only kids are smart enough to understand about the Great War."

"Smart enough?"

"Yeah. It wouldn't do any good to try to contact adults. They just wouldn't believe it."

"I suppose you're right. But, son, you know what?"

Mr. Merriwell leaned forward. His teeth flashed in a half-moon grin and his eyes fixed Bobby's firmly.

"I believe you," he said.

"Dinner's on," Mrs. Merriwell called.

They went to eat.

At the table, Bobby got down a bite of liver and a gulp of milk and said, "Anyway, Geezers are just the size of kids between six and ten, Dad, and grown-ups wouldn't fit into their space-ships at all, so --- ."

Mrs. Merriwell thumped her coffee down in white anger, splashing a brown ring on the tablecloth. "You just eat, Bobby, and keep quiet, you hear me? Ross, I thought you were going to thrash this business out before dinner once and for all?"

"This is the end of it, darling, I promise you."

"You don't think we'll have to ---,"

She left the question uncompleted; knowing Ross understood her meaning, about taking Bobby to a doctor.

"No, I don't think so. Pass the asparagus, will you?"

Mrs. Merriwell passed the asparagus wishing there was a small bomb in it.

"Ross, do you hear something?"

Mrs. Merriwell sat stiffly upright in her bed like a spring-released mechanism, straining to hear again whatever it was she had heard.

"Nubbin tall, d'rin. Back sleep."

"Wake up, will you please? It may be Bobby again."

"What's sound like?"

"Like --- like noise in the wall."

"Like --- like mice in the walls, or something. Pattering sounds; and little squeaks, or cries. Ross, there it is again, getting louder!"

"Dream."

"No. Listen! Please wake up!"

"Bobby lissen 'at program, 'sall. Whale tar outta him mornin'. Lemme sleep."

"Ross, it's outside in the street. I'm going to go look."

"Go 'head and bedam."

"What?"

"Nemmind."

Staring with wide eyes at the womb-curved figure of her husband in the other bed, Mrs. Merriwell got up. Clenching her fists nervously, she padded hastily across icy floorboards and cold scatter rugs to the window. She raised the blind halfway and looked out into the moon-spangled night.

Mrs. Merriwell had heard of the death-rattle. The sound that shaped and burst involuntarily from her throat was very similar.

"Children, Ross, children," she managed to shrill after a moment. "Running towards the court house square. You can see them running all the way down East Gage and coming out of the side streets. What is it, Ross, what ---?"

Her husband's voice came, quiet and comforting, behind her.

"They're all recruits," he said.

"Re --- what?"

"Recruits, Mary. New troops for the Geezers. Only they can't handle the weapons or fly the ships without becom-

ing Geezers themselves. That's why Nertz was distributed. Plant concentrates from Geezer laboratories, stuff that couldn't be mixed and stored in one box. Works on the kid's glands; different stuff in each box affecting different parts of their bodies at the start, but ultimately ---."

Mrs. Merriwell clapped a hand over her husband's mouth, staring at him in the moonlight.

"Ross, are you --- are you mad?" she whispered. "What are you talking about? Where did you get such ideas --- from Bobby?"

Gently, he pulled her hand away.

"I --- knew, dear. Now don't worry. None of this really concerns you, not any more."

"Look, Ross! Across the street! It's the little Dillon boy ---but what's wrong with his hands? They're dragging on the ground!"

"Geezer hands, Mary. Jim's mother must have bought him just the box marked 'HANDS'."

"Ross, that's --- that's horrible! Why, that means ---."

"You're right, darling. That's just what it means. And there he goes now."

Her knuckles hard against her teeth, Mrs. Merriwell watched the boy who darted out of her own yard and joined the Dillon lad in the deep shadow of a plane tree. When they emerged into the moonlight, heading up the street, she shrieked aloud.

The wattled ogre face on the second boy turned towards the window for a moment, its great green eyes goggling, then twisted away at the urging of the Dillon boy.

"It's unthinkable, Ross; my God, unthinkable! Where is he going, Ross, where is my boy going?"

"Easy, darling, relax. They're all going to fight a world-wide uprising of Slizzards scheduled for tonight. The Geezers will have ships and weapons waiting in the square, in thousands of squares across the country. They're in no danger yet, not until the Slizzards drop their disguises. But the Slizzards believe in a fair fight. That's the Code of Gowka."

"Oh, Bobby, Bobby," said Mrs. Mer-

riwell in a haunted voice, no longer listening to her husband, her eyes fastened on the diminishing figure of her goblin-headed son trotting toward the court house square.

Her eyes glazed as the shock the sight of her boy had wrought in her mind

THERE ARE FLOWERS ON THE MOON
(Concluded from Page 15)

valley, Landry...beautiful valley, beautiful ... trees. Green. Beautiful valley. Headly, man. Headly.

IMPRESSION: FLOWERS. UNDULANT, GROPING UP, SWARMING, RIOTING. THERE ARE FLOWERS ON THE MOON, LANDRY. THERE REALLY ARE FLOWERS ON THE MOON...

---Sorry, Cogan. Sorry...

The ship came, hurtling out of the barren bleak of space. As it approached Earth, it became apparent to observers that something was wrong, that the automatic-set regulators were dropping the ship into its landing run too fast. Somehow, some irrevocable way, the auto-set had miscalculated. They watched,

THE LAST WORD
(Concluded from Page 3)

but --- for this kind of publication --- more importantly, it will build contributors.

You've done a really excellent job on the first issue, and the future of the magazine looks very promising.

Best wishes,
Richard Kyle

Well, it seems that for a first issue, and for amateurs, we did well for at least one reader! It's nice to know. I believe that the key to success for a sf mag is for it to have "atmosphere"; that is, to have a personality that a reader can recognize. Part of this personality is layout, so, while we will undoubtedly develop different layouts as we go along, I don't think we'll mix different layouts in one issue. Odd you should dislike "Umbo" --- that's the only story of the three(so far) under consideration to be published professionally! -rvh

Pensacola, Fla.

I thank you all for a fine magazine.

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blossomed to its fullest, but it was not that which broke her reason.

What did that was the hairy purple arm of the Slizzard that reached over her shoulder and pulled down the blind.

THE END

helpless, as the husk of mindless steel charged like a doomed bullet toward the atmosphere, a point of metal light spilling itself toward destruction. Like a fast-moving meteor it struck, and in a soundless scream of flame was blown mangled and shredded to flecks of particled.burning steel. Not even ashes were salvaged in memory of its once-proud metal existence. There was not a trace or wisp or solid piece to mourn.

But two weeks later, unaccountably, the equipment on the Moon began to send signals and data. Landry was notified immediately, and he attempted to contact Cogan, on the Moon. There was no answer. No matter how hard or how long Landry tried, there was no answer...but then--- how could there be?

THE END

To me it is No. 1 in its field, though you mark it Vol. 11, No. 3.

Been reading sf since 1925, and have read and enjoyed many stories much inferior to your three. That's my complaint, only 3.

You sincerely have my best wishes in this project, which I can only see as a labor of love.

Very truly yours,
Warren deBra

More stories this issue, and if we can only build up to a printed format, we will have more yet. Yes, SFS is a labor of love, so your best wishes are much appreciated. -rvh

Dillon, Montana

The Original SCIENCE FICTION STORIES is more interesting to read than the old fan fiction from way back in the late 1930's and the 1940's. I like the magazine very much...

Sincerely yours,
Rosco Wright

Hope you will like this issue even better than the first one. -rvh



I BATTLED THE LITTLE MONSTERS FROM HELL!

BY H. B. MUNN

G RISLY MONSTERS CAN COME in all sizes --- Van found that out one terror-filled night in the Central American jungle. Hollywood ain't necessarily right in its contention that the bigger they come, the more monstrous they are!

THEY CLAIM THAT about 1,500 new species of insects are discovered every year. I wouldn't be able to say about that one way or the other --- I'm not a bug-man, I'm an archaeologist.

Or rather I was then. I'm an archaeology researcher and writer now. No more field work for me. I got spoiled for that sort of thing in one night.

One thing I can tell you about bugs, though --- there are still varieties on this Earth that we haven't run across yet, and if you go poking your nose around in out-of-the-way corners like I did, they're liable to discover you.

The demand for archaeologists never gets very far above zero, so when I joined a field group in the Central American jungle only days after getting my Master's diploma, I was patting myself on the back all over the place.

After six weeks of digging, cutting brush, sifting dirt and examining pebbles until my eyes were glassy and every muscle in my body ached at the end of each twelve-hour day, I had my doubts.

Relief from the dull routine came

when we had exhausted the site. Word came that we "junior members" of the group were to be sent out in pairs, on two- or three-day hikes into the surrounding jungle, looking for another likely spot.

I drew big, amiable Charley Cooper as a partner. We made up our kits, drew rifles and ammunition, and set out at dawn, machetes in hand, glad to get away from digging for a couple of days.

We hacked our way along most of the day, yapping about archaeology, women, baseball, mosquitos, and I don't know what all, until Charley, who was leading, suddenly stopped and motioned me up beside him.

At first I could see nothing but the green curtain of jungle, but then through the tangled mat of creepers I made out the face of low cliffs.

Another few minutes of hacking and we stood at their base, or as near to it as we could get for the vines and things which were using it as a natural trellis.

We began moving along the foot, until we emerged into a clearing, floored

with sand and coarse gravel. The cliff face was exposed here --- and the first thing which struck our eyes was the mouth of a cave.

It was roughly circular and quite big. It looked like the mouth of a trunk sewer, and as we stood there gaping at it, I said so.

Charley laughed.

"It does at that," he said. "But it isn't man-made if that's what you mean. It's water-made --- the mouth of a subterranean river. This channel must have got blocked up somehow. The river might be completely underground now. All this sand and gravel was washed down here during the course of thousands of years, and see how those rocks are worn smooth?"

"Let's see what's in the cave," I suggested.

Rifles ready, we moved cautiously toward the blank opening.

Due I suppose to the reflection from the open floor of the clearing, the gloom inside was less than we had anticipated. We looked in on a rock-strewn, sandy floor, obviously the dry bed of a once-sizeable stream of water. Alert to the distinct possibility of a sleeping big cat, we advanced inside.

A few minutes were enough to show us that we had nothing to fear from cats, or any other large animal. There were no signs of recent occupancy, although a few clumps of bones lay around, looking as though they were moth-eaten.

We also discovered that toward the rear, the cave dwindled away into a solid mass of tumbled boulders, which might have been what had plugged up this channel.

Charley stood his rifle against the rough, rocky wall and stretched.

"A perfect spot for the night," he yawned. "This is where I squat until morning."

I shed my pack and rifle, sat down in a nice soft patch of sand with my back against the wall, and lit a cigarette.

Charley flopped down too, and opened his pack.

"I'm hungry," he said.

By the time we had finished our sardines and biscuits, the sun was about

to go down. Saying something about lighting a fire, Charley flipped away the butt of his cigarette and began to heave to his feet.

Suddenly he shot up with a startled exclamation, slapping wildly at his sleeve.

Then he stamped at something on the ground with a fury I didn't think he had in his large and easy-going frame.

I jumped to my feet too. "What is it?"

"Spider! Big black-and-brown one --- ugh! It got away, down between those rocks, I think."

"Big? How big? I didn't see it!"

He held his fingers apart about two-and-a-half or three inches.

I laughed.

"That isn't big. You should have seen the one I ran across by the diggings a couple of weeks ago. Eight-inch leg-span or more. One of those bird-killing things. I let him have it with my shovel. Funny finding a spider in here --- they're brush and tree inhabitants, aren't they?"

"You mean funny 'peculiar' or funny 'ha-ha'?" he frowned. "It ain't funny 'ha-ha' to me --- I hate the damn things. I don't feel too good about bedding down in here with that thing running around."

"From the way you were trying to stomp it, it's probably half-a-mile out in the jungle by now," I smiled.

"Well ---," his eyes searched among the rocks, "--- maybe you're right. I'll go get that stuff for the fire."

We lit a small shinny near the mouth of the cave and decided it wouldn't be necessary to keep watched, we both unrolled our bags and bedded down. Last thing I heard before dropping off to sleep was Charley scrunching his big behind around in the sleeping bag, making a comfortable nest for himself in the sand-patch he had chosen.

I don't know how long I had been asleep when my eyes clicked open in the pitch darkness, my ears straining for the slightest sound.

Then every hair on my body crawled as Charley screamed!

My hand shot out for the flashlight

in my pack --- and closed over a wriggling mass of legs and pulpy bodies!

Unthinking, convulsively, I did the one thing that possibly saved my life right then and there --- I squeezed, and I could feel some horrible stuff spurt-
ing out between my fingers.

I must have let out a yell, too, for dimly through my shock I could hear Charley screaming my name.

This time I found the flashlight.

Sometimes, after I wake up from the same nightmare, screaming as Charley did that night, I wish I hadn't. Sometimes I think it would have been better if I had missed that flashlight altogether, and they had gotten me, too.

For when I turned the light on Charley, I couldn't see him. He was covered, buried in spiders!

The mound of black-and-brown scintillated in the light and moved its grotesque arms and legs, and thrashed and squirmed.

And it screamed --- My God, it screamed!

"Oh, oh! Van! Oh --- Van!"

Suddenly I realized that they were on me, too!

I snaked out of the sleeping bag and played the flash around. Black-and-brown shapes scuttled everywhere. Only a few around me as yet, but they were on their way!

They didn't like the light --- as I moved it around I could see whole waves and phalanxes of the devilish things advancing toward me, sidestepping the light as it fell on them.

I saw something else too. Eyes! In the fringes of the light, tiny eyes sparkled like red diamond chips!

Slashing a path ahead of me with the light, I picked my way as quickly as I could to Charley's form, but even as I did, I knew I was too late.

Spiders scattered as I held the light on him, and then I think I went a little crazy. I remember a voice going on and on without stopping --- it must have been mine --- it couldn't have been his!

One thought overwhelmed me then --- to get out of this den of devils!

Gripping the light like a spear, I stabbed a path through the spiders which

had gathered in the darkness behind me and made for the mouth of the cave.

When I saw it, the full impact of what was happening all but stopped my heart.

Across that opening, my only way out, was a monstrous web, embedded in which lay hundreds of spiders, watching and waiting for their prey to blunder into them in a blind effort to escape!

I leaped back and almost stumbled over our packs. Metal clanked against stone and as I swung the light down, I saw my machete.

Scooping it up, I began to slash at the web. It was tough --- and sticky. Instead of cutting, the strands stuck to the blade, and before I knew it, spiders were swarming toward me along the bridge of web my hacking had created.

I dropped the machete with a clatter and retreated.

Frantically I cast the flashlight beam around the cave. Spiders were everywhere, even on the roof.

Our rifles lay by the packs, but they were useless. A small pile of dead brush lay close to the remains of our fire.

I suddenly became aware of a pain in my hand. Examining it under the light, I could see a swollen spot on the palm. When I had swished that handful of spiders, I had been bitten.

I hoped desperately that only a small amount of the venom was in my system. It wouldn't have to be enough to kill, me, or even paralyze me as it had Charley. Enough to slow me down would be all they needed!

I forced some measure of calmness into my churning mind. As long as I held on to the flashlight, I had a chance. Was it my imagination, or was the light getting dimmer? Without it, I would be defenseless in darkness.

Fire! I needed a fire. Could I burn my way through that web?

There were a couple of notebooks in my pack. Just in time I stopped myself from putting my hand into the knapsack to get them out, and dumped it over with my foot instead. At least a dozen spiders came tumbling out with the rest of the contents.

Right then I snapped back to full

sanity again, and knew --- really knew --- that I was fighting for my life.

One mistake, one hasty move, one more spider bite, could mean the margin between survival --- or the most gruesome death I had ever imagined.

For when I had looked at Charley --- had it only been minutes ago? --- red blood and white bone had contrasted starkly under the light of the flash. He had not only been bitten to death --- they had been EATING him, stripping the flesh from him and carrying it away between the rocks!

Nocturnal, predatory spiders, working cooperatively like a tribe of ants, catching and killing their victims in a trap of their own devising!

The pain in my hand was getting worse, and I shook off a tinge of light-headedness as I snatched up one of the notebooks and tore out a few pages. Quickly I rolled them into a long slim tube like a taper and lit one end with my lighter.

It was only a little flame, but I'd soon have more. I cautiously began to pick sticks out of the pile of firewood, being careful to keep my taper burning and to watch for stray spiders.

Jungle wood, even when dead, is never completely dry, and it seemed a heartbreaking eternity before, with the aid of more notebook pages, I saw the sticks catch and begin to support their own combustion.

Strategically-added sticks made the flames leap higher, and my hopes rose with them. I finally stood up, eyes smarting from the smoke, and switched off my flashlight.

It was a smoky, flickering blaze, but the most beautiful thing I had seen in my life. At least I had a small space I could call my own again.

Could I hold out until morning? Would the light of day drive these demons back into their holes and give me a chance to destroy the web which blocked the exit?

I had no idea how long it would be before dawn, but a glance at my pile of firewood convinced me that I couldn't just sit and wait. I'd have to fight for my life if I wanted it.

Rolling a notebook page into a ball,

I lit it in the fire and gave it an underhanded toss into the web.

It stuck and blazed, and I had the momentary satisfaction of seeing one of the dirty little horrors being incinerated before it could climb out of the way.

But the web itself, outside of a little pocket in direct contact with the flames, remained as strong as ever.

That web was not one of those fragile, lacy things you see in the fields and woods, but layer after layer thick, millions of strands among which the spiders lay and clambered as if in one of those playground "jungle gyms" made of pipe, gigantic, but on a miniature scale.

I tossed a few more fireballs at the web, until I saw that I was wasting time, and time I might not have much of. It would have taken all of my fire and more to have made any significant impression on that web.

My hand was throbbing now and my eyes smarted from the fire's smoke, but I kept it blazing as high as I dared.

Every few minutes a wave of dizziness and nausea swept over me, and I knew that the spider-venom was pouring through my bloodstream. Why wasn't I a bug-man instead of an archaeologist? At least then I'd know if I were dying, and how much longer it would take --- no! I shuddered, knowing that it wouldn't be any better that way.

I didn't look toward the rear of the cave where Charley lay. Or what was left of Charley --- I had no doubt that the spiders had continued their grisly harvest, and I didn't want to find out for sure.

It might have been the smoke from the fire stirring them up, or it may have been their standard line of attack when their first attack failed to bring down their victim --- it didn't matter which.

I had squatted by the fire, afraid to sit down, trying to think, when with a slight tap which felt like the crack of doom a spider landed on my shoulder. No sooner had I slapped it off than one bounced off my knee!

Reaching for the flash I flicked it on and played its light over the walls

and ceiling.

There were hundreds, thousands of them crawling up the walls and on the ceiling!

As I watched another dropped onto my head and it took me several swats to mash it to a pulp in my hair.

One by one they would eventually get me, and what if they should start dropping in clumps?

I could count my minutes of life on my fingers and toes unless I got out of this cave of death fast!

But I was trapped! That damnable web!

I snatched up my sleeping bag, gave it a hard flap to shake off any spiders and draped it over my head and shoulders for what protection it could afford.

Then my eyes lit on the bandoliers of cartridges for the rifles. They were full, over two hundred in all.

A wild idea flapped around inside my head like a demented bat. Was it possible? Could I do it with my bad hand?

There was no choice --- I had to try, or die.

I clawed the bandoliers and one of our empty canteens over to the side of the fire and set to work. I had no tools, only my hands and teeth.

How long did it take? Five seconds a cartridge? Ten seconds? I didn't even try to count. Bite, twist, spit, pour the powder into the dry canteen. Bite, twist ---.

I ignored the ever-increasing pattern of falling spiders against the canvas over my head and back, stopping only to mash one that came to close. At every movement pain shot up my arm from my swollen hand.

My eyes seemed to become red-hot marbles and my fingers fumbling balloons. Sounds like sirens and clanging bells seemed to ring through my head. I felt myself swaying drunkenly back and forth as I worked --- bite, twist ---.

Until suddenly there were no more cartridges, and I fumbled in my pocket for my lighter. The wick and cotton packing, soaked in fluid, would serve as a fuse.

Then a prick like a hot needle on my ankle made me heave to my feet. I

knew I had been bitten again.

They were all around me! I had waited too long! They were moving in for the kill --- the lighter --- no time!

In one last terrified act of self-preservation, I flung the canteen from me straight into the fire and flopped onto the ground.

I remember the flash and roar as the canteen bomb went off, and that's the last coherent memory I have.

After that I seemed to have tumbled along in a torrent of water, which was like a continuation of the bomb's roar. Then I was out of the water, staggering somewhere on dream-like legs and feet.

My memory begins again in a hospital room in Colon. They told me it was three weeks later. They told me about backtracking my trail in search of Charley and of finding the river coming out of the cave. And they asked me what had happened.

But I didn't tell them anything. What was the use? I just got the hell out of there and back to the States as soon as I could, which was not until several months later.

I've figured out what happened to my own satisfaction, at least. My bomb blew out the web, of course. But it also put reverse pressure on the rockpile which clogged the old river channel, probably destroying its water-tightness just enough to let the pent-up pressure do the rest. The released river washed me, spiders and everything right out of the cave.

I still haven't recovered full use of my hand and arm, and I sometimes have hallucinations, other than the nightmares I mentioned.

How, in my condition, I made it back to the vicinity of the diggings, I'll never figure out, but I did.

And now I'm afraid to sit out on the lawn on summer evenings, for fear some harmless bug will crawl on my hand or neck. Even the tickle of a fly is enough to unleash it all again, and I'm back in that cave, fighting the spiders.

They call it delusive hysterics, but I call them the little monsters from hell!

THE END

I BATTLED THE LITTLE MONSTERS FROM HELL!



DOG DAYS

BY ARTHUR D. GRAHAM

"I CAN'T SPARE HEALTHY young dogs from the huntpack," said Prince-402, "Unless this thing is going to show practical results. Don't any of these books make sense yet, Rags?"

"Well, we haven't been able to read a whole book right through," replied Rags-722. "It takes two dogs just to turn a page. But all of the group can actually read. I can even make some headway on newspaper print."

A big grey dog near the center of the council signaled for the leader's attention.

"Wolf-500?" Prince acknowledged.

"We hunters realize that this reading business is going to take lots of time, Leader," said Wolf-500. "And you can't fill our bellies with books. How do you know that there's anything useful in these books to be found? Books certainly didn't do humans any good. Most of them died in the Pits, and we've all seen the ones that didn't! If books do that to humans, I say that dogs should leave them alone!"

"It's silly to say books did that to humans," snapped Rags. "How do you know? That's one of the things we've got to learn. Maybe we'll find the answer and maybe we won't. But we'll never know if we don't try!"

Wolf's angry retort was forestalled by a command from Leader Prince.

"Let's not go mad over this, now," he said. "It's tough enough to figure

out what's best without dog-fights to worry about.

"We had this thing all settled last summer, you know," he went on. "But it appears to be a bigger job than we thought it was. I'm beginning to doubt now that what we started out to find is going to be worth the time and dogs we'll have to spend on it.

"Maybe we could learn to heat our dens with 'furnaces', or ride in 'automobiles' and 'airplanes', like the humans used to do --- if we could put a hundred or a thousand dogs to work on it for the next twenty years. It looked like a good idea when you first mentioned it, Rags, but ---."

He paused to scratch an ear thoughtfully.

"What we need," ventured Rags, "Is some way of handling the books --- holding them open, turning the pages --- something like artificial human hands, or something ---."

His telepathic images became indefinite chaos as he struggled to transmit vague concepts beyond their experience.

Wolf sneered.

"Artificial human hands!" he growled sarcastically. "Why not go out and capture a human to turn book pages for you, Rags? Of course, after it had killed three or four dogs defending itself, it would be dead, too --- to stop it from killing more dogs!"

Rags' canine temper began to kindle under the attack.

"Can't you think beyond killing, Wolf?" he shot. "Or your belly? Every winter we lose ten or twenty youngsters in the cold and snow. Every year the cats and wild dogs get some of us. That's killing, too! We know humans --- before the Pits, when the books were made --- could make the dens the built warm and dry with 'furnaces'. They could kill farther than they could see with 'guns'.

Can't you see what we could do if dogs could learn these things? I say it's all in the books, if we can only find it! Maybe we won't find anything worthwhile in time to do us any good, but our pups will see the difference. Or do you want your pups to grow up into more dumb dogs --- like you!"

Wolf rose up snarling, hackles high and ears flat. Rags started up to meet him.

"Stop it!"

The Leader's telepathic command cracked through their brains like a whip-lash.

For an instant the two faced each other, trembling. Then the tension passed. Wolf resumed his position amid the hunt-pack, but his ears were still flat against his shaggy head.

"If this book-reading project is going to cause trouble like this," said Prince-402 grimly, "It's going to stop right now. Both of you ought to be ashamed of yourselves. Living is hard enough without --- Oh, growf! These fleas!"

The Leader interrupted himself to scratch energetically at his neck, powerful hind leg thumping the ground. His tongue lolled intently as he sought relief from Dog's immemorial plague. The power of suggestion set off a wave of scratchings through the assembled pack.

Routing the enemy-insects, at least temporarily, the leader shook his hackles back into place and glared around the circle of grey shapes.

"Some dirty dog has been chasing a sweet-looking wild bitch from across the river!" he growled telepathically, "And if I find out who it is ---."

Rags recognized an opportunity.

"Humans could kill fleas," he said. All ears went up, including Wolf's.

Prince focused his flea-engendered glare on Rags.

"They did it with something called 'D-D-T'," continued Rags, heartened by the interest he had aroused.

"Why didn't you tell me this before!" barked the Leader. "What is this 'D-D-T'?"

"I don't know," admitted Rags, "but it's in a book with pictures of dogs and cats and other animals. Something about 'pets'."

"What's a 'pet'?" Wolf-500 asked.

Prince-402 ignored the query. He lay down again, head erect, facing the pack in the position of leadership.

Silently, they waited.

"If we can learn just this one thing from the books," he said finally, "It will be worth all the time and trouble. Go back to them, Rags, and never mind the 'furnaces' and the 'air-planes' --- just find out what 'D-D-T' is!"

Rags savored his triumph as he led his pack of mutant dogs away from the packden, across the valley and over the hills beyond. Rendered telepathic and intelligent by the hard radiation of the atomic holocaust which had wiped human civilization from the face of the Earth, they picked their way through the ruins of what had been a small city, toward all that was left of humankind's greatness --- water-soaked, rat-chewed books in the tumbled remains of a library.

Time --- time off from hunting, time to read the books! He would never ride in an 'automobile', he knew, or his pups; maybe not even his pups' pups.

But what dog knew how much was in these books? Who could foresee the end?

As efficiently as they could, they set to work, nosing through the scattered lumps of board and paper, heeding the drive of their dogs' curiosity as it guided their fumbling paws and questing black muzzles.

Searching through the rubbled volumes for the one with the 'pet' pictures, Rags had a sudden thought.

Had humans ever pawed through the wreckage of an older, wiser civilization at the beginning of their search? If so, what had they been looking for?

EDITORIAL
(Concluded from Page 2)

"The Wooing Of Umpo", last issue, has a lot of clever ideas in it, I think, and was a good presentation of a way-out theme.

"Man Of The Multiman" has well-defined conflict, good writing, and a seriousness of purpose which carries out a familiar theme to good advantage.

When I first read "The Recruits" by Bill Blackbeard, I immediately thought of that old radio drama, "The Witch's Tales." This would have fitted right into old Alonzo Dean Cole's schedule! Quite an effective bit of science-fantasy, I thought.

I think "Dog Days" by Art Graham is a little gem, compressing material for a whole novel into 1,100 words. The snap-

per on the end takes care of Lovecraft's "old ones" and all the various atlantean legends in one deft stroke.

"Scapegoat" by Rem Roberts is a grim and business-like picture of "what happens when..." The very essence of science-fiction.

"Little Monsters From Hell" is not science-fiction in my estimation. I believe it was written for those men's mags with the snakes and crocodiles and undressed babes on their covers. It is, however, a hair-raising yarn, very effectively done, and has enough of a s-f element to creep in here. Maybe the reason the men's mags didn't take it --- no babe!

SO THERE YOU HAVE my thoughts on what SFS has presented so far. Now let's have yours! -rvh

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"JOE MARTIN AND THE ID MACHINE"

BY TOM PIPER

Joe Martin --- as just plain Joe Martin --- had his troubles, of course; Don't we all? But that was before he met Alexander von Penzolt and his lousy Id machine. EVERYTHING turned to trouble after that. You just can't imagine what trouble is until you become tangled up, like Joe was, with the cops, firemen, the Id machine, little old ladies with sharp umbrellas, and a couple of chicks --- one of them a CHIMP chick! You'll just have to read it in SCIENCE FICTION STORIES!



THE SCAPEGOAT

BY REM ROBERTS

WALLABIES AND JACKRABBITS have been problem enough when they outgrew their ecological breeches. Man was able to recognize them as enemies and take the necessary steps. But then came the quin-quins --- which man seemed unable to recognize as enemies ----. Until it was too late.

I HEAR FRED BAGLEY and a few of my other former neighbors downstairs having a brawl. Three of them just made a triumphant return from outside the house and I hear the excited squeaking of a quin-quin. Before long they will bring it to me and I will have to do something I don't want to do to keep them satisfied. Right from the beginning that was the problem --- keeping the neighbors satisfied.

I remember how Bagley acted a day or two after Vera and I ordered the quin-quins. I was in the garage, trying to piece together a cage from a few laths and a roll of chicken wire. I didn't see him come up, and when he spoke in that foghorn voice of his it startled me.

"What do you think you're doing, Turner?"

I looked up, perspiration dripping from my forehead.

"Hi, Fred. Hot day, eh?"

"Don't change the subject, Turner! What are you building that cage for?"

I looked him over carefully. He

stood nearly a head taller than I and weighed an additional fifty pounds. He had a bull neck like a wrestler. It had always amazed me that with a build like his he should do nothing more strenuous for a living than sell insurance.

"Vera and I have sent for a pair of quin-quins," I answered.

"You did, huh?" His tone was openly belligerent. "Well, maybe you'd better figure on sending 'em back again!"

I picked up the hammer. "I don't see what business it is of yours, Fred," I said reasonably.

"Zoning laws!" he snapped. "This is a fairly exclusive neighborhood you and your wife have horned your way into, Turner."

I didn't like that. For one thing, I was naturally against exclusiveness in any neighborhood except where it concerned such things as pig sties and glue factories. Besides that, what Bagley said about exclusiveness and our horning our way in wasn't true. The brick house and the little chunk of land around it was for sale to anybody. The fact that no-

body in this tenth-rate suburb of this two-bit metropolis had connected my commoner-than-common face with Mars, rockets and spacesuits was not my fault. Nor was it my fault that they had so far failed to recognize the name of Guy Horace Turner as being the Wyatt Turner everyone had heard about. I might have told Bagley a few things if at that moment we hadn't been interrupted.

"What's the matter, dear?"

I turned to see Vera staring at me in a perplexed manner. She wore a yellow blouse with an old pair of dark brown slacks and a rundown pair of bedroom slippers. Her stringy hair was hanging loose to her shoulders and, as usual, she had neglected to apply black dye to the narrow, unpigmented strip that ran from her crown to her forehead.

"Bagley here doesn't like the idea of our raising quin-quins," I said.

"Is that true, Mr. Bagley?" she asked. Her dark blue eyes were wide with seeming innocence. Just looking at her, it would have been hard to realize that she was a completely qualified lawyer.

Bagley lowered his gaze before she did. "I was just telling Wy --- er, Guy here that the zoning laws prohibit ---,"

I blinked at Bagley's partial use of the name "Wyatt". The word is out, I figured.

"But, Mr. Bagley, they don't say anything about the raising of quin-quins," Vera said in a smoothly interrupting manner. "There aren't any zoning laws that forbid our keeping a few pets in the basement. And that's all they are, Mr. Bagley --- pets."

Bagley hesitated only briefly.

"Zoning laws can be changed," he said. "I've got influence around here. I can get up a petition if I have to."

"Why would you want to do that, Mr. Bagley?"

He fastened his eyes on the albino patch at the edge of Vera's hairline.

"These quin-quins are an unknown quantity," he said. "They might carry disease or something."

"Because they come from Mars?" I asked, determined not to let Vera do all the talking. "Because I happen to be the man who brought them home from there?"

It was out now, like a poison-fanged serpent undulating in all its hideousness.

"Just because a few tests were made on those things don't mean they're safe to bring into a town like this. There's something unnatural about them. I read an article on it just a little while ago."

"You mean the one that quoted some scientist as saying people became too attached to them?" Vera asked.

"That's the one. They tested a bunch of third-year medical students at a university and not one of them had the guts to chloroform one."

"Is that bad, Mr. Bagley? Don't we need a little more kindness in the world?"

Bagley glared at me as if the situation was all my fault, which in a way it was.

"The article said it wasn't natural," he said stubbornly. "People like them too much and they breed too fast."

I laid down my hammer and put my hand on his shoulder.

"Fred, if people object to our quin-quins as much as you say they will, I give you my word we'll get rid of them."

Bagley looked suspicious.

"Anything to keep peace with our neighbors," I said.

Bagley struggled with himself and found one last shred of defiance.

"Okay, Turner," he said. "But if anything happens --- I guess you'll know who'll be responsible!"

The quin-quin downstairs has stirred up quite a racket. It's got the ones outside answering it. "Quin-quin, quin-quin, quin-quin," they keep calling even over the voices of my former neighbors. It's comforting to know that the house is made of bricks --- that the quin-quins can't eat their way through the walls and get at us. Not so comforting to know that, despite everything, Bagley and the others hold me responsible.

It was on a Sunday, a week after Bagley had shown up while I was building the cage.

Vera and I were feeding carrot sticks (although we knew that wood sticks would have done just as well) to

two bushy-tailed, cinnamon-colored creatures in our basement. There came a knock on our door.

Vera never looked up from her place on the basement steps. She cuddled the living teddy bear to her and said, "Better answer it."

Reluctantly, I placed my own quin-quin back in the cage. "Quin-quin", it said to me. I felt its large dark eyes on my back all the way up the stairs.

When I opened the front door I found four people standing on the porch. One of them was Fred Bagley.

"Good morning," I said eyeing him.

"We're here about those animals," foghorned Bagley.

"They've got to go," interrupted a female with him whom I mentally labeled "Mrs. Snurp".

"They're the devil's work!" shouted the old man with the cane. "When I was a lad, cats and dogs were the only pets people ever had, and they were bad enough. Now they've got monkeys and parakeets and things from Mars!"

I recognized a crisis. Without a word, I turned and went back inside.

Returning to the basement, I found Vera still fondling the quin-quin as if nothing had happened. Placing a finger to my lips, I removed the other quin-quin from the cage and went upstairs.

Approaching the still-open front door, I heard them arguing among themselves. But when they saw what I held in my arms they fell silent and stared.

Quin - quins always affect people that way. The first sight of one seems to open up reservoirs of affection and longing that the beholder never consciously possessed. It was as if quin-quins were things lost and forgotten from human knowledge and understanding, now miraculously restored from the forgotten memories of childhood.

Finally they found their voices.

"Why --- why, it's darling!"

"Gee, wouldn't my kid like to have one of those!"

"Reminds me of a chipmunk I once had," the old man said. "Guess I clean forgot about it!"

Then each one of them wanted to hold the quin-quin. That was always the clincher.

There were tears in Bagley's eyes as several minutes later he said: "When they breed, Wyatt --- when they breed, don't gotget your neighbors!"

Forget them?! They'll never let me do that!

The commotion downstairs has gotten noisier. Sounds like there's a disagreement with Bagley over the split of the quin-quin meat. I wish I could still see --- I'd go to the head of the stairs and look down at them. That is, I would if my door wasn't locked. And if I could see, it wouldn't be locked, and I wouldn't be here at all.

When was it that things first started turning sour? It's hard to say, exactly. The quin-quins bred so rapidly that it was only a few months before everyone in the neighborhood had a couple. A year later all of us had more than they could keep penned-up or give away.

The reproductive rate of quin-quins is far on the wrong side of phenomenal. Each individual is both male and female, meaning that both parents drop litters every few weeks --- large litters. The record in our neighborhood was twenty-eight. The babies mature in a month or two and begin producing litters of their own.

Quin-quins have voracious appetites and are completely omnivorous --- they -- 'll eat wood, paper, flesh, fish, anything vegetable or animal, no matter how far removed from its natural state it may have been processed. You had to keep them stuffed, or they'd eat your clothes, books, rugs off the floor, your cigarettes, even the wood in your house.

And the fact that even the most hardened criminal-type person couldn't be forced to kill a quin-quin meant that there was no check at all to their propagation. No poison had much of an effect on them, no other creature stood a competitive chance with them.

When things started to get bad, the news broadcasts showed huge masses of quin-quins laying waste to mile after square mile of countryside, devouring everything, crops, trees, fences, houses and any unlucky animals who might be in their way.

It was strange what indignation we

all used to feel at the government's frantic efforts to stop them.

As the world-wide food shortage became a crisis and then an agonizing day-by-day aché in the belly for humankind, every method of quin-quin extermination that could be dreamed up was tried. Bacteriological spraying, poison gas, even the deliberate spread of radioactive substances --- nothing seemed to be of any use against their fantastic metabolism. What they couldn't absorb, they avoided; what they couldn't avoid, they buried under hundreds of tons of quin-quin bodies whose putrefaction odors made whole states and regions uninhabitable.

Planes machine-gunned quin-quins and dropped shrapnel bombs. Artillery and rockets blasted into hillsides covered with them. Remote-controlled tanks rumbled across fields, crushing all before them.

It was all a big joke. Nothing short of complete extermination would have had any effect at all, and while the armies and navies and airplanes were out slaughtering quin-quins, every last citizen who had ever seen one was cuddling a quin-quin, feeding it, keeping it safe from harm, "ooh-ing" and "aah-ing" over the cute little babies which came along with deadly regularity --- and then slyly turning them loose when they became too numerous to cope with.

How can they blame me for that?

Funny thing, blind people were comparatively immune to the "vibrations" or whatever it was that comprised the quin-quin magic. Some governments drafted brigades of blind persons, armed them with ferocious dogs, and set them prowling. When the citizenry saw how well they were fed on the quin-quin meat they killed, the dogs were killed, and the blind ones held as captive butchers of quin-quins, hated and reviled for their callous ability to kill, but each nevertheless jealously guarded by the neighborhood that owned him.

Somewhere in the midst of the breakdown, a report was circulated that scientists thought that all animal life and almost all vegetable life on Mars was gone because the quin-quins had eaten it all. Obviously, people said. To think my dear little quin-quin could conquer a

world!

Itchy-coo!

Vera and I had more than our share of difficulties. Even before food had become synonymous with the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, Vera had been first snubbed, then insulted, and finally actually stoned in the open street by boys acting out the desires of their parents.

A brick through the window carried a note which read: "It's your fault, Wyatt Turner!"

I started the next day to turn the house into a fortress. By ruthlessly squandering my savings, and by contacting the right men in government, the same men who had shook my hand and congratulated me upon my successful return from Mars, I had my brick house surrounded with electric fence and burglar alarms. I got guns and ammunition. I scrounged and bargained for food and managed to lay in a supply.

A night or two later, the alarms went off, and I shot the man who was the slowest of the group running away. I shot him in the back.

In the morning, I found a bundle of twelve sticks of dynamite outside the fence. We weren't bothered again. The police didn't even bother coming around to ask about the man I shot. It was too commonplace an occurrence for them to notice.

Soon after that, things got really desperate. Desperate people ate dogs, horses, cats --- then desperate people began to eat people. First the reports came from faraway places where people never had had really enough to eat. Then reports from our own country. From our own city.

Reports had stopped coming altogether by the time we knew it was happening right in our own neighborhood. Our neighborhood didn't have a blind butcher. It was a pity there weren't enough blind people to go around.

Vera and I stayed behind our fortress walls, never going out, never seeing our neighbors except at a distance.

I lost track of time, being satisfied merely to survive and be left alone.

But it must have been many weeks later that everything happened at once.

The electricity went off, and we lost all water pressure at the faucets. I guess you could call that the day civilization ended.

Our own little two-by-four of civilization ended when our food gave out. It's odd now to remember that I thought at the beginning that we'd be alright; that the whole world could go down the drain, but not us.

I can't forget the day when Vera begged me with unaccustomed tears in her eyes to go outside and kill a quin-quin.

"It's been days since we've eaten," she pleaded, "And --- and I know you can do it if you make up your mind to it."

I looked at her face, dark blue eyes bright with hunger and the narrow albino streak above her forehead.

What she asked, I knew to be impossible. Packs of humans endlessly patrolled what remained of our neighborhood. Since the quin-kins had eaten the wooden houses, along with the lawns and the trees, not very much remained. Yet despite all this, I found myself promising to do as she asked.

I felt strange and my thoughts all seemed turned upside down as I picked up a .45 automatic and checked the clip. I unbarred the door and stepped out onto the front porch.

The sunlight was bright in the street outside, and I could see several quin-kins ambling about. No people were in sight.

I went down the walk and out the gate in the fence. There was a quin-quin only paces away on the bare, inedible sidewalk.

I raised the gun. I was determined that this unnatural fascination of the quin-kins was going to end right here.

The quin-quin looked up at me with eyes like great pieces of soft, black velvet. They seemed to grow in size, to become deeper, blacker ---.

"Quin -- quin", it said, creeping closer.

Could you have shot Santa Claus when you were five years old? Could a boy have chopped off the head of Donald Duck if he had waddled up and quacked at him? Could a little girl have slit the

throat of her teddy bear?

Something exploded in my head, and I turned and ran.

The next thing I remember is the gun bucking madly in my hand and a terrible roaring sound. Then I was standing over Vera, who was lying on the kitchen floor, her chest, her face, even the albino streak of hair --- red ---.

That's really all I remember except for a brief spell of running and screaming through the deserted streets.

Justice finally caught up with me in what may or may not have been an alley. Two men held me by the arms and another man kept hitting me. It was hard to recognize anything human in the bearded, dirty faces.

"Wyatt Turner, I hate you! Wyatt Turner, I hate you!" the man who was hitting me kept shouting. Each time he shouted he struck me with his fist.

Horribly, I couldn't think of Vera at all at that moment --- I could only think of the quin-quin I had almost shot.

"That's enough, Bagley," one of the other men said. "Remember what we're gonna have!"

The fist landed again where the bridge of my nose had been, but where there was now nothing but pain.

"You're damned right I remember!"

Shockingly, his hands were suddenly on my face, his thumbs pressing with unbelievable force against my eyeballs, ---.

There was a scream downstairs just now. I think the scream was Randall's, but it could have been Bagley's. No matter, it simply means that there will be more meat in the pot tonight than just the quin-quin's. Once the thought would have horrified me.

I hear them coming up the stairs now. One of them will throw open the door, and I will be given a quin-quin in one hand and a knife in the other. The love and affection I remember now will be nothing to the knowledge that I must destroy the source of it in order to live. Should I fail, either this time or later, it will be the end for me and the neighborhood, too.

I'll do it --- this time --- but I'm beginning to realize that it just isn't worthwhile any more, keeping the neighbors satisfied.



OUTCASTS OF LIGHT

BY SAM MOSKOWITZ

ON THE OTHER SIDE of the barrier of the speed of light lay the trap into which the ship plunged. Long centuries of Time stretched backward, containing all that he had ever hoped for, aspired toward, and held dear. And ahead lay --- well, death seemed to be the most trivial of the alternatives which Jack Hidley faced.

"SHIP'S CREW WILL strap themselves into their safety seats." Above the vibrant whine of the atomic engines, Jack Hidley could hear metallic footsteps responding to his order, which had been carried through the length of the vessel by loudspeakers. Then, one by one, little blue lights on the control board flashed to show that each section of the ship was in readiness.

His face flushed with excitement, he turned his head to Rubenschall, fellow astrogator, strapped in beside him at the auxiliary controls.

"Another twenty thousand miles per second will tell the story, Rubenschall," he said.

Rubenschall made a nervous movement with his hands, but kept his eyes fastened on the slowly climbing speed indicator.

In the same pilot room, expert technicians Callpard, Riggiero and Thomson each sat at a control board governing a phase of the complicated vessel's functioning. Like well-oiled mechanisms their hands moved here and there, adjust-

ing a lever slightly to build up lowered air pressure in a portion of the ship, twisting a knob to reduce overheating in the engine chambers, or building up still further the artificial gravity.

In the far corner of the room, brown-haired, brown-eyed tiny Ruth Walters sat strapped into a wall seat, carefully recording each new action into the ship's primary log.

Jack twisted about and gave Ruth a confident smile. She returned a rather wan one, but buttressed it by blowing a kiss to him with her hands.

"This is my last trip," Jack thought to himself as his hand almost casually reached for the lever controlling the auxiliary drive. "If I prove that I'm right, shatter Einstein's concept, and show that man-made objects are capable of infinite speeds, that they are not chained by the speed of light, then I'll settle down and live like a human being!"

This was it! He threw the auxiliary drive in. The tempo of the en-

engine's whine changed. The speed indicator leaped forward with unexpected rapidity. There was a lift. Jack's stomach slipped as it once had in a fast moving elevator.

Then the entire perspective of the ship began to change. The walls seemed to swell, to bend, then straighten. Thousands of tiny triangular vortices appeared to whirl in the room about him.

The metal of the ship's hull seemed to break down into a crystalline mass of sparkling energy, then as quickly transmute back to its original form. Things turned and twisted into every conceivable shape and angle and some scarcely conceivable ones.

Then pain, red-hot, searing, eating pain caught him. He felt as though every cell in his structure was turning inside out, was ripping apart and reforming again. There was no strength left in his arms; they hung grotesquely, twisted, almost boneless, at his side. His legs began to wobble like some gooey gelatine mass, to lose all solid substance.

An instant before unconsciousness shut out the amazing sight, he peered from a crazy, inconceivable angle into the very recesses of his body. Saw the heart beating tumultuously. Saw the red-ribbed grey of the lungs, expanding and compressing mightily. Saw blue blood coursing in ceaseless streams through his expanding arteries. Then oblivion --- merciful oblivion.

AS HIS SENSES BEGAN to collaborate once more, there was but one predominant effect that registered on Jack Hidley's brain. A constant, ominous, eerie, hollow sound:

Thrum'm'm. Thrum'm'm. Thrum'm'm.

He rose unsteadily to his feet, that strong noise, in great, rolling vibrations, emphasizing the unsteadiness of his mind and body.

Thrum'm'm. Thrum'm'm. Thrum'm'm.

The walls seemed to come close and then recede with each rhythmic echo. Something in his eardrums was responding to that ceaseless vibrant sound. It was torturing in its metallic hollowness, chilling in its lonely, foreboding cadence. It would have been better, much better, to have everything silent.

The metal beneath him clanked softly as he released his safety belt and stepped unsteadily forward, bracing himself with his hand on the control panel. He shook his head again and again to clear the misty cobwebs from his brain. His eyes seemed to have forgotten how to focus and a kaleidoscope effect of images whirled dizzily upon the sight centers of his brain before the muscles of his eyes resumed something of their customary efficiency. Only a single dim light burned in all of the pilot room. In the hall from the passageway, there was indication that a few other lights still burned.

Jack's eyes flitted to the control board. No yellow, red or blue lights registered there. Only a soft layer of dust atop the multiple array of dials.

With an effort he wiped the dust off one of the dials. It was labeled SPEED, but the delicate hand lay disconnected in its case as though it had snapped. Uncomprehendingly he wiped off another dial which said FUEL. The indicator rested quietly at zero.

No more fuel! It should be important, yet the full significance of what that meant refused to register in his mind.

Now he was conscious of an awful thirst in his throat.

Scarcely thinking, he stumbled over to the water container and purifier. He plunged down the button and held his mouth to the spout. For an instant nothing happened. Then, a wet, rusty brown liquid spurted up and struck him in the face. He staggered back, relinquishing his pressure on the button.

Huge dirty spots of metal rust mingled with the dust and water formed an evil-appearing greyish-brown puddle that slipped sullenly down the drain, as if scarcely drawn by a gravitational force.

Jack applied pressure to the button again and waited. Minutes passed and still the water ran brown. Something seemed to tell him that the water container's interior should have been non-corrosive, as surely as did the carefully constructed apparatus not allow for evaporation.

His thirst was so overwhelming now that he geared himself to force down the brackish, dirty mess that passed as wat-

er. Closing his eyes he gulped down huge draughts --- he must have drank a quart --- but there was no taste in his throat other than the water being wet. It was as if deposits of sediment had formed over his taste buds, blocking their effectiveness.

A moment later he doubled up in nausea. The dried-up juices of his stomach protested and he rolled on the floor of the ship, violently ill. For a while he was afraid, terribly afraid, he was going to die. And then, as the pain rose in ever-increasing, never-ceasing torrents of agony, he was afraid again, afraid he wasn't going to die!

Finally the excruciating stabs of pain in his stomach settled down to a dull throbbing. With a great physical effort he drew himself off the floor. Beads of sweat began to appear on his brow as dormant glands began to function under the stimulus of the huge amount of liquid he had consumed.

The cloudiness was disappearing rapidly from his brain. Thoughts began to well up in confusing array: was he alone on this ship? Was he supposed to be alone? What was wrong? How had he gotten here?

The noise in his ear-drums gradually lessened. Soon there was silence. No sound but the movement of his own limbs, as they echoed weirdly from chamber to empty chamber of the space ship. He could think more clearly now, but his memory was foggy. Only tiny portions of the past penetrated through to the present. He concentrated on it for a moment. Shooting pains went through his forehead. He stopped. It would come to him gradually. No need to force it.

For the first time his eyes found their way to one of the ship's ports. He gazed out into the vasty black, span-gled indiscriminately with stars. Wild-eyed, he cast about, searching almost frantically for a familiar constellar formation. Every arrangement that he could see was a strange and unfamiliar grouping. Nowhere could he find a familiar sign or a recognizable star.

He was not within his own galaxy!

Where was he? Where was everyone else?

Galvanized by mounting fear, he turned and plunged down the long metal

corridor of the ship.

"Hello!" he shouted. "Hello! Is anyone here?"

"Hello," the echoes mocked him. "Hello."

The ringing, empty sounds pierced him through and through. He lapsed into silence as weakening reiterations of his call murmured along the hull of the ship.

The big dining room. He flung open the doors. There was the long dining table riveted to the floor, its shiny surface modified by layers of dust. Row upon even row of seats, like stools before a drug-store fountain --- all empty!

He turned from the dining room back to the cabins. Hopelessly he searched through them. The bunks were vacant. Each and every one of them empty.

He almost fell down the winding staircase to the fuel chambers. The ponderous shiny feeders were silent. The fuel chambers empty. The mechanics gone.

Unutterably weary, he forced himself back up the staircase.

Where was everyone? There was only a single answer. But, no! God, please, no! It couldn't be. He couldn't be here, here --- alone ---.

He was suddenly weak. Terribly weak. He must have food to replenish his dried-out tissues. How long had he lain there unconscious? Hours? Days? Weeks, maybe? But the water --- the corrosion of the rust-proof tank --- it would have to be --- many years!

Somehow he found his way to the galley. The once shiny kitchen equipment was now sullen, tarnished and incredibly dusty.

Bending down with an effort, Jack lifted some canned goods from compartments underneath the waste converter. Can after can he had to discard, their roundness discolored and bulging, but eventually he found one which looked promising. Too tired to search for a can-opener, he pounded the can against the metal sides of the ship until it split and the juice poured forth. It was canned peaches.

The flavor had a rum taint to it, but this served to revive his flagging strength. He drank out the juices and

gulped down the peaches, soft and soggy as they were.

Carelessly dropping the empty can on the floor, he began to examine the galley more carefully. A dust-covered bracelet on the table caught his eye. He picked it up. There was something familiar about it. Wisps of memory flickered down the unused corridors of his mind.

HE TURNED THE BRACELET around. R.W. The initials --- RUTH WALTERS! The sheet of forgetfulness was magically whisked away from his mind. Everything, everything, was remembered and clear.

"Ruth!" he cried. "Ruth, where are you?"

He staggered from the galley and called again. No answer.

Silently he moved through the dusty chambers of the space-shell, his mind seething with frantic thoughts. Rubenschall, Callpard, Riggiero, Thomson. Gone! All gone.

From stem to stern he again explored the ship. Searching uselessly in impossible extremities.

No one.

Refusing to credit the evidence of his senses, he went through the ship a third time, searching hopelessly for some clue to this crazy dilemma, for an answer to this unsolvable riddle. Nothing! All his efforts were fruitless.

Just a moment ago, it seemed to him, Rubenschall had sat tensely next to him. Ruth had smiled her encouragement. Now they were gone. What had become of them?

He staggered into the radio room. With some coaxing he warmed up the powerful space-radio transmitter. On all wavelengths he sent out appeal after ringing appeal. Blazoned his fantastic situation for all the universe to hear. But if it were heard there was no indication of it. The universe, the strange mysterious unknown universe replied not to pleas or entreaties, logic or insanity, but remained aloof and inscrutable.

Leaving the set on with the remote hope that something might come through, Jack moved mechanically through the corridors, grappling with the strength of reason with the monumental questions

that beset him. Where had everyone gone? Why was he alone, deserted? Where could they all have gone? There were no auxiliary life-ships. And how long had he lain unconscious? The deep layers of dust, here in the air-tight hull, could not have accumulated in days or weeks, but only in years. And the water container. He knew the alloy that composed its interior. It was impregnable to the ravages of rust; even decades of wetness could have made no impression on it. In a century it would have been as incorrupted as when it was first built.

In a century! No man could lie in an unconscious state that long. And Ruth. If centuries had passed, Ruth was dead now. A mental censor in his brain clamped down to prevent him from thinking further along that line.

His thoughts were becoming irrational. He realized that. He was tired. Needed rest. Carefully, now, he moved along the ship and found the cubby hole that should have been his room. From the meager lights that still burned down the corridor he saw that his cot, suspended from the ceiling, still hung as he had last seen it, but piled high with decay-created of its own substance.

Jack chuckled dryly as he realized that another scientific curiosity had been solved. Would a sealed space ship gather dust? Well, most assuredly it would, for one of the most important components of air was dust, without which there would be no light for the eye to see. Slowly inevitably, it would drift towards the steel floor of the ship, pulled by the weak artificial gravity. With this line of thought in his mind, he fell asleep.

When he awoke it was to find that strange "thrumming" sound vibrating in his ears again. The silence, the stillness, of the ship was so intense, so grave, that the ear-drums protested at the lack of nothing to hear and created their own disturbances. But awakening from this sleep was not a refreshing feeling. His tongue was coated with white substances, his brain felt woozy, and a certain, indefinable sense of weakness permeated his entire being.

Despite the fact that the gravity plates were not gripping the soles of

his shoes with anything like the force they should have exerted, he walked heavily, with difficulty, grabbing at the wall often for support.

He rinsed his mouth with the offensively-tasting water, and played some over his face with snapping motions of his wrist. It helped refresh him, and he didn't bother to find something to dry himself with, content to let it evaporate instead.

With a mental effort he drew himself together. He must make a concerted effort to solve his problem. Must rationalize all angles carefully, and as unemotionally as possible.

In some inconceivable fashion he had awakened to find the space vessel empty, deserted. All but himself gone. Why? When? Where? Those were questions which demanded solution. And finally, how to remedy the situation. He must quit the impatient echoes of his footsteps down the vacant corridors of this deserted ship and must set the cells of his brain to working, to contriving an answer to this riddle.

One by one he dusted off the glass tops of the meters in the control room and examined their figures. One and all they were crazily awry. Of valuable information he could gather none. cursory examination of the food stocks revealed a limited amount of various canned goods and virtually nothing else. There was no sure way of ascertaining just how large a supply of water still remained, or how long the reserve storage power would keep the air purifiers and radio in operation. The lights were composed of a radium compound and did not depend on outside power, but all but three were burnt out, and those three were weak and dull. It was evident that he could continue to exist for the time being, and equally certain that his strongest hope lay in the operable radio unit, which was capable of sending signals over many light years of space.

For hours at a stretch he played about with the radio, trying to draw in any sound which might at that moment be speeding across the cosmos. Hoping against hope that one of his appeals for help would be heard by someone, something, anything. The powerful set sucked futilely about for radio waves to

feed on, but found nothing.

After a particularly long, and completely useless, session with the radio, Jack turned away; his eyes rimmed with bitterness, his soul crusted with frustration. The farce of the reasonable approach was rapidly becoming an untenable philosophy. There was a small mirror in the radio room and he stumbled over to it. Even in the dim light it was evident that his clothes were nondescript. He hadn't bothered much about his appearance. There was a very heavy growth of beard and his hair was a riot of disarray. All the fears, all the bitterness that he had been suppressing welled up to the surface. It seemed a red pencil had quietly moved over the page of his life and in glaring, incriminating letters proclaimed: FAILURE. All he had done, all he had ever tried to do, added up to the unsymphonic dirge of failure. The "genius" he was said to have. The "genius" that had cleverly constructed innumerable gadgets (for that was all they added up to now) had proved its true, mocking shallowness. Had rung empty as he always feared it might under test.

Men of Earth, willing to worship anyone gifted with the aura of success, called him a genius simply because he had slaved day and night over a few mechanical gadgets and got them to work. Any man with his type of education and with a little inborn persistence would have achieved the same result.

Now, the irrepressible forces of nature were testing him, were giving him the supreme chance to prove himself. Here on this vessel he might have all the tools necessary to extricate himself from this predicament, but he could not even begin to guess how to use them. And the humming from the powerful radio unit that he had forgotten to shut off seemed to serve accompaniment to his morose thoughts. Soon he found himself listening to it, to its strangely rhythmic surge of power, to its useless feelers of sound.

Abruptly the single light in the room faded. Stirred by a sense of impending disaster, Jack Hidley moved to the corridor. He got there barely in time to see the remaining hall light flicker and disappear, and seconds later

the control room glow, down at the end of the hall, abruptly winked out.

It was no longer any use. There was no sense lying to himself. The last remaining radium lamps, constructed to burn for centuries, had faded and gone out before his eyes. It was centuries past that he had thrown in the auxiliary drive and pushed the ship beyond the speed of light!

An instant longer a red glow lingered in the radio room lamp, and then that too was gone. All that remained were the infinitesimal dots that lanced in through the ports of the ship. Now he was in darkness and only the insistent hum of the radio remained with him.

He stood motionless trying to ascertain the location of the set with a sense of direction that had deserted him as the lights flickered out.

There seemed to be a scarcely discernable radiance in front of his eyes. Probably some effect of pitch darkness on the retina of the eye, he surmised. But no! It was growing brighter, brighter. Slowly, tenuously, the radiance grew and through it he could see the squat outlines of the radio.

Outlines formed. A shape began to resolve itself. No, it couldn't be. It was the form of a woman!

It became more defined with every instant that fled by. A strange, utterly alien, radiant and transparent woman --- or the transposed image of one. Eyes popping in disbelief, Jack stared forward as if hypnotized. The limbs were beautiful and curved, and somewhere in their curve there was something just a shade different from the shape of a woman of Earth. Somewhere in the full, ripe breast there was a tilt that was completely strange, bizarre, and somewhere in the contours of that breathtaking face all the alienity of a being light years removed lay hidden.

Then, rising up from the forehead were two swaying feelers about a foot long, with dainty knobs at the top, radiating blinding fingers of color. The two feelers seemed to lean towards Jack. An unbelievably strong hypnotic power drew him towards the image before him.

The veins knotted on Jack's forehead as he instinctively resisted the unearthly power of this strange feminine

visitation. Sweat poured from him and finally, involuntarily, words rent from his throat.

"You're not real! You don't exist --- you can't be real!"

The spoken words seemed to have a power in themselves. The image of the woman faded, slowly, slowly. Abruptly it was gone!

Back against the hull of the ship Jack staggered. Was he going mad? Having hallucinations? Or was what he had just seen real? Was it the projection of some intelligence along the open road of his radio waves which had finally made some impression upon some unimaginable world? With an effort, Jack attempted to move towards the humming radio. He pushed forward, gaining a few inches. It was as if some invisible force was holding him back. Then he could go no further. He could not reach the radio.

An unholy fear descended upon his mind. What had he let himself in for? What incredible menace was represented in the vision of that weird and beautiful woman he had viewed an instant before?

Like a blind man he groped his way along the corridor of the ship back to the kitchen. No hall light illuminated its interior now. He ate mechanically from a can he had previously opened, not comprehending what it was he was swallowing. He knew he must get a grip on himself. Take action of some sort, but the firmness had fled from his nature. An element of inability was present that had never been there before. He knew something must be done. He wanted in the most desperate fashion to accomplish something, but he couldn't. He didn't even know what it was that he had to do.

Another sleeping period. He awoke refreshed, but nevertheless depressed. Again and again he tried to force himself past the invisible barrier that completely cut him off from the humming ship's radio. Scheme after fantastic scheme he fabricated, discarding them only for fear that they might destroy himself, as well as the radio which represented his only hope of rescue.

From cabin to cabin he groped his way despondently through the darkness, which now impressed him as being less ominous, even friendly, for in its in-

visible depths he could escape the peculiar phenomenon that plagued his waking periods.

He ended up by staying as far away from the radio room as possible. He justified this in his mind by considering it a precaution against falling under the magnetic influence of the weird radiant woman, in the event of a reappearance.

He was seated morosely upon the floor of the ship's galley when his fears searched him out. Abruptly, an eerie radiance was born in the very center of the room. It grew, and grew, and grew. Shaping itself carefully into the contours of an alluring, almost irresistible woman. Flood-red lips beckoned enticingly from the radiation. The well-shaped arms reached towards him.

Slowly he lifted himself from the floor. It had followed him from the radio room --- would it slowly stalk him down every corridor of the ship, until ---.

He mustn't let that happen. If he was driven from the galley it would be the end. Then the food would be out of reach, and inevitably he would starve. If she didn't reach him first!

He stared at her as though in a trance. Could he force her disappearance by the power of his will, as he had the last time? If so would a barrier be flung across the galley door as had been the case in the radio room?

Possibly he could withdraw enough food to an outward extremity of the ship. But no. She would only follow.

She took a step towards him. Through her he could see the dimly-outlined corridor leading to the radio room. Mentally he fought with himself. How did he know she was dangerous? Perhaps there was no insidious motive in her presence. Perhaps it was but a friendly attempt of another race of intelligences to communicate.

"Who --- what are you?" he finally asked deliberately. His voice echoed hollowly down the corridors of the ship.

There was no change of expression on the visitation's face. The same inscrutable, enticing smile was visible, the same alluring contours of her lovely body.

"Who are you?" Jack asked again.

Somehow most of the ring had left his voice. He took a slow step towards her. Then another. Still another.

She seemed to glow even more warmly. Her eyes found his --- and held. A powerful clamp was pressed upon his brain. Slowly, step by step, inch by inch, he advanced toward her. Involuntarily he could feel his arms reach out to grasp her, as she reached for him. Energy drained from his brain. He could feel sections of his mind closing shut as though there was not enough mental force left to keep them in operation.

Then, incredible, probing thoughts swept swiftly through his mind. Thoughts that were not of his origin. Thoughts of such strangeness that they snapped the link that held him.

He lurched backward, and was free.

His pulse pounded. Every ounce of mental energy he possessed he directed toward the beautiful image before him. Always man had suspected hidden powers in the mind. And sometimes in moments of particular stress they exercised themselves.

Step by step she retreated before his gaze. The strength was leaving his body as he drew upon his innermost resources. Foot by foot he was forcing the image backward. Now she was in the corridor, a thing that still smiled, still extended arms toward him, even as it backed away. It seemed now as if she were but an automaton, a mindless thing that could do only one thing --- lure men into her embrace.

Again and again it appeared that his mind was completely exhausted. That he could force this projection back not another inch, but always, from somewhere he found the necessary vitality and mental strength to make her move back just a bit more, and then a bit more still.

Once he murmured softly under his breath, "Ruth", and the result was as the saints of story who held the crucifix before a vampire. The woman in front of him began to dissolve as she had before, but this time, in her place --- God! --- in her place was the projection of the most horrible, revolting refugee from the vaults of a maniac's brain that was ever viewed by human eyes. It was indescribable, with crazy angles and projections that could not have ex-

isted in three dimensions.

At that thought Jack gained new strength. It was the clue he had been seeking. Could not have existed in three dimensions. He redoubled his mental output, and with an action that he imagined resembled a frustrated snarl, the thing whipped into oblivion.

THE RADIO ROOM was clear. A victory should have been won, but Jack did not cease to murmur over and over again: "Ruth, Ruth, Ruth."

He left the comparative light of the radio room and groped down a corridor a shade darker than the blackest abyss of night. Once, overcome by weakness, he stumbled and fell to his hands and knees. He regained his footing and groped on.

In the pilot room the pin-point lights of the stars seemed almost blinding in intensity and he blinked a moment. His fingers found the controls of the ship and he seated himself before them.

The explanation was fantastic, incredible, but the only sane one. He remembered an old volume by Gamow that he had once read. If a two-dimensional creature, consisting of only length and width and possessing no thickness, could by some paradox exist, and enter the world of three-dimensional men, every tiny rise or slope in the ground would represent an impassable barrier. A simple line, drawn with a pencil around it, would serve as a prison wall, simply because it could conceive of nothing beyond that wall, having no idea of thickness. Unable to conceive of height or depth, it would never think of going over the line or digging under it. Indeed, it would be totally incapable of doing so, inasmuch as it would be equipped by nature to exist in only two dimensions. Therefore, within a few seconds of their entry into a three-dimensional world, the flatlanders would find themselves hopelessly detoured or trapped, either by nature or by three-dimensional men with pencils, who would be invisibly gazing down at them from above.

This was the fourth dimensional world, and to successfully live therein, one had to be a four-dimensional being.

Einstein had been right --- the fourth dimension was time, and a fourth-dimensional creature could bend it to his will. This was the fourth dimension and in entering it, each of his party had been separated by just a fraction of time, but that fraction was utter finality itself since an Earthman could move in but three dimensions, and do naught but speculate on the fourth. Here on this ship, with him now, were Ruth, Rubenschall, Riggiero and the rest of his crew. Possibly here in this very room, separated from him by only a pencil-line. A pencil-line of time.

Maybe centuries, maybe years, days, hours, or quite possibly only a fraction of a second. And there on the outside, intelligent creatures sat above them and wondered, puzzled and amused, why these silly creatures could not step over the pencil-line and come together again. And in ways that they knew sent probing, questioning feelers to determine why these creatures behaved as they did, and perhaps, occasionally, draw a pencil-line of their own across the radio room, or the galley.

Great tears welled in Jack Hidley's eyes, as something told him that he had finally struck the bell of truth and had solved nature's mightiest riddle. There was no elation in him as his sensitive fingers found their way across the hundreds of little levers and buttons that comprised the control board until he found the one he wanted. A finger compressed it and from the depths of the control board there came a flicker of red, a microscopic dot that flickered and died, but not before the very last dregs of the once-mighty reserve batteries exhausted themselves, and automatic machinery made a tiny noise, followed by an ominous hissing.

Jack turned and faced the empty room. "Gentlemen," he said. "I know you are all here, even though I can't see you. Let me say then, Einstein was wrong. Man can exceed the speed of light. We have proved that. But he can't do it and remain in the same universe."

He kept talking, ignoring the straining, choking sound of the oxygen machinery.

"We surpassed the speed of light

and entered the fourth dimension, which Einstein correctly surmised to be time, but we didn't stay together long. How many of you awoke, as did I, to find himself alone, on a deserted ship? Which of you experienced the horror of final depletion of the fuel reserves? Are some of you still unwilling ambassadors to creatures of a race of insanely alien design? Do you press futilely against pencil-lines more solid than steel walls?

"I made it possible for us to exceed the speed of light and enter the fourth dimension. We were the first to contact alien life of superior power. That makes me a great scientist, I guess. Some day, a trillion-trillion years from now, this ship may prove, though no one will record it, either that space is curved and finite, or boundless and infinite, but for now, it is enough to decide whether you will die of suffocation when I opened the locks, or from the cold."

Jack's breath became more labored. Despite the increasing cold, perspiration popped from his pores in little beads and bubbles that expanded, broke and rolled down his body until he was filmed in dampness.

"Death is never easy," Jack thought. "Even oblivion is a commodity to be purchased at a price."

A shimmering light was forming in the chamber before his eyes. He wondered. Would there be hallucinations heralding the exit of life from his body? If so, he told himself, he would watch them to the end with cold scientific aplomb.

"God!" Jack hurled the name with horror. The same incredible, beckoning form of a beautiful woman was again forming in the center of the room. The same impelling lure that he had defeated only moments before with the last resources of his strength and will.

"Come ahead!" he shouted. "Come on. You're a little late --- an eternity too late. I don't have to worry about you. I'm through --- finished like the rest of them!"

The figure attained full glory, its beautiful lines a magnet of attraction. Subtly a change wove itself into the features of the face. The hint of alien-

ity disappeared. The golden glow of magnificent reddish-tinged hair darkened to a familiar chestnut brunette; the nose shortened and grew pert; the waving feelers atop the head dissolved and became a part of the hair, and their ends detached and became two warm brown eyes. The figure shortened to an almost tiny stature.

"Ruth! Ruth! It's you --- you're here!"

Jack sprang forward, momentarily insane with the joy of the revelation, and then suddenly froze in horror. "No, you're not Ruth, you're that other thing. That glow gives you away. I'm not fooled."

The soft brown eyes fastened on his, warmly, urgently. There was no seductiveness in them, only love. No trace of deception. Her lips moved, but no sound came.

Step by step, Jack moved forward, his head whirling dizzily, his heart pounding in the frigid, thinning air. Ice had begun to form on the metal surfaces of the room, but the eyes of the image were warm, its arms enticing.

Jack stumbled forward, his hands encircling the glowing vision of Ruth. Fiery shocks of electricity seemed to travel through him; there was a subdued roaring and the ship's interior whirled in frantic distortion as objects shifted and rearranged, accelerated into chaos and then re-emerged into sanity.

The air was thicker. Something warm and alive was in his arms. His brain and eyes united to focus and he choked out: "Ruth, it's really you. Ruth, Ruth, Ruth! It's you. I know you're real --- I can feel you!"

A hand gripped his shoulder. A familiar face swam into his vision. It was Salvatore Riggiero's.

"You're not dreaming, Jack. You're back with us --- with all of us."

"Oh, Jack!" a mass of brown hair was sobbing on his shoulder. "You're alive!"

Figures were all around him. Bald, grinning Collpard, dried, serious-looking Rubenschall. And amazingly, there was no dust anywhere he could see. The instrument panels were clean and shining, the fuel meters read three-fourths full.

It was too much. He guided Ruth to a couch. He closed his eyes tightly, opened them again. Ruth was still at his side; his crew was still there; the controls were still dustless.

Impulsively Jack leaped to his feet and strode to the water container and pressed the button. Instantly, clear water sparkled forth.

The crew was smiling at him, amused. Talk went back and forth, while he held Ruth as if to let her go would mean falling back into the dreadful state of loneliness and frustration he had only just escaped.

"It was as you surmised," said Rubenschall. "We were carried into the fourth dimension, got separated in time and lost from each other from the first moment. They found one of the fuel boys first and coincided him with me. Then one by one, they rounded up the rest. You were the last.

"Our fourth dimensional friends seemed to sense what we were and what our predicament was. They had no trouble at all in shifting through time creating traps and lures to draw us back into the same instant of time, just as we might shuttle a lost flatlander by drawing a line in front of him every time he took a wrong direction.

"Most of the men were easy prey for the image of a woman, so they used that trick over and over again, with good success. In your case they finally succeeded by using the image of a special woman --- I wonder if they understand love, or merely felt that you would respond more readily to something familiar?

"I think also that you were the furthest off in time, which added to the difficulty ---."

"Jack," Callpard interrupted, "take a look outside will you? I hope I'm not seeing things ---."

Jack moved quickly to a port. There, seemingly millions of miles distant, yet crystal-clear in detail, was the spinning blue orb of the planet Earth.

Quickly he took readings from the instrument panel.

"It's a mirage," he said. "No gravitational pull is recorded. Everything else negative. I don't get it ---."

He stopped talking momentarily.

"Of course!" He snapped his fingers. "That strange woman was a mirage, too, a mirage to guide us through the fourth dimension. This image of Earth is for the same purpose. If we set our sights on that image, just as if it were the planet itself ---!"

In an instant he was a bustle of activity.

"Everyone to their stations!" he called. "Riggiero, start the engines! Let's get going as soon as possible."

They strapped in, hope showing in their faces.

Soon a low, muffled rumbling vibrated through the ship. Jack activated the drive, and although there was no sense of movement, the speed indicators began to climb in jumps of 10,000 miles.

Rubenschall silently handed Jack a slip of paper with the trajectory settings pencilled on it.

Jack set the controls accordingly. Their speed continued to rise. The needle on the speed indicator first crept, then raced, up towards the red line which marked the speed of light.

An instant before they reached it, the image of Earth snapped from the space in front of them. Jack turned and smiled at Ruth.

"I've had enough," he shouted above the roar of the engines. "It's a vine-covered cottage for me from now on."

Ruth blew a kiss.

The entire perspective of the ship began to change. The walls seemed to swell, to bend, then straighten. Thousands of tiny triangular vortices appeared to whirl in the room about them.

The metal of the ship's hull seemed to break down into a crystalline mass of sparkling energy, then as quickly transmute back to its original form. Things turned and twisted into every conceivable shape and angle and some scarcely conceivable ones.

Again they plunged into the fourth dimension, but this time Earth and home awaited them at the end of the journey instead of the deadly trap of time.

T H E E N D

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