STARDUST

the magazine unique

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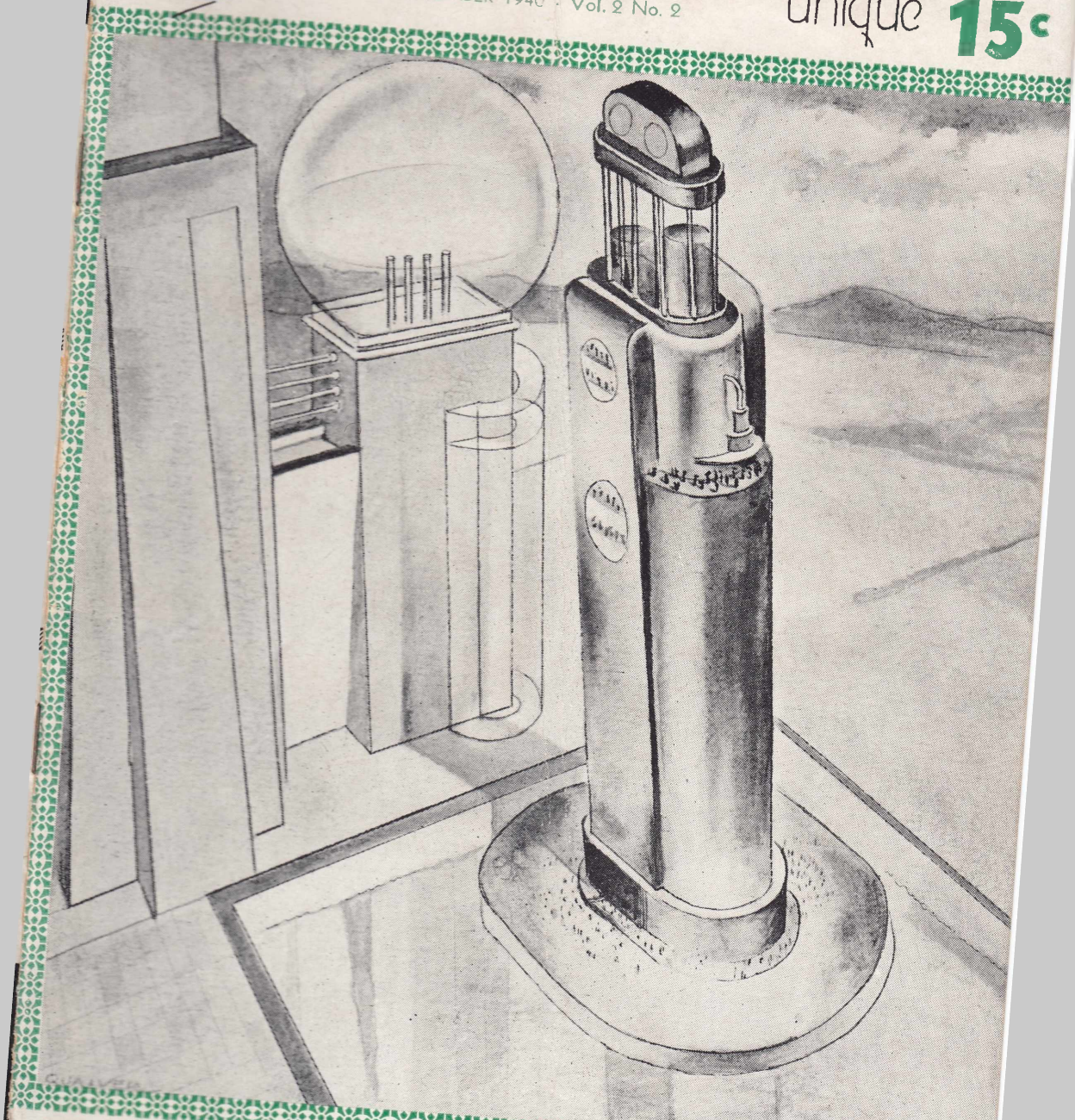

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●

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THRILLING WONDER STORIES
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STARDUST *The Magazine Unique*

VOLUME 2 NUMBER 2 NOVEMBER 1940

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Let's Discuss It

EYE TO EYE

With the Editor

On behalf of the entire staff of STARDUST. may I extend a cordial welcome to Conventioneers for the 1940 World's Science Fiction Convention here in Chicago the first two days in September. This is probably one of the most outstanding occasions ever to take place in fantasy fandom's entire history. This Convention, which we hope you will thoroughly enjoy, is the fruit of many laborious months on the part of the Convention Committee. No efforts have been spared to produce a Convention which will go down in *science-fiction* history. If we have succeeded, here in Chicago, in the last part, we shall be happy indeed.

Special mention must be made of two men who have cooperated notably in this stupendous endeavor. Two men, whose names, and the organization they represent, the leaders in the fantasy field, have offered their services whenever required, in regards to publicity, Convention publication support. and literary contribution as well as many outstanding gifts to the Convention auction. These men are well known to all of us. On behalf of the Convention Committee, the staff of STARDUST and myself, thank you Ray Palmer and Leo Margulies. You gave us a *real* helping hand whenever, and wherever you could. We want you to know that your help has been deeply appreciated.

When I decided to change the format of STARDUST, I had no idea that the new format would be so enthusiastically received. The tiers of complimentary letters that have poured in since the last issue was released have truly impressed me. By your acclaim STARDUST will permanently adopt its present format!

Last month the voting was wild and enthusiastic. It was a tight race for the first three places. But finally the votes tabulated as follows: A tri-tie for first place between Bob Williams with his unique story, *City In the Far-Off Sky*, L. Sprague deCamp with his humorous tale, *Inverse Variations*. and Julius Schwartz, with his off-trail memoir collection, *Private Papers of a Science Fictioneer*. (Incidentally, this is the fourth time in a row that Robert Moore Williams has landed in the top spot! Bob always asks me how the fans like his yarns in STARDUST. I can think of no better reply than the above rating!)

In second place there was a tie. Our new

(Continued on page 23)

THE NEXT INVASION

BY MORT WEISINGER

The latest number of THRILLING WONDER STORIES was still wet from the printer's presses. I reached for the issue, thumbed my way to the contents page.

"Good edition," I remarked to Leo Margulies, my boss and editorial director of Standard Magazines' thirty-five national publications, as I scanned the bill of fare. "The lead novel by Don Tracy is the best we've featured in several months. It's easily as good as anything Tracy has had published in *Saturday Evening Post* or *Collier's*."

"That's what I thought when I read it," Margulies remarked. "With a little polishing, Tracy *could* have sold that story to the *Post!*"

My eyebrows arched upward. For Margulies can call his shots. I've been with him for six years, and he's rarely missed. He's the guy that called the turn on George Bruce, Steve Fisher, Frank Gruber, Leslie Charteris, Oscar Schisgall, Major George F. Eliot, Paul Ernst, Forbes Parkhill and a host of others.

So that's why my eyebrows soared upward. Had Tracy missed the boat?

"Sure, the yarn was good enough for the slicks," I agreed. "But the slicks don't publish science fiction!" I argued.

Margulies smiled, flipped open a copy of the *Saturday Evening Post* on his desk. "That's where you're wrong, Mort," he said gently. "Here's a serial that's running, authored by Leland Jamieson. The story's called "Attack." Do you know what it is? It's a dramatic account of the near future . . . of an invasion of America."

"Why, that's the background of Tracy's novel!" I cried.

"I thought you said the slicks ban fantasy fiction," Margulies went on, after explaining that the themes of both novels were strongly different.

That one stumped me. But then I remembered. I wasn't a science fiction fan of fifteen years' standing for naught.

"Sure, the slicks take science fiction . . . but once in a blue moon. There was the famous "Maracot Deep," a serial in the *Post* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Lord Dunsany did a few shorts for *Harper's* and *Atlantic Monthly*. Stephen Vincent Benet has popped up with a fantasy now and then in slicks like *Esquire*. Gerald Mygatt had a pseudo-scientific series in the old Pictorial Review. And Arthur B. Reeve's scientific detective series, featuring Craig Kennedy, used to run in *Cosmopolitan*. But that's just a drop in the bucket when you consider all the fiscal territory covered!"

Margulies tapped the copy of THRILLING WONDER STORIES on his desk.

"Have you ever considered that the fault for scientifiction's scarcity in the slicks rests with your writers—not with the editors? The men who write fantasy fiction today invade the fourth dimension, the infinities of Ursa Major, the center of the Earth, the realm of the sub-atomic, the macro-cosmic. But how many of them have ever tried to invade the slicks? Writers like Binder, Williamson, E. E. Smith, Hamilton, Farley, Merritt, Taine, and others, have made good in the pulps. Why don't they aim for the big national magazines? The lads who write mystery fiction, air yarns, adventure stories, romantic tales, etc., for our thirty-five magazines are always trying to make the grade with the slicks. And very often they do! Send a slick editor a good scientifiction yarn and he'll be glad to buy it!"

I agree thoroughly with Margulies. The slicks offer virgin horizons for the skillful science-fictioneer. Yet, to my knowledge, no writer has begun a serious attempt at trying to land in the slicks. Today, with more than a dozen scientifiction periodicals reaching the greatest audience fantasy literature has ever yet claimed, a slick "boom" in science fiction seems in the offing.

The late Stanley G. Weinbaum once told me that he hoped, after serving an apprenticeship in the pulps, to aim at the slicks. I used to agent Weinbaum's stories. One of the first stories he sent me was "Circle of Zero." The story was so adult no pulp magazine would touch it. It bounced from office to office. So I sent it to the *Post*.

The *Post* editors liked the yarn, but they told me it was just a trifle too off-trail for them. They suggested that Weinbaum try them again with another story. He never got the chance. Years later, when Standard was in the market for pseudo-science, Margulies was shown "Circle of Zero." He liked it well enough to include it in the first issue of THRILLING WONDER STORIES. If any of the fantasy scribes seemed destined to have made the smooth paper magazines, Weinbaum was the lad.

What do you think will go in the slicks? Offhand, we'd say that themes based on an extension of present-day knowledge and familiarity would appeal the most. The nonscientifiction reader has an unpalatable pill to swallow when he is doled out a fantastic preview of the future. Rocket ships, atom-smashers, death rays, cyclotrons, etc., are not as pre-digested for him as they are for us. Your average smooth paper reader probably has never read Verne, Wells and Flammarion. Beyond an acquaintance with Sunday supplement feature articles, he's never had a chance to dip into the thousand-and-one wonder-vistas explored by the scientifiction veteran.

What's the answer? Give 'em something they can understand. Your layman likes his glamorious stories of Hollywood. So why not show him a Hollywood of the future, wherein crack-ups of space ships are maneuvered on the Moon, etc.? Henry Kuttner has been doing a laudable job of visualizing the movie-makers of tomorrow in THRILLING WONDER STORIES. In modified form, the exploits of Tony Quade might make good fodder for a Catholic audience.

What reader of any national magazine hasn't heard of the World's Fair? It wouldn't be very difficult then, to get him to extend his imagination into a time thousands of years from today, a time when the various inhabited worlds of the Solar System will hold a Fair on the satellite Ceres. If you've read Manly Wade Wellman's "World of Tomorrow," in a recent Wonder, you can judge for yourself how universal in appeal is such a theme. Here's a story that's fair for both the dyed-in-the-wool fantasy fan and the non-science-fictionist.

It is only by parelleling know instiutions, known customs, and known personalities, that we can lure the interest of the average layman and the thus proselytize scientifiction. Give your slick reader a picture of the West Point of tomorrow, a looksee at a female Frank Buck of the future (Gerry Carlyle) who brings her quarry of alien monsters back to the London Interplanetary Zoo, and you will hurtle him from a springboard of today into the fascinating centuries to come.

The slick science fiction tale should be elementary in concept, with an emphasis on characterization and plot. Futuristic trimmings should only serve as the skeleton, yet be convincing. The story is the meat. Once the writer has established his premise, he's on his own. The reader has swallowed that foundation, because he has been able to identify it with contemporary settings and situations. The reader accepts the idea of a Fair of the future, a West Point of tomorrow. These concepts become as taken for granted as the pulp scientifiction reader's understanding of the Lorentz-Fitzgerald contraction, Newton's Third Law, etc. Your slick reader is now ready for the story.

And Margulies and myself are waiting for Tracy, Binder, Wellman, Hamilton, Williamson, Kuttner, Barnes, Farley, Smith, Merritt, Friend, and Taine to begin their next invasion . . . an invasion of the slicks! We wish them all *smooth* sailing!

At The Summit

By Virgil Travis

I know a poet who dares not disguise
His daring lyric dreams, but sounds a sharp
Challenge to Israfeli at his harp.
I see him as he seeks to analyze
The universe, and hear him as he cries,
"Eureka! There was Unity before;
"There will be Unity with God once more--"
But suddenly he stops in wild surprise:
What ominous apparition greets his eyes?
What demon, this? With him I see it still:
A ghastly fowl whose fateful croakings chill
His heart;whose crimsoned, tearing beak defies
Evasion; and whose outflung pinions cast
A shadow that enshrouds his soul at last.

MY LADY OF THE POPPIES

By
WILLIAM CARTER FELLOWS

Here is a unique short weird fantasy by our newest popular author. Mental suggestion is responsible for many unusual occurrences in our modern world. Often people do things which we take to be absurd and a product of an overwrought mind. Seldom are we able to actually substantiate fantastic experiences with cold fact.

The author of this story presents such a theme. But in so doing he creates a situation which gives rise to question. Fact or not, this story gives rise to the imagination. We don't say such a creation ever existed, but who knows, it might . . .

That the canvas was a masterpiece, I could not doubt. And it was finished but for a few deft touches of the brush. Its creator sank back against the hard panel of his chair and sighed. He was exhausted.

Harold Harcourt had never been a truly healthy man, and had he not been a friend of many years standing, his appearance at that moment might have frightened me.

He was naturally tall, and very thin. Today I perceived he was growing even thinner. His pallor might have shocked a physician. Sallow, with his eyes sunken, the pupils oddly dilated. Lines pulled forward from his lips, contorting his features into a semblance of pain. A cigarettte smoldered between his lips, and he smiled.

"Unique, eh Roger?"

I rose and left the room, Harold sitting dejectedly in his chair before the easel.

That was hardly the word for it. The painting was positively remarkable. Its scope awed me.

The easel stood possibly three feet high, and the canvas upon it met my gaze at eye level. I presume it was this fact which caused me to perceive that which I can but term as an optical illuion. Possibly the room itself had something to do with it.

A single yellow globe provided the only illumination. This was set in the exact center of the ceiling. Around this globe drifted clouds of cigarette smoke, from which I could detect odors which I am positive were not related to the tobacco. These fumes caused me to cough. I felt slightly dizzy. As a registered Pharmacist I identied these odors as the narcotic product of the poppy flower—*opium!* I had never suspected Harold . . .

These various factors I blame for the illusion that I was subjected to at that moment. For, as I sat there, still and silent beside the chair of my friend and gazed closely at his painting, it seemed as if I were gazing through a window—into a garden without. A garden of poppies—millions of poppies. Poppies swaying in the path of an invisible breeze.

As I shook my head to clear a slight film which seemed to pass momentarily across my eyes, the figure of a woman suddenly materialized in the foreground.

I believe I gasped slightly as my eyes focused upon her. I had reason to, for she was the most alluring being I had ever seen. She was definitely of the East. Her skin had the sheen of old ivory, mellowed. She was tall, and her body was molded perfectly into a scarlet gown. Her hair, the color of a Raven, flowed down over her shoulders, lost in the shadows behind her back. A solitary poppy was entwined through the tresses upon her brow.

Her eyes were a lost Sargasso, captivating. The pupils were myrtle, and they seemed to swim. Her glance was piercing, hypnotic. Satan might have had such eyes.

Beyond this remarkable woman, on the edge of the poppy sea, stood a strange mechanism. Strange that is, until I perceived its nature. The body of a man was lashed securely to it. A huge negro operated a wheel beside the mechanism. It was a medieval rack. And the miserable wretch upon it . . . .

I leaned forward in my chair to gain a better look at the features of that poor suffering creature. But unfortunately his face was twisted sideways in pain, and I found it impossible to gain even a slight view of his countenance. I noted that he was tall and thin.

Behind the rack stretched the poppy sea. Millions of poppies, endlessly wavering. From the depths of this waterless ocean I saw a thousand faces. They peered, watching that figure on the rack. There was rapture and ecstasy in their gaze. They might have been lost souls, or more probably so, slaves. Their faces swayed in rhythm with the poppies. Inwardly I shuddered.

It was the most horrible sight I have ever witnessed. It was a scene which might have sprung from the mad delirious dreams of an opium eater. *An opium eater!* That was it—this incredible canvas was a living portrayal of all the weird rapture, ecstasy, and torture conceivable to the poppy paradise! I turned my head from the painting in disgust. There was a vague nausea stirring at the pit of my stomach.

Harold however did not notice my reaction Or at least he *seemed* not to notice. His eyes were feverishly bright. His sallow cheeks showed the least tinge of red, comparable to a normal flush. He was plainly excited.

"You see here, Roger, my masterpiece! That which I have been eternally striving to produce. It embodies all the charm, terror, and realism of the opium eater's ephemeral dreams. It is wonderful Roger—isn't it?" I nodded absently.

"My Lady of the Poppies—that is what I call it. But only a servant of the poppy, Roger, can fully appreciate its theme . . . "

I noticed that his voice trailed off slightly with these last words, as if he were not actually sure of himself. He slumped even lower in his chair.

"Every artist since the beginning of time has sought to make *the* realistic painting, Roger. Every artist has tried, and failed. But I have succeeded! My painting actually lives!"

I leaned forward in alarm for my friend had keyed himself to such heights that I feared his frail health might suddenly snap. It seemed as if his every nerve shook.

"Easy there, old boy," I endeavored to calm him. "You don't have to shout at me. I'm not deaf you know." He eased slightly. "A peg of brandy would do both of us some good!" I ventured, slapping him lightly on the shoulder. "You make yourself comfortable, and I'll be back in a jiffy."

I rose and left the room, Harold sitting dejectedly in his chair before the easel, a half-smoked cigarette between his lips. I closed the door behind me.

The liquor cabinet was but a few paces down the hall, set in a corner opposite the small dining room. I walked towards it.

The revelation that my friend was addicted to the use of drugs astounded me. In all the years of our friendship I had never suspected. This revelation, while distasteful however, explained one thing I had long pondered over unsuccessfully. The poor state of health in which my friend constantly lived. I vowed that I should force him to the care of a physician before the day passed. I felt personally guilty for his condition. I should have known . . .

And that weird, ethereal painting. A damnable creation. And yet I could not doubt nor discredit the skill and mastery with which it had been created. But such a masterpiece . . . Those myrtle orbs haunted me. Strange . . .

I picked up the tumblers, full to the brim and recoursed my steps down the hall. Pausing at the door to my friend's study, I shifted both glasses to one hand, and opened the door.

The room was empty.

Something trickled down over my fingers and spilled to the floor. I glanced downward. My hands were trembling.

Icy fear clutched at my heart. Set it pounding in staccato thumps. I could not grasp the evidence of my senses. Harold Harcourt had disappeared! But where? . . . How? . . .

Mechanically I walked to my chair and placed the now half-empty tumblers on one end of the easel. I grasped one of them fiercely and gulped down the contents. My hand shook.

Swirling smoke caught my eye. A half-burned cigarette lay beside the easel, streamers drifting upwards. I sank into my chair wearily. My mind was in a turmoil. Where was Harold Harcourt? It was impossible . . . He could not have left this room! I was in complete view of the doorway all the while . . . And there were no windows . . . That half-burned cigarette . . . Greedily I gulped down the contents of the remaining glass.

Damn those fumes! I coughed in agony.

"My Lady of the Poppies, Roger—" I seemed to hear my friend's voice from some isolated void. Unconsciously my eyes strayed to that damnable painting. Cigarette smoke made me dizzy . . .

I seemed to gaze from my invisible window into a garden without. A garden of poppies . . . Millions of poppies . . . Poppies swaying in the path of an invisible breeze . . .

Faces peered from the flowers. Faces watching—watching me—it seemed . They did not mock. No, it seemed as if they pitied me . . .

A figure loomed before me, a figure in a scarlet gown. Myrtle orbs swam before me—carmine lips parted, invited. Every bone in my body suddenly ached. It was a wonderful ache . . .

Slender ivory arms raised to embrace me . . . Lips invited . . . Poppies swayed . . . My head pounded. I grew mad with desire. I wanted to crush that yielding body to me . . . I ran towards her . . . *Then I heard the moan!*

The rack loomed gigantic on the beach of the poppy sea. The negro tightened the wheel. The wretch upon it groaned again. Groaned rapturously. Horribly. His body writhed and his face suddenly twisted upright . . . I screamed—screamed madly. "No! It cannot be!" But it was. *For the man upon the rack was my friend, Harold Harcourt!* . . .

The Lady of the Poppies reached out to me. Beseechingly. Almost she touched me, but I eluded her. I ran in terror, screaming. Ran through miles of poppies, a sea of poppies, endless poppies. Faces loomed about me mocking, while behind I could hear her as she pursued me. Her breath was hot upon my neck.

Slender arms grasped my body fiercely. I grew powerless in that grasp. Her embrace grew tighter. Carmine lips were heated irons of searing pain. I tore at the hair which twined about me like a Medusa. I clutched madly, tearing at the single poppy entwined in the living tresses. A roaring avalanche pounded through my brain . . . darkness rushed upon me, and I sank into merciful oblivion . . .

I regained my faculties lying upon the floor of my friend's study. I lay upon the broken remains of the easel which I must have smashed in a moment of frenzy. The canvas was ripped to shreds.

My garments were bathed in a cold sweat, and every nerve in my body shook. What a ghastly nightmare!

Inwardly I thanked God that it had been only an optical illusion—brought on by those damnable fumes. I shuddered when I remembered that delirium . . . My friend—my friend . . .

I have since concluded that the experience was a product of my semi-drugged mind. At least—that is what I should like to believe. Sometimes I doubt even my own senses—for though such a thing is incredible beyond belief, I have found just cause for wonder.

For when I arose from the tangled wreckage of the easel, I did not arise empty-handed. My fingers clutched a solitary poppy and a few strands of black, silen hair . . .

CONCERNING PROFESSOR JAMESON

BY NEIL R. JONES

Probably the most famous character ever created by a science-fiction writer is that of Professor Jameson, the human being whose brain was placed into a practically immortal robot machine. The Professor's adventures, with his band of "robot men" have thrilled countless thousands of fantasy readers over a period of many years. This entire series, until very recently, has appeared in the pages of AMAZING STORIES, one of our leading and best science-fiction magazines.

But in the last few years, the Professor has been absent from his public. And the demands have been many for his return. Unfortunately a situation has arisen to stalemate the return of Professor Jameson in AMAZING STORIES. For that reason, STARDUST takes up the gavel. WHERE IS PROFESSOR JAMESON? Neil R. Jones, popular author of this famous series, tells us the story behind the scenes from his viewpoint. So without further ado, let us go forward with the question—"WHERE IS PROFESSOR JAMESON?"

* * *

The greater share of science fiction readers are acquainted with my Professor Jameson Series. The first twelve of these have been published in AMAZING STORIES. I have written five since then, but the new policy of the magazine bans them. Professor Jameson is not wanted in his known and recognized character which has made him popular with the readers. His friends, the Zoromes with their numerical names, are especially barred. In fact, there would be scarcely anything left by which to recognize him except his name and his mechanical status. It would be difficult for him to be anything else, however, than what he is and has been, whether he would or not, and I firmly believe that the readers to whom he has come to be recognized as an old friend, while having continually made new ones, would not have tradition upset to an absurd and incongruous state of conditions any more than they would like to see America become a dictatorship or see the Metropolitan Opera go burlesque Any one of the series can be read and enjoyed separately, entirely independent of the others. There are many enthusiastic readers who have not read the earlier stories. The following are the unpublished stories of the series in the order in which they were written. "In the Meteoric Cloud" had already been accepted by the old regime but was immediately returned to me by the new owners.

13. "In the Meteoric Cloud"
14. "The Accelerated World"
15. "The Strange Moonlet"
16. "Doomsday on Ajiat"
17. "The Feline Men"

A great deal of improvement has been done to the new AMAZING STORIES, which is also riding on a crest of science fiction popularity sweeping the magazine stands, but one mistake made is the discontinuance of the Professor Jameson Series. Readers do not like it. They have written in. Grudgingly, the editorial attitude has been forced to acknowledge the popularity of Professor Jameson and have opened a narrow door through which he cannot enter in his character as we have known him. Policy dictates more or less a trading on his reputation in a new and utterly fantactic, anachronistic role, extremely contradictory to previous facts—like changing history and admitting that Napoleon won the battle of Waterloo, conquered England—and take up the story from that point under the new point of view. I would rather retire the professor, and I have offered to do so—but the unspoken reply to this is to bar and discourage completely every story I send in, with pointed suggestions from time to time as to the new set-up regarding Professor Jameson.

I have always considered the readers when writing this series, and if they want Pro-

fessor Jameson as they have come to know him, they must take up the torch. The crux of the matter is this: Professor Jameson is barred by the editor-owner, Mr. B. G. Davis. Write your demands to Mr. Davis—not to Mr. Palmer. Mr. Palmer is little more to blame for the situation than is Charlie McCarthy and does not deserve your ire. Nor does Mr. Davis entirely. Mr. Davis has done a very creditable job in the rehabilitation of AMAZING STORIES, especially in regards to improving the illustrations, creating many interesting departments and lowering the price of the magazine, and he has been aided by a timely rise in science fiction popularity. Mr. Davis does not believe in a flexible policy. His policy, though probably 80 to 90% perfect, can be improved by an alteration of a small percentage, but evidently when he makes a change it is a blanket change, and he adheres strictly to it. He is, unfortunately for a large majority of his readers, unfamiliar with the Professor Jameson Series and entirely out of sympathy with it. Possiby, the only one of these stories he has ever read was "In The Meteoric Cloud," and that in a prejudiced frame of mind, if he even finished reading it, when he saw how it conflicted with his blanket policy.

The Professor Jameson Series has always operated under a policy of its own, and successfully. It is entirely different. True, these stories do not carry a complicated plot as a rule, but they are convincing, living and real. They are what you would naturally expect to find in regards to environment, conditions and reaction in a far distant future among other worlds. Nothing of this world shoud expect to touch them too exactingly. It would be unnatural, there would be no conviction. These unearthly adventures carry a high interet and suspense with exciting complications and thrilling adventures even if they do follow a travelogue sequence. This last is the essence and foundation of the series—else, why did not Professor Jameson jump to his doom when he found that he had been recalled to life forty million years after and made a machine man? He considered the matter strongly at the thought of undying loneliness. But 25X-987, from his wisdom born of many planets and thousands of centuries experience, urged the professor to come with the Zoromes on adventures in the vast, endless Universe among the galaxy of stars and planets, and he did not jump. What opportunity for such adventure could be more appealing? And this decision of his became the guiding light of the Professor Jameson Series.

If AMAZING STORIES does not want the series any longer, because of its disturbing contrast of policy, perhaps another magazine might be persuaded to continue the series through the efforts of the readers. Right now, there appears to be a curious hands-off policy of these other magazines, as if they were tampering in a business which was not their own. I do not, however, intend to let either Professor Jameson or the readers down through the fact that profits are dangled before my eyes and withheld in the face of my necessity. I have contacted a number of readers to sound out popular opinions and the following is typical of the group: "By all means, keep Professor Jameson as he is. Do not make the fatal mistake of writing as AMAZING would have you do. This would mean the ultimate downfall of all you have accomplished in the past."

I am willing to place the Professor Jameson Series on the shelf in deference to editorial disinclination, but I do not feel that I should be made to pay a penalty of having all my other stories rejected because of this, to be martyred because my creation of Professor Jameson ultimately brought about a difficult situation. I still turn out odd stories like "Kobera" ("Kiss of Death"), and I am author of "Tales of the 24th Century" and "Tales of the 26th Century."

There is not space to list all the favorable and congratulatory comments concerning the twelve Professor Jameson stories, but here are a limited number, dealing mostly with specific reasons why the professor is enjoyed.

* * *

..'It would be a pity to allow stories like Neil R. Jones' Professor Jameson series to be discarded because of a set policy that is admirable in most cases but which can have exceptions. By this you may gather that I like Professor Jameson stories.'—H.F.P.

* * *

'How about bringing back Professor Jameson and the Zoromes?'—A.L.W.

* * *

'Mr. Jones has always put out a damn good story. Maybe the AMAZING story policy needs a little rehashing.'—T.B.Y.

* * *

'I can name two other Science Fiction magaines that beat you a mile. But a Jameson novel would put you in unquestionable lead.' —L.M.

* * *

Ask Mr. Jones if we can't have another Professor Jameson adventure'—S.Y.

* * *

EDITORIAL REPLY: No sooner said than

done. We've written Mr. Jones and requetsed the immediate presence of the estimable Jameson. You've voiced the request of very many other readers. *So watch for the latest Jameson story in AMAZING. We'll rush it to you as soon as possible.—R.A.P. (And then Mr. Davis stepped in with the axe after having read his first and last Professor Jameson story. Oblivion. I happen to know that Mr. Davis was entirely new to science fiction when he came to take over AMAZING STORIES).*

★ ★ ★

'"On the Planet Fragment," by Neil R. Jones, best in the October issue.'—R.B.

★ ★ ★

'One author who never fails to cause me to purchase a copy of AMAZING STORIES is Neil R. Jones, especially when he sticks to his favorite of the machine men and their eternal explorations with the redoubtable Professor Jameson. His work is sustained and lurid, never overdone, and leaves the reader with the feeling of sharing great adventures in excellent company. He has the gift of arousing an absorbing and peculiar interest in his subject.'—P.R.O.

★ ★ ★

'Was I pleased to see another of the Professor Jameson stories. Since the first Professor Jameson story appeared in 1931, I have read them first in whatever issue they appeared. I have never been disappointed. Let's have the list grow!'—O.E.S.

★ ★ ★

'Any of Jones' Professor Jameson stories are very interesting.'—C.H.

★ ★ ★

'I experienced great delight in seeing Neil R. Jones back again with our dear metal friend, 21MM392.'—R.P.M.

★ ★ ★

'"Zora of the Zoromes" was super-super-super, etc. excellent.'—J.V.B.

★ ★ ★

'I especially like stories of Professor Jameson by Mr. Neil R. Jones.'—V.M.F.

★ ★ ★

'The stories that I have enjoyed most are the Professor Jameson stories by Neil Jones. I have yet to read an uninteresting story by Mr. Jones.'—A.Y.

★ ★ ★

'The Professor Jameson stories are great. Please give us more.'—J.M.

★ ★ ★

'Please give us some more of Professor Jamesson and his Zoromes.'—J. McD.

★ ★ ★

'"Sunless World". The mag was worth two-bits for that story alone. The first Professor Jameson story I have read, although I've heard of his fame for a long time. Here's to many more stories like it.'—A.L.W.

★ ★ ★

'The best science fiction story I have ever read was a Professor Jameson story called "Into the Hydrosphere" back in 1933.'—B.D.

★ ★ ★

'I feel that I must write and congratulate Neil R. Jones upon his consistently entertaining and thought-provoking Professor Jameson series.'—J.R.F.

★ ★ ★

'The adventures of Jameson and the Zoromes are among the best stories you have ever had.'—F.G.P.G.

★ ★ ★

'This story took first prize. Please continue the Jameson Series.'—E.C.

★ ★ ★

'I would like to see a fresh adventure of Professor Jameson and the Zoromes every month.'—P.S.H.

★ ★ ★

'All the Professor Jameson stories have been excellent. Keep them up.'—C.D.G.

★ ★ ★

'All Neil R. Jones' Jameson stories—excellent!'—L.A.K.

★ ★ ★

'The interest in these Professor Jameson stories, I think, is because they have plots that possess originality and characters that are diifferent from the usual story. Mr. Jones has made you feel that you have gone through Professor Jameson's adventures with him, and he becomes like a friend you have known. I'm sure the majority of readers will welcome him back in a new adventure.

★ ★ ★

'I hope Neil R. Jones' Jameson stories go on forever—masterpieces, every one.'—R.T.

★ ★ ★

'You have kept an unusually high standard and should be congratulated on authoring the longest series of science-fiction stories centered around a single character ever written.'—C.H.

★ ★ ★

These are some of the many comments in AMAZING STORIES. Every science fiction magazine ever published has some time or other published letters containing reference to, and requests for, Professor Jameson. How do you fans and readers feel? Shall Professor Jameson lie buried forever? He was created for you—the reader—do you want him no longer?

PALMER *Tears his hair . . .*

. . . out and down

BY RAYMOND A. PALMER

More than fourteen years ago I chanced to see a copy of a magazine called "Amazing Stories" on a drugstore newsstand. I didn't pause to glance at the contents. I bought a copy with what amounted to ludicrous haste—which stamped me from that moment on as the wildest sort of fan.

Today, I am editor of that magazine, and of two others, one of them still another science fiction magazine. And to the readers of the present *Amazing Stories*, who are exactly the same type of fan I became on that first day, I am now the *piece de resistance* of a really delectable (and sometimes lusty) feast of anethema. And why? Well, that's *your* story (and how you've been telling the world!) But here's mine—and I'm here to tell the cockeyed universe!

Once upon a time I won $100.00 (first prize) in a contest called: "What I Have Done To Advance Science Fiction." I won it because of many things, all of them fan activities, such as the old Science Correspondence Club (which once numbered nearly 3000 individuals—not at one time, but over a stretch of years—if my file of names means anything), and for such fool stunts as writing hundreds of letters weekly, and plunking down the hundred for a mimeograph to put out still further fan material in the way of the old Cosmology.

In those days, I was known as Fan No. 1, 3 and 4. (No. 2 was Forrest J Ackerman, bless him!) I worked so damned hard for the fan that I collapsed. I spent eight months in a sanatorium. And when I came out, some ambitious fan had "lifted" (aw hell, *stolen* is the word!) the mimeograph, and the club had gone into the well-known pot. Daunted? Not me. I loved science fiction. So I started all over. And this time I added to the melee, writing. I sold my first story "The Time Ray of Jandra," which the fans thought was pretty good. I was encouraged to go on. I did. Result: a heck of a lot of rejects.

More fan activities. Names like Frank Brent Eason, Conrad H. Ruppert, Forrest J Ackerman, Walter L. Dennis, J. Harvey Haggard, Clare Winger Harris, Robert Konikow, Joseph Houghton, Arthur Dake, Richard Leary, Aubrey Clements, Miles J. Breuer, Jack Williamson, Peter Schyler Miller, Jerome Siegel, Joe Shuster and others (Some of these names are well-known today, others you've never heard of—but they were *all* fans, just as you and I! Arthur Dake, Pacific coast chess champion. Siegel and Shuster, creators of Superman, Dennis, Denver Safety Council, etc.).

More writing: Science fiction (under my own name *and* others, assuredly!), detectives, gangster, murder, western, adventure, sex, and under a dozen pen names. To name a few:—Ray Palmer, Rae Winters, "Rap", A. R. Steber, Alexander Blade, Wallace Quitman, Morris J. Steele (two out of three actually by me, reprinted from Fantasy Magazine, and one long one, *not* by me, except for a single draft of revision to help the real Morris J. Steele get started—whereupon he went to work!). And not to name a few more, at least three names which today are held in high esteem by readers of science fiction!

Editor and co-worker on a 20% basis with the staff of Fantasy Magazine. Originator and plotter of "Cosmos" the most amazing fan project ever completed, a novel by 17 of the biggest of the big shot science fiction authors.

And finally, editorship of *Amazing Stories*. Which is where the present crop of fans come in. And where my story really begins.

Your *favorite* magazine (yeah, I can hear the snorts) was purchased by Ziff-Davis along with *Radio News*, and when Ralph Milne Farley called on Editor Davis to find out what he could sell him, he discovered that an editor was needed. Farley, (so the credit goes to him) suggested he knew just the man. A veritable encyclopedia of knowledge

of things scientific, a master in the field of science fiction, a paragon of writing ability, and a glittering young genius—named Raymond A. Palmer.

Yes, Davis believed it, and I succeeded in deluding him into committing the magazine into my tender care. So I went to work, determined to make the worst magazine (who knew better than I how it stunk!) the best in the field.

You can imagine how I felt. Here at last I had it in my power to do to my old hobby what I had always had the driving desire to do to it. I had in my hands the power to change, to destroy, to create, to remake, at my own discretion. What would you do today, with just such an opportunity? I piled in gleefully to spell AMAZING a little differently. And that spelling was PALMERAMAZING.

I think I know science fiction. But I also know that for years I read it and *didn't* enjoy it, because the irksome fact existed that science fiction stories were not *stories. They* were half-baked ideas, screwy science, and pedantic, professional writing. Not one professional author's touch glittered from the whole danged dungheap of gadgets, theories, and interplanetary travelogues. There wasn't a living, breathing character, emotion, adventure in the whole lot. I'd turned to writing to write just those factors into science fiction. Now I had the power to make other writers put them in.

I set out to do it. Tremendous task. First, the writers weren't authors. They were science enthusiasts, with plenty of theory and idea material, but no plots in their heads. How could they plot? They didn't know what a plot was.

Amazing Stories had on hand for that critical June 1938 issue 17 stories. Some hundred ancient manuscripts, accepted on a pay-on-publication basis (which meant nothing less than five years) by Teck Publishing Co., had been returned by Mr. Davis with regrets. He shouldn't have regretted. He did right. The only thing he didn't do right was sent back the 17! I did that, with one exception, A. H. Vance's "Germs of Death." I figured that was passable, and might fill a hole someday.

So, with deadline two weeks off, I had to get seven good stories. I got some fair ones. One was good. John Russell Fearn did it. "A Summons From Mars" was a nice tale. We put on a photographic cover to attract attention. We put in a flock of departments. I wrote an eitorial, rather stiffly, and some what hopefully.

I wasn't satified. The story material in that issue smelled. Badly, Only Fearn was any good. One fan summed it up. He said: "Your June issue stinks!"

But Rome wasn't built in a day. The circulation was—that issue went over excellently, and there never was a drop after that; quite the reverse, there was a constant and satisfying climb into what I believe to be top position. It's still there.

However, for two years I tried to teach writers what I wanted. A classic example is Robert Moore Williams. He came into my office one afternoon, after having had a dozen straight rejects from me, to find out what was wrong. I told him very simply: "Your stories are a lot of "pretty" writing. You write for Mr. Campbell. I don't like Campbell's way of writing. Only thing I ever liked of his was the 'little red ants' phrase one of his characters used. Or *was* it Campbell, I can't even remember? Anyway, if you'll take your next manuscript, blue-pencil *every* phrase that you consider to be *good* writing, I'll buy it."

He did. Yes, dear fans, he 'done went an' hacked sumpin fearful!' And he wrote a good story. He's been writing 'em since He has been learning too, with practice, and today, he is still writing *stories*, with hack words (Webster says they are common-ordinary ones) but those stories are beginning to get naturally the "soul" that he used to think he was giving them with his pretty, high-sounding phrasing. Today, ofttimes, he *sells* me some pretty phrasing, but it has *guts*. It is really writing! A yarn called "Trouble In Avalon" under his pen name, for instance. It was a clever bit. He wrote it for Unknown. But I grabbed it.

Well, all through those two years, the fans swung their axes at my head. Not only did my magazine stink, but I too, stank—loudly. I was a traitor to science fiction. I was a fool. I was a veritable ass. I lied, cheated. I dragged the "literature" of science fiction down into the dirty, filthy fen of "hack" pulp. I called pulp by its own name. I debunked science fiction. I printed tripe. I ground good science fiction writers into the dirt. I starved 'em. I ought not to show my face under the sun again.

And worst sin of all, I siced "Time" onto the NY convention and the boys who attended got called jitterbugs. But the fans saw through my motives to the foul ulterior reason—to sell my damned magazine!

"All he thinks of is 'sales'," they denounced. "The great god Money is his all. He

would kill his own grandmother for a Mexican peso."

Yes, my dear friends, I wanted to sell *Amazing Stories*. And I have! I have taken the worst magazine in all stf history, and brought it up to the peak of sales. I have pleased my publishers immensely.

Worship money? Maybe—to the extent of eating in cockroach-ridden hashhouses for six months while the recuperating bi-monthly staggered once more to its tottering feet and grew strong. To the extent of living alone for two years in a strange town without a friend to talk to. To the extent of leaving all that had meant anything to me back in that heaven that is Wisconson. To the extent of rooming among the drunks and dopes of a Clark Street rooming house. To the extent of working day and night to re-write (at a cent a word for the author!) almost every manuscript I received both to permit publishing them, and to demonstrate to the author what was needed to pep them up.

Even today, I receive a monstrous salary which amounts to about 70% what I made as a hack writer of all sorts of fiction. The secret of it all is that I love editing, especially science fiction, and I'm awfully proud of my two babies. But when the Great God Kale comes into the picture—hell no, boys, that ain't my motive!

Some of my friends have ideas of their own on what I really do for Amazing, insofar as editing is concerned. Recently the awful truth was revealed that I do absolutely nothing, having acquired a staff to do all the work, while I laboriously pound out the editorial (which is awful, I admit, but at least it's *mine*), as my sole contribution to the magazine.

I certainly don't mind that aspersion. I wish it were true. But I do regret having my friends call Mr. Davis incompetent, and he surely is, if he pays me for doing nothing.

There is only one thing that might cast light on this matter. Lou Sampliner, my "staff", complains bitterly of having to work evenings, Saturdays, Sundays, and birthdays in company with my valueless self, to get our books out in the proper shape. But he only does it because he is rather touchy about maintaining his reputation of being able to keep up with me. From which you may infer that I actually do some work, at that.

Once I said that I adopt my "policy" (oh, that policy) by carefully considering the desire of the fans, as expresed in their letters, and then discounting them 100% by acting in just the opposite direction. Yes, I'm afraid that's true. There are some 200 fans who write letters regularly. They are the same type that eventually write a story, filled with theory, heavy science, learned writing, and absolutely no craftsmanship. They can't put in characterization, plot, emotion, human interest, surprize twist, significance, good dialogue, action (plot action) contantly rising pace, continuity, climax, and all the technical factors of good pulp writing because they don't know how.

Now, wouldn't I be a sap of the first water to disregard my fifteen years of experience, throw away all I've learned, and follow the advice of people who are *not* by any stretch of the imagination even remotely versed in the art and science of writing good stories? Would you have your portrait painted by a man who knew all there was to know about the *science* of color, but had never *painted* anything in his life?

So, when those 200 praise a story which my critical eye tells me has only science, only theory, and nothing else, I must only decide that it is the wrong thing to publish, because it cannot be complete and satisfactory to the ordinary reader. It hits only 200 out of (Time says 150,000).

But that I entirely disregard the fan is the veriest tripe ever spouted from the mouth of the Sphinx who knows all but tells nothing (in a loud voice). The fans asked for Paul, on covers without a lot of printing to spoil them. Since it isn't good business to run front covers without type, I gave them back covers, in a series that has received so much praise I feel it was a fan project par excellence. I only regret that I am able today to keep them on Amazing Stories only, because of ad contracts. In reality, the order went forth to can the AS back cover also, but I howled loudly in protest, saying: "You can't do this to my fans!"

I gave the fans a department wherein their favorite authors are presented, plus the author's pictures they asked for. I gave them really good art work. An editorial in which the editor relaxes. A reader's column which works both ways. Plenty of other departments.

In every instance, where it was sensible, I gave the fans what they asked for. And no editorial office in the country is as open and extends as hearty a welcome to the visiting fan as does Ziff-Davis.

The fact is, Amazing is a good magazine, and getting constantly better, and the critics who decry its odor look only at its editor (who may stink all right, and doesn't resent

ASHES OF IRON

BY JACK WILLIAMSON

What would happen to the world if suddenly every atom of iron dissolved to dust! What terrible catastrophes would ensue? Most of all, could mankind conquer such a terrible plight?

Jack Williamson, one of our greatset fantasy writers presents here a story of such a possibility. ASHES OF IRON is the story of a single man's fight against what he thought was a great handicap. He envisioned the whole of mankind as Slaves to Iron. And he resolved to free the human race of its captors. What he accomplished—and what finally happened provides a unique story worthy of its author. To most of us iron is merely a metal to be bent into contorted shapes for myriad purposes. Few accept it as else. But take it away once . . .

* * * * *

Peter Garrick had been two months in his self-imposed exile on Little Whale Island, when Jean Minturn came to beg his return.

She had left her father on his yacht at Jacksonville at dawn. Her hired plane had drifted out along the coast, above the lonely Barrier Islands. Twice at last it wheeled above an isolated bit of white-fringed green, while she studied her charts.

"That's the one, Miss Minturn," the pilot at Jacksonville had told her. "Little Whale. I landed Garrick there two months ago, with a lot of crated scientific junk. There's a cabin on the north side, just above the palms. Oh, you'll find him there, all right. He had no way to leave if he wanted to, except an old skiff."

She landed on the beach. Slimly boyish in boots and riding togs, with soft red-brown hair tucked up under her broad white felt, she walked up across the hard white sand still wet from the tide. Her eyes searched eagerly in the jungle's green fringe, for the cabin beyond the palms.

Peter Garrick had heard the plane; he was standing in the door of the little dilapidated pine shack that some sportsman must have built. He was tall and lean in the freedom of shorts and polo shirt, his skin burned dark from the sun; but the slight stoop of his broad shoulders told that he had been a studious man. His somber clean-cut face was freshly shaven, but in two months his dark bare head had become a little shaggy. A lingering bitterness shadowed his eyes, and tightened the corners of his mouth.

Recognition swept away his scowl of annoyance . He smiled solemnly and started down to meet the girl, walking with a slight limp.

"Pete!" Her gray eyes lit with joy. "I'm so glad to find you!" She studied him. "You still limp, but you look tanned and well."

They came together. He kissed her eager red lips deliberately. His dark eyes were quizzical.

"Well, Jean?"

She mocked his grave voice. "Well, darling?" She laughed happily, and her arms went around him. "Well, I've come after you. That's what. I've come to take you back to your job and your place in the world."

His lean face shadowed darkly. Harshness edged into his voice.

"I've left the world, Jean. I told you that. I've no place in it—ever. I'm not going back."

She took his elbows with her hands.

"I can understand, Pete," she said softly. "It was a terrible thing. You were pretty badly hurt, you know—there were weeks when we thought you would never regain consciousness. And when you did, and found your mother already buried, it must have been a dreadful blow."

Her grip tightened on his arms; her face lifted earnestly.

"We've given you two months here. But that's enough. Now you must come back. Don't let your bitterness fester in you, Peter. You have a place to fill in the world. You

have a work, something you alone can do.

"Dad's engineers have never been able to work the kinks out of your oscillation power valve—"

His harsh grim laugh checked her voice.

"So you want me to come back to finish the thing that killed my mother." His dark lean face twisted to a spasm of pain. "You say you understand, Jean. You don't. But you're right when you say I have work to do."

A terrible strange smile burned the pain from his face.

"Yes, there's something I alone can do. And it's going to change the history of the world—"

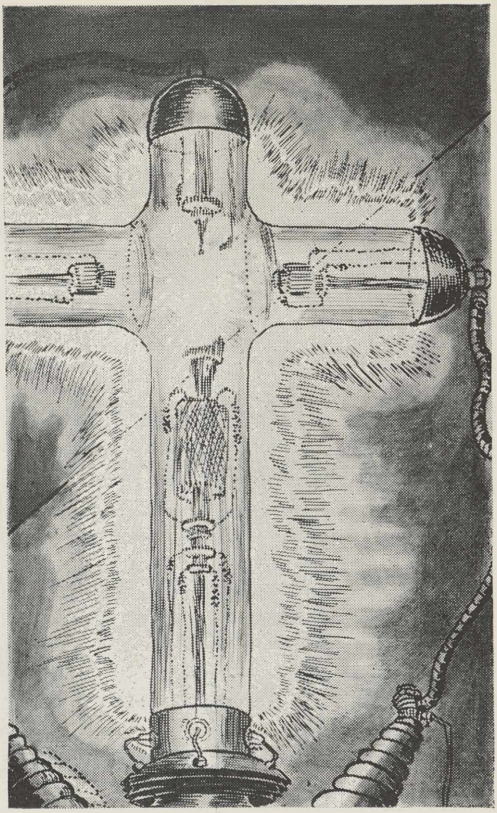
She smiled. Oh, Pete, I'm so glad—"

"Wait!" his hard voice rapped. "You haven't heard me."

She shook her head with the broad white hat, happily.

"It doesn't matter. Nothing does, if you're coming back." She leaned a little toward him. "Dad has been begging me to come after you ever since you left. And I brought

The cross-shaped tube lit again with its painful green



a message from him—he's at Jacksonville now, on the yacht.

"Here is the message. On the day that you finish your work, and demonstrate magnetic beam transmission of power as a commercial proposition, he will reorganize Minturn Steel under the name of Planet Power and Transport. You will be the new president—"

Peter Garrick stopped her with a sharp jerk of his shoulders.

"You don't understand, Jean. I'm not going back. There's never going to be any Planet Power. There's not even going to be a Minturn Steel any longer."

She released his arms and stepped bask quickly. Her white face went rigid; her eyes widened fearfully.

"Pete, what do you mean?"

He moved a little after her. His voice was low, husky.

"I love you, Jean. That is the only reason I have hesitated—because I didn't want to destroy your position in the world, and perhaps risk your life. I do love you—"

He swallowed; his long mouth set grimly.

I'm glad you are here, so that I have a chance to explain. Your life rests upon your

(Continued on page 27)

DO OR DIE

By ROBERT MOORE WILLAIMS

Again we are proud to present Robert Moore Williams, with another of his well-received stories. This time, DO OR DIE!

Nature's formula since the beginning of time has been based on the ancient tradition of, "The strong shall survive, the weak, perish . . ." Man has always considered himself as superior to all other mortal creatures on the face of the Earth. For this reason, and it cannot be denied to a degree, he has survived. Perhaps this signifies his strength. But! Do we know of EVERY creation on the face of the Earth? Are we absolutely sure that man is the strongest? If a creation presented itself that were to challenge man—then what!

DO OR DIE is the story of a strugggle for survival. A struggle between man and a creation far ahead of his time. It is a story of nature gone wild and what subsequently happened. Read it and then feel secure—but not too secure. One never knows! . . .

Frank Ludlow sat, his back against a sapling, and drank again. The light from the carbide lamp fretted over him, threw shadows on his cheeks, shadows that seemed to be shadows of darker shadows. His clothes were torn, his pith helmet gone. An angry welt reached down across his face from ear to chin, but the blood had dried.

He didn't look like the twenty-eight year old youth whom Sam Rutling knew, the youth who had gone out into that swamp with Warson, and had returned alone, whom Rutling had carried from the boat to the fire.

What had happened out there in that dark morass, where heavy darkness brooded over stagnant water? Sam Rutling shivered, conscious of the darkness and of the vast hum of insect life moaning softly from the swamp. The questions—there were dozens of them—died unborn on his lips. Very suddenly he was not certain he wanted to know what had happened out there where sun-heat and stagnant water conspired in the creation of life . . . He waited, and watched.

Ludlow no longer looked like the dreamy-eyed biologist, the youth who had aspired to finding the secret of life itself, who had dug into the structure of protoplasm, and dug and dug and dug, and found there was still more digging to be done, who had studied life in all its freakish forms, from man to fossil shapes dead these many million years. He looked like a sodden bum desperately seeking courage in a bottle. He looked old.

He spoke. Suddenly! One moment he was gulping at the whiskey. Then he spoke.

"Look out over that swamp, Sam . . ." He jerked his hand.

The shock of sudden but not unexpected fear sent Rutling to his feet, his eyes wide in apprehension. He expected to see something coming over the swamp, moving through the air, walking on the face of the

"I sat there in the boat, not knowing what to do. Yes, I was beginning to bo afraid.

water, something—*anything*. The sweat on his body was clammy with chill.

But there was nothing, or nothing that he could see . . . The darkness was broken by faint starlight into ghostly shadows, a creeping, moving darkness so heavy it seemed to be fluid. There were dark clumps that he knew were reeds, a dead snag rising, a tree with a leafy top on an island in the dark water. But there was nothing that he could see. He turned back to Ludlow, his eyes wide in vast and growing unease . . .

"Can't you see Her out there?"

Her?—It might be the heat. This Amazon country was hot, and the heat did strange things to the white man. It might be the delirium of a fever. It might be—anything. In the back of his mind was the mounting knowledge that Warson, the guide, had not returned . . . It might be anything. It might be something they had found out there, where the energy of the sun drove slime and stagnant waters into strange conspiracies . . .

And the natives feared this swamp, had refused to guide them. There was a devil here. Neither Rutling nor Ludlow believed in devils. Nor Warson. But the stooped, thin-bearded, gray-eyed guide had brought along his heavy rifle.

It might be the heat. Or . . .

Ludlow's gaze was fixed over the swamp, glassy-eyed and unwaveringly far away, the look of a man who sees beyond and does not like what he sees. He spoke again, and in his voice were undertones deeper than fear.

"She's out there tonight, just as She has been out there every night since the world began, and every day . . . A vast hovering spirit, working in the heat and slime, shaping, building, testing, discarding, working with the million forms that protoplasm has taken, striving toward some vast, unrevealed, perhaps unknown goal . . . She made the plants that take the nitrogen from the air and the minerals from the soil. She made the slimy, creeping things that belong in the hot seas. She gave them a start, told them the rest was up to them . . . I wonder why

they call her *Mother* Nature . . . Mothers are kind to their children. But she isn't kind. She tells them to evolve or die . . . The slimy things in the seas grew fins, and did not die. Eventually they grew lungs, changed their fins to legs, and continued living . . . Through unnumbered millions of years, they walked on four legs . . . Then one of them learned to walk on two, and found another use for the other two . . . That one did a nice job with what he had, a mind of sorts and two front legs that he could use as hands, with eyes to see and ears to hear and a nose to smell with, and a skin to protect him and tell him when he was cold . . . That's all he had . . . He did the best he could, and she ought to be proud of him, for he has conquered the globe . . ."

Ludlow coughed, and gulped again at the whiskey. Rutling's face mirrored shifting thoughts. Heat?—Or what? It was the latter that held his tongue. He let Ludlow talk.

"She gave him five senses, and he did a nice job with them. He learned to talk to his fellows and he learned to work together. He invented some things for himself. He learned to fly in the air and he dreamed of flying to the stars . . . She ought to have been proud of him, and if she had any other gifts, she should have given them to him, for he had done the best he could with what he had . . ."

Ludlow's voice changed and hard bitterness crept into it. "Sam, you and I thought that man, that two-legged animal, was the goal of all the vast evolutionary process. We didn't think that nature might have other plans. We didn't think she might produce an organism better fitted to survive . . .

"But she did! Right out there in that swamp, out there in her laboratory, she's been busy again. She has produced a new organism, and instead of five senses, she has given it at least seven, maybe more. She didn't give her gifts to the creature who had done the best he could with what he had. She created a new form, endowed it with extra senses, and man, instead of being the main stem of emergent evolution, is an offshoot doomed to extinction . . ."

It might be the heat. Or . . . Rutling told himself it was the heat. He preferred to believe that. His voice was soothing.

"Take it easy, Frank . . . Here, you better lie down on this cot. Try to sleep. Relax . . . Don't think. I'll get a wet towel for your head. You'll feel better in the morning, and we'll start getting out of this pest-house, if never an electric eel gets studied in its native habitat. Easy, old man . . ."

Rutling's voice was soothing. Even more than to Ludlow, he was talking to himself. Ludlow laughed, a cracked, broken whimper. Then power came back to his voice.

"You think I'm nuts, don't you? You think the heat's got me . . . Sam, do you know any prayers?"

"Huh?" The single monosyllable dropped from an open mouth.

"If you know how to say a prayer, here's one you had better get busy saying: 'Please, God, let Frank Ludlow be crazy . . .' Say it over and over again. Keep on saying it . . . Brother, I hope I am crazy. I hope I didn't see what I saw out there. I hope it doesn't exist . . . but I know damned well it does . . ."

It seemed to Rutling that the darkness was crowding in around the light flaring fitfully from the carbide lamp, that the darkness moved closer to the faintly glowing bed of coals . . . Man, the goal of the evolutionary process. No, he hadn't exactly thought that. He was a biologist. He knew that anywhere on the face of the globe there might be developing an organism destined to carry the thread of life in the future. The lung fish first learned to breathe air, thus managing to survive when the swamps dried up. But the lung fish, in spite of that splendid advance, had been side-tracked, had been left behind, while the stream of life flowed on around him. Was man on a sidetrack too? How would he know?—He wouldn't . . . There was darkness over the swamp, and the hum of insect life was a dim moan. And Frank Ludlow was laughing and asking him to say a prayer. "Please, God, let Frank Ludlow be crazy . . ."

Before he could speak there was a movement in the air, a beat that sounded like the pounding of heavy wings. Ludlow heard it. Terror grooved his face. He leaped to the cot where Warson's rifle, left behind that afternoon, lay. He grabbed it, tried to take aim at the winged creature of the night. The heavy roar shuddered, the flat crack raced back in echoes. Ludlow was off balance and the recoil flung him backward to the ground.

The wings flapped away. Or were they wings?

Ludlow sat on the ground, the smoking gun in his hands, looking up into the darkness, muttering, "Sorry . . . I lost my head. They can't fly . . . Or I guess they can't . . . That was only a bird of some kind. For a moment I thought it was something else . . ."

He patted the rifle, ran his fingers caressingly along the dark blue barrel. "Warson sent me back after his rifle . . . It's our only hope. I don't know that it will work, but I

have to try . . ."

Rutling found his voice. "Warson?—What . . ."

Every trace of emotion went from Ludlow's face. The shadows from the light fretted over it, and the long gash down the cheek was a sinister line.

"Warson's dead . . ."

It wasn't the heat. It was something else . . . Rutling did not know that his voice verged on a scream. "Frank! For God's sake, tell me . . ."

Ludlow looked at him. Ludlow's face was cut into grooves. "Sure, I'm going to tell you. Because, as soon as I can borrow some courage out of this bottle, I'm going to take this rifle, and go out there into that swamp and enforce the oldest known law—survive or die. And if I don't succeed, I will surely die. And, not tomorrow but in the next five hundred, or one hundred years—however fast those things reproduce—a lot of other men will die . . ."

Rutling tried not to look over his shoulder, tried not to remember the dark swampland there behind him, tried not to feel the heat of the tropic night, nor to smell the stench rising from stagnant waters.

Ludlow gulped at the courage in the bottle. He seemed to need the courage even to talk.

Rutling watched, thinking . . . Ludlow was going back into that swamp where something had emerged. He did not doubt that it was there. Ludlow, whatever he might be, was never a liar, never dealt in fictions. He kept remembering that dank swampland at his back, kept feeling on the back of his neck the pressure of a wind moving over it. He took the bottle from Ludlow. The whiskey burned at his throat . . .

"There's an island out there in that swamp," Ludlow spoke. "Three or four acres in extent. You would expect an island in this morass to be a twisting torture of reeds and cane and climbing plants all fighting for the sunlight. Well, this island isn't. It's bare . . . Hard, caked mud . . . Vegetation doesn't grow on it . . . Why?—Some radiation . . .

We found it just at sunset. The last rays of the sun were slanting down over it . . . They were standing on the island, drinking in the sunlight . . ."

"They?" Rutling choked over the word. "They . . ." His eyes went over his shoulder. Darkness washed from the black waters to him. Ludlow's cracked voice jerked his attention back.

"They looked a lot like two pumpkins—a little pumpkin sitting on top of a big one, the little one the head, the big one the body, if you can imagine a pumpkin with legs . . . Warson stood up in the boat and looked—Sam, that man had something he could use for courage. He said, 'The natives talked about an island out here. This must be it . . . Now that we have stumbled on it, I'm going to find out about it. You land me and pull the boat off shore. And remember: Unless I tell you to—whatever you do—don't let them get to you. Don't try to pick me up unless I tell you to . . .' Sam, he had something any man could use for courage. He had heard the natives talk about this island and he *knew* . . .

"He stepped from the boat. I pulled it back fifty yards and waited. Those pumpkins—there were nine of them—I counted—raised up. They waddled down from the little knoll toward him . . .

"Warson called to me. 'Ludlow, you're a biologist. What are these things?'

"I didn't know, and I didn't want to do any guessing right then. For my guess would have been experimenting again—Will she never be satisfied? Dinosaurs, she tried. Brutes as big as a house and as fierce as tigers. Reptiles, alligators, ground sloths, snakes, elephants, lions, monkeys and men—and it looks like one of them would have suited her . . . I wonder if she knows what she wants, or is she working through trial and error, too . . .

"Warson stood there on that island. Those things were about three feet tall. They formed a circle around him . . . Did I mention they had a couple of flat, flipper-like hands, and two short, knobbed horns projecting from their head? Did I tell you they were a dirty green color, and that the color was deepest on the side where the sun was shining? Did I tell you that when we came up they were standing on the highest part of the island, drinking the sunlight? . . . Oh, I told you that . . .

"Warson called to me. 'Ludlow, these things are intelligent . . .'

"You can imagine my curiosity. Here was a new form of life. I had never heard of them. I didn't know anything about them. But I wanted to know, and I wasn't afraid. I forgot what Warson had said, and I started paddling the boat toward the island. He saw me . . . He didn't raise his voice . . . 'Ludlow, don't land on this island . . . because you'll never get off . . .'

"That stopped me . . . I held the boat in the water and watched . . . He seemed to be conferring with them. He would say a few words and then listen. I got the damnedest feeling then . . . Because I could hear the

answers . . . No . . . No . . . Not with my ears . . . With my mind . . . The flash of word pictures, idea pictures, dim and vague . . . Sure, it was a form of telepathy—I wonder if She saw what man made of his ability to communicate with his fellows?—That is one of the foundation stones of his progress, you know . . . With it you can tell me what you have learned and I can profit by your experience . . . I wonder if she saw what her two-legged creature had done with that ability and decided to give it, in perfected form, to another of her creatures . . . I wonder why she didn't give it to man, who had done the best he could with what he had, instead of creating that monstrosity . . .

"Warson called again. 'Ludlow, these things are very intelligent . . . They have never seen a white man before, and the few natives that have blundered in here, they have regarded as animals . . .' He went on talking, to them now, but most of his words were spoken so softly that I could not hear them. He was telling them about man and man's civilization, the cities man has built, his ocean liners, his airplanes that fly . . . I could feel the eagerness radiating from them. Here was something new to them. The intelligence which She gave them—intelligence needs facts to work with, and they hadn't acquired any facts relating to the world beyond the swampland—that intelligence enabled them to see there was a vastly different world than the one they knew . . . You don't need to be told what man would do if he suddenly learned there was a better world than the one he knew. He would get there, somehow, anyhow, and if he met resistance . . .

"I sat there in the boat, not knowing what to do. Yes, I was beginning to be afraid. He was telling too much. They were getting too eager. But I couldn't see that their eagerness amounted to much. I just couldn't visualize them as a menace. I could not believe that here was something that in the future would rise to threaten man. I learned better . . .

"Then Warson called again. 'Ludlow—Is it biologically possible for any creature to live directly in the sunlight, to extract the energy it needs directly from the rays of the sun?'

"That question stumped me. The photosynthesis of plants is in one sense a living on the sunlight, but all other life forms exist parasitically, either living on vegetation or as cannibals on other animals. Before I could think of an answer, he called again.

" 'You don't have to answer that question, Ludlow. Because these things do just that; they take energy directly from the sun . . .'

"Then I remembered they had been standing on the highest part of the island when we came up—standing in the sunlight. And I saw again they were greenest on the side nearest the sun, and I thought of the green chlorophyll, and I knew Warson was right—She sure made something when she made those creatures. They weren't dependent on vegetable or animal food for life. In the middle of the barest desert all they would need would be the light of the sun—How would that rate in the scale of survival values?—Divorced from the need of food . . . The biggest bugaboo that man has is to find something to put into his stomach. Most of his wars, his folk migrations, his slaughter and rapine and pillage has been to find something to put into his belly . . . And the greatest danger in his future is failure of his food supply . . . I wonder if She took a long look into that future, a look down perhaps half a million years, and foresaw that man was on a sidetrack, that in the far future he would not be able to control his food supply, and in consequence would die, I wonder if She was thinking of that when She created those things on that island?—I wonder . . ."

Ludlow's voice faded into silence. Rutling stirred uneasily, stared in vast apprehension at his comrade. The night and the silence of the night crept in around them. The darkness was a living entity, a crawling encroaching form that seemed to have life of its own, that strove constantly to blot out the little light from the lamp, the little glow from the bed of coals. Haunted night and darkness, and the smell of stagnant water. And a sense of vast, brooding watchfulness . . . And a vast hovering spirit, a something that moved during the night and the day, that worked with sun-heat and stagnant waters while milleniums rolled away into nothingness . . . building with the million forms of protoplasm toward some tremendous goal, testing, discarding, building anew, working in callous indifference, but always working . . .

Ludlow's voice broke the silence.

"Sam, I wonder about that man, Warson. A guide, a prospector, a wanderer . . . He didn't look like much but he knew a lot of things . . . And he had the best grade of courage I ever saw. He had heard the tales of the natives and he knew he was a dead man. But he was a man, and his only thought, when he knew he was trapped, was to do what he could to save me, and through me to save a lot of other people . . . He called

to me once more. 'Ludlow, you go back to camp and get my rifle . . . and destroy these things utterly . . . if you can . . .'

"The last words were weak. But he had warned me. He had told me what to do, if I can . . .

"As he spoke, there sprang, from the horns on the heads of those things, a thin blue radiance. It played over Warson. He screamed once, a scream retched from the depths of torture I can't guess at. His body seemed to stiffen. I thought I saw smoke. Then there was an odor, rank and terrible . . . Then his body burst into little puffs of flame . . . The flame raced over him . . . It wasn't true flame, not the flame of combustion, but the searing blue flame releasing some heat far hotter than can be attained by any oxygen combination . . . They drew energy from the sunlight, and the flame that played over Warson was something taken from the sun . . . How?—Ask Warson . . . He died in it, died in a blazing burst of intolerable energy . . .

"I was driving the boat away, trying to watch and to paddle, for I knew there was nothing I could do to help. I shoved it around a tangle of swamp grass just as they turned their attention on to me. One of those beams of radiance barely touched me, as I got out of sight . . ."

Ludlow's fingers touched his lean jaw, traced across his cheek up to the ear the seared welt where the blood had dried. Then his hand came back to the rifle, and his face set in lean hard lines. He drained the last dregs from the bottle, flung it outward. It splashed sullenly in the black, stagnant water lapping at the low shore. He got to his feet.

Rutling stood in momentary indecision. "Frank . . ." His voice was husky. "Frank . . ."

Ludlow shook his head. "We're sixty miles from the Amazon, two hundred from civilization. In the length of time it would take us to cover that distance and return with help, those things might be gone. And if we tried to tell a tale like that.—Even if anybody believed us, there is no immediate danger. People would shrug, and go on about their business. Perhaps an hundred years would elapse before these things came out of this swamp in numbers. But when they did come out, it would be too late. No, I've got to strike now, tonight, while I know where they are, while there are only nine of them . . ."

Rutling's face was bloodless. "I didn't mean that . . . I meant—when they are armed with the natural weapons you describe —How can we do anything against them with only a rifle?"

Something seemed to choke Ludlow. "We . . . You said we?—You're going with me?—You don't have to, you know . . ."

"You don't think I would let you go out there alone?—You may be crazy, or it may be the heat, but when you start out into that swamp, I'm going along—even if all we have is just one rifle. If we didn't have anything but clubs, I'd still go along."

Ludlow still choked. "Sam . . . We can hide in the reeds. Tie the light to the boat and one of us shove it from behind, the other in the reeds with the rifle. It's forlorn hope, but we've got to do the best we can with what we've got . . ."

In that moment Sam Rutling knew there were two men in that swamp who had something they could use for courage. Warson, the thin, stooped guide . . . No longer Warson, but still, somehow, a guide. And Frank Ludlow, who had been a dreamy-eyed biologist . . . That there were three did not occur to him.

The black water lapped protestingly at the boat. Around them the air stirred with a soft moaning sound, a ghostly wailing, as it moved anxiously across the dank swampland. There was movement in the night, movement unseen and unfelt. Overhead, thin clouds slipped silently across the stars. There was no moon. There were no shadows. All the world was in shadow.

Foul odors rose from the noisome water where sun heat during all the yesterdays had entered into strange conspiracies, where in some long gone yesterday, sun heat had stirred the elements of protoplasm into life, where a vast, hovering spirit worked toward some dim purpose, worked callously.

Rutling was thinking of Her as he helped send the boat forward. Wonderingly . . . Two men against a purpose. To what eventual end? Even if they won, tomorrow or tomorrow or tomorrow . . . in some tomorrow she would move again, and those of her creatures which were side-tracked would perish. The whole history of biology was the history of an emergent species. The dinosaurs had ruled the earth, and the dinosaurs had gone. Now they were fossil bones found in wastelands, and man, emergent in his turn, ruled where they had fought in their day. But what of tomorrow?

In front of him Ludlow put out the light. Again the boat moved forward, slower now, for there was darkness everywhere.

Ludlow's whisper came hauntingly to him. "Make no noise now. We are very near."

The paddles sucked silently at the black water. And all that Rutling heard was the pound of his beating heart.

Ludlow guided the boat to a dead snag rising from a clump of reeds. "Over there," he wispered. "Less than an hundred yards . . ."

All Rutling could see was blackness over there. There was no movement. There was no suggestion of movement. There was silence.

"You take your choice, Sam—to stay here with the rifle, behind this snag—or to wade behind the boat, shoving it forward toward the island, the light tied to its bow . . ."

Rutling made his choice. He could not see that it mattered. He slid from the boat. There were six inches of water under his feet and then there was a gummy mud that made a soft sucking sound as he moved forward. It was fiendish business—moving in the dark in a tropic swamp. You never knew when fangs would reach toward you. He stood behind the tree, slipped cartridges into the magazine of the heavy rifle—Warson's gun. He clicked the final cartridge into the chamber.

Ludlow's whisper came out of the night. "The light is tied in place. I'll turn it on when I'm close enough . . . You start shooting then. Keep on shooting until nothing moves on that island . . ." The whisper faded away, then came back with a choked sigh. "And good luck, Sam . . ."

"Good luck, Frank." He heard the swirl of a paddle as the boat moved away, and his mind kept repeating "Good luck . . . Good luck . . . Good luck . . ." kept on repeating the words while an eternity passed away and another started, while he held his hand on his left breast, trying to slow the racing of his heart.

With a suddeness that was startling, there was light over the waters, light that was momentarily blinding. Then his eyes adjusted to the light.

It was a low island. There was a huddle in the center of that barren expanse, a huddle that looked like pumpkins piled carelessly together. Then there was movement, slow and sluggish, and the light came back to him from the eyes in the pile of pumpkins, eyes opening in slowly turning heads.

He did not wait. But he took all the time he needed. The gun rested on the side of the tree. He knelt on a tangle of slippery roots.

He saw a pair of eyes through the tiny peep-sight.

Unless they could turn bullets, there would be one casuality.

Thunder rolled over the swamp, thunder from Warson's gun, and a pair of eyes blinked out with sickening suddenness. Rutling yanked the lever that fed cartridges into the chamber. There was a second clap of thunder.

It was odd that they should move so slowly. He could not understand. They were sluggish, they were half awake, and it seemed they could not awaken all the way. Vaguely, the flashing wonder came—Where was She now? She should help her creatures, rouse them to wakefulness. He half expected to hear the pulse of powerful wings in the night, to see the swoop of a vast, protecting spirit, moving to shelter behind her wings her last experiment in survival . . .

But there was no movement of split air, no swoop of hovering spirit. There was only the thunder of Warson's gun, in the night taking vengence for the death of its owner.

They were so sluggish. They *did* look like green pumpkins. There were horns on their heads. The heads turned wildly, seeking in the night the source of death. Or did they know about death? They saw the light, they turned toward the light turned slowly—and Rutling prayed for Ludlow behind the boat, hoped that Ludlow would be out of sight in the water. From the horns a blue radiance sprang—sprang and fizzled out in the air. . . .

The rifle was hot in his hands, and he was plugging fresh shells into the magazine, cursing at the clumsiness of his fingers. Then the gun roared again, whooped the thunder of its death from dead snag to barren island, and the scream of slugs of lead ended in explosive thumps against soft bodies . . .

There were three left . . . At that moment Rutling thought first of winning this fight. He had thought only to do the best he could, and he could not understand why they were winning, but he dared think that perhaps the fight might be won. The three were waddling about the island, there was a pulse of dim-far-heard wailing in the air, a weeping, perhaps a call to Her . . .

From the horns bolts of blue radiance sprang as the three concentrated on the light that was revealing them, but the radiance fizzled out in air, and Warson's rifle spoke three times, and the slugs from it did not fizzle out . . .

Rutling knew he held a hot gun in his hands, knew that the thunder over the swamp was washing back to him in vanishing echoes. He stood stupidly, still behind the tree, and the light moved toward him. And Ludlow was there with the boat, a silent

Ludlow.

"What . . . What?"

They were on the island, Rutling still carrying the gun and trying to understand, his eyes going from battered pumpkin to battered pumpkin, hulls where life had been but had gone.

Ludlow nudged with his foot a battered, broken, pumpkin-like object. "Why did their radiations fail?—I don't know—I think—remember we found them just at sunset, and they burned Warson to ashes. They took their energy from the sunlight, but after that, darkness came, and they couldn't recharge their weakened batteries until day came . . . That must be the explanation . . . She . . . She hadn't given them large enough storage reservoirs . . ."

"Yes," Rutling slowly answered. "That must be it. But I was thinking . . ." The words faltered, then came again with a sudden rush. "I was thinking, wondering . . . if perhaps there are not others, somewhere here. These swamps are so vast . . ." The words faltered again.

Ludlow took a long time about answering. "We'll never know—you and I. Perhaps some great-great-grandson of ours will find out—too late. You can be sure of one thing—if man is on a sidetrack, if he is an emergent offshoot doomed to extinction with the dinosaurs—She will see that that doom is carried out to the last degree, to the death of the last faltering man . . . Tonight, here in this pesthole, two men defeated one of her experiments. That should prove something . . . but what it proves is only her oldest law: emerge or die . . ."

"Yes . . . But what if that law is stated this way: Emerge *and* die; which is what so many forms have done . . . What then?"

Ludlow did not answer. Seemingly he had not heard. But he must have heard, for he shook his head.

Over the swampland there was a vast silence, as if all the world waited for the answer to that question . . . Silence, and the rank odor of stagnant waters, where tomorrow the sunheat would come again . . .

EYE TO EYE (Continued from page 2)

fan-author, William Carter Fellows, with his unusual, *Bridsby's Hoax*, and Walter Liebscher with his hilarious piece, *Blotto!* Walt's article, more aptly termed, essay, proved so popular that we will present more material of this type in the near future.

In third place, believe it or not, there was another tri-tie! Bob Tucker, with his, *The Ladies—You Bless Them!*, placed closely beside STARDUST'S all-fan department, *MEET THE FAN*, and Harry Warner Jr., with his unusual article on fan fiction. The rest of the material followed very closely, with special mention going to Paul Startzman and his poem, *Ghost World*.

Next month we will present three principal features. Continuing his popular appearances in STARDUST, Robert Moore Williams is back with a gripping story. *The Light That Never Was* is the story of a group of men who sought the age old secrets of the Universe. They sought . . . and they found. But as they learned, they were not the only seekers . . . there were others, others who sought for a far greater reason. And then these men had to make a choice, a choice which meant the destruction or preservation of the entire Universe! But it was no easy choice . . .

As was scheduled for this issue, but which unfortunately, due to last minute changes was postponed, comes J. Harvey Haggard with his gripping story of the starways, *Redemption!* This is the story of a terrible doom which threatened a terrestrial colony on Eros, and how a lone spaceship was thrown into the balance. There was a means of saving the Earth colony on the tiny satellite, but it was a great price, and even then was doubtful of success. Read this thrilling story of life in the spaceways between worlds, we know you will like it!

Also in the next issue, postponed because of unforseen circumstances, is Neil R. Jones off-trail article dealing with the story of his entire published works. Mr. Jones has long been a favorite with fantasy readers through out the world, but few of his admirers know that his stories have been written in a definite pattern. To learn the truth behind the stories of Neil R. Jones, watch for the next issue of STARDUST!

Well, it comes time once again to close the Editorial notebook for another issue. We'll be back however next month with more ratings, forecasts, discussions, etc. And in the meantime, support STARDUST wholeheartedly by standing beside me shoulder to shoulder, and I'll see you in this column every month, EYE TO EYE! . . .

being told so—because at least it proves people think enough of me to inform me of my faults). Proof of this is evidenced by the experience of Mark Reinsberg, who paced Hamling in the popularity poll conducted by the fans, in 8th place. He had the temerity to write an article in defense of Palmer. Next poll failed to list his name. The fans voted him right out of the running, out of the picture, and so far as his future popularity is concerned, right out of fandom.

Approximately 99% of those "impersonal" critics have never met me. Never had any contact with me. Never heard of the '20's and the early '30 in which fandom really flowered. They are assuredly authorities.

Fan letters poured into this office praising the first A. R. Steber story. More poured in praising the second. Then the awful truth was revealed. It is only coincidence that within five days, the letters did an about face to the extent of 100% with the exception of those letters from readers who are *not* fans, but just readers?

Yet, in spite of it all, a Steber story has yet to be written which does not capture first place for the issue in which it runs, according to a complete poll of letters received, *including* the "impartial" ones.

Our story titles have been given ceremonial acid annointment. Yes, they are simple, they are not too original, and they reveal what the story is about. I am afraid I can't imagine what a story titled: "Xnix-4 Plus Quintessence" would be about, and I would hardly be stirred to sufficient interest to read the story to find out. It is, to put it simply and plainly, gibberish. I don't like titles like that. It's plain silly, and I don't believe I ought to use them. So when a story comes through with such a title, I change it.

Astounding leads the field. Certainly. Who said it didn't? But Amazing isn't in Astounding's field. Astounding publishes a vastly different type of story, with a vastly different handling. I even admit that sometimes I read a story in Astounding with keen enjoyment, because I too, was once only a fan, and still like to go through a bit of mental calisthenics.

Why should Amazing invade Astounding's field? The result would be two identical magazines. The result would be cutting our respective circulations by half. We'd simply divide readers. Campbell would be a fool to imitate me. Thank God we are individualistic enough to stick by our tenets.

Our circulation? Both of us is greater than the other, but I lead. Campbell says the same, so take your pick. Anyway, what business is it of yours?

And now, in closing, I want to go on record, not only for all I have said in the foregoing, which is said *as a fan*, but for the following statements: I am *still* a science fiction fan and always will be. I love science fiction. I think I am doing a creditable job of editing a science fiction magazine. I love to write. I *do* write. And I have pen names that allow me to express my versatility. I do Steber stories for Amazing entirely gratis, simply for the love of seeing my stuff in print.

I am not writing this in animosity against fans, but because some of you have asked me to quit sitting back and grinning like a Cheshire cat, and letting my opposition hold full sway. I like debate. I respect my fellow debaters. I think this is a grand debate. It's this sort of thing that makes us fans.

I have even taken sly pokes at myself under those awful pen names, which gave all the fans a hearty chuckle.

But I have a personal characteristic which makes me unable to take life very seriously. I don't take science fiction seriously. I try to keep it alive, vital, interesting; to keep it from getting stereotyped, stodgy, dead. I have my Hector Squinches, my Percival Piffs, my Oscar Doolittles, my talking horses, my cartoons, and my little jokes (like the A. R. Steber biography).

And I'll bet all of you have gotten a few laughs along with me. Anyway, you gave Hector Squinch the most rousing welcome I've ever seen a humor yarn get. And you've done one thing more—you've brought a new era into science fiction, the era you have *pleaded* for for years, if you'll remember—humor.

Which ought to please Hugo Gernsback immensely, because he was the first to present humor in science fiction. Can it be that the old master was wrong? Heck no, and you know it too.

And dammit, I think that's all. Except that I'm at your service at the convention and anything I can do . . .

Oh yeah, one more thing. We've got some prefectly elegant yarns coming up in FA and AS. Real classics, if I ever saw 'em. Wow, will you go for them! Boy-oh-boy-oh-boy!

Meet The Fan . . .

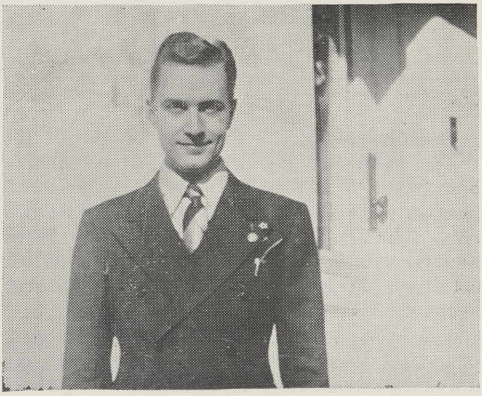
As a youngster, our hero had the usual Parental Problems. Mother and Father disapproved so much reading, so little exercise; and once the holder of what is believed to be the world's most multifaceted and extensive collection of scientifictiana had to dispose of an "embryonicollection" (a favorite pastime of Ackerman's is telescoping words into weird and wond'rous combinations) because it was "cluttering up the closet" (about 50 mags). Fifty pro's, today, is but the accumulation of about 5 months (not to mention fanmags, books, original illustration, stills, excerpts, mss. and any other form in which fantasy may exist)—and this has been going on for 14 years, now! Small wonder the "J" has 2 dens too dense for comfort—and a garage annex for overflow!

The initial once stood for James, a fact Ackerman prefers to have forgotten, signing his name without a period. This is in line with ideas he practices of foneticizing and abbreviating English into a streamlined spelling variously known as Simplifyd, Ackermanese, and 4SJargon. "4SJ" is his "numeral-name," one of many familiar or pseudo names by which he is known, such as Jack Erman, Weaver Wright, Claire Voyant and the Esperanto Fojak and Erdstelulov.

"Odd J" does not drink, dance, smoke, swear, gamble or attend church. Is sexmaniac second only to Henry Kuttner. And a congenial idiot. Likes to kid, pun, whistle, write fan article and make magazines.

Likes stf better than fantasy fiction and f.f. more than weird fiction and disapproves anti-science fiction. Reads *nothing but* imaginative fiction, thus branding him in the eyes of all sane individuals as a scientifictionut. Absorbs other ideas thru the medium of the movies, having seen as high as 356 films in a year. In pictures prefers mysteries, musicomedies and modernity; men: Herbert Marshall, Charles Boyer, Bing Crosby, Claude Raines, Conrad Veidt and Raymond Massey; women: Jean Arthur, Alice Faye, Hedy Lamarr, Priscilla Lane. How about his old flame, Marlene Dietrich? Ah, but she's an angel!

While not a woman-hater, "Wacky-Acky" is a confirmed bachelor, claiming he is "wedded to his work"—fandom. Read his first stf in 1926 (October Amazing) at the age of 10, first letter was the first letter published in the first Science Wonder Quarterly and started with the phrase which has since become



FORREST J ACKERMAN

time-honored: "Although I am only twelve years old, . . . " Founded Boys Scientifiction Club in 1931; co-creator and co-editor with Glasser, Schwartz and Weisinger of the first true fanmag, *The Time Traveller* ('32); part publisher and Scientifilm Editor of Fantasy Magazine; First Class Active Honorary Member Number One the International Science Fiction League under the aegis of Chas. D. Hornig; collaboration with Francis Flagg, "Earth's Lucky Day," published in April 1936 Wonder Stories; "Nymph of Darkness" with Catharine Moore reprinted in Weird Tales December 1939.

Member Quill & Scroll, the International Honor Society of High School Journalists; and California Scholarship Federation. Majored in English with a straight 'A' grading for four years. Entered University of California at 16. Has studied French and German; speaks and reads and writes "universalanguage Esperanto competently. Is Hollywood Delegate of *Internacia Esperanto-Lingo.*

Has Civil Service rating as Senior Typist; has worked for Government as a time-keeper; an oil company as a statistician; and at the time of writing is Hollywood representative of the Players Directory and Superintendant in Charge of Varityping of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

His favorite artists are Paul, Dold, Finlay and Bok; authors: Keller, deCamp, Heinlein and Schachner; pro's: Astounding, Famous Fantastic Mysteries, Astounding and Unknown; fanmags: Spaceways, Golden Atom, Pluto, Voice of the Imagi-nation; fans: Warner, Tucker, Reinsberg and Morojo; stories:

(Continued on next page)

REMINISCENCE

By DALE TARR

"Besides being the first school day of the year," Professor Reinhart Robertson said to his class, "it is also the twenty-eighth anniversary of a little magazine that made history. That is, it *would* be the twenty-eighth anniversary if the magazine still existed. It collapsed in nineteen forty-five, just three years after its birth."

Sensing that one of Robertson's well-liked anecdotes was on the verge of being told, the class settled back comfortably, forgetting studies, whisperings and other less lawful means of amusement.

"Temporarily dropping the fascinating subject of two of the best-loved works of science fiction in English literature, The Weinbaum *Black Flame* duo and Gold's story, *A Matter of Form*, let's step back to nineteen forty-two. At that time science fiction was just emerging from its pulp popularity into classic recognition. Movies plays and whatnot. A common bond among a certain type of reader caused them to call themselves fans, and between putting out their own magazine, having world conventions and the like, they became a powerful force in science fiction's development. In nineteen forty-two when there were exactly 197 fan mags being issued monthly and biweekly and two being issued weekly, a well-known group of fans from one of the large cities of the central section of the U. S. struck upon the idea of putting out a slick paper magazine to be called 'Digest Of Fandom' and to consist only of articles, stories, poetry, etc., culled from the various mags over the world and therefore enabling more fans to reach more good fan literature.

The new magazine was a whirlwind success and with its third issue was printing one hundred pages of selected fan material. Digest of Fandom became the *thing to buy* in the fan field. Its circulation jumped to ten thousand in a year and at the end of three months of the second year its circulation was fifteen thousand. At this time it was noticed by the readers that Digest of Fandom only carried 75 pages. Another four months and it was down to fifty. The ex-fan mags had dropped from 199 to 75, explanation for this was that the number of fording less material. In nineteen forty-five, Digest of Fandom suspended publication for two months due to insufficient material.

Then it appeared as an invalid semi-pro which was soon eliminated by the too-stiff competition of a similar magazine published in Chicago. At the time of its suspension of publication, the fan world in general had become aware of an amazing fact. There were no more fan mags being issued. Why should a fan buy an ordinary magazine with a great percentage of rubbish when he could use only a quarter to purchase an issue of the Digest which contained the cream of the entire field!

The Digest had, in other words, caused its own death, by feeding too well upon its host."

Robertson sighed deeply, as though from the depths of bittersweet memory. He was shocked back to reality by the question of a student.

"Who edited the magazine, sir?"

Robertson's face grew very red. "I did . . . . "

* * *

MEET THE FAN (Continued from page 25)

"Odd John," "Mastermind of Mars," "Black Flame," "The Diminishing Draft" (and a thousand others like Cummings' "Thoughtgirl" of 20 years ago, "The Nth Man," "Second Swarm" "Star-Begotten," "A Voice Across the Years" —but don't get him started!); scientifilms: "Things to Come," " Metropolis," "High Treason," "The Invisible Man"; ordinary films: "Fury," "Private Worlds." "Christopher Strong," "History is Made at Night"; music: "Star Dust," "Rhapsody in Blue," "I Surrender, Dear," "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," "Sophisticated Lady," "Deep Purple," "Sonny Boy." Favorite color is green; flower, carnation; scent, pine; flavor, chocolate (lime or spearmint—it's difficult to determine).

The Efjay also has: a collection of 6,000 stamps; 500 phonograph records; and an alphabetical assortment of hundreds of film-players' pictures.

Tag-ends: Is a native Californian (Angeleño); 24 years old, 6 feet one, brown hair, blue eyes (near sighted), fair-complected. Materialist. Futurian. Introduced the abbreviation "stf." to scientifiction; coined "Chicon," "Nycon" and "Philco;" popularized the nicknaming of fanmags ("Nell," "Micky," "Lylda," "Dusty," etc.) Wore first "futuristicostume." Member FAPA, American Rocket Society, LASFS (Honorary), etc. Ambition is to die an "actifan" . . .

father's industry—steel, iron. I want to show you that iron is the cruel master of mankind, and that it must be destroyed!"

She shrank from the hard, fanatical ring of his tones.

"Peter," she whispered apprehensively, "what are you going to do?"

His shaggy dark head jerked at the cabin door.

"Come in here, and I'll show you."

She stood still, her blue eyes watching him in defensive wonder.

"Remember yourself, Pete," she begged. "You were badly hurt. In the hospital, you were out of your head for weeks. But the doctors said you were all right again. You've got to come out of it. Forget your bitterness. The accident couldn't be—"

"Accident!" His voice was a savage rasp. "It wasn't an accident, Jean, that killed my mother. It was iron. Look at my life—let me tell you what iron has done to me!"

His voice sank into black depths of hate.

"My father was a laborer in the Minturn steel mills," he said. "He was not a strong man. He used to come home exhausted by the work. Iron drained the life out of him.

"Sometimes there was no work—because the iron industry was greater than men. Then he lay about the house, getting shabby and cross and despondent, while we lived up the few dollars my mother had saved. Or he drank, and stayed away from home, miserable and ashamed—because iron had beaten him, crushed him.

"Iron finally killed him. Hideously. I saw his body, after he had been splashed with liquid steel.

"I was nine years old, then. My mother had his compensation—the price that iron paid for his life. And she set up a little eating place for the men. "Ma Garrick's," they called it.

"She found money, somehow, to keep me in high school and college. 'Study hard, Pete,' she used to tell me. 'Learn things, and get on top. Your Pa was a slave to iron. And you will be. But you can slave with your brains and not with your hands. You can live better than your Pa did, and die a civilized death.

"'But you'll always be a slave to iron, Pete.'

"She used to laugh, in a secret, bitter way she had. 'We're all slaves to iron, Pete,' she would tell me. 'You might think that Joseph Minturn isn't, when he owns the mills. But when times were bad, I've had him stop for a cup of coffee in the middle of the night, white-faced and worried about ore-leases and strikers and markets and competition. He's a puppet, just like the rest of us—on iron strings.'"

Peter Garrick's dark eyes looked past the girl's white hat, past the straggling cabbage palms and the dazzling beach, over the flat, illimitable sea.

"I worked hard," he said, "for her. I wanted to set her free from the tyranny of iron. I won a scholarship; I came back to work in your father's research department, and after a while I was head of it.

His grim face smiled a little.

"I remember how proud she was, when I told her that I was working on a ray that would carry electricity thousands of miles without a wire. She said, 'Doctor Pete—it's grand to call a son of mine Doctor—you've done wonderful things.'

"Then she shook her head. 'But don't think, Pete, that anything you ever do will set you free. Your invention will just make iron a stronger, harder master. Still men will sweat and die in the mines and the mills to make iron machines. And toil to own them. And die under them.

"'Men won't be happier. But iron will be a mightier master."

Peter Garrick's hollow dark eyes looked back at the girl, and lit again faintly with dim-remembered joy.

"It was that day, Jean, that I told her about you—that we were to be married as soon as the power beam was worked out. That pleased her mightily. She said, "Miss Jean's a real lady, Pete—not to care that your father worked in her father's mill. I'm proud of her for you—of both both of you, my son.

"'The two of you will always be slaves to iron; but I hope you may be reasonably happy slaves.'"

The face beneath the white hat lifted, bright with a painful eagerness.

"We were happy, Pete," said Jean Minturn. "And we could be again."

Peter Garrick seemed unconscious of the interruption.

"My mother was interested in my work," he went on. "She used to come down to the shops, every few days, to see what I was doing. When she saw the trial heliocopter, powered by the transmission beam, she wanted to go up with me.

"I wouldn't let her go, of course, until the preliminary trials were complete. Then I thought it was perfectly safe. I was taking up the machine, and she got in with me. I hadn't the heart to make her get out—she was so proud and happy.

"You know what happened. The beam apparatus worked perfectly at first, as it had always done. We climbed to two hundred feet, and drifted over the testing field. Then the grid burned out in the oscillation power valve—a consequence of earth-induction; I should have foreseen it."

His lean jaw hardened bitterly.

"But I didn't. We had no warning. We were so low that there was no time to do anything. We had parachutes. But there was no time—" He bit his lip. "Mother was killed, and I should have been."

His dark eyes looked at the girl, moodily.

"You were splendid when I was in the hospital, Jean. But it wasn't you that made me want to live. When I finally decided not to die, it was so that I could avenge my mother—"

Jean Minturn caught his arm again, anxiously.

"I know it was a terrible thing, Peter," she said urgently. "But it was just a dreadful accident. You mustn't blame yourself for it—"

"I don't," he said harshly. "I blame iron. I was just the tool of iron—it was iron that killed my mother." Into his voice had come a ring of terror. "It is an evil metal, Jean. It must have shed the blood of a thousand million men! It is the metal of knives and swords and bayonets and guns."

His laugh had the wild elation of mania.

"But I have found a way to sweep it off the planet!"

Horror widened the girl's gray eyes. They looked briefly, fearfully, back past the dunes and the palms to the plane on the lonely beach, and then again at Peter Garrick.

"Peter!" Her voice was low with dread. "You had—you have a splendid mind, Peter. Try to keep it. You can do wonderful things for the world, and for—us."

His somber eyes regarded her, while he laughed with a short, hoarse sound.

"You think I'm crazy, Jean. Maybe the world would think so. But I'm telling you the truth. Come in here, and I will show you a discovery that will burn all the iron off the face of the earth!"

As she peered into his hollow, burning eyes, her disbelief was replaced by apprehnsion.

"Maybe you can do it, Peter," she said at last. "But you mustn't! Think what it would mean. All our civilization stands on a foundation of iron—"

Peter Garrick shook his shaggy head.

"Iron is the master," his deep voice said. "It did take a happy savage and civilize him as you say—civilize him into a miserable slave, to toil for iron and die by iron! But men shall be free." He seized her arm. "Come on. I'll show you."

"Listen, Peter—"

She hung back unwillingly, trembling with dread. He dragged her roughly into the cabin.

It was one long room. A cot stood in one corner, beside a small iron stove cluttered with cooking utensils. But most of the room was filled with work benches and apparatus. A little gasoline motor-generator stood near a large, cross-shaped vacuum tube, which was surrounded with coils, condensers, batteries, and equipment hidden in black rubberized boxes.

From a little rack on a rough improvised bench, Peter Garrick picked up a tube of heavy clear glass, with a close-fitting ground glass stopper. He gave it to the girl.

"Look at this."

Within the tube she saw a little cluster of pointed triangular crystals, gleaming with a silvery metallic sheen. Her gray eyes studied it. Her forehead wrinkled into a puzzled frown.

"What is it, Peter."

"Iron," he told her. "Living iron. I might term it—just now in suspended animation. I turned off the catalytic ray, and stopped the change, or it should have been dead, now—dust.

"But watch. I'll show you." His hand moved toward the cross-shaped tube. "First I must start the ray. It serves a double purpose. First it acts as a sort of catalytic agent, to facilitate the sub-atomic reactions of the process. While it consumes but a few watts of power, the tube will make the change possible over all the earth.

"In fact, too great an intensity of the ray inhibits the reaction. The second purpose of the tube is to protect the iron parts of my apparatus, which I have arranged near it, where the ray is too strong to permit the process to occur."

He had bent, as he spoke, to start the noisy little gasoline motor. Now he moved switches and rheostats until coils buzzed angrily, and the tall, cross shaped tube lit with a painful, flickering green.

He drew the trembling girl beside him to a bench. Before her terrified eyes, he laid a common iron nail on a clean sheet of glass. Then, carefully, he removed the stopped from the glass tube, and poured out the little crystals a few inches away.

"Watch."

At the instant they came from the tube, the argent crystals changed. They shone with a clear rosy light that deepened at

their spear-like points to hot scarlet. They moved, grew longer. They budded; new tiny lances thrust from them.

"They're changing!" Jean whispered. They're alive!"

Garrick said, "But watch the nail."

She saw that the nail, several inches away, was flecked with points of red fire. She saw minute sharp needes push away from it, branch, grow. The process became more rapid. A few moments, and the nail was a cluster of scarlet, glowing crystals.

"Why," she exclaimed, "it's like the other—"

Her voice stopped when she saw that the tangle of crystals was changing. The red light was fading from the needle points. They turned gray, crumbled. A little heap of gray dust was left on the glass.

Peter Garrick's big hand moved abruptly to throw a switch. The angry coils became silent, and the eye-probing flicker died from the cross-shaped tube. The red gleam faded with it from the new crystals. They became silvery again, motionless.

Carefully, with a card, he scraped them up, dropped them in the thick glass tube, replaced the stopper. The little engine made a gasping death-rattle, and stood still.

"Well," said Peter Garrick, "you've seen it—living iron, burning itself to ashes."

He blew contemptuously at the gray dust left on the glass.

"What—" the girl whispered fearfully, "what was it?"

"It is a self-perpetuating sub-atomic process in some ways analagous to life—although little more so, perhaps, than fire is. It feeds on iron. It liberates energy in the radiation with which it propogates itself by affecting other masses of free iron.

"The iron is consumed by a process of atomic disintegration. Only dust is left—an end product of the atomic disruption—dead—utterly useless—"

"You're not—" the girl protested fearfully. "You aren't—"

"Yes," Garrick said grimly, "I'm going to release the crystal life—"

She stared in wide-eyed horror.

"Then all the iron in the world—in automobiles and railroads and airplanes and ships, in buildings and tools and watches and plows— it will all grow and crumble into dust?"

His dark head nodded; his hollow eyes burned with a terrible fervor.

"And men will be freed from iron."

"Freed!" Her voice was high with urgency. "Men will die, Peter—"

He nodded somberly.

"There will be pain and death," he said. "Because iron has made men into weaklings and slaves. Men will perish in their falling buildings, too stupid to escape. They will die because they are too weak and too ignorant to find their own food, their own shelter.

"But men will recover their lost independence. They can build another civilization, free from the cruel despotism of iron. They will find other useful substances, other metals. They will turn to peace instead of war. They will restore that simple happy age that was ended by the curse of iron."

Jean Minturn whirled away from him suddenly, and ran to the door. She paused there, her white face quivering and tense.

"It's a mad thing, Peter," she cried. "And you aren't going to do it! I'm going to send somebody to stop you! For your own sake, Pete, as well—"

Peter Garrick shook his lean shaggy head. A terrible strength rang in his voice.

"No, Jean, I can't be stopped. If all the navy came, the men would find their ships growing into living crystals beneath them, and crumbling to dust. But wait, Jean—" His dark face was wrenched with pain. "You'll be hurt—"

But she was gone. Heedless of his shouts, she ran down across the low dunes, toward her plane waiting on the white beach. He watched her stonily until she had almost reached it. Then he turned abruptly.

"*Now!*" he muttered. "Before she can take off—or she'll be killed—"

With trembling, desperate haste, he labored to crank the little balky engine. It fired at last, and ran with staccato explosions. The cross-shaped tube lit again with its painful green.

Garrick opened the glass tube, and poured the tiny crystals out of it upon the rusty iron stove. He stepped back quickly as they began to grow. Scarlet spears thrust away from it like the blades of some magic plant. In a few minutes it was no longer a stove, but a grotesque, jagged heap of scarlet, crystalline fire.

A sharp pain stabbed at his thigh—the knife in his pocket had turned to needle-pointed crystals. A sharp tinkle as the crystal of the watch on his wrist was burst outward. The tin cooking vessels on the wall turned to crystals, and fell with a jangle like shattered glass. His little hunting rifle, leaning in a corner, fell in gleaming fragments.

The quick deep drumming of an airplane motor made him run out of the cabin. Jean was in the plane. Every atom of iron

destroyed, he knew, was sending out the propagating radiation. Would it stop her plane in time, before the crash would be fatal?

He ran down toward the dunes, shouting:

"Jean, don't take off! You'll be killed—"

Her white arm flashed as she waved him back. The ship roared forward across the hard wet sand. It lifted. It wheeled away across the flat blue expanse of water, flying low.

Garrick watched, open-mouthed. Was there some failure. Did the catalytic radiation not reach the plane in sufficient intensity? No, that was impossible, he knew; they must cover the whole planet. Then the propagating rays—would those from the stove be adequate? Or—

The thundering motor caught, stopped with a loud explosion. His anxious eyes glimpsed scarlet crystals stabbing from the doomed machine. It sagged toward the water, the alloys of its hull and wings still intact when the steel of the engine had been destroyed.

Clutching at his throat, Garrick watched the crash. The plane fell in shallow water, crumpled. The fuselage was half submerged. One broken wing was thrust up like an arm lifted in a signal of distress.

Jean—could she have survived—

Crash!

He started at the unexpected sound from behind him. For a moment he looked back, to see that the cabin had collapsed. The nails, of course! How many millions had died, throughout the world, as other buildings fell? He had not thought of that.

But in a moment he was running again. It was Jean who mattered now. He crossed the beach, waded out over the sandy bottom, toward the wreck. His heavy shoes came apart on his feet. Their hob-nails had been iron. He stopped to tear off the useless uppers. Rocks and shells were painful to his tender feet, but, splashing on, he ignored the pain.

Out beyond him, the black triangle of a shark's fin cut the milky surface. It was yet far out, but it might—And there were barracuda in these waters, their razor sharp teeth far more dangerous. If he had a gun, even a knife—

He bit his lip. No man would ever again have the protection of a steel barreled gun, even of a good knife—

He went on, splashing, swimming when the water was too deep to wade. He came to the plane, clambered over the fuselage.

"Jean!" Panic edged his voice. "Jean, do you hear?"

There was no answer. The door was stuck. If he only had a knife, to cut his way into the half-submerged fuselage. Tearing at the wreckage, he cut his bare hands. At last the door came open. He saw the motionless form, touched it.

He gasped a grateful sigh.

Her head was above the water. She was living. He could feel the faint pulsation in her wrist. Her body moved limply when he tugged at it. He saw the ugly bleeding wound upon her temple, where it had struck something. The white hat was gone, her brown hair clotted with red.

His first frantic efforts failed to revive her. He dragged her inert body out of the wreckage, swam and waded with it back to the shore. At last, with his lungs heaving for breath, he staggered with her up across the beach, and laid her in the shadow of a palm.

She was conscious, then, for a little time.

"Water," her voice came faintly through bloodless lips. "Oh, Pete, I feel so awful. Please—a drink—"

The pipes and the iron tank of the little water system had been destroyed. Pushing his way into the jungle, to the little spring that had fed the reservoir, Peter Garrick wondered blankly how many millions now must perish of thirst, for want of iron.

The rusty tin-can cup at the spring had crumbled away. He searched and at last found a broken cocoanut shell, and brought water in that.

The girl lifted her head weakly to rinse the brine from her mouth, and sip. Her blood-streaked face was rigid, sweat-beaded with agony.

"My head, Pete," she murmured. "It hurts so awfully! Can't you get me a doctor?"

"But if I leave you—"

"You must, Pete! My head hurts so—"

"I'll try—"

Numb with the despair of a slow, sickening realization, he ran down the beach, to the white-painted skiff turned bottom-up over the little outboard motor. It was a frail craft, to meet miles of sea—

When he tried to right the boat, the gunwhale came away in his hand. The nails had been iron. And all the steel parts of the motor had fallen to dust.

He stood up, his face haggard and dull with despair.

Could he signal? Perhaps build a radio transmitter from his apparatus in the cabin? Fingernails cut into his quivering palms. Even if he could, there was no radio set working anywhere, to pick up his message. Every iron part, every magnet in headphone and speaker, had been destroyed.

Teeth sunk savagely into his lip, he stumbled back to the girl. At first he thought her unconscious again. But she opened her sick gray eyes, whispered:

"Pete—the doctor—"

"No," he said bitterly. "Without iron, I have no way to go or send a message. Even if I could get word to a doctor, there would be no way for him to come."

His eyes were shadowed with a mounting, terrified realization.

"The doctors that are left alive must have plenty of patients close at hand," he muttered. "But they can't do much." Agony twisted his face. "Because I've destroyed their equipment. There's no iron in the world, no surgical steel. They can't give an easing hypo, or sew up a wound."

His trembling hands knotted.

"I was wrong, Jean. Dreadfully, insanely wrong! I have murdered you—murdered civilization. I blamed iron for the pain my own selfishness brought. Iron has never been the master—now I see that; it is just the servant of the good and the evil in man. And there is far more good than evil, in man and in iron. I see that now—my selfishness had made me so blind."

His thin lips twitched.

"It's too late, now, to do anything. But please forgive me, Jean. Say you will forgive me!"

He bent above her white, agonized face. Her pale lips whispered:

"Oh, Pete—"

But his voice cut in, harsh with self-accusation.

Don't forgive me! I mustn't ask you. That is selfishness. There is no forgiveness for what I have done—"

A distant thrumming lifted his head; his eye caught a remote fleck far over the sea. An airplane? That was impossible, when iron had been swept from the earth. But there it was.

"A plane, Jean!" he cried exultantly. "I don't know how—"

"Must be Dad," she whispered. "He knew where I—"

Garrick ran down across the beach. He tore off his shirt, waved it.

An amphibian, the plane landed on the smooth sea, came skipping toward the beach, and rolled up on the sand. A short man clambered anxiously out. Garrick ran to meet him. It was Joseph Minturn.

"Garrick!" he gasped. "Jean! Is she—Her plane—The crash—"

"She's here." Garrick's head jerked toward the palms. "Hurt. We must get her to a doctor."

"I brought a doctor." The little man thrust his head back into the plane. "Come on, Harley! Work for you."

With the doctor, they started up toward the palms.

"A fishing party on the next island saw the crash," Minturn explained. They radioed the Coast Guard. We picked it up on the yacht at Jacksonville, and I knew it must be Jean—"

Garrick's mouth fell open with wonder.

"Radioed?" His lean face lit with sudden hope. "Then nothing has happened to the world? Iron's all right?"

The little man gave him a puzzled look.

"Iron? Sure, it's been steady all week. Pig was up two points yesterday.—But let's see about Jean."

They watched as the doctor's gleaming instruments probed the scalp wound. He looked up at last with a professional smile.

"Nothing too serious," he said. "Slight concussion, but the skull is intact. She'll be all right."

And Garrick was presently carrying her down to the plane in his arms. She smiled wanly, and whispered:

"Pete, how did it happen they could come? I thought everything of iron was destroyed?"

He looked back at the wreckage of the cabin, and his puzzled frown cleared suddenly.

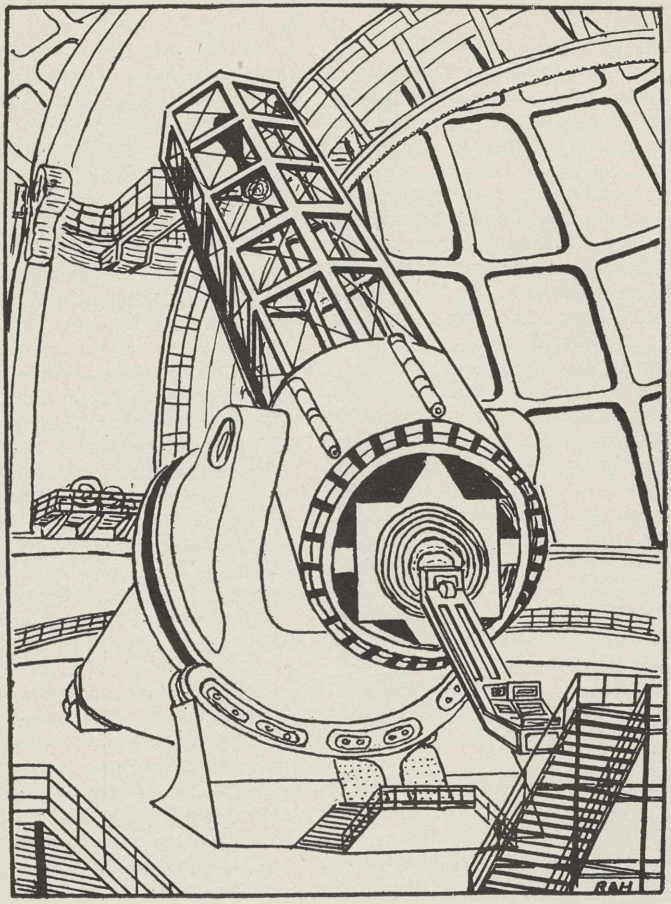
"Oh, I see it!" he exclaimed. "When the nails were destroyed, the roof fell on my apparatus. It must have broken the tube and stopped the catalytic radiation. The crystals couldn't grow without it. And the change didn't spread beyond the island.

"I'm glad, Jean. Now nothing will ever part us."

"No," she whispered. "Our love will be—like iron."

His pale lips parted and he smiled . . .

The End



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