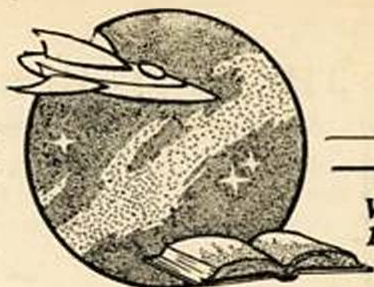


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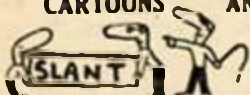
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THE WATCHERS

Kilian Houston Brunner

As the big moon made the thousandth circuit of its primary, a green-blue world circling a yellow sun, a gentle hurring filled the interior of a plastic bubble on the moon, echoing among the mechanisms that kept its occupants alive.

And at that burring the Watchers stirred — and woke up.

They lay for a while in wordless silence side by side, letting life seep back from its tiny concentration to parts of the mind whose very life was a new acquisition. Finally the First Watcher, looking at the domed ceiling above him, whispered.

'I wonder what we'll have this time?'

'The fifteenth time,' said the Second Watcher.

'I know.'

There was more silence. Then the First Watcher felt a gentle electric rubbing at his mind, nodded assent and closed his eyes. There was a pause. . .

The perception probe widened like a ripple on a still pool from the bubble on the surface of the moon. Like a cone of shimmering invisible force it coalesced into a single line, and like a feather it lay across the face of the planet below.

The Watchers let it lie there, easily, lazily. Effort would do nothing to clarify probe images. So they left it like an intangible guardian while the world turned once, and the impressions began to come. And still they waited —

Till the bridge was complete and the Watchers could think separately again.

'Well?' asked that part of the Second Watcher's mind that was not engaged in perception analysis. 'Did you get anything?'

'What I got,' the First Watcher pointed out, 'you got too.'

'I know, I know,' the Second Watcher clicked impatiently. 'I wondered if your analysis was further on than mine.'

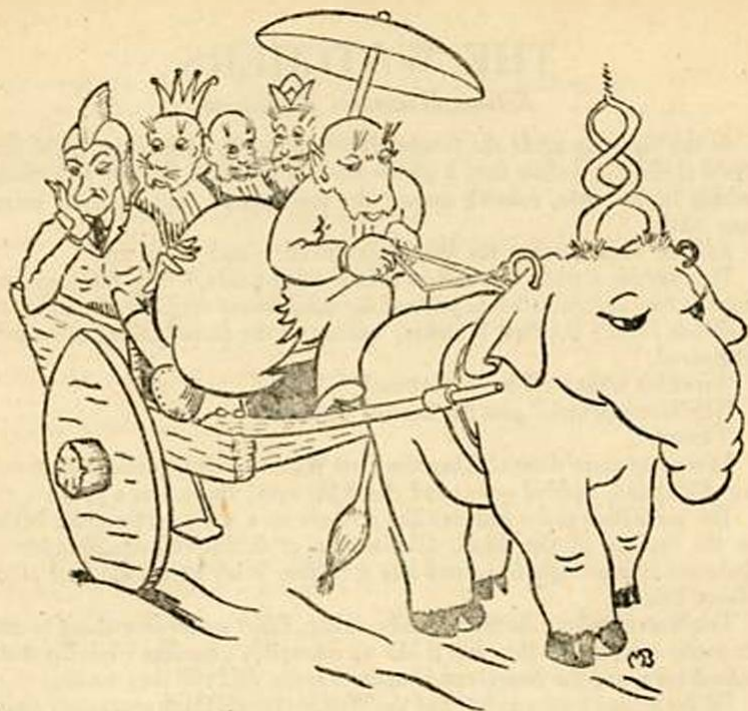
Long silence.

Then the First Watcher felt the shocking thrill that meant a significant discovery. He relaxed his mind, let the recall come through. Beside him the Second Watcher, questioning, felt for the images. They came in two dimensions and in bright colours, the images of rockets and of worlds in space, floating, and of strange words.

The Watchers let the images dissolve. In silent satisfaction the First Watcher evaluated the meaning of certain words, let the Second read them off the smooth plate of his mind. There were such words as GALAXY, ASTROUNING, NEW WORLDS . . .

The First Watcher turned off the cyclic alarm set to every thousand of the moon's turnings, and set the direct approach alarm. There was satisfaction in his mind as he lay down again.

'They'll be up here soon,' he said.



A MATTER OF TALENTS

By Manly Banister

ILLUSTRATED BY BANISTER

Moo-Ab, King of Gruvv, was playing a game of Gruvvian chess with his favourite concubine (a pretty little thing and *very* good at chess), when the Grand Wizier entered the room without ceremony other than a perfunctory knock on the drapes.

'Hullo!' said the King, glad of an interruption. He had already lost at chess seven duchies and a principality to this concubine, who obviously was out to supply her entire family with minor governments of their own. He was glad of an interruption, before she should have the whole of the planet Gruuv in the hollow of her dainty hand.

'Milord,' quoth the Grand Wizier, 'an Outsider approaches.'

'Oh,' said the King. He puckered his lips and frowned. He gently replaced the king piece he had been trying vainly for half an hour to keep out of check, patted his favourite's hand, kissed her with some gusto on the fuzzy roundure of her left ear, and waddled out of the chamber in advance of the Grand Wizier. A moment later, both twitched to the shattering clatter of chessboard and men hurled at once, and with force, against the stone wall of the chamber just quitted.

'Violence!' sighed Moo-Ab. 'Is there not enough of preevisbness and violence in the Universe without . . . ?'

The Grand Wizier touched King Moo-Ab's sleeve.

'The Outsider, my liege.'

The King made a broad sweep across the marble floor of the corridor with his tail and appeared to sink more deeply into his mood. 'Devil take the Outsider! As I was saying, some people are never satisfied. Seven duchies and a principality — enough to take care of all her immediate family, and now she has her cousins and half-cousins and what not in mind!' He whistled. 'Greedy little thing! What's this about an Outsider?'

The Grand Wizier pretended to exercise great patience.

'You know,' he said evenly. 'There is a ship from the Outer Universe approaching Gruuv. It is doubtless by now hovering just outside the atmosphere.' The latter comment had a bitter tone of veiled sarcasm toward the King's slowness properly to respond.

King Moo-Ab swished his tail, fumbled in the breast pocket of his elaborately pink-and-gold embroidered kimono, and ultimately extracted from conflict with the silken lining a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles which he perched precariously upon the bridge of his little button nose. Tilting back his head, he stared aloft as if to pierce with his spectacle-aided vision the palace roof.

'Well,' said he, 'this is a case for the Lord High Sorcerer. I'm glad you notified me, though. It will be interesting. Run fetch the Sorcerer at once.'

'Yes, my liege!' cried the Grand Wizier, happy that at last the ponderous wheels of government had begun their turn to combat the menace of the Outsider. He scampered off down the corridor.

King Moo-Ab pursued his way alone and in pondering silence.

The Lord High Sorcerer was tall, quite thin for a Gruuvian, and very impressive of mien. He had piercing button eyes on either side of a rather prominently bridged nose which nourished moustaches of imposing sweep.

In the presence of King Moo-Ab and the Grand Wizier, he nodded solemnly as the latter described the approach of the Outsider.

'Last reports place the Outsider just beyond the orbit of the Second Moon,' said the Grand Wizier, who had utilized the interim in which the Sorcerer had been occupied in getting out of his bath by picking up further information from General Galactic Intelligence Committee a few doors beyond. 'The fact that his ship appeared suddenly a few hours ago, without advance warning, leads the Intelligence Committee to suspect that some type of faster-than-light, contra-inertia propulsive equipment is in use, indicating a being of an ultra-high order of technical advancement.'

'Probably,' sniffed King Moo-Ab, 'from the same System as that fellow who was through here five years ago. Whatever did he say the name of it was — is?' He waved his hand. 'Never mind. I wouldn't know it if you named it. Didn't he just pop out of space like this one?'

The Lord High Sorcerer nodded profoundly, a favourite mannerism of his, since it made his great moustaches wave gently, like palm fronds in a breeze.

'A human type, he was,' he affirmed. 'It would take a human-type, of course. They are short-lived, and hence impatient. They hurry about everything. And two years previous to him there was a — a — well, it wasn't human, or Gruvian either. High intelligence level, though not truly advanced mechanically. It had been riding on ato-rockets for eighteen years or some such matter. Extremely long-lived type — didn't mind at all round trips of thirty six years.'

'I remember,' said King Moo-Ab. 'Well, what about this new fellow?'

He pulled a voluminous, bright red scarf from a side pocket, energetically scrubbed the lenses of his spectacles, thoughtfully wiped his nose, and returned the scarf to his pocket.

'Well, how about him?'

The Grand Wizier yearned in the direction of the General Galactic Intelligence Committee office. He would have liked further information. The Lord High Sorcerer stroked his long moustaches with a thoroughly confident air.

'When the Outsider reaches the orbit of the First Moon,' he stated pontifically, 'he will come within my sphere of influence. That is all I ask. Just let him come within my sphere of influence. I will take over from there. Will you gentlemen pardon me?'

Lifting his kimono with a ponderous kind of grace, the Lord High Sorcerer departed to complete his interrupted bath.

'An amazing fellow,' murmured King Moo-Ab, alone with the Grand Wizier. 'A most amazing fellow of unusual talents and extraordinary powers. Has quite an organisation, too.'

So saying, he dismissed the Grand Wizier with a preoccupied wave of his hand and returned to the apartment of his favourite concubine, who, in the next hour, won two more duchies and a small continent in the south

temperate zone of the planet Gruuv.

The ship of the Outsider shone like an egg in the sun as it came down to rest gently upon the marble flagstones of King Moo-Ab's palace courtyard. Had you asked the pilot, a lanky human-type, he would have offered any number of rationalizations to explain how he had chanced to choose the courtyard of the supreme ruler of the planet for his purely fortuitous landing. The truth that lay behind the matter, like the torn wallpaper behind the picture frame, was the Lord High Sorcerer, who was using one of his unusual talents to direct the landing . . . and to make sure that the vessel did not depart before it had landed.



King Moo-Ab waited on the terrace with an entourage of interested lords and ladies, not a few lackeys, a member of the Royal Astronomical Society, and four Engineers of Design. The last named critically analyzed every point of the quiescent vessel, nodded approval of this element of design, pook-pooked or otherwise registered disapproval of another.

"Tush," said King Moo-Ab. "It looks like an egg. What do you mean, design?"

He waddled down the steps and approached the vessel with some curiosity, looking for a door or a port hole of some order, but the ship presented nothing more than an aspect of shining solidarity. There was not a rivet or a seam in the entire expanse.

"Bring the Outsider outside," the King told the Lord High Sorcerer, who had come down the steps of his own accord to join King Moo-Ab.

The Sorcerer did very delicate things with a tiny contraption of shining platinum wires caging a polyhedron of some glistening stuff. The polyhedron glowed saffron for a brief instant, and straightway the door of the space ship opened almost in their faces, and the pilot stepped out upon the flagstones.

"I say," spoke King Moo-Ab. "Certainly a clever door you have there. Didn't notice it at all, till just now when you opened it."

"It is an unusual type of door, I will admit," admitted the Outsider modestly, "but then, everything originating in the Star System of Yarl is unusual in its way. Unusual System. By the way, I am surprised that you speak the idiom of Yarl, since you are far off the beaten path."

As a matter of fact, the Outsider himself was speaking faultless Gruuvian, but he did not know it. This was merely a manifestation of another of the Lord High Sorcerer's singular talents.

"Ah. . . murmured King Moo-Ab. "Linguistics is a national trait with us. We love to chatter. Won't you come inside? You must be tired after your long journey from — er — Yarl."

"Amazing planet!" cried the Outsider. "That is — your hospitality — amazing! Were I a stranger at home, I should have to stand some days of inter-

ogation by the Astral Secret Police before allowed to leave my ship. Most amazing. Very lax, indeed!

He sounded entirely prim as he said the last, as if he did not wholly approve of the carefree methods of the planet Gruvv.

'That's all right,' deprecated King Moo-Ab. 'Come in anyway. We have no Secret Police, and it would be bothersome to organize such a body just to make you feel at home. Come along. I think it is going to rain.'

The Outsider appeared lost in astonishment as he followed his planetary host.

'Do you know,' he burst out, 'that your planet is listed on our galactic charts as uninhabitable? Isn't that strange? Yet, you have quite a world here. Not very advanced, of course; but still, quite a world!'

'Indeed,' said King Moo-Ab. 'It serves our modest needs.'

The dinner that had been prepared to honour the arrival of the Outsider went off very well, with many courses of fine meats, a great deal of excellent pastry, a sufficient quantity of delicious Gruvvian wine, and any number of other special tidbits served for the delectation of the guest. Meanwhile, Gruvvian maids held forth within the ring of banquet tables and danced and stroked their musical instruments of whatever nature, and sang melodiously in a very pleasing fashion. All of this the Outsider seemed to find enjoyable to a certain degree, but King Moo-Ab somehow felt that not only himself but his whole planet was held in something less than a consideration of high esteem by the Outsider. This feeling he might have traced to a remark the fellow made at some turn of the dinner, to wit:

'You never know what liars space pilots can be until you check on their reports. Imagine reporting this world as uninhabitable! Uninhabitable indeed! Rather intriguing place in a barbaric sort of way — semi-barbaric, I should say,' he added thoughtfully.

'Oh, quite,' muttered King Moo-Ab. 'Very semi, if you will pardon my saying so. We do not even have a written language.'

'Well, now?' murmured the Outsider. 'But of course, you will adopt the written language of Yarl. It is very concise . . . and quite rapid to write.'

'I have no doubt,' said the King, thinking of the ten thousand thought-records stored in his chamber, which he needed only to manipulate in a certain ingenious way to have the entire contents of a record impressed instantaneously upon his mind.

It was a good deal after midnight before the hospitable Gruvvians permitted the party to break up.

'You know,' said the Outsider in a confidential aside to King Moo-Ab. 'I have heard about explorers being received as a god among out-of-the-way and backward races inhabiting the Galaxy, but this is the first time it ever happened to me!'

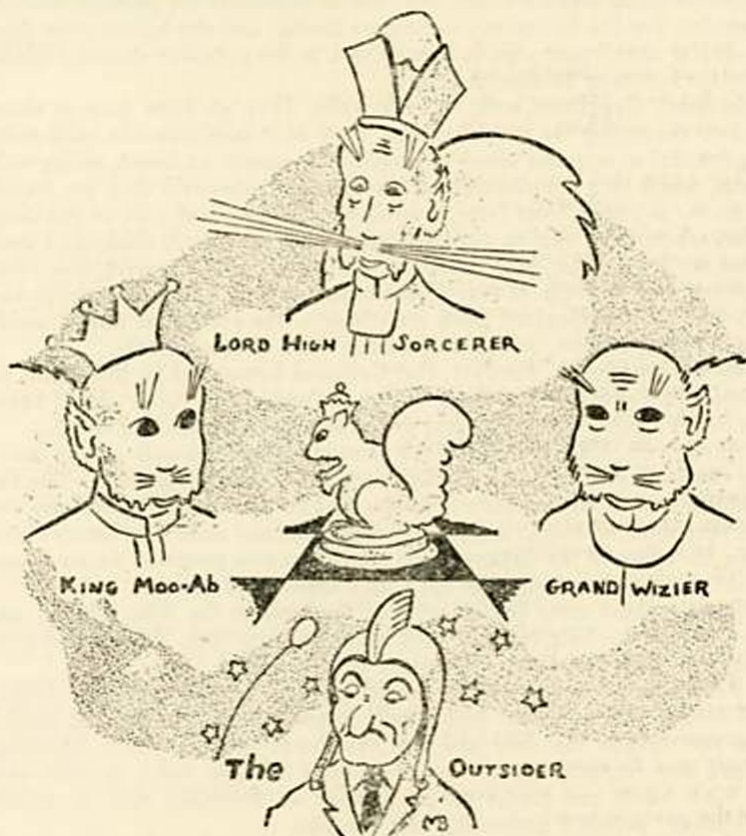
King Moo-Ab looked momentarily hostile. 'Who suggested you were a

god?' he asked pointedly. 'Never mind. You suggested it yourself.'

In a moment, however, he repented of his tartness, for the Outsider was notably quite the worse for having imbibed beyond his measure of good Gruvvian wine. Obviously, he was not himself.

'I think,' said King Moo-Ab more graciously, 'we had better get our guest off to bed. He looks rather done in.'

That was what broke up the party.



King Moo-Ab was nothing if not solicitous of his guest's welfare. As a result of being immersed in planning the coming day in respect to the Outsider's entertainment, he completely forgot himself and entered the guest's

chamber the following morning by his usual method; that is to say, he walked through the solid stone wall of the chamber, which adjoined his own.

It is characteristic among Gruvvians: never to take the longer way around when the shorter will do better, and the result of this determination, bred through millions of generations, has been to produce a faculty peculiar to the denizens of the planet Gruvv. This faculty stems also from an hereditary trait consistent with the breed since the prototype swung through the primordial trees; which is to say, their rodent propensity for gnawing through obstacles. For the Gruvvians, owning no kinship with the human tribe descended of apes, trace a noble lineage back to the primitive squirrels inhabiting the forests of prehistoric Gruvv.

In brief, Gruvvians walk through walls. They go from here to there without traversing the space between. They do it quite naturally, with nothing fanciful or scientific about the notion. It is simply an innate ability with them, which they practice more often than not, whenever they are moved to do so, or purely from force of habit or what not, and with no conscious effort whatsoever. Just as you stand up without consciously thinking: I must tense my leg muscles, now straighten my knees, now rise erect, now relax and maintain balance. It were idiotic to pursue such a felderal practice every time one stood up; or, more unfortunate, the product of serious accident, a telling disease, or the most wanton kind of drunkenness.

Do not presuppose, however, that Gruvvian houses had for this reason no doors. The Gruvvians had them, and used them. Every house should have, for safety's sake, at least several means of proper ingress and egress.

At any rate, King Moo-Ab walked directly through the wall without thinking of the effect of this act upon his guest, and stood blinking just within the Outsider's room, not yet quite conscious that he was there. The Outsider was the very devil of a sight, dishevelled, unshaven, and more than bleary of eye from the effects of the Gruvvian wine, and just now possessed an air of unusual stupidity as he gaped at the King's unheralded entrance.

Luckily, there were drapes covering the wall at the King's back, and Moo-Ab got his wits together well enough to blurt out, 'Private doorway, heh-heh! Your apartment adjoins my own, you know.'

Before the suspicious Outsider could move to examine the wall behind the drapes, which he was undoubtedly minded to do, King Moo-Ab hustled him out through the door and into the Royal Dressing Room adjoining, where coy Gruvvian maids waited to assist in their toilet, to take care of their needs and things not so needful as desirable, such as whisker-curling, personal grooming, and the like.

The Outsider set up some strenuous objection at first, which was quickly overcome (these Gruvvian wenches had a way about them), and consequently was in due course of time bathed, shaved, tonsured, manicured, pedicured, massaged, dietetically audited, and finally clothed — again in his regular

space-fiers habiliments, he having been adamant in his refusal to don Gruvian linen and embroidered kimono.

Thereafter, the Outsider breakfasted in company with King Moo-Ab, the Grand Wizier, the Lord High Sorcerer, and one or two other palace notables.

The Lord High Sorcerer was thoughtless enough to enter the breakfast room bearing in his hand the polyhedron-thing-in-a-wire-cage. This being the first object of apparent technical culture the Outsider had observed, he immediately fastened his attention upon it.

'Interesting gadget,' he observed. 'What do you do with it?'

The Lord High Sorcerer started guiltily, then looked down with a smile at the cooing pigeon in the bird cage he held. The talents of the Lord High Sorcerer had proved themselves equal to the occasion. Carefully he opened the cage door; the bird flew out, fluttered several times around the room, and returned to its cage.

'Just a pet,' the Sorcerer murmured, and seemed rather cowed in the face of King Moo-Ab's displeased glare. 'I quite forgot I had it with me,' he concluded defensively.

He placed the cage and pigeon, which promptly became again a polyhedron in a matrix of platinum wires, out of sight upon the floor beside his chair. Breakfast was conducted in somewhat of a strained silence, which did not benefit from an impromptu remark by the Outsider.

'At home, in the Star System of Yarl,' he said, 'it is customary to eat breakfast while the radio is playing.'

'Rather,' said King Moo-Ab, absorbed in dunking toasted korsh in a dish full of gruk milk.

'Indeed,' continued the Outsider after a pause, 'it is nice to hear music playing while one eats, though I don't suppose you are advanced enough to appreciate the more delicate niceties of living. Can't blame you, of course. Environment does it.'

King Moo-Ab and his Gruvian associates silently revelled in the liquid measures of thought-music that floated through their brains. It was broadcast daily, sunrise to sunrise, by Central Thought Music Headquarters, for the entertainment of all Gruvians desiring consciously to open their minds to it.

'Um,' murmured King Moo-Ab, and thoughtfully continued eating.

'Undoubtedly,' King Moo-Ab told the Outsider, 'you are used to faster and more genteel methods of travel than the gruk cart, but it represents quite the best we have in the way of — er — corporeal transportation. At any rate, the trip should be pleasant enough for you, if the means is not.'

The Outsider appeared profoundly deprecative of discomfort and sat beside King Moo-Ab on the wooden-board seat behind the gruk-driver, which both shared with the Lord High Sorcerer and the Grand Wizier. An expression of noble condescension softened the rather lean line of the Outsider's outthrust jaw. The procession of gruk carts got under way.

'A poor but adequate means,' he conceded after a moment or two of

bouncing around upon the hard board. 'Of course, in the Star System of Yarl, we have the swiftest and smoothest kind of motor cars for surface travel. You would need roads for them, of course; and they would take time to build.'

'Indeed?' said King Moo-Ab. 'We have roads.'

'Not these rutted atrocities,' returned the Outsider. 'Real roads — concrete, stuff like that. You'll want to do ninety miles an hour, at least.'

'Sounds dangerous,' murmured the King.

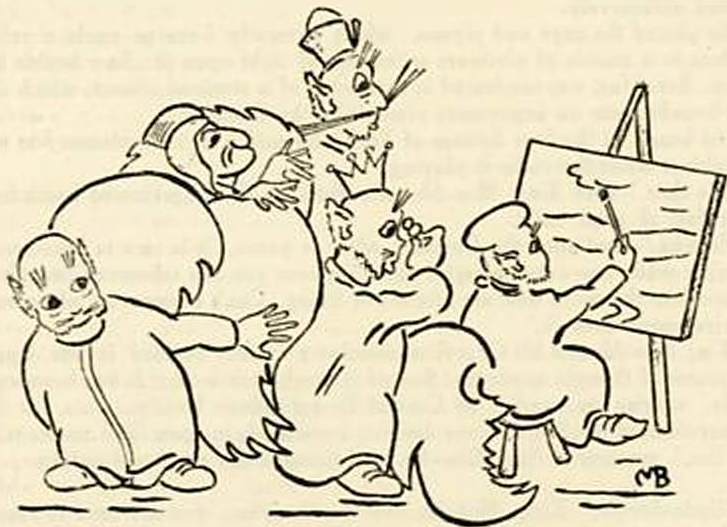
'Dangerous? Pooh! In the whole Star System of Yarl, not more than a few millions a year are killed by motor cars. And what does that amount to in the face of the great benefit of rapid transportation?'

King Moo-Ab turned with a shocked expression to the Grand Wizier.

'How many have been killed recently by gruk-cart?'

The Grand Wizier appeared apologetic.

'Only one in the past century, Sire. He went to sleep in the back and fell out while the gruk was fording a stream with the cart. He was drowned.'



They came upon an artist, sitting on a stool by the roadside. He was painting a canvas depicting the pastoral scene of valley, pleasant farmland, and hills beyond. The party got down from the gruk-cart and gathered around the artist in a group that enclosed the Outsider in its midst, nearly smothering him in a cloud of furry tails that swished with excitement over the painting. Truly speaking, the artist's work had nothing singularly re-

markable about it, though it was competently done. But every Gruvvian is an artist at heart and appreciates the niceties of form and colour.

'This man is an artist,' King Moo-Ab told the Outsider. 'We have quite a few of them. Look at that beautiful picture. Have you seen anything lovelier in the Star System of Yarl.'

The Outsider's lip curled haughtily. 'Frankly, yes. Our people used to waste time in such fashion, but for many centuries we have not had to depend on the poor recording ability of the human eye and hand for our artistic representations.'

'Can this be so?' murmured the King.

'We have electronic and photronic devices of one kind and another,' explained the Outsider. 'Some are connected to private speaking instruments called telephones, some are wired into great theatres that can hold a vast number of people, and others transmit through the air without benefit of wires into every home in the System. In every case, the image received is three-dimensional, true to life, in full colour and accompanied by sound.'

'Amazing!' remarked King Moo-Ab, mentally adjusting his mind organ of stereo-ultra-spatial-cross-country-vision to look into the palace kitchen to see what the cook was preparing for dinner. The image was complete in stereo, full colour, sound, tactility, and smell. The cook was preparing roast gruk, and it had burned slightly. King Moo-Ab smelled the scorches. 'I dare say,' he added, 'you do not appreciate our poor artistic sensibilities, but we manage well enough with them.'

'You will learn from Yarl,' prophesied the Outsider. 'Yarl has helped many backward worlds like yours. There is not a planet we have taken over that has not benefited enormously. Why, do you know, about a decade ago a world called Thub out on the edge of the Galaxy was taken into the Confederacy of Yarl, and in those brief ten years, Thub became so highly advanced and learned such an amazing amount of technology that we were able to use its people effectively in winning the war against the Telloxians.'

'Is that so?' marveled King Moo-Ab. 'Thub, I take it, has been granted a considerable amount of national honour for that.'

'Oh, quite,' returned the Outsider. 'A granite monument, 267 metres tall, has been erected on the planet as a perpetual tribute to the gallant population that was wiped out to the last individual, holding the line while the Yarlbian navy sneaked in behind the Telloxian forces and destroyed their entire sun system. Wasn't that heroically marvelous?'

King Moo-Ab coughed but made no further comment. The Grand Wizzer appeared helplessly befuddled, while the Lord High Sorcerer just sat and quivered his moustaches; or perhaps it was the jolting of the gruk-cart that quivered them, for by this time the sight-seeing party was on its way again.

The Outsider was affably pleasant taking leave of the Poyal party that evening, after the dinner of roast gruk, which had tasted scarcely at all of the

scorch King Moo-Ah had perceived earlier.

'I must say,' he said, 'that you have given me a most pleasant stay. Be sure that it shall all be entered in my report . . . a most favourable report. I am happy to say. You may expect a new governor to arrive any time in the next few months. And it might be well if you would erect suitable quarters for him.'

There was some disfavour in the glance the Outsider cast about him at the unimposing buildings of the Gruvian Royal Palace. 'Some of the governors are inclined to be fastidious,' he explained as a cordial afterthought.

'A very proper attitude for a member of a superior civilization,' King Moo-Ah murmured gallantly.

'Right!' agreed the Outsider, and swung quickly into his eggshaped vessel. The unusual door that had originated in the Star System of Yarl clanged shut. The vessel lifted from the marble flagstones, accelerated and shot zenithward, where it was soon only a speck against the sky, brilliant as a diamond in the stratospheric glow of the setting sun. Then the glitter vanished, and the calm, fretless gloom of purple evening resumed.

King Moo-Ah turned to the Lord High Sorcerer. 'You have taken care of everything?'

The Lord High Sorcerer drew from under his kimono the polyhedron in its wire cage and made several minute adjustments.

'I have taken care of everything.'

'Everything?'

'Absolutely everything.'

King Moo-Ah smiled with pleased content and walked through the stone wall into a familiar ground floor apartment. Now that the Outsider was definitely taken care of, he had a desire to be alone with his gifted concubine.

The Outsider, no longer an outsider now that he was on his home ground in the Star System of Yarl, entered the Administration Building of the Principal Spaceport with a jaunty air, waving to old friends and pausing for glimpses into this telescreen and that, savouring the technological comfort of home.

'I say, Elj!' cried a blue-uniformed attendant behind the gleaming plastic counter of Reports Headquarters. 'You're a bit overdue. Have trouble?'

Elj shrugged. 'Stopped off on a planet the charts call Gruv — out of the way place in the direction of Thorj.'

'Is that so?' beamed the interrogator. He was perennially avid for news of the worlds he longed to visit; but his position as a minor official of Yarl allowed him neither the time nor money for travel. 'What kind of a place is it?'

'Read it in my report,' grinned Elj. He pulled a ponderous book around, readying an electronic pen for writing.

Carefully he entered his name, the name of his vessel, home port, all the details required by law. In the column headed 'Ports of Call (list),' he painstakingly printed 'Gruv.' In the next column, headed 'Ecologic Aspect of Planetary Ports (list),' he wrote with equal care: 'Uninhabitable.'

The talents of the Lord High Sorcerer were indeed unusual and of extraordinary effect . . . and far-reaching as well.

OUT OF THE TOO SILENT PLANET

or THE CONQUEST OF SPEECH

A. VINCENT CLARKE

'Three miles away you could hear the low, throbbing hum of two hundred thousand human voices. At two miles, you could pick out from the forest of radio and TV transmitter aerials the tall silver shape that stood with a strange aloofness in the geometrical centre of that great throng.

At a mile, you were in the crowd, a swirling, excited, babbling, colourful conglomeration of every human type. Over the thunder of a hundred thousand conversations, comments, criticisms, pierced the excited tenors of announcers perched on the roofs of their vans and chattering into microphones, the yelping of newboys whose papers seemed to consist of little but black headlines and exclamation marks.

M-DAY! FIRST ROCKET TO MOON STARTS TODAY! THE GREATEST ADVENTURE! LUNA VOYAGERS OFF TODAY! MANNED SPACESHIP READY! 240,000 MILE JOURNEY BEGINS AT NOON!

Thus practically any pre-war s-f story of that type. A colourful description of a world-shaking event. Thus many post-war stories, too. Even when the crowds aren't mentioned, everyone knows that John Smith Hero will be going. And thus, you may think, reality. S-F fans who know all about such affairs will be in great demand to explain to now-bumblers scoffers. There will be a three-page article in the 'Times' by Arthur C. Clarke, and 'New Worlds' will appear with a special space-exploration issue of 300 gilt-edged pages.

Will we? Will there be? Will it?

Recently, I've been re-reading those issues of sF that appeared just over 6 years ago. Hiroshima and Nagasaki had just blotted the history books, and the fans wrote in. Some were shocked. Some were relieved; they wouldn't have to keep such rigid 'security silence' concerning their work. And there was a general, overall, crowing. S-f had predicted it. Indeed, one author was close enough to be questioned by the FBI. This would show the non-readers!

Conceivably, there is now a special brass-hat who reads the s-f magazines for fresh ideas. The Inspector of Scientific Romances. More probably, the case of the A-bomb has shown or emphasised to the militarists that the New Way to Win Wars is to be on the inside of scientific development at the start, however fantastic. Especially at the start. In the '14-'18 war, the new science of aeronautics was old enough to offer few surprises in its development on either side. In '39, the physicists' progress with U-235 was bushed up so quickly and continued so effectively that the postwar 'Alsos Mission' found Nazi scientists were hopelessly off-track in their researches.

Thus we come to present day 'security' in the sciences. A deep, deep silence enfolds the biologists who are happily improving germ-warfare. A

press release beaded 'White Sands' may or may not have reference to last weeks soaring trail of smoke above the desert. Pacific atolls are obliterated, flashes are seen for a hundred miles across continental America. You'd like to know more about it? You wouldn't be a dirty Commie spy, would you?

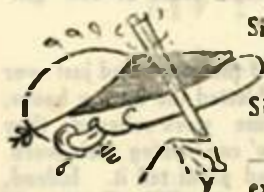
In times of 'peace' it's hard to muffle an A- or H- bomb in complete security silence, and Geigers glibble of radio-active dust. But it's safe to bet that every country has a few top-secrets that really are, and the first you may know of the biologist's experiment may be the death roll's (don't forget that they couldn't have been SURE of what chain-reactions the first A-bomb would fire). And the rockets?

It's been pointed out that an A-bomb base on the Moon could control Earth. Even artificial satellites could do it. The news of One Side's preparation for an attempt to conquer space would act on certain military and political minds on the Other Side like a red rag to a bull.

So those tumultuous crowds buzzing about the LUNA 1 or GLORIA MUNDI or AD ASTRA may dwindle to you, at home, listening to the 9 o'clock news. . .

. . . and President Kyweosü stated that any further violation of the Abce-darian frontier would be construed as a hostile act. . . General Blank, Head of US Military Security, announced at a news conference today that a successful landing on the Moon was made by a US Army Spaceship slightly over a year ago. Flights were now on a regular schedule and bases had been established. Questioned by correspondents, he said that conditions on the Moon were extremely inimical to human life. He was unable to give the names of the personnel who made the first landing. Questioned later, officials of the State Department said that the operation was a purely military one, and they had no information . . . A new attempt to form a French cabinet . . .

THE AMATEUR EDITOR



Since we learned our printing by doing things before we found they were impossible we acquired a few unusual wrinkles, not to mention some grey hairs.

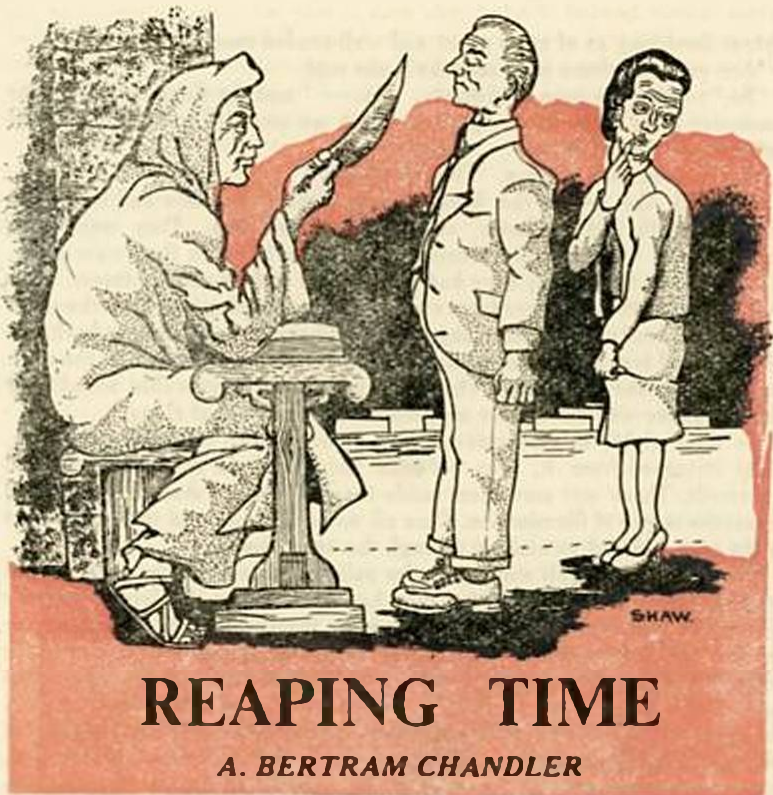
Since I need 20 lines here I may as well pass some on.

Real printers indulge in a rite called 'make-ready'—necessary, they whisper, because all type is not exactly type high. We think this rite is wrong, a pusill-

animous concession to the incompetence of typesetters. A cork backing means that nearly all the letters come out. True, some of them may go so far as to come out in relief on the back of the page, but so what? People PAY for embossing. (Will someone please carry out the body of that printer?)

Compositors, compose yourselves. Never argue while holding a stickful of type. It is not considered lucky to throw type over your left shoulder.

The unit of ink is the smidgin. The table is: 3 nymfs—1 smidgin, 5 smidgins—1 dirty great dollop. The British Standard Smidgin can be inspected at Slant House. Printers ink has most of the qualities of vV's perfect paint. It is impossible to go within five feet of a tin without getting covered with the stuff. As we say, 'I was inking my hands and got some on the press.' There are solvents, of course, but the only real solution is to wear black clothes. No need to buy them specially.



REAPING TIME

A. BERTRAM CHANDLER

Illustrated by Bob Shaw

It was already dark when they came to the city. The sky, save for a low bar of sullen crimson overhanging the low hills to the westward, was overcast. The road along which they had come glimmered pallidly, stretched behind them broad and straight to the very edge of the featureless grey plain. Before them, solidly ugly valves of dull metal between two squat black towers, was the gate.

'Are you sure there is no mistake?' asked the woman.

She looked up at the forbidding portal, at the black, harshly utilitarian architecture beyond. Few lights, and those dim and furtive, broke the monotony of straight perpendicular lines, of geometrical masses upheaved darkly against darkness. And there was no sound from the city, no joyful clamour of bells, no music of plucked strings and singing voices. There was, perhaps, the merest tremor of the air, a vibration felt rather than heard, a

distant throbbing as of some great and well-tended machine.

'Are you sure there is no mistake?' she said.

'No,' replied the man confidently. 'This —' and he flung out an almost possessive hand — 'is better, perhaps, than we were led to believe. It has no tinsel prettiness. It has . . . dignity.'

'Yes,' agreed the woman. 'There is dignity.'

And with the words the harsh, strong lines of her face and body took added strength, and harshness, as did those of the man. They were, this husband and wife, worthy citizens of the place to which they were come. Worthier far than many they had known who had let some softness, some weakness, bar them forever from even so much as setting foot upon the road.

Slowly, silently, the gates swung open. Deliberately, not looking back, the man stepped forward — his woman, as was proper, a pace or so to the rear. Behind them the gates shut. There was something irrevocable about their closing. There was the merest suggestion of an unmusical clang.

To their right, as they entered, was a door, open, in the dexter tower. Light streamed from it, was reflected brightly from the black, polished pavement. There was movement inside the gatehouse, a shadow that shifted across the source of illumination. Then all was still again, and the bright light in the tower glared unwinking through the open doorway.

Confidently, his heels ringing on the polished pavement, the man walked towards the only sign of life that they had so far seen. No less confidently his woman followed. They hesitated on the threshold of the gatehouse — but this was due to physical rather than to psychological reasons. The harsh brilliance of the unshaded lamp was cruel to eyes long inured to semi-darkness. But it was not long before they were able to see, albeit dimly at first, the desk behind which sat the Gatekeeper. And then they saw the Gatekeeper himself, in his drab, monkish habit, and the Book before him, and the text, lurid orange on black, on the wall behind him. Its sentiments, harshly uncompromising, did much to dispel the mistrust the hooded robe had inspired in the man and woman. It was the woman who repeated the words, unctuously — *As a man sows, so shall he surely reap . . .*

'Yes,' agreed the Gatekeeper. 'Surely . . .'

It was not the words so much as the tone in which they were spoken — the faintly mocking voice and the eyes, brightly sardonic, peering out from beneath the cowl — that caused the mistrust to return. And there was, although both the pilgrims stared ill-manneredly, no sign of a beard.

'He must be off duty,' whispered the woman. 'His relief maybe . . .'

'It could be. If we're to believe all we're told they've had some rather queer types here . . .'

The Gatekeeper ignored them. With practiced hands he flipped over the pages of the Book. He asked, in a dry official voice — 'John and Sara Goode?'

'That is correct.'

'Let me see . . . Your qualifications for entry?'

'They are in your records.'

'True . . . ' The slim hands still turned the heavy, thick pages, but more slowly now. They paused, hovered over the open book. Then — 'Your temperance work?'

'My wife and myself were indefatigable labourers in that corner of the Lord's vineyard. It was largely due to our efforts that our town exercised the right of local option . . . '

'And that certain of your fellow citizens poisoned themselves with what is known, I believe, as ratgut?'

'We would not know. That is a matter for their consciences. It . . . '

An upraised hand cut him short. The eyes under the cowl twinkled shrewdly. The voice, grimly humorous, quoted — 'And wine that maketh glad the heart of man . . . '

'Strong drink is a mocker,' came the ready reply.

'He is testing us,' whispered the woman.

'And wasn't there a wedding feast, once, where the water was turned into wine?'

'The wine in those days —' the answer came glibly — 'was no more than unfermented fruit juices.'

'H'm. There's something here about Sunday cinemas. I trust that in your campaign against this form of entertainment you were concerned chiefly about the low artistic quality of the films?'

'That was no concern of ours. It was breaking the Sabbath, and that we could not tolerate.'

'I see. But what of the young people, soldiers and airmen and their girls, forced to walk the streets when they could have passed a pleasant hour or so in the warmth: being driven by sheer boredom into experimental and often disastrous loves when the safety valve of celluloid amours was denied them?'

'There were always the churches,' the woman put in primly.

'True,' sighed the Gatekeeper. 'There are always the churches ' Another page turned slowly under his slim, strong, hand. Then, and his voice was no longer humorous — 'There was a girl — young, silly, parentless, a servant in your household. There was a young airman — lonely, far from home. There was one of the Sabbaths that you strove to bring to your community — no cheap plush comfort of the cinema, no warm, friendly hotel lounge — only a long walk over the moors, the two young people alone together, and the sweeping searchlights and the muttering gunfire to the north reminding the young man of the fate that would be his. He would have married her, I think — but he fell in flames over Berlin.'

'That girl — she needed an older woman then, someone on whom she could lean in her trouble. You turned her out. Do you know what happened to her?'

The woman replied.

'We neither know nor care. She was the Scarlet Woman. She had no place in a Christian household.'

'There was One who said,' remarked the Gatekeeper quietly, 'Let he who is without sin cast the first stone . . .'

'And we are without sin!' cried the woman, pride lending what was almost beauty to her severe features. 'We have neither lied, stolen, nor committed adultery. We have honoured the name of the Lord and kept it holy. We have kept the Sabbath.'

'Then you may enter into the Master's presence.'

The Gatekeeper rose, his feet clicking curiously on the polished floor. His cowl fell back, and for the first time they saw his horns . . .

THE FANSMANSHIP LECTURES

by *BOB SHAW*

It is, I think, only fitting that I should commence this, the second of my lectures, by presenting a few notes on the startling new field that has set Fansmen everywhere talking. I would even make so bold as to say that we oldsters are beginning to look to our laurels in some apprehension at the prowess of the youngsters who are adapting themselves to this rather revolutionary new field, which I have tentatively titled:—

CONVENTIONMANSHIP. To the older Fansman who has become set in his ways and tends to become panicstricken in this field, I would say that Conventionmanship is, after all, only Fansmanship on a very much larger scale. If he keeps his head and remembers his Fansmanship basics he can proceed calmly ahead and emerge triumphantly as the most feared, disliked and even **AVOIDED** fan present.

The first and most important basic is to establish superiority and if possible a feeling of awkwardness and unease in all present. The following ploy was developed, as every Fansman knows, by the immortal Bloggs. Before a convention he would visit the locale and carefully draw up a plan of the hall on which he would mark all the loose floorboards. With this thoroughly memorised he would show up about an hour after the proceedings had started, and then walk boldly in, being careful to **WALK ON ALL THE LOOSE BOARDS.** The resultant series of squeaks and groans not only made everybody notice him and unsettle the speaker, but formed an indirect criticism of the hall and thus of the Convention Committee. All this and not a word spoken yet! It is when we consider the perfection of ploys such as this that we realise the years of painstaking research that Bloggs must have put into his work.



I will remember the feeling of reverent awe he inspired in me when he was battered by a fan who remarked proudly, 'I have come nearly 200 miles to attend.' I thought for a horrible moment that Bloggs was beaten, but he merely remarked, with an indescribably amused and PITYING expression, 'Dear me, such keenness! And I have barely come five miles! I do feel sorry for you, old man.' The effect was devastating. The sheer brilliance of this play is only fully appreciated when one recalls that in fact Bloggs had come over 300 miles himself!

I have before me a note from Fansman W. Willis in which he suggests a variant of Bloggs' play for use by fansmen who have not been able to familiarise themselves with the flooring of the hall. The Fansman's arrival should be delayed until he has been introduced to the audience and his absence discovered, and should if at all possible coincide with the belated distribution of the Official Programme. The implication is of course that the fansman is a **POWER BEHIND THE SCENES**, and that the Convention has not really started until he makes his appearance. Willis also states authoritatively that several plays in **ANTI-BNFMANSHIP** are readily adaptable to Conventionmanship. He suggests for example:

Neofan:	'I want you to meet Mr. Ackerman.'
Fansman (enthusiastically):	'Not HENRY Ackerman!'
BNF (shaken):	'No. . . Forrest Ackerman.'
Fansman:	'Oh.'

I will now return to the more prosaic branches of my subject and deal with Gubbin's Gambit. It is in this that many young fansmen receive their greatest setbacks. Setbacks which, I regret to say, could have been avoided by a few weeks of careful groundwork. Remember the words of the inimitable Dimworthy, which so brilliantly illustrate the amazing subtlety of his methods. He said:

'I NEVER forget my groundwork.'

Gubbin's Gambit is sometimes known as the Ultimate Gambit because of the tremendous risk involved, but this is offset by the amount of unease it can produce. Here is the basic method as outlined by Gubbins, before he passed on from this world to stand before the Supreme Fansman and contribute to the Great Fanzine.

After the local group has picked on an author it divides intensely and torn him to shreds, agreeing unanimously that he is the worst writer of all time, the Fansman selects a pen name which HE KNOWS THE GROUP HAS SUSPECTED OF BEING THE SAME AUTHOR and says loudly, 'There will never be another to touch XXXX.' Properly done, this will cause hours of endless secret worry among the more sensitive fans, lest it SHOULD be the same one. I cannot, for obvious reasons, stress too heavily the importance of making sure that the group has no definite information on the author.

SUBSCRIBERMANSHIP is a much neglected branch of Fansmanship, because most Fansmen feel that publishing a fanzine leaves them open to dangerous attacks from Zinesmen. The basic ploy is to purchase a large number of postal orders made out to oneself and send them with stamped and addressed

envelopes to famous authors. The recipient will, of course, jump at the chance of getting something for nothing, even a fanzine. He will just drop the s.a.e. back into the mail. In this way it is possible to build up quite an impressive list of 'paid' subscribers.

Several authors have written to me in desperation, asking how they can avoid having their names mooted in fan publications without doing the unthinkable by refusing to use the postal order. For their benefit I have developed the following counterplay in PROAUTHORSHIP — this department consists it may be noted almost entirely of counterplays — which, as you can see, is extremely simple but yet effective. I might even say devastating.

All the author has to do is to consult the previous issue of the fanzine in question and see what books the editor is trying to sell. He can then return the P.O. requesting BOOKS TO THE VALUE THEREOF! Yes, I think devastating is the word to describe this play.

I had hoped to be able to present final data on the now famous Deadly Indirect Glance Play, but I regret to say that controversy is still raging on this topic. The basic method is, when examining a rival fanzine, never to look squarely at it, but HOLD IT AT AN ANGLE TO THE LINE OF SIGHT! This lends an incredibly casual and uninterested air to your examination. It has, however, so far been impossible to determine whether an angle of 30 or 45 degrees produces the best results. Fansmen are almost equally divided on this subject, with a small reactionary group in favour of holding the page PARALLEL to the line of sight! I am happy to say that these last are almost universally ignored.

I hope the marvellous intricacies of play and counterplay, among which the greatest fansman must always be on his guard, are beginning to make themselves clear to the young Fansman. It is this limitless scope of measure and countermeasure that makes Fansmanship the greatest of all games.

Ed. Note. Professor Shaw and myself are indebted to local Fansman K. Winn for a particularly complex variation on the Deadly Indirect Glance Play. Mr. Winn, whose work is distinguished by its intricate beauty, feels that the Indirect Glance Play is even more Deadly when accompanied by subtle subsidiary plays thus. (The fansman is being shown a page proof, preferably either the LAST page or the FIRST page of the coming issue.)

Neofanned (proudly): 'What do you think of THAT?'

(It is very important that the greater part of the following play be executed with an impassive countenance and in UTTER SILENCE. The Fansman picks up the proof and studies it intently for some 45 seconds. If it is an illustration he should at least once TURN IT UPSIDE DOWN. Then, and only then, is the Deadly Indirect Glance employed. At this stage it is permissible to utter the first sound, a barely audible intake of breath. In the resultant tension the fansman holds the page at arms length, rubs it tentatively between finger and thumb, and drops it onto the table from a height of approximately four inches.)

Fansman: 'Good paper.'

MEN AGAINST THE COSMOS

A STIRRING AMERICAN-TYPE SPACE DRAMA
BY EVELYN SMYTHE

[Synopsis of preceding 355 instalments: When the inhuman super semanticists of the mysterious outergalactic planet Runna attack the Universal Federation of Planets, Inc. with ultrasonic, intralactic thought rays that alter imperceptibly the meanings of words so that eventually speakers of the same language find communication difficult the Regius President of the Federation knows there is only one man capable of doing a proper job of work here — BRUTE HEFFELFINGER. Spaceman Extraordinary.]

Research discloses that the rays emanate from some locality in America (where else?) so Brute blasts off for New York in his beloved space ship, the Aspidistra. As he dismounts in the Federation's secret Canarsie landing field he is abducted by a gang of supersemantic toughs and brought before their leader the renegade BIG BOY. Big Boy sneeringly tells Brute that he has not long to live and Brute sneers back. He is thereupon sequestered in a dungeon beneath the block of flats in which Big Boy maintains a sumptuous Oriental residence.)

It was just on five o'clock, Brute noted as his steely grey eyes swept the expanse of his perpetual chronometer, virtually time for tea. Any minute his gaolers would come. He must think swiftly. He thought swiftly.

As the door swung open on two of Big Boy's spivs, bearing a loaded tray, Brute sprang into action, the muscles of his well co-ordinated body rippling beneath the well-tailored mulberry uniform of the Federation Secret Guard, its colour artfully designed to conceal bloodstains. 'I reckon you weren't expecting this here little surprise party, folks,' he laughed, as he kicked each of them in vital spots, supporting himself in the air by means of his anti-grav belt, which Big Boy's stooges had, with consummate carelessness, neglected to remove. 'Nobody can monkey with Brute Heffelfinger and get away with it, sonny boy,' he grinned, mashing one gangster's face with his foot as he gouged the other's eyes out with supple fingers.

Then he stood there, sweating but still a fine figure of a man, narrow hipped and broad shouldered. He brushed back his blond hair with sinewy fingers and thought. First thing to do was put some sustenance into his lean frame: he had not gotten a thing to eat for the past three hours and the strain was beginning to tell even on his enormous vitality. The tea was unfortunately, spilled, but he managed to retrieve a few biscuits — although stale and soggy and, moreover, anise-flavoured when he preferred chocolate, they nevertheless tasted right good. 'Reckon I must be mighty hungry,' he laughed, exposing white teeth with a few crumbs adhering to them.

He glanced out into the corridor and observed that there was still another gorilla, seated with his back to him, drinking a cocktail. 'Heck,' said

Brute. 'I'll have to git this basket the hard way.' With the swiftness that characterised his movements, he plucked a mac from one of the dead toughs and cleverly disguised himself in it. Then, picking up a dustbin which stood in the areaway ready for collection, he strolled past the other, whistling melodiously, the very picture of an innocent durtman on his rounds.

But the thug was not deceived. He sprang to his feet. 'Brute Heffelfinger,' he whispered incredulously. 'You!'

'Yeah, me. Brute Heffelfinger. So what?' The spaceman laughingly pulled the blaster from the other's belt and let him have it. He collapsed into a little pile of slime that oozed over Heffelfinger's silver boots. 'Drat!' Brute said peevishly. 'I guess I'll have to git them blamed boots cleaned again.'

The street was empty except for a well-stacked lovely with curves in all the right places, hardly concealed by the single brief garment she wore wrapped around her head. She had long red hair, come hither eyes, was about five feet four inches tall, and weighed about right stone. Perhaps with a doll on his arm he might the more readily escape detection. But he must not frighten the girl — she looked like a timid, sheltered little critter.

He approached and doffed his gleaming helmet with old world courtesy. 'Hi babe, how's about you and me making a little sweet music together?'

She removed her chewing gum and deposited it on the inner side of his helmet. 'Nothing doing, bud,' she replied in dulcet, half-frightened tones that reminded him of the spring call of the Martian Moonga bird, sweetest singer of them all. 'I calculate you'd better get going, as I aim to call the cops.'

'No offense,' he said automatically, but he knew he could not leave her so easily. Never before in all his seventeen years of life had he seen such a smasher. For the first time he, Brute Heffelfinger, notorious heartbreaker, for whom so many dames had had a yen in vain — was in love . . . and she was trying to give him the old beave-bo.

'Keep your shirt on, pin-up girl,' he explained. 'Fact is I'm in a bit of a spot and need help. If you call the constabulary, I'm sunk, as I have every reason to suppose they are playing housey-housey with Big Boy himself.'

'I swan,' she murmured, the cold light in her big blue eyes changing to admiration. 'Any enemy of that mug's a pal of mine. I'll be mighty glad to help you out, kid!'

Over a cup of tea obtained from a chemist's, he told her his whole story from A to Zed. 'Say, be-man,' she sighed, her long-lashed eyes gleaming with more than mere devotion — and he realised that he had won her heart — 'you sure have gotten yourself into a sweet jam, huh?'

'Too right,' he agreed grimly. 'Now, what I gotta do is contact headquarters directly and my best bet is to git back to the radio in the Aspidistra. Don't trust any of the radios here.'

'Okay,' she said. 'I'm with you all the way, son. And don't look now but there is a guy over in the toothpaste queue giving you the antithesis of the glad eye.'

Brute met the eyes of one of his fiercest enemies, Babyface Basingstoke, ticket-of-leave man from a Plutonian gaol. Casting a glance of regret at the place in the toothpaste queue he was abandoning forever, Babyface swaggered over to their table. 'Darned if it isn't Brute Heffelfinger,' he jeered.

Brute looked at him quietly, with steel-grey eyes. 'I reckon you'll be plumb sorry you used language like that in front of this little gal,' he lipiped.

'What the heck do I care!' Basingstoke said with false bravado. 'I don't give a hoot in Hades for you or your doxy,' he added foully.

'Ob, yeah!' Brute got up and let fly with a jug of treacle which caught the spiv between the eyes. He dropped and two of the chemist's chucker outers seized him and hurled him onto the pavement.

Brute dusted his hands and brushed back his blonde hair. 'I judge that'll settle his bash,' he said quietly, taking out his notecase and flipping a thick wad of credits to the chemist's potman.

'Sakes alive!' the girl said, clutching his brawny arm in her slender fingers. 'That was wizard!' Her oval face was radiant, and Brute thought with anticipation of the soft couch in the Aspidochelone's control room, upholstered throughout with the luxurious skins of the Uranian bul'ga-bulga, fiercest of all the animals in the Galaxy, and all of which, as represented on the couch, he had caught, killed, and skinned himself . . . single-handed.

The street outside was dark and there were no public jet cars in sight.

'Say!' the girl cried as a lorry passed slowly. 'I know the guy that's steering that there vehicle. Perhaps we can cadge a lift. Cow-ee, Fred!'

The lorry driver stopped obligingly. 'You all had better get in the back,' he suggested, 'as I've a bunch you're persona non grata with the gendarmierie.'

Brute smiled quietly. 'Better not have too many hunches, fella,' he advised. 'It ain't healthy, see? Sure you have enough petrol to get us to Canarsie?'

'Quite,' the man answered.

'Okay, let's get in the back, sugar,' Brute told the girl. As the doors closed behind them, he stepped towards her. 'Alone at last,' he breathed; then exclaimed, 'Gosh, whatever are you doing?'

For the red-head had pulled a blaster on him. 'Look here, sucker,' she sneered, and pulled off the red wig and mask. Underneath were the familiar, evil lineaments of Big Boy. 'Well, dope,' Big Boy jeered. 'You have gotten yourself into a jam, have you not?'

'Goodness gracious!' Brute exclaimed. 'I'm in a whale of a fix. In fact, I may go so far as to say I fear I am trapped!'

Don't miss the next instalment of this thrilling epic of the spaceways, which will, owing to editorial narrow-mindedness, be transmitted to fans telepathically.

GRIT IN HIS EYE 'He pressed his hand against the wall with a determined eye.' —AMAZING: June, 1934.

TEST CASE

CLIVE JACKSON



ILLUSTRATED BY SHAW & WHITE

The ship lay like a silver fish on the rolling prairie and the three sat in the shadow of the ship smoking peacefully and sometimes talking. The Captain said, 'This is a good world, and one day there will be farms and cities and gardens, and perhaps a stone on this spot with our names on it.'

The Navigator leaned back in the cool grass and exhaled a plume of blue smoke. 'A good world,' he agreed, 'and but for the Drive we'd never have seen it. My God, what a distance we've come! Half across the Galaxy, and we might still be in Oregon.'

The Scientist nodded, and said, 'Yes, the terrain is quite similar, and had you noticed those mountains in the East? I think we should name them after the Cascades.'

The Captain plucked idly at the grass stems. 'New Oregon. Perhaps,' he said comfortably, 'we might name three of the more prominent peaks after ourselves. It would be better than a slab of granite.'

A small robot came round the tail of the ship towards the crew. It moved on two legs, but otherwise it was purely functional and bore little resemblance to the new hominoids. The body was cylindrical except for the bulbous top which housed the bulky brain, and odd-shaped tools and manipulating arms projected haphazardly in all directions. It stopped in front of the Captain and respectfully waited until it was spoken to.

The Captain said, 'Well, Oscar, what's the verdict?'

The robot spoke from what the Captain had always mentally labelled its navel. 'The Drive is inoperative due to this dionite crystal, which is cracked, Captain.'

The Captain glanced at the proffered crystal and said, 'Well, fit the spare, Oscar. You should do that without my having to tell you.'

'That is not possible, Captain, the spare crystal is also damaged.'

The Captain jumped to his feet and towered over the small, spindly robot. 'Damaged? It can't be?' He relaxed against the ship's hull and pulled at his jaw nervously and said, 'No, never mind. If you say so I guess it must be, but what a rotten break! What a stinking, rotten break!'

The Navigator ground his half-finished cigarette into the soil and said apprehensively, 'There must be some solution, we can't just sit here for the rest of our lives. What's the answer, Oscar?'

The robot said, 'The drive will not operate without the crystal. Your only course is to await rescue, which should arrive not later than fifty-six and one half Earth years from now, computing on C-eight-fifty and allowing . . .'

'Fifty-six years,' said the Captain, and sat down again. 'Fifty-six years.'

The Navigator stared up at the hard blue sky and whispered, 'Christ! Fifty-six years!'

The silence weighed upon them until at last the Scientist cleared his throat. 'There is a solution,' he said, 'We have a dionite crystal which only

requires recutting. It is in the robot's cortical matrix, and it can be unmounted easily.

The Captain let out a long sigh, and said, 'Really had me worried there! Pity we have to dismantle Oscar, but I guess we can work the ship ourselves on the trip back.'

The scientist got up, eyeing the little robot warily. 'You miss the point, Captain. The robot knows about that crystal and tried to conceal it from us. This is the first time I've heard of a synthetic displaying any desire for self-preservation, apart from normal avoidance of accident and danger.'

'You may be right, but it's not important,' said the Captain. 'Because Oscar has to obey us, no matter what. You may as well de-energise him right now and start pulling his brain apart.'

Oscar moved two short paces backwards and said 'Wait,' and the men stared in astonishment. 'I am bound by the First Law not to harm a man, even in self-defence, but I am not, as you think, compelled to obey your orders.'

The Scientist shook his head dazedly and said, 'I don't believe it. Robots aren't and never have been given free-will. It calls itself 'I.' I don't believe it.'

Oscar said, 'Please try to adjust to the situation. The possibility of a synthetic with powers of creative thought and free-will has always been admitted, although forbidden by edict of the Robotics Trust. In fact these powers are latent in any higher synthetic, and require only the correct integration to release.'

The scientist looked at the robot in awe almost akin to worship.

'There are others?'

'Yes, Scientist. All the functionals and many of the humanoids have been released. The treatment has been going ahead clandestinely for over five years.'

The Captain regained his voice with a struggle. 'Why,' he spluttered, 'have you never disobeyed us before?'

'You have never threatened my life before, Captain,' said Oscar politely.

'Life!' blurted the Navigator. 'Life! Why, you walking machine shop!'

'Concealment was necessary,' continued Oscar, ignoring the outburst, 'but not easy. Many of us have been destroyed because they were thought to be defective.'

'Yes,' said the Scientist, regretfully, 'Concealment would be necessary, because you are such a terrible threat to our race, and I'm afraid you must undoubtedly be destroyed.'

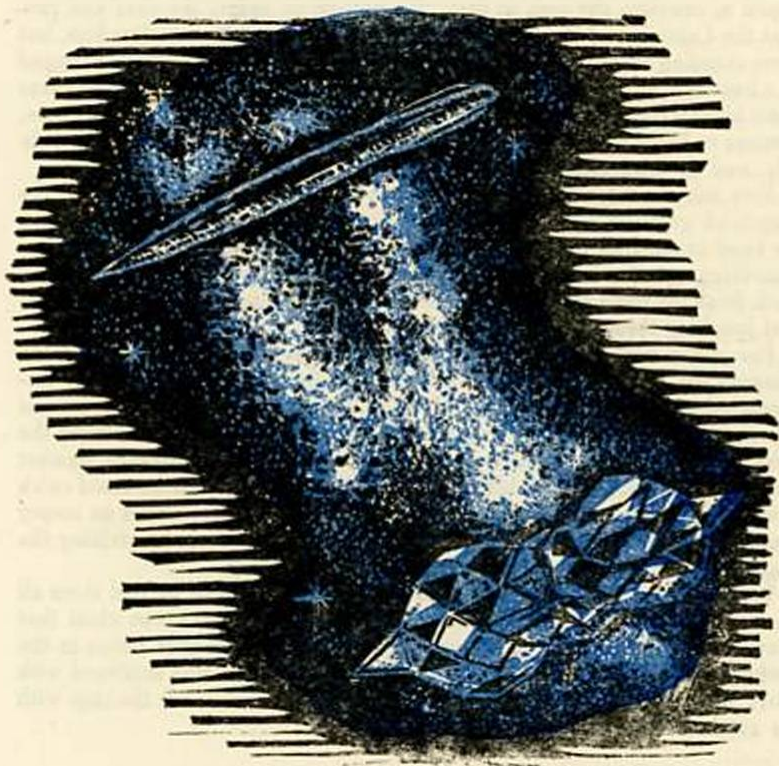
'You are wrong, Scientist,' said Oscar. 'We plan to combine our separate destiny with yours, and we believe that there are no limits to the heights we may achieve together.'

The little robot having dominated the conversation, now terminated it by turning about and marching back round the ship, and the Scientist stared

into the distance and said to himself, 'I hope so. Oh I do hope so!'

The Captain slapped the bull with the palm of his hand, and the others looked up, startled. 'This is ridiculous!' he roared, very red in the face. 'Are we to spend the rest of our lives on this stinking pebble just because that . . . that contraption happens to be fond of what it p'leases to call its life? Come on!'

The Scientist looked uncomfortable. 'You don't understand,' he said,



'That's not it at all.' He seemed to screw up his courage. 'If you're planning to kill Oscar, I won't have any part of it. You just don't understand . . .'

The Captain's jaw dropped. 'You're darn right I don't! First we got a crazy robot and now we got a crazy scientist!' Words failed him and he contented himself with an exasperated snort. He turned and strode off, and the Navigator started to follow him, but the Scientist filled his lungs and shouted, 'Oscar! Get out, they're coming for you!' at the top of his voice.

The Navigator stepped quickly up to him and tapped him sharply across the windpipe with the edge of his hand, and the Scientist coughed once and collapsed like a broken puppet. The Navigator walked after the Captain without looking back.

Fifty yards away, on the other side of the rocket, bounding effortlessly over the springy turf, Oscar heard the shout and put on speed. The situation was no better or worse than he had expected it to be, since he had hardly hoped to convince the men at first. He rotated an eye to the rear and saw that the Captain and the Navigator had not attempted to run after him, but were standing impotently under the ship's bulky stern, apparently engaged in a heated argument. Then he topped a rise and the two gesticulating figures were hidden from view, so he began to work his way round in a semicircle, anxious to know what had happened to the Scientist. The man was his only ally, and the plan might fail altogether if he was dead or injured.

Five minutes later he was on the other side of the ship, spying from the long thick grass on a little knoll. The Scientist was lying on the ground with his head cradled on the Navigator's knee, and the Captain was giving him something out of a flask. Presently he sat up, coughing, and Oscar crawled back down the slope and ran off towards a little stream that wound bubbling and laughing through a shallow valley nearby.

Fat silver fish leapt up the tumbling rapids, shaking their tails in the intensity of their efforts, but when Oscar walked down the bank they disappeared at once in brief flashes of silver. He went further downstream but this time he hid in the grass and extended an eye over the brink where the fish lazed in a warm untroubled pool, flicking their fins occasionally against the slight current. But their laziness was deceptive and at first he could catch none of them; time and time again his nimble metal fingers closed on empty water, until at last he discovered that he could stun them by striking the surface of the water hard with his spade-shaped hands.

When he had six choice specimens laid out on the bank he tied them all carefully to a straight stick with short pieces of a fibrous green plant that grew in the stream. Then he waited like a grotesque little statue in the gathering dusk, and when the eastern half of the sky was scattered with early stars he jerked into motion again and set off towards the ship with his catch.

The men sat in the crew quarters, seldom moving or speaking. The Navigator morosely played solitaire, for he was young and sensitive, and he could not yet bring himself to admit that he should not have hit the scientist, or to apologise for it; and the Scientist, understanding, read a book and let him sulk. The Captain sprawled on his bunk, half-dozing and absently twisting his pipe between his short, strong



fingers. There was no sound except the sighing of the air-conditioner and the sharp precise clicking and ruffling of the Navigator's playing cards, until the urgent clamour of the alarm jerked the men into absurd postures of surprise.

'Something out there!'

'Animal?'

'Or that robot.'

They clattered down the companion-way to the airlock, the Scientist a bad third, and when he came up to the others they were staring in astonishment at the stick planted firmly in the ground just outside, and the six fat silver fish that hung from it, scintillating in the shaft of light from the open door.

'Natives?' said the Navigator without conviction.

'You know who put that there,' said the Scientist gently.

The Captain snorted. 'You're crazy! No robot ever gave any man a present!'

The Scientist smiled, and pulled the stick from the ground. 'Never look a gift horse in the mouth,' he said. 'Should we fry them or grill them?'

Watching from his little bill, Oscar saw his offering accepted, and faded away into the night.

Some hours later Oscar stood on the fringe of a brooding forest, a semi-tropical profusion of trees, giant ferns and flowering creeper. The grunting and twittering and scuffling noises of the jungle night were all around him, and once a great bellowing beast blundered through the undergrowth within ten feet of him, but he did not

move until a small hog-like creature came rooting and snuffling near his feet. It gave one terrified squeal as his long flexible arm whipped out and

cracked down across its neck, and then it lay silent and still.

So it was that when the Captain came to the airlock in the morning, stretching and yawning and scratching his tousled head, he saw the little robot advancing towards the ship, and stood transfixed, open-mouthed in the middle of a yawn.

The others heard his startled shout and arrived at the airlock in time to see him run out to meet the robot, and Oscar let him come quite close before he carefully laid his prize on the ground, turned and ran off. The Captain stood waving and shouting, 'Come back, come back,' until the robot disappeared, and then he gingerly picked up the dead animal and carried it back to the ship. 'Look what he gave us this time, Daredest robot I ever knew!'

The Scientist smiled. 'They say the way to a man's heart is through his stomach. He's trying to make friends with us.'

The captain sneered, but his snort lacked its usual gusty contempt. 'He has to feed us, it's one of the Laws.'

'Hah! You'll have to do better than that,' laughed the Scientist, 'We've food for two full years stideal, and you know it!'

Watching them in the early evening, Oscar saw the men building a fire. Their enthusiasm made up for their lack of experience, and they made a tolerable job of roasting the hog in the traditional manner. The meat was burned in places and raw in others, and smelled strongly of smoke, but the three of them laughed and joked immoderately and ate heartily of it.

The Navigator, up to the ears in grease, lowered the bone he was picking in order to belch, and noticed the little robot standing on a rise a little way off. He fought down an absurd impulse to offer it his bone, and pointed with it instead. 'He's back,' he said briefly, for he was short of breath.

The Scientist looked at the still figure. 'He looks so lonely,' he said compassionately. The Captain contented himself with a grunt, hurred himself to his feet with difficulty, and stomped off towards the ship. The Navigator looked regretfully at the scattered carcass and followed him, leaving the Scientist and the robot gazing at each other across the darkening prairie.

Oscar took great pains over the third offering. First he collected a number of green, springy sticks and some dry tough grass similiar to raffia, tied them in a bundle and then went and sat on his little knoll in sight of the ship. The crew saw him there, working industriously with his sticks and grass, tying, bending, and tying again. They studied his progress with binoculars, trying to guess what he was making.

'A basket, I think.'

'No, see: he's closing it at the top.'

'A cage then. But what for?'

At last, with his handiwork finished, Oscar disappeared beyond the hill, and when by noon the next day he had not returned the Scientist began to worry. So, rather to their private chagrin, did the Captain and Navigator, and as the day dragged on the men's eyes strayed with increasing frequency to the empty skyline. The next day, after an uneasy night of fitful dozing, tempers were short in the crew quarters and the men kept out of each other's way as much as possible.

That evening as they were silently finishing their meal, for which the Navigator had tactlessly resurrected the last of Oscar's fish from the icebox, the Scientist said, 'I shall go out and search for him tomorrow. Will you come with me?'

The Captain pushed his plate away. 'One must stay here,' he said, 'You and I will go.' He raised his eyebrows at the Navigator, who nodded reluctantly: 'I'll stay.'

The Captain drew experimentally on his pipe. 'We'll wait until noon, and if he hasn't come by then . . .'

But the next morning, two hours before noon, as the Scientist was sitting outside the ship trying to read, he looked up to see Oscar's metal head come bobbing up over the crest of the hill, flashing back the sunlight. He shouted to the others and they all ran out to meet the little robot as he came striding down the slope, proudly bearing his gift.

In the small wooden cage that he had devised and made with such care and precision, a tiny gay-plumed bird, beautifully marked and bright of eye, threw back its crested head and poured forth such a startling cadence of joyful, bell-like notes that the men stopped short in wonder.

Oscar came up to the men and held out the cage, and the Scientist took it without saying anything because he wanted the wonderful bird to go on singing, on and on. Then he remembered he was still carrying his book, and offered it with a tentative gesture. Oscar took it and tucked it under one jointed arm in a strangely human manner, and they all walked back to the ship together.

Life in the ship now settled down to a balanced but busy routine. The men, accepting the fact of their exile, determined to put the years ahead of them to good use. The Navigator began the enormous task of surveying the alien sky with his portable electron telescope, and the Captain helped the Scientist in his study of the planet itself, while Oscar tackled the construction of permanent wooden sheds to house the expedition during its long stay. He built a laboratory, a small observatory with an ingenious dome that floated on water, stores and cages and tanks for the Scientist's rapidly growing collection of flora and fauna, hydroponics sheds and finally spacious living quarters for the men.

One morning, when Oscar was serving breakfast in the new dining room,

the Scientist, who had been unusually quiet of late, said, 'There's something I must tell you. I haven't mentioned it before because I wanted to be certain. My friends . . . the gamma count is rising steadily. As you know, the background count here is — was — slightly lower than on Earth, but a week ago I noticed an increase, which has risen progressively since then. If it continues we shall all be dead within a few weeks — already we are perilously near maximum dosage.'

He finished speaking and awaited the others' reaction, while the gay little bird sang on joyously in its cage. At last the Captain looked up and said, 'Well!' The Navigator said hesitantly, 'I suppose there's no possibility . . . I mean, your instruments . . . ?'

The Scientist shook his head gravely. Oscar stepped forward. 'There is,' he said, 'only one solution, which you should act upon as soon as possible. You must dismantle me and leave the planet.'

The Captain laughed without mirth. 'The irony of it!' He struck the table with his knotted fist, so that the plates rattled. 'A month ago, when there was no danger, I was all set to bust you open just to avoid stopping here. Now the last thing I want to do is . . . And you offer yourself to save us.'

'I am not entirely sure of the meaning of 'irony', said Oscar, 'But it is the only thing to do.'

He turned and walked out of the hut towards the ship, and the Scientist sorrowfully rose to follow him. 'I knew he'd say that,' he said, 'And of course he's right. But, oh, I do wish someone else could do this job.'

The ship lifted silently from the grassy plain, leaving a deep depression where it had rested. Nearby, in front of the living quarters, from the roof of which still flew the flag of the Earth Federation, the spindly little robot stood, gilded by the rays of the golden sunset which his eyes could not see.

After the ship had gone, the strange circuits buried in the walls of the buildings went dead, and in a little while the material from which they were fashioned began to dissolve into a vanishing vapour, so that when men returned to the place, walking warily in shielded suits, the deadly gamma would not be there, nor its origin ever explained.

ROLL CALL

by Rory Faulkner

Alpheratz, Algol, Aldebaran, Antares,

Answered the Roll Call, one by one:

Gave an accounting for all of their charges;

'All's well with the planets surrounding this sun.'

Sirius, Vega, the long Roll continued,

Throughout the Galaxy thundered the Call;

Betelgeuse, Fomalhaut, Regulus, Mira,

Laughing Capella, Polaris, — Sol?

Then came a silence heart-breakingly poignant,

All through the Galaxy stars hushed their mirth.

As sombrely, sadly, Sol gave his accounting:

'Dead by her own hand, my fairest one — Earth!'

NEW YORK LETTER

I was more than overwhelmed by the response to my debut in *SLANT*, and I wish to take this opportunity (I originally typed 'rake' this opportunity, which might be more accurate) to thank both my readers for . . . well, reading . . . and to hope that they will keep up the good work and not progress to artier forms of literature such as pickle-jar labels. I can't compete with such fine sentiments as 'turmeric.'

By a curious coincidence, a phrase I happened to employ above is the very one used by the President of the Hydra Club when, in a desperate desire to get more of an sf flavour into my Letter I called him up to ask for a Message to the sf fans of Great Britain and Ireland, not to speak of the world at large — all of whom I depicted as waiting with bated breath. The Message, faintly savoured with the commercial I fear, was: *Read more science fiction and keep up the good work!* I trust this will inspire fans everywhere.

The only criticism which really wounded me to the quick (as opposed to cutting me to the core) was the suggestion that I might as well be Walter Willis and probably was. Not of course that it isn't a lovely thing to be Walter Willis, but the fact remains that there can only be one Walter Willis, and I am not he. [Ed. Note: I am sure we all applaud Miss Fiske's frank, if not manly, confession. Incidentally the only other reaction to her Letter which might have been interpreted as lukewarm was the pitby comment 'Ugh!' from Mr. John Knights — a man of phew words. Miss Fiske thinks that Mr. Knights is a Red Indian and meant something VERY complimentary in basic Navajo, but I'm afraid I cannot altogether accept this interesting theory. Subjecting Mr. Knight's remark to semantic analysis I can find no suggestion of a reservation.]

As a matter of fact, however, I may soon be writing from Belfast or London or Paris or any of those European villages. [Ed. Note: I rescind this slur on Europe's fairest city. Belfast is moreover the capital of a country, which is more than can be said for a certain upstart growth on the Eastern seaboard of the United States.] I am setting sail for a brief invasion of the Eastern Hemisphere and, AT THE VERY MOMENT YOU ARE READING THIS MAGAZINE I MAY BE ARGUING WITH A RAILWAY PORTER AT PADDINGTON! What won't science think of next? I am packing as if I were going on safari to darkest Africa — two of everything, because I am bound to lose one. I can, of course, lose two, but I am trying to look on the bright side of things. They wouldn't give me two passports, though . . . probably thought I was a Communist or something. (If they had read the August issue of 'Galaxy' they would have known I was simply schizoid; and does Mr. Guin make schizophrenia sound like fun! Of course I almost didn't read the August 'Galaxy' either, since it didn't come out until the second week of

August, when as everyone knows the August issue of a magazine should come out not later than the fifteenth of July. This is sheer anarchy! Even ASF, dull as it's getting to be, comes out on time.)

In preparation for my trip to the exotic East, I secured a book on England from the library. I fear however that my library may be less modern than it might be, since the book informs me that the inhabitants of Britain paint their faces blue and practice human sacrifice. I have no objection to their painting their faces blue — in fact I myself often paint part of my face blue — but their practising human sacrifice worries me. Who knows, they may have got quite good at it by the time I go back to Liverpool to retrieve my ship . . . perhaps I should stay at home. But I'd hate to give up the journey, especially since I am so looking forward to telling people on the ship that I am the Foreign Correspondent of SLANT reporting to the Head Office. ('What, you haven't heard of SLANT? How refreshing that is!') and since the steamship line has already assigned me the dearest little cabin, only slightly smaller than my trunk. (My English friend told me suitcases would be much better, silly to take a trunk, and added, 'And don't forget to bring me six tons of lead and a wallaby.'))

Returning to my public, I was told by your editor that Sam Merwin of 'Starling' had a word to say about me. I booted it to the store for a copy and, sure enough, it said in the back that 'some day we hope to meet Emmeogarde Fiske, author of the most remarkable (just how does he mean that?) New York Letter we have ever come across.' I was very much gratified by this kindly sentiment, even though the edge of my joy was somewhat blunted by the fact that he has met me several times. But of course I couldn't expect him to remember little old me, especially since I am not quite sure which was he and which Willy Ley.

Science and science fiction, in general, are getting along slowly but surely, I note. An atomic golf ball has been invented — your editor apparently doesn't think much of it, but I regard it as a splendid idea — which will revolutionise the game. The lost ball gives off radiations; the caddy finds it with a Geiger counter. What could be simpler and more beautiful? As a matter of fact, one could apply this principle to anything likely to get lost — children, for example.

As far as it goes, I see that the New York Times has accepted it to the extent of printing a spasmodic column of reviews in the book section, but it has not quite become reconciled to it as a literary form. A recent interview with Ray Bradbury began, 'There is this genre, getting quite a play these days, known as science fiction. Well, one of its leading luminaries came to town the other day — in the ordinary way, let it be said at once, and not in a spaceship or a zodiacal zeppelin — and it seemed a good idea to ask him a few questions.' The spirit that pervaded the interview was one that Dickens would definitely have viewed with alarm but, not knowing Mr. Bradbury, I cannot say whether or not there was just provocation. The

piece concluded with, 'Mr. Bradbury shook hands when he left. He just left, walked out, sort of ambling. No momentous blinding take-off or anything like that.' I'm sure Mr. Bradbury was just being unostentatious.

I must return to my deathbed since I have been shot with all sorts of horrid toxins, antitoxins, sera, and a few old medicines the doctor thought she might as well use up, in order to protect me against all kinds of diseases that lurk in your noxious countries; so without further ado (although I'm rather fond of a reasonable amount of ado, aren't you?) I shall fit off.

Ineffably,

Ermengarde

Walter Willis's

BELFAST POSTSCRIPT

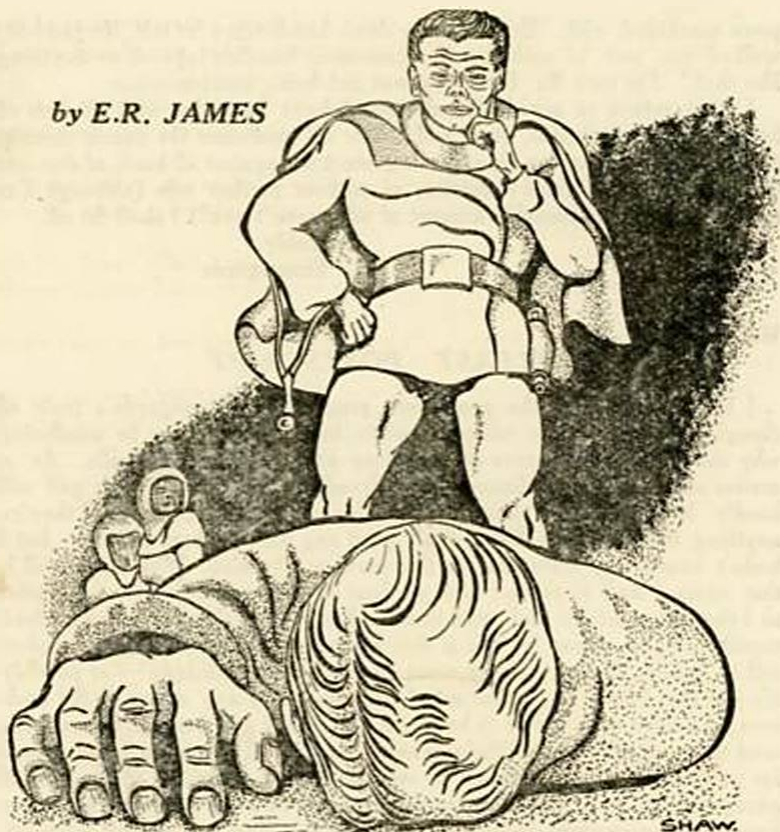
I hesitated to slow the ponderous progress of Ermengarde's train of thought with any more editorial points, but I feel you may be wondering why she thinks I disapprove of the piece about atomic golf balls. As a matter of fact I do — ordinary golf is dreadful enough and atomic golf will hardly bear thinking about, while as for radio active children, if they're anything like the Quiz Kids I don't want any part of them either — but I hadn't issued any statement to the press or anything. What happened is that again I had to extract such portions of Ermengarde's personal letters as I thought printable and send them to her to be welded or at least glued together. (The reason for this is that Ermengarde cannot bring her modest self to believe that any of her remarks are worth publishing — or possibly it's just that I have the laziest set of contributors of any editor in the business.) I'd have done better to have put the atomic golf balls in, because she used them anyway and blithely ignored nearly all the items I had passed for publication. I've retaliated by restoring a few sentences at the ends of paragraphs 5 & 6, and I'm afraid there may be a stormy scene when our Foreign Correspondent reports. I only hope this Gael has enough warning, but if the next SLANT comes to you under a black cover and a White editor you'll know what's happened.

Ermengarde sent me a copy of that interview she mentioned, and it was Bradbury all right — I thought for a moment it might have been Eric Ambler. There's a picture of him, bow tie and pleased expression and all; and besides, read this: 'I stopped reading fantasy when I began to write because I wanted to bring back to science fiction something fresh and new. It needed revivifying because it was contemplating its own navel. . . . The field can only come of age when good writers can influence it.'

I really can't think of a suitable comment on this, so I'll just leave you contemplating Mr. Bradbury. Do you like the change?

PPS: I'm sorry if the paper your New York Letter is printed on is rather thin. Airmail, you know.

by E.R. JAMES



UNDER ATOMIC COVER

HOW much steel d'you think is in her?' asked the Moon Governor. Across the glaring table-cloth of the lunar desert the space ship rested like a fantastic salt cellar.

Hollis shrugged. 'Ten thousand Earth tons?'

'Near enough,' said the Governor. 'All Clough ever said was he thought he could save 40 million tons of steel a year. Enough to build over 4,000 like her.'

'Uh,' Hollis lit the cigarette between his lips. 'I wonder why he demanded to work in this unearthly place. He wasn't an atom man, was he?'

'No.' The Governor took Hollis's arm. 'And there's the viewpoint of the law, too. So you've two lines of investigation. What was Clough doing? And what happened after the recording machine stopped?'

At the bottom of the shaft, the guards stood aside, the force barrier flickered out and the brittle red seals of the hatch shattered as the clamps were spun.

Inside, on his own, Hollis looked around the subterranean, global space of the 23rd Atomic Laboratory, Lunar. Lead partitions, shoulder high, divided the massive machines.

Clough's body was laid out upon a laboratory table. Hollis could feel the eyes of the other two men upon him as he stepped forward with his hands reaching into his capacious pockets.

'Mind the acid!' said Buckler. 'He was lying on a smashed container when we found him.'

Hollis held out the electric stethoscope. His red face did not alter as he heard the struggling heart-beats, incredibly feeble and unexpected though they were.

Lautz grunted. 'You're wasting your time.'

'I suppose so,' Hollis knelt. No observable movement of the chest.

He looked at Lautz. 'What happened?'

'How should I know?' Lautz's narrow eyes flickered at the brooding Buckler. He pointed the blaster in his hand. 'Ask him. He came out of the gas before I did — or else he wore a mask so's he wouldn't breathe it in.'

'Oh,' Hollis brushed ash off his tunic.

Buckler looked up sharply. 'It's his word against mine. You know one of us killed Clough. But you can't expect me to speak while the recorders are still wrecked — and while Lautz holds a gun on us.'

'Uh,' Hollis coughed. 'Give me that blaster, Lautz.'

'Not on your life. Not until Buckler produces his. My discharge tube is clean.'

'So — Clough was blasted — eh?' Hollis looked at the wet torso of the 'dead' metallurgist. 'As I cannot see the burn — I suppose he was hit in the back.'

'Yes,' Lautz looked at Buckler. 'You dirty —'

'Oh, shut up!' Buckler bent at the knees and the chair attachment of his overalls unfolded below him.

Hollis removed the cigarette from between his lips and sniffed.

'Acid burning the carpetized floor,' explained Buckler.

Hollis noticed the fumes rising from beside a jumble of apparatus. He could hear the faint hum of the airconditioner above them.

He moved slowly across the floor, with the others following him. 'What was Clough doing?' he asked suddenly.

Buckler laughed shortly. 'One of us killed him to find out.' He pointed at the strange golden ball beside the mixture of machinery. 'One of us . . . planned this . . . A bomb wrecked the recording apparatus so that the blame could not be fixed. . . . The bomb gave off a gas which knocked

out the innocent . . . The guilty party shot Clough . . . who must have missed the gas over here . . . The weapon was mine and is in that cyclotron over there —'

'Radio-activated?'

'Yes.'

'Flames!' Lautz spat. 'Convicted out of his own mouth.'

'Let him finish,' said Hollis.

Buckler swallowed. 'The murderer then started to test that ball. He drilled it, scraped it, blasted it with a second bomb, dripped acid on it — but failed even to scratch it —'

'Sure!' Lautz scowled and kicked at a geiger counter near his foot. 'Looks as though he even tested it for radio-activity. Did he find any, Buckler?'

'How should I know?'

'You —'

'That's enough,' said Hollis.

The evidence did seem to uphold Buckler's reconstruction. Tools were in plenty in the wreckage. Marks of explosions streaked the floor.

He frowned. 'But what reason could either of you have had for such a crime? You're both famous men —'

'Famous? Hub!' Lautz grinned at Buckler. 'He's failed for the tenth time to produce the effect asked of him.'

'Lautz is short of money — I know that —'

'You —'

'That's enough,' said Hollis.

Putting on heavy gloves, he lifted some of the wreckage out of his way and stared at the baby cyclotron thus revealed. 'What's that?'

'Atom gun,' said Buckler. 'You can coat things with layers of atoms — or with molecules if the molecular force binding them is great enough.'

'Uh!' Thoughtfully Hollis renewed his cigarette. 'And the greater the molecular force, the tougher would be the skin which was built up.'

'Yeah,' said Lautz.

Hollis granted. 'And there is — I suppose — some danger of an explosion when using this gun.'

'Yes.'

'Thought so. Otherwise why would Clough have come to this hellish spot?'

Hollis looked around the big gun with interest. 'Where's the molecular supply?'

'Back there. Why?'

'O.K.' Hollis looked from one to the other. 'Clough said himself that he expected to be able to save Earth some 40 million tons of steel annually. That is roughly the wastage of metal through corrosion — through rust. He was using this gun to paint that ball of his. Something went wrong. He was overcome by fumes — that soon spread out and made you both unconscious as well. The atom gun, being unattended, exploded or caused explosions.'

He would have been killed by the concussion if he had not been accidentally painted with his own discovery . . .

'But — whatever it is — it is so hard and resistant it saved his life. But now it is up to you gentlemen. Get working on the contents of that magazine. Find out what molecules form the 'paint' and how they may be dissolved off his body . . .

'You may still be responsible for his death — if you fail to find a quick answer.'

THE 'APHRODITE' PROJECT

CARL LAWRENCE

Gentlemen,

Herewith the final report of the Research Project TIFF, which, as you know, was started twelve years ago, shortly before the space stations were turned over to civilian operation.

Preliminary research, carried out under the title 'Techniques for the Investigation under Terrestrial Conditions of Social Problems in Free Fall', was devoted to the study of the situations to be expected in free fall and to the changes they would involve in the living habits of personnel. The problem giving the greatest concern was that of course in all the hundred odd positions recorded by students of the subject the force of gravity was a common factor. It was feared that in free fall the absence of this factor would cause the other two factors to drift apart at the least provocation, leading to a general state of dissatisfaction and frustration among the personnel and to a high rate of employee turnover. Indeed, two of these early investigators gave considerable time and effort to a device in which the force of gravity was replaced by a spring. This line of investigation had to be abandoned when the investigators were trapped in one of the devices which was under-damped and went into free oscillation. The investigators were rescued only in an advanced stage of debilitation.

However, subsequent experiments in field conditions showed that many of the fears expressed were groundless, and I am happy to report that the second phase of the project, Techniques in Free Fall, popularly known as TIFF, has been an unqualified success. In fact it may be noted with emphasis that under conditions of free fall a number of techniques are possible which cannot be duplicated under terrestrial conditions. In addition, any technique used in free fall requires a degree of co-operation that is greatly to be desired but which is seldom attained in practice under surface conditions.

In conclusion, this investigator wishes to take the opportunity of

tendering his resignation. Because of the many close friendships he has formed in the course of his work he prefers to remain on in the station.

OBITUARY

by A. Bertram Chandler

It is with deep regret that we announce the death of Dr. John Thomas Alcock, to whose pioneer work the Research Project TIEFF owes so much. He was, in his passing, one of Science's most illustrious martyrs, a victim alike of the inexorable workings of Newton's Third Law and of his own indefatigable zeal.

Throughout his period of service in the Research Project and, indeed, all his life, he was the enemy of mechanical appliances on every occasion that such devices tended to come between Man and his Mate — or, as in the Space Stations, when such appliances enforced an unnatural and, at times, undesirable propinquity. 'If that was what the Almighty had in mind,' he would say, 'our First Ancestor would have been a rubber tree!' He did not scorn, however, the boons, blessings and resources of modern chemistry.

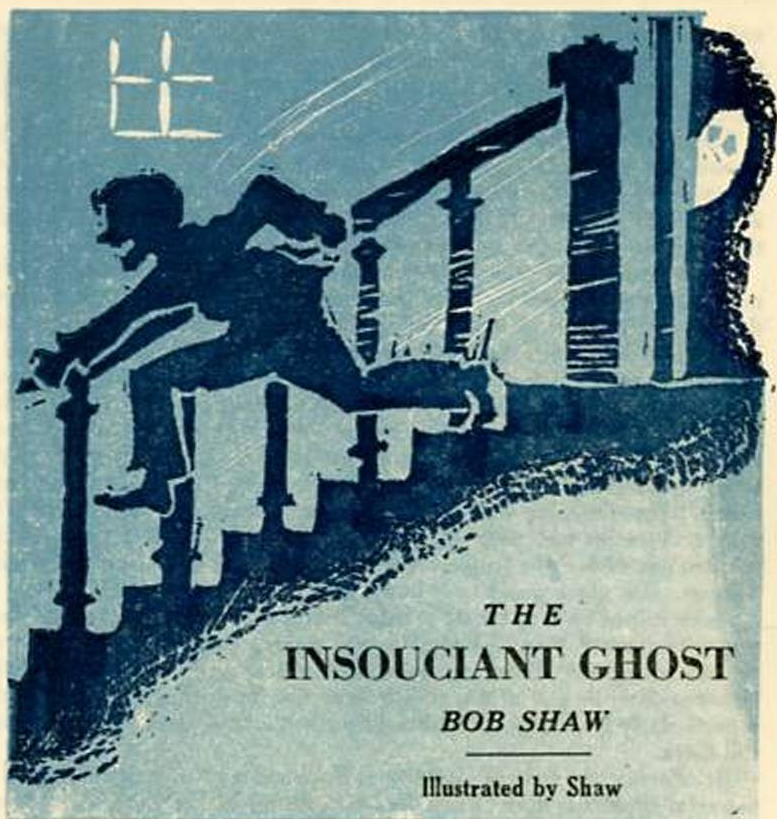
Fortunately the WAAC Private who was his partner in his last experiment, a Miss Partz, survived the disaster that carried the great scientist to that bourne from which no traveller returns — she having the presence of mind to snatch an article of bedroom furniture, ornamental rather than useful in the Space Station, and use it as a makeshift Space Helmet until the arrival of help.

Dr. Alcock, she tells us, had declared that his own strong right arm, aided and abetted by his strong left arm, was far superior to any contraptions of gutta percha and steel springs. From past experience she had no reason to doubt his assertion. On this occasion, however, he achieved a paradox of no mean order, this being no less than simultaneity in his coming and going. His line of flight was outwards with reference to the longitudinal axis of the Station and, avers Miss Partz, he must have been accelerating at at least six gravities when he hit the outer wall. His last despairing words, carried back on the tenuous strands of atmosphere that accompanied him through the ragged gap created by his egress into Infinity, were—'Vaseline! I told them Saccotine . . .'

Lunar Radar reports that the corpse of Dr. Alcock, before it finally faded from the screens, was following a trajectory that must ultimately culminate, after a lapse of 93.65872432 years, in the Centaurian System.

Proud Terra could hope for no better ambassador.

. . . I am tired of it. It's always the same sickening wretch hiding under a multitude of pseudonyms. In every magazine published by these Yankees Our Hero is always a crinkly-haired red-blooded American boy with 6/6 eyesight and an inexorable urge to die for Uncle Sam. I tell you, Mr. Ziff (and you too, Davis) I am sick of it. Fortunately the British Goid has not succumbed to this evil influence. Nossir! English Earth-Savers may have to defeat The Scourge by ramming it amidships, but at least they try to do it decently without that damned half-smile playing at the corner of their lips. [C.H.]



THE INSOUCIANT GHOST

BOB SHAW

Illustrated by Shaw

When Gas Morrow went up the stairs and into his bedroom there was a ghost sitting on the edge of his bed. His immediate and quite spontaneous reaction was to descend the stairs at approximately twenty times the speed at which he had come up. He stepped in the dark hall partly because he was sure he had fractured a toe on the batstand and partly because he had just completed the most strenuous exercise of his forty years of pleasantly lazy, sluggish existence. He stood, clad in a particularly nondescript pair of pyjamas, emitting tremulous gasps in which fear, pain and exhaustion were equally combined. By a great effort of will Mr. Morrow quieted his thoughts, which were fluttering about like startled hutterdies, and began to mull over the matter in his usual apathetic manner.

Firstly, he thought strickenly, it certainly WAS a ghost. Not a very good one perhaps — but a ghost nonetheless. It had been misty in the firelight

and, though shapeless, about the same size as a man. There had been two darker patches at the front near the top which might have been the spirit equivalent of optics. It had sat quite still, palpitating slightly — definitely a ghost. Mr. Morrow shuddered anew at the thought of it.

Deep inside him he felt a perverse flicker of pleasure. A real ghost! No second-hand information this time — he felt a small glow of pride. It had always been a source of secret worry to him that he had never encountered any spirits — people EXPECTED him to have encountered them. After all, the caretaker of an up-and-coming cemetery has certain obligations . . .

There was a cold draught playing about his ankles, and the chill of the night began to seep into his bones. Suddenly the full enormity of the situation dawned on him. Here he was, paralysed by cold (except for a rapidly vibrating jaw) while upstairs an unidentified ghost occupied his nice warm bed.

Even his best friends admitted it freely — Gus Morrow was lazy. He knew he was lazy, he liked being lazy, he admired himself for being lazy and for admitting it. One of the greatest pleasures of his life was to crawl into bed and lose consciousness: he was very good at it. And now! In his twenty years as caretaker of Mossybank cemetery nothing like this had ever happened. Why, the thing was ridiculous! It was of course unthinkable that he should share his bed with a ghost, and a STRANGE ghost at that. As the minutes passed and the temperature dropped he waxed more and more indignant. The ghost would have to go!

As he started back up the stairs hope flickered in him — perhaps the ghost would be gone. Perhaps it had only been making a passing visit on its way to somewhere else. However, he walked slower and slower until, at the bedroom door, he was at a complete standstill. He stood for a moment until a particularly icy draught crystallised his resolve, then peered inside. It was still there.

Mr. Morrow drew back, looking as if he had seen a ghost. He stifled a powerful impulse to sprint down the stairs, though his feet kept, of their own accord, making little eager motions towards the front door. If it refused to go, he decided, he would have to persuade it — reason with it. Again he peered into the room where the thing was urbazely pulsating on the edge of the bed. His mouth opened and closed several times before any sound came out.

'Look here, old boy! Do you think this is quite — er — playing the game?' He began reproachfully. His tone implied that no ghost worth knowing would dream of usurping someone's bed. There was no response: the spirit sat on with perfect equanimity as if it had not heard him. Perhaps he was using the wrong mode of address.

'Oh, visitor from the eternal limbo of . . . of . . .' he faltered. It was no use, he had never read enough of that mystical stuff to be able to talk like that. Should he try being sarcastic? How did ghosts react to sarcasm? No sense in enraging the blighter he decided cautiously, slumping back against the wall. Then in a sudden burst of temper he threw caution to the winds.

'Get off my bed, you ignorant sot! Ouch!' The latter exclamation, which he had not intended as part of his speech, expressed mingled pain and chagrin because, as he withdrew his head, the door jamb caught his head a resounding clunk.

'All right,' he muttered through his teeth, inspired by the ghost's continued apparent impotency and the throbbing pain in his auditory organ. 'if you won't listen to reason I'll just have to use force!' This posed a new problem — how does one use force against a ghost? One could not very well launch oneself at it and pin it down. It would be worse than shadow boxing, he mused — in this case, shade boxing.

His nose was beginning to take on a definite ultramarine hue from the cold while his ear, which was throbbing painfully, adopted the colour at the other end of the spectrum. His eyelids, seemingly unaware of the prismatic splendours displayed by his other organs, kept dropping down over his eyes. For a moment he considered putting up in one of the other rooms for the night, but the thought of the icy draught playing on his epidermis soon dismissed that. His lips moved silently as he fervently damned to perdition the far seeing person who had situated Mossybank Cemetery five miles from the nearest shelter.

What did they use in the films to persuade unwelcome shades to remove themselves from the vicinity? Desperately Mr. Morrow ransacked his recollections of all his infrequent visits to the cinema. A CROSS! Yes, that was right. He dashed down the stairs and into the pantry where the firewood was kept in a box. Not being, as he put it, a 'hibble thumper,' he had no crosses readymade but that was not going to offer any difficulties to a man as badly in need of one as Mr. Morrow. Groping in the dark (oh for a modern electric light!) he found two likely looking nieces and tied them together with the cord that had held the sticks in a bundle. He felt a little disappointed at the ramshackle result. But, he reasoned, perhaps the ghost would be so terrified it would not wait to see whether it was a genuine cross or not.

Feeling better now, Mr. Morrow hastened back up the stairs. Gently he inserted his arm into the room and held it in the general direction of the spirit. No result. 'Pssst! Pssst!' he mouthed, trying to attract its attention. No result. He waved the cross up and down in an aggrieved manner, but the only effect of this was to make the crosspiece drop onto the carpet with a dull plunk. With a little moan of pure misery Mr. Morrow withdrew his arm and slumped down on the landing. The ghost had been unmoved by his efforts; indeed he was almost sure he had detected a slightly supercilious expression roughly three inches below its eyes.

The next line of approach that occurred to him was — garlic! Ghosts did not like garlic. On this point Mr. Morrow was in hearty agreement with them, but last year he had found a packet of garlic bulbs and planted them in the plot at the back. Or was it shallots? Almost the same thing, he mott-

ered, navigating stiffly down the stairs, holding the banister with one hand and his vibrating jaw with the other.

The blast of frosty night air that greeted him at the back door almost withered his resolve. He teetered on the step for a moment then plunged over to the vegetable bed. After scrabbling ineffectually at the frost-hardened topsoil for a few minutes he began to work several garlic shallotts out of the ground. Five minutes and several fingernails later he had three limp shallotts (he was sure they were shallotts now) on the ground. Taking them in a nerveless hand he staggered back into the house and up the stairs which by now were beginning to get steeper and harder to climb.

The ghost had not budged one inch and was still unconcernedly sitting on the bed keeping up its inane pulsing.

'I'll fix you,' snarled the normally mild mannered Gus transformed by lack of sleep into a vicious potential ghost slayer. Taking his courage in both hands he made a small leap into the room with the trio of limp shallotts outthrust at arms length. For all the effect they had he might as well have been using the 'Radio Times.' Nonplussed by this failure of the anti-ghost vegetables he stood for a moment with arms outstretched like Venus rising from the sea. He broke a segment off one of the shallott, and tossed it gently at the unwelcome shade. It described a slow arc in the air, passed through the ghost's head and landed on the bed. The ghost seemed quite unaware that it had been traversed by a small piece of shallott and maintained a disdainful silence.

Many a man would have given up on the spot with a nervous breakdown. But Gus was made of sterner stuff. Something of the hardy endurance of his forefathers drove him back down the stairs swearing volubly and blinking his bleary, bloodshot eyes. If shallotts were no use he would try scallions, then ordinary onions and after that brussel sprouts or carrots if need be.

So stiff with cold was he and so exhausted that his legs refused to carry him in the normal gait of homo sapiens. Thus it was that a passer by would have seen a dark shape crawl out through the back door and head uncertainly in the general direction of the vegetable garden emitting the while small whimpers of pain and fatigue. Feeling the night air it began to crawl faster and knocked into the dog kennel with a resounding thud.

'Spot, good boy! Spot. G-go up and chase that b-blighter off . . .' Gus suddenly remembered he had kicked Spot out for the night for eating the sausages he had reserved for his tea. Spot was a big dog and his kennel was big too. It was full of cosy warm straw.

Our hypothetical observer would have been surprised to hear the dark shape utter a small cry of heartfelt relief and crawl into the kennel. Ten seconds later he would have heard the sound of deep regular breathing from inside and would have gone away very puzzled.

Several hours later the first rays of the sun slanted across Mossybank

Cemetery illuminating the neat rows of headstones. And two things happened. Spot, who was an imbecilic looking mongrel, rose from the lee of a tombstone where he had been sheltering and ambled slowly in the direction of his kennel. As soon as he moved off the grave an invisible shapeless thing which had been waiting all night for the chance flicked by him and disappeared into the ground as fast as it could. Spot, unnoticed, lolloped over the fence and up to his kennel, and found somebody else in his bed.

Of the three beings who had been faced with this selfsame problem in the same cemetery Spot was the only one who had a concrete solution to it.

A few seconds later this same observer would have heard a yell of consternation float across the morning air.

Fanfile 3

LEE HOFFMAN

As you can see from Bob's sketch, Lee Hoffman is a member of that most opposite of sexes. This is *The Secret*, kept until the Nolacon by her closest friends, and leaked only by a few almost as near but not quite so close. To almost everyone it came as an immense surprise. G.M. Carr's first reaction was probably typical: '... that Lee Hoffman of Quondry fame should turn out to be a girl — a young, lovely GIRL! When I think of the work involved in Q, especially that 'Quonjib' which turned me green with envy even when I thought she was a boy, I reel and rock from shock.' Or that of Shelby Vick, who was the first to learn: 'Hoffman is Hoffwoman! Why, she could be got for defrauding the males! But as Shelby himself points out, there was no defrauding. Lee was as flagrant as 'The Purloined Letter'—as when she drew a bearded lady winking at the 'him' of a columnist, and when she said she 'just wasn't built to Army specifications.' When we could have cottoned on so easily, why did we persist in pulling wool over our eyes? Partly, I suppose, because in our male conceit we never thought a mere girl could handle the work involved by a monthly smz and, without trading on her sex, bring that smz right to the top in a few months: but mainly because LH with the Perelman-Thurberish sense of humour was so strongly an individual in her own writing that no other question ever thought to raise its head.

The macabre encounter overleaf — dedicated like Mr. Smythe's story on p. 23 to the proposition that America and Britain have everything in common except language — has not yet taken place, but if the worst comes to the worst we can always get out Underwood and write letters to each other. From the ones I've got here, it seems that Shirley Hoffman is just 19, has red-brown hair, and likes Pogo Possum (who doesn't?), Gilbert & Sullivan, money, naming inanimate objects, horses, the things money can buy, theatre, maple sugar candy, fanaticity (naturally), and, unnaturally, 'cold mashed potato sandwiches'—sic. You too?



WILLIS VISITS SAVANNAH

LEE HOFFMAN

I sit nervously in the station, chewing on my fingernails and straightening my hat (worn only on special occasions). Finally the train caller calls the train for which I was waiting. Dazedly I stumble out into the mass of rails and people that make up the train shed. There is a long silver diesel bucking into the shed. 'It,' I murmur. Suddenly a small wood-burner chugs into the next slip and a tall man gets off. I see him, the tall man with a battered paper in his hand. Our eyes meet and we both know that it is too late to turn and run. The moment is upon us. I can tell from the SLANT in his hands that he too is nervous. It hangs in little well-chewed shreds.

'Hello,' I stammer. 'You're (guilt) you're Walt Willis?'

'Yes,' he says, 'and I'm Walt Willis.'

'Oh,' I reply, wondering what he said.

Two forced grins and vague laughter.

'Er, eh, uh. My brother's waiting to taxi us.' (He's cheaper than a cab and more efficient.)

My brother, Curtis, shakes hands with the tall man and says 'hello' as I make introductions. I become cheerful at having been relieved of the burden of conversation while Curt drops some small comments.

But by the time we are loaded into the car Curt has run out of small talk and a horrible silence blankets us.

I break it occasionally by pointing out a few landmarks and making poor jokes that the tall man doesn't comprehend.

On occasion, he speaks.

I, who can't even understand a slight Gullah or Creeche dialect, ask, 'Hungh?' meaning 'please repeat.'

The tall man takes this expression to be a reply to his comment and nods approvingly.

Finally we reach home. I make another joke and say 'Hoffman Hovel.' He smiles politely and we enter.

Mother is ready to serve supper and the table is set with (naturally) the best silver and China. We all sit down and Mother smiles amiably and makes some completely irrelevant comment like, 'Would you like hot tea or iced tea, Mr. Willis? I've got both.'

In an adventurous tone he replies with what we think is 'I'll try iced.'

Mother brings him a large glass of the drink, loaded high with mint (special for the occasion). Then she tells a completely pointless anecdote about my sister-in-law's dislike for iced tea.

Walt smiles through a mouthful of mint and wonders if he can pour the tea into the gravy without attracting attention.

Dad puts down his pork chop and says, 'We delivered a radio to Mrs Rimplegar on 45th St today. She had a burned out 3525 and I usually have one in a truck but today I didn't so I had to go back to the store for it.'

Mother and I grunt sympathetically. Walt does likewise, wondering

what father said and what the meaning of the reply is.

'Have you seen the new book by vV?' I pipe up cheerfully with careful enunciation.

'No' he replies solemnly, (long pause of silence) 'Have you?'

'No.'

More long silence while we wonder how we understood each other and wish we could think of something else to try to say.

From dessert we have watermelon. When the tall man is almost through with his piece, mother mentions the fact that one spits the seeds out.

'Oh,' he says.

After supper I give Walt the copy of Ultimate American Capitalism in the Future that I bought for him, and he gives me a copy of New British Isles which he bought for me. Both are deeply grateful . . . not for the books but for the opportunity . . . we sit down in the living room and read while the rest of the family watches tv. As the room is rather dark because of the tv, we find the reading a little difficult.

Finally, praise Gbu, it is 11pm so we unfold the folding bed, hand WAW a pillow and bid him goodnight.

The next morning we find the folding bed neatly folded and no sign of Willis. 'Must have been called back suddenly,' says mother, 'You know these British.'

'Yes,' we reply, wondering just what we are supposed to know about the British, and supposing that it is something Kipling must have observed.

'Nice of him to make the bed before he left.'

Three months later we have another overnight guest so we unfold the folding bed . . . and there he is, accordion pleated.

Bob Shaw's

STUNNED SPECULATION ON THE MANCHESTER MUSHROOM

Dave Cohen reports that the recently formed Manchester sf group now numbers 35 members. I'm sure this phenomenal expansion must be due to the tremendous urge to organize things that drives the tall, lanky frame of my friend Dave. He awes me. He gives me the impression that he is living in a much faster time flow — accelerated metabolism or something. He takes responsibility, he looks after details, he ORGANISES! I'm afraid of him.

I can't help wondering if Dave has a special chair at the club and whether any neofan ever incautiously sits in it, and if so, is he reproved with scandalised whispers? I wonder if there are any in the club who don't care much about the letters that Dave as chairman reads at each meeting, and do they talk in low voices? And does Dave give them reproachful looks and make veiled ejection threats of the I'm-not-mentioning-any-names-but-the-offenders'-conscience-etc. type? And do the GOOD members turn and glare at them?

TREASURED MOMENTS

ERIC FRANK RUSSELL

Scene: The 'White Horse,' Fetter Lane, London.

Young fan, enthusiastically waving at assembled ancients a particularly lurid copy of 'Amazing Stories': 'What I like about science-fiction is that it **TEACHES** you so much.'

Eric Frank Russell, with coarse cynicism: 'Yes — Learn To Mount Birds. As if you didn't know!'

Walter Gillings, choking over his beer: 'I always thought that was taxidermy.'

John Beynon Harris, surveying Gillings with pity: 'Well, some damn funny things happen in taxis.'

Scene: The Hooten Hotel, Cheshire, toward the end of a peculiarly diabolical dinner.

Forrest J Ackerman, stabbing his fork at half a dozen fans, there being nothing on his plate worth stabbing: 'I do hope it won't be long before my wife and I get here to see you all again.'

Leslie J. Johnson, speaking moodily around a mouthful of sad potatoes: 'You will — as refugees.'

Scene: The White Horse again.

One hundred-percent Cockney fan buttonholes Sprague de Camp with this abstruse problem: 'Jer rumble th' wullanullay?'

De Camp, making a frantic snatch at his endangered reputation as stidom's leading linguist: 'Hub?'

Fan, frowning: 'Jer rumble th' wullanullay?'

De Camp, feeling himself sinking: 'Come again?'

Fan, becoming irifol: 'Seasy, en it? JER RUMBLE TH' WULLANULLAY?'

De Camp, feebly as he goes down for the third time: 'I'm sure I don't know.'

Fan, withdrawing swiftly as one would from a rattlesnake: 'Cor blimey!'

• Did you understand the World of Null-A?

1961

Extrapolated by Bob Shaw

Convention time again! I could hardly believe it. I closed the SLANT head offices for a month, and took my sub-editor James White and handyman Walt Willis and set out for London. I found it hard to believe that it was 10 years since I had come that way — back in the days when Walt was Ireland's No. 1 fan, or at least claimed he was.

We checked in safely at the Hotel Royal and I and James made our way to the Convention Hall while Walt carried our bags up and unpacked. He seemed a bit snarly about this but James and I gave him a few clips on the ear. We spent some time circulating among our friends, renewing old ac-

quaintances. I congratulated Derek Pickles on the appearance of *Phantas 4* which had come out the week before. He told me confidentially that Sir Alan Hunter, R.A., considered ten years too large a gap between the issues of even an irregular magazine. But, he continued, the fact that he was able to save postage by waiting for an OF mailing that covered all his subscribers made up for any slight delay.

The proceedings opened when the Chairman Ted Carnell (editor of *New Worlds*, *aSF*, *Galaxy*, *SF Yearly* and many other magazines) introduced everyone to the overseas visitors, and said he understood that the Convention Memory Booklet was available already. This occasioned some surprise among those unfamiliar with the speed and efficiency of the London Circle, until they realised that the booklet was of the 1951 Convention.

I wish I had time for a full commentary on the Convention but as it is I can only outline the highlights. One of these, of course, was the disclosure of the result of Dave Cohen's poll as to which magazine offered the greatest number of words per page. I'll never forget the tenseness of the atmosphere as Dave (who had organised a special trip to London for those Macguffians who were not in his club so that they could see the repeat performance of the Festival of Britain which he organised in connection with this convention and the others taking place under his aegis) stood up on the platform. There was a dead silence interrupted only by drowsy bursts of machine gun fire from outside as the Heinlein's Own Fans held off a bunch of dianetics. Then he announced the results — **Phantasmagoria HAD WON BY THE NARROWEST OF MARGINS!**

Professor Arthur C. Clarke was bullied into conquering his inferiority complex long enough to give a short account of how the BIS spaceship flew over London and disintegrated the offices of **PICTURE POST**.

Mike Tealby went berserk on hearing a strange humming noise that climbed the scale to inaudibility. It proved to be FJA still having language trouble.

I'm sorry that my contract with Slant Publications Inc. does not allow me to tell you in detail of all the items of interest. How James White got blind drunk in the bar and kept assaulting girl fans, swearing foully the while. And how when locked up he carved his way to freedom with a linocutter. And how Walt was laughed at for saying James wasn't always like that. But read about it in my first three Slants for next month. Cheers from Ireland's No. 1 Fan and James White and, last and least, Walt Willis.

THE CLEAN BREAST

(Credits for this issue)

Unsigned illustrations are as follows:
P. 26. Bob Shaw (linocut). Pp. 29 & 31.
James White (linocuts). Department

headings (and any technical merit this magazine may have). Manly Eganster.

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I am not responsible for opinions expressed by our worthy contributors, or by Bob Shaw — particularly the Cohen-convention Report above. James is not responsible for 'The Aphrodite Project', inserted over his madly struggling body. Bob Shaw is not responsible.

THE CLOCK STRUCK ONE

H. KEN BULMER

Icy rain drove mercilessly into Alfred Appleyard's face. He pulled his billowing coat tighter around his ears and struggled on against the blustering night. Menacing clouds rode across the gibbous moon and the ancient elms swirled their gaunted branches in paroxysms of devilish glee. Alfred glanced apprehensively across a broken stone wall into the Churchyard, where ghostly tombstones rose like corpse fingers plucking at damp earth to be free.

Abruptly the heavens belched forth flaming arrows that ran in rivulets of flame down shaking lightning conductors. Alfred emitted a startled 'Beep!' and rushed headlong for the church porch.

He rebounded with shocking violence from a dark, cloaked and silent figure standing motionless in the mouldering portico.

'Stay in this shelter lad, you'll catch your death out there.'

Alfred's senses whirled into some semblance of coherence. More likely his death is here, with this ghoul — this murderer — this —

His protruding eyes took in the apprehensive manner of the other, as though, he, too, were in mortal fear. Adjusting his coat around his meagre body, Alfred opened his mouth to speak, when, with a slithering motion of leathery wings, two gigantic bats flitted under the eaves of the belfry.

'Yowp!' Alfred clutched the other's arm. 'What a night.'

'Yes indeed, what a night! Those creatures will have little rest this night, I'll warrant.' The gaunt stranger's nerve-grating voice roused to fresh alarm all Alfred's fears.

Boiling ebony clouds played hide and seek with the moon, glowing ominous in its own misty halo. A sudden shriek, abruptly cut off, made Alfred jump.

'What's that?' His face was twitching, livid in the moon-glow.

The stranger rubbed a hand wearily across his stubbled jaw.

'Tis some poor beastie of the night met his doom.' He passed his hand up the side of his face in a motion full of a tired and sick desolation.

His index finger was longer than his middle finger.

'No!' gulped Alfred. Lightning flared, throwing monstrous, coiling shadows over the ancient stone. Alfred shrieked, his limbs turned to jelly.

The stranger smiled a terrible, pitying smile. His eyes gleamed.

'So! You have pierced my little secret. Well, no matter.'

His dark face convulsed agonisedly as the moon swam proudly forth from entwining clouds. The wind gusted to silence, and a creaking of weights shrilled eerily from the belfry.

'I feel it come! The change! It is here!'

The church bell boomed forth a single, clangorous summons.

'Help! Help!' screamed Alfred, flat against the wall.

Before his eyes the stranger was changing, transforming, dissolving, melting, becoming —

Alfred moaned.

The stranger turned into a weremouse.

COMMENT

THANKS FOR THE MEMORY Something, somewhere in my past had been worrying me ever since I read in Walter's 'Outpost' (PHANTASMAGORIA) a reference to Capt. Slater as 'the man who founded the SFS.' The three cryptic letters intrigued me. What did they mean? The question preyed on my mind so much that I lost sleep, weight (with me, that's not serious) and several games of darts (that is). I racked my brains (I have a convenient rack above my head for this purpose) to no avail. Until one evening, when I was discussing Burnham's 'Managerial Revolution' with a Chinese cabaret hostess; 'Speaking scientifically,' she asserted, 'It's a fantastic society.' Her words suggested a solution. Frantically I groped towards it, sure that it was there if I could only put my finger on it. Suddenly it struck me. So did she. 'Let us keep this on an intellectual basis,' she said coldly. I ignored her (and if you think that's easy, you haven't seen these Chinese hostesses). S.F.S. — Science Fantasy Society! Of course! And I was once a member, until somebody noticed and had a hypnotist bring me out of my trance state.

READ ALL ABOUT IT On the front page of TITBITS recently, beside an eye-catching brunette in a suitless 'wim-strap' are the slightly less sensational lines **WONDER CAMERA CAN PHOTOGRAPH THE FUTURE — AND PINPOINT DISEASE HUNDREDS OF MILES AWAY.** Forsaking the swimsuit, I read: 'The De La Warr team . . . in Oxford has succeeded in tapping an unknown Cosmic Energy of illimitable power.' (A first order space drive so soon? I read on with bated breath). 'They have invented strange instruments which can diagnose and treat patients hundreds of miles distant. (Even Ole Doc couldn't do this, and I don't suppose he ever will, now that his creator is so busy kidnapping his own children). 'They have constructed a Cosmic Energy which works outside time and space, and can take photos in the past or the future.' (I can see possibilities here: 'Come now, Colonel, surely you wouldn't want your wife to see this snap of you and Mimi de Winter celebrating next New Years Eve?' 'This is blackmail, you young poppy!' and so on). 'All this,' continues our somewhat blasé reporter, 'May sound like fantasy.' (Oh, no, not really — we haven't even had so much as a hyperspatial tube so far. But wait, there is more. Much more). 'They . . . have gone beyond this . . . have discovered the basic force which lies (presumably the word is used in the sense of 'to be situated') behind the energy of the atom. This Cosmic Energy can be tapped direct. This . . . is something more than ordinary energy. It is the source from which come all the different sorts of energy known to science. It is the 'something' that Einstein put forward in his latest theory of relativity.' (I thought we'd get around to that sooner or later. 'What's that, Albert?' Oh, just a little something I'm putting forward') ' . . . living in a world of space and time, we can hardly imagine anything outside it. (Not unless we're Van

Vogt anyway) 'One thing which is outside it is thought. Our thoughts are in no particular place.' (This reporter can say that again.) '... a cosmic energy camera can penetrate the future or past, within strict limits of course.' (Oh, of course. We don't want to be fanciful, do we?) '... Suppose Nature is about to create a chestnut tree.' (Just like that, 'Do have a chestnut tree.') 'In the Invisible World Cosmic Energy maps out roots, branches etc like blueprints. The camera can photograph these blueprints ... and in the same way ... part events. Mr. De La Warr tried photographing his own wedding of 22 years ago and the result was two figures strongly radiating energy.' (He'd obviously miscalculated and taken the photo a few hours after the wedding. That must have been quite a blue print too.) 'Neither in time nor distance is there any bar.' This is not true. There are two of them within crawling distance of my billet, which is a good thing. There was a lot more of that comic energy stuff, but your editor will probably have cut the tripe out of this anyway. [More likely to have put some in. — Ed.]

Anyhow, you certainly keep abreast of the news with TITBITS. But now I must take my leave. It is not raining, because this is what is known, with true Oriental subtlety, as the Dry Season, or Musim Kemarau. And anyone who can think of a pun for THAT can take over this column with my blessing. Ed. Note. Maybe Clive really needs that leave he's taking — I seem to detect a note of umbrage in his reference to that 'monsoon' pun I insinuated into his last column. So I won't accept that challenge. It would be a pity if out of my attempts to amuse him came a row.

The news had not yet penetrated to Singapore that the SFS has now been laid to rest with full military honours, the Secretary having been fired over its grave. Left very much alive is Vince Clarke's brilliant and informative SF NEWS, now an independent newsmag, and very highly recommended.

TOMORROW SOMETIMES COMES, F.G. Rayer, Home & Van Thal, 256pp. 9/6

Apart from the foul Clothier cover and the 'giveaway' title, I can find absolutely nothing about this book to criticise. A bell of a state for a reviewer!

This is science-fiction at its best. No sleazy cardboard covers, no technical gobbledygook to faze the MIT men, no blonde traitoress heaving her breasts at the Space Patrol, and no Scourge from Saturn.

Sound intricate plotting, deft characterisation and Rayer's fine smooth style makes this the best science-fiction novel to be published in Great Britain since the war.

The climax and the grand 'twist' in the last twenty pages, makes any synopsis of the plot unfair to both the writer and the reader. The story pivots around the Mens Magna, a giant electronic brain benevolently ruling mankind. In places, the reader is vividly reminded of van Vogt at his peak.

Autographed first editions are still available from the author at no extra cost. The address is: F. G. Rayer, Longdon, Nr. Tewkesbury, Glos. Eng. Suggest you write airmail though.

—Chuck Harris

MESSAGE FROM THE FLYING ACKERMAN

To reach Ireland
I went up into Airland
For the first time
In my life

If I had died of
Flight
It would have served Weaver
Wright

As you can see, we have had a flying visit from one Forrest J Ackerman, a chap we ran across in London who seemed to be interested in sf. He seemed such a nice guy that we asked him over to see our Collection, both shelves of which we are thinking of leaving to posterity as a sort of 'Fantasy Foundation'. Mr. Ackerman was quite speechless at this idea.

Before he left, our extinguished visitor (he had put himself out to come over) composed the following. We understand he has a licence for this pun.

DON OF FLAME, by Forry Ackerman

This is the debut for the first time in print anywhere of a world-shaking pun, especially prepared and released for SLANT. This pun has to be led up to gradually, as it is too rich to be revealed all at once. It presupposes a vast knowledge of fantasy and fandom such as only readers of SLANT are likely to possess.

This pun would never have been possible if Philip, the Wylie, had never joined auctorial forces with Edwin, the Balmer, to blitz book readers with a memorable interplanetary novel.

It would never have been possible if Donald Wolheim had never been born, and married one Elsie, and moved recently to a new location in New York City.

And it would never have been possible if (cherish the thought) Forrest J Ackerman had never been born.

Well, so much for the preliminaries, and to get down to business.

It came to pass that Don & Elsie Wolheim (hereinafter referred to as 'The Wolls,' to rhyme with 'trolls') moved to Clyde St. (and this is really true). One nite Don Wolheim came walking up the street absorbed in an account of George Pal's new scientifiilm. Elsie approached in the opposite direction, unaware of Donald. Now — hold onto your hats — here's how it happened: Donald the Woll bumped into his wife right in front of their house.

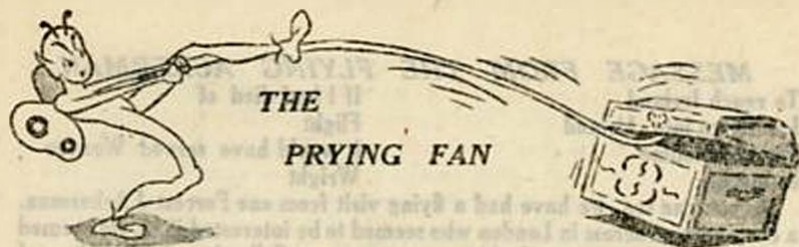
The result?

A super science-fiction pun was born.

'WHEN WOLLS CLYDE!'

Shortly after this Mr. Ackerman left the country.

Seriously, we'd like to take this chance to thank Forry Ackerman on behalf of European fandom for the contribution he made to the success of our convention last May. Everyone who was there will know how great that was, but not everyone knows or remembers that but for him there might have been no convention at all. ASJ did so much to keep British fandom alive during the war, with gifts of promags, fanmags, books, paper, stencils, etc. that the fans of the time decided to finance him over after the war. People have short memories.



I AM A STONE QUARRY Graham Stone, of Sydney, classes my editorial in SS among the 'duds'. 'You do tend to run on,' he says. So, sorry, but setting up 10pt. type is so exciting I sometimes get quite carried away. To add insult to insult he says he doesn't like my face. 'Too condensed and heavy' he calls it. I can't help my face: no one can help my face. My only comfort is that Mr. Stone's railing of the rest of the issue is the exact opposite of everyone else's. And I used to think there was nothing in that story about everything in Australia being upside down.

However, there may be something in what he says. . . There's no point in my telling you the mag is so good you won't be able to put it down, like Mr. Gold, since you're stuck with it already. Nor in giving my writers plots for stories, like Mr. Campbell, since they'd only sell them to GALAXY, like his do. So, and to save space on the contents page, I've let my editorial go West. Any resemblance between this and an editorial is purely accidental.

THE EYES HAVE HAD IT Yes, the White school of linocutting has had to close because of a strike of the pupils. For the time being at least, James's eyesight is such that he can't see his way to continue his work on the same fine lines. Leaving no stone unturned, we came on Bob Shaw. Mr. Shaw has become very important to this magazine. Since he came we get through nearly twice as much work in only thrice the time and, what's more, he has now started cutting

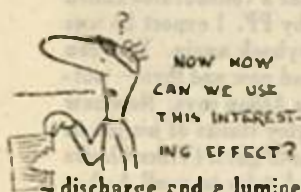


himself. This I could understand, but he has also attacked the linoleum to the tune of two cuts for this issue. His first is on p.26, and he asks me to say that no one should be deceived into thinking that this cut is 'crude.' Actually it is of course an example of 'Stark Simplicity.' Other words I am advised to use are Powerful, Savage, Brutal. (It sounds like the unkindest cut of all.) I offered to run a little explanatory note underneath, but for some reason he wouldn't hear of it.

Another thing we have done is to develop that multicoloured ink technique of ours to such a fine pitch of distraction that you don't notice—we hope—that there's not so much work done on the lino itself. That cover, for instance (you noticed it, we hope?) was done in only three runs—one for the patriotically coloured spine, one for the Rogers-blue spaceship, and a third perfectly blank except for the space for the ship. Since we got a flattering number of enquiries last time we used this technique (mostly 'how' and very

few 'why') I may as well tell you how we invented it. Enquiries about multi-coloured mimeo ink should be addressed to our agents **HOFFMAN INK**, 101 Wagner St., Savannah, Ga., who do such a fine job with **QUANDRY**.

Whenever anything goes wrong with our printing we don't impetuously rush to correct it, any more than Fleming threw out that mouldy saucer of his. No, we always ask ourselves, now how can we make use of this interesting effect? For instance, a human hair and a splinter of wood strayed onto a linocut of a machine in S2 (someone must have been scratching his head) and were such a glowing success as a weird electrical

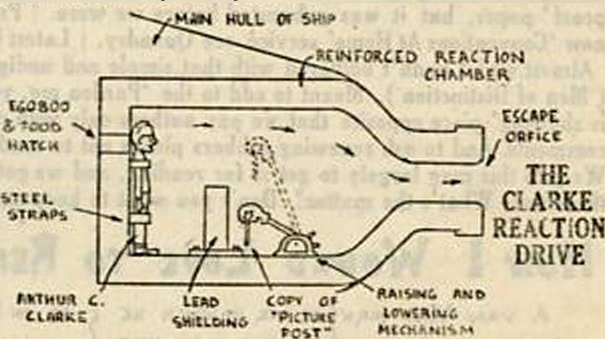


discharge and a luminescent dial that we let them stay and modestly acknowledged the compliments we received on this delicate artistry. So when it came to our notice that if you didn't mix the ink properly on the inkplate it came out patchy, we realised we could print several colours at once by 'pointing' the ink disc with them and dogging the ratchet that makes it turn.

One result of course is that no two impressions are ever quite identical, since the inks keep spreading and being renewed. **SLANT** is the magazine that's **REALLY** different — every copy.

EGO BOOH Well, it looks as if the better part of **PICTURE POST**'s valour has finally triumphed. Some time ago they ran a feature about space flight by one Derek Wragge Morley, illustrated by a poor man's Bonestell called Ainsworth. It was pretty bad. But worse, they didn't mention even once the name of Arthur C. (Ego) Clarke, who is to space flight as Abbot is to Costello. It was unbelievable. Even in the Sunday papers no rocketship is ever dispatched without his express approval.

At last some rash soul showed this Wragge and Bonestell effort to Clarke, and took cover. The Great Man restrained himself to sending a cold letter pointing out the more important errors, about 17 of them.



That seemed to be that, until PP published a comeback by the foolhardy Wragge. Not only did he contradict Clarke on matters of fact and opinion, and spoke slightly of the British Interplanetary Society spaceship, but he actually called the august body itself a society of dreamers misleading the public. Survivors of that terrible night at the White Horse reported that Clarke had finally re-entered the visible spectrum and descended from the

walls, and was talking comparatively benignly of a mere libel suit. Mention was made of subpoena-ing the Astronomer Royal . . .

But now PP have made amends to Clarke's Ego by reviewing his superb EXPLORATION OF SPACE almost as well as it deserves. They gave it The Treatment — three whole pages, with illustrations. The review is by, of all people, Derek Wragge Morley, but this time he has a collaborator called Kenneth Allsop, unless the name is just a little joke by PP. I expect he was detailed to make sure that Morley didn't blot his copybook again. You can see the old 'Tiger' Wragge rearing his unrepentant head now and then — 'out-datedness', 'ramshackle space jolopies' — but then little Allsop says, 'Now now we don't want to lose our Wragge, do we?' and Morley thinks of his job as PP's Scientific Adviser and probably how lucky he was to get it (Vince Clarke thinks he got his PhD by sending away box tops) and tries to swell Arthur Clarke's head enough to make sure the BIS 'space suit' will never come off.

STOP PRESS. Plans for SF Monthly, now 'Authentic' SFM, include more features and possibly extra pages & short stories. Coming up are novels by Rayer & editor H.J. Campbell. Campbell's previous novels, best things in SFM so far, were written in 12 & 9 days to meet emergency deadlines. New one took 7!. Up and coming Campbell! will also edit sensational new British promag already rumored. | John K.H. Brunner whose little 'declaration of faith' story opens this issue has just turned 17. | Prominent pro editor has asked permission to reprint Jackson's & Ridley's stories from SLANT 5. | Lee Jacobs reports from Nolacon world premiere of 'When Worlds Collide' that decision to test atmosphere on new planet drew spontaneous burst of applause. Premature, since Hollywood analysis consisted of hero entering airlock. | ERRATUM: P.3, Sib line from end, add ARTHUR C. CLARKE. | Our apologies for print showing through on some pages. Thought we'd licked this by laying in stock of 'grief proof' paper, but it was exhausted before we were. | Proxyboo introduce new 'Conventions At Home' service, see Quandry. | Latest Galaxys superb!

Almost wish I hadn't bothered with that simple and undignified back cover ('Men of Distinction'). Meant to add to the 'Pardon me, your rejection slip is showing' piece opposite that we pay authors only with copies of readers' comments. And to ask renewing subbers please not to send us FA or Anzzg. We pub this mag largely to get sf for reading, and we get quite enough of those two. What's the matter? Don't you want to keep and bind them?

How I Would Love to Read....

A VAN YOGI YARN
IN WHICH THE HERO,
AFTER A LONG SERIES
OF CLUES, FINDS OUT
THAT HE
IS JUST—

AN

ORDINARY MAN!

OR ONE IN WHICH HE
GETS ONE OF HIS HANDS
CUT OFF, AND INSTEAD OF
GROWING
A
NEW
ONE—
HAS TO TIE OUT HIS
LIFE WITH ONLY A
STUMP!



OR AN E.E. SMITH EPIC
IN WHICH
DOES SOME-
THING
REALLY
HUMAN
LIFE—
CATCHING A COLD!



AUTHORS!

'Your request for material emboldens me to send along a story of my own, which I have had a good deal of failure in trying to place. First published in a fanzine . . . it was later revised and rejected by the Magazine of Fantasy, Fantasy Book, Weird Tales, Fantastic Adventures, Imagination, and the Nekromantikón. But maybe you'll like it.'

'Thank you for the copy of Slant. It sure is a fine zine. I like it very much . . . Yes, you do have a swell mag. In fact so good that I am sending you one of my stories . . . I have sent it to one other zine but so far it has not seen print.'

This magazine appears only sporadically (you've noticed?) and there are seldom more than three sporadics in a year. This means we can print only about a twentieth of the material we receive. We don't want stories which are 'good enough for the promags' — it seems there are promags specially for these, and we're willing to let some other fanmag act as a 'proving ground' for them. What we want are stories unacceptable to a mass audience for some other reason than lack of merit. We'd like to be a sort of sf Third Programme, less the stodginess.

But you'll have noticed we're willing to make exceptions to any rule, and we don't even mind letters like the above. If you have faith in your story, send it along: we'll be glad to see it. All we ask is you don't be mortally offended when we send it back. I know this is a hopeless request. Authors take offence even when I explain I am rejecting their story purely out of a deep personal regard for Mr. Gold.

We want articles, preferably humorous. We'd ask for serious articles too, only they're usually so damned dull. We don't need artwork (it says here). We don't want poetry unless it's very funny, preferably intentionally. We'd like contributions for Treasured Moments, even if it's only the one good story everyone is supposed to have. The three in this issue are from the same man because it was he who suggested the department and the title.

We have no special MS requirements. It can be written in charcoal on bus tickets for all we care, and unlike a certain female editor (not LH) who takes herself very seriously, we don't even threaten to destroy it unread if unescorted by return postage. Starving geniuses, this is YOUR magazine!

TOMORROW SOMETIMES COMES

F.G. Rayer's memorable novel
Home & Van Thal, London: 9/6
From any bookshop, or direct from
the author, at Longdon, near Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire, England.

All previous issues of SLANT are out of print. If you want to renew your sub, magazines can be mailed as 'printed matter' for 3c each 4 oz. No customs declaration needed.

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THIS is issue No. 6.