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SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

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E d i t o r i a l



I DON'T know how many of you read AMAZING from front to back, but for our purposes this month I'd like to request that you read Bob Bloch's hard-hitting novel, "Sneak Preview," which starts on P. 50, before you go any further with this editorial.

* * *

OK . . . You back again? Great story, wasn't it? Did you think it was pretty fanciful, a little too imaginative? Well, now hear this: Not too many weeks ago a Hollywood psychoanalyst reported tests that prove the time needed for psychoanalysis can be halved by showing patients powerful movies that depict graphically their inner conflicts!

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But there can be bad effects if the viewer is *not* in analysis—stress, imaginary illness, depression, even juvenile delinquency. Perhaps you'd better take to the couch before you go to your next movie.

But at any rate, that boy Bloch is a pretty good seer, eh? Down, Nostradamus! Down, boy!—NL

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General Webb had a simply magnificent idea for getting ground forces into the enemy's territory despite rockets and missiles and things like that. It was a grand scheme, except for one

MINOR DETAIL

By JACK SHARKEY

THE Secretary of Defense, flown in by special plane from the new Capitol Building in Denver, trotted down the ramp with his right hand outstretched before him.

At the base of the ramp his hand was touched, clutched and hidden by the right hand of General "Smiley" Webb in a hearty parody of a casual handshake. General Webb did everything in a big way, and that included even little things like handshakes.

Retrieving his hand once more, James Whitlow, the Secretary of Defense, smiled nervously with his tiny mouth, and said,

"Well, here I am."

This statement was taken down by a hovering circle of newsreporters, dispatched by wireless and telephone to every

town in the forty-nine states, expanded, contracted, quoted and misquoted, ignored and misconstrued, and then forgotten; all this in a matter of hours.

The nation, hearing it, put aside its wonted trepidations, took an extra tranquilizer or two, and felt secure once more. The government was in good hands.

Leaving the reporters in a disgruntled group beyond the cyclone - fence - and - barbed - wire barriers surrounding Project W, General Webb, seated beside Whitlow in the back of his private car, sighed and folded his arms.

"You'll be amazed!" he chorled, nudging his companion with a bony elbow.

"I—I expect so," said Whitlow, clinging to his brief case

with both hands. It contained, among other things, a volume of mystery stories and a ham sandwich, neatly packaged in aluminum foil. Whitlow didn't want to chance losing it. Not, at least, until he'd eaten the sandwich.

"Of course, you're wondering where I got the idea for my project," said "Smiley" Webb, adding, for the benefit of his driver, "Keep your eyes on the road, Sergeant! The WAC barracks will still be there when you get off duty!"

"Yes, sir," came a hollow grunt from the front seat.

"Weren't you?" asked General Webb, gleaming a toothy smile in Whitlow's direction.

"Weren't I *what?*" Whitlow asked miserably, having lost the thread of their conversation due to a surreptitious glance backward at the WAC barracks in their wake.

"Wondering about the project!" snapped the general.

"Yes. We *all* were," said the Secretary of Defense, appending somewhat tartly, "That's why they *sent* me here."

"To be sure. To be sure." General Webb muttered. He didn't much like tartness in responses, but the Secretary of Defense, unfortunately, was hardly a subordinate, and therefore not subject to the general's choler. Silly little ass! he said to himself. Rather liking the sound of the words—albeit in his mind—he repeated them over again, adding embellishments like "pompous" and "mousy" and

"squirrel-eyed." After three or four such thoughts, the general felt much better.

"I thought the whole thing up, myself," he said, proudly.

"I wish you'd stop being so ambiguous," Whitlow protested in a small voice. "Just what *is* this project? How does it work? Will it help us win the war?"

"*Sssh!*" said the general, jerking a quivering forefinger perpendicular before pursed lips. "Security!"

He closed one eye in a broad wink and wriggled a thumb in the direction of the driver. "He's only cleared for Confidential material," said the general, his tone casting aspersions on the sergeant's patriotism, ancestry and personal hygiene. "This project is, of course, *Top Secret!*" He said the words reverently, his face going all noble and brave. Whitlow half-expected him to remove his hat, but he did not.

They drove onward, then, in silence, until they passed by a large field, in the center of which Whitlow could discern the outlines of an immense bull's-eye, in front of a tall, somewhat rickety khaki-colored reviewing stand, draped in tired bunting.

"What's that?" asked Whitlow, relinquishing his grip on his brief case long enough to point toward the field.

"*Ssssh!*" said "Smiley" Webb. "You'll find out in a matter of hours."

"Many hours?" Whitlow ask-

ed, thinking of the ham sandwich.

General Webb consulted a magnificent platinum timepiece anchored to his thick hairy wrist by a stout leather strap.

"In exactly one hour, thirty-seven minutes, and forty - three-point - oh - oh - nine seconds!" he said, proudly.

"Thank you," Whitlow sighed. "You're certainly running this thing—whatever it is—in an efficient manner."

"Thank *you!*" General Webb glowed. "We like to think so," he added modestly.

Passwords, signs, countersigns, combination-locks and electronic recognition signals were negotiated one by one, until Whitlow was despairing of ever getting into the heart of Project W. He said as much to General Webb, who merely flashed the grin which gave him his nickname, and opened a final door.

For a moment, Whitlow thought he was going deaf. The shrill roar of screeching metal and throbbing dynamos that pounded at his eardrums began to fuddle his mind, until General Webb handed him a small cardboard box—also stamped, like every door and wall in the place, "Top Secret"—in which his trembling fingers located two ordinary rubber earplugs, which he instantly put to good use.

"There she is!" said General Webb, proudly, gesturing over

the railing of the small balcony upon which they stood. "The Whirligig!"

"What?" called Secretary of Defense Whitlow, shaking his head to indicate he hadn't heard a word.

Somewhat piqued, but resigned, General Webb leaned his wide mouth nearly up against Whitlow's small pink plugged ear, and roared the same information at the top of his lungs.

Whitlow, a little stunned by the volume despite the plugs, nodded wearily, to indicate that he'd heard, then asked, in a high, piping voice, "What's it for?"

Webb's eyes bulged in their sockets. "Great heavens, man, can't you *see?*" He gestured down at his creation, his baby, his project, as though it were self-evident what its function was.

Whitlow strained his eyes to divine anything that might give a clue as to just what the government had been pouring money into for the past eight months. All he saw was what appeared to be a sort of ferris-wheel, except that it was revolving in a horizontal plane. The structure was completely enclosed in metal, and was whirling too fast for even the central shaft to be anything but a hazy, silver-blue blur.

"I see it," he shouted, squeakily. "But I don't understand it!"

"Come with me," said General Webb, re-opening the door at their backs. He was just about to step through when, with a

quick blush of mortification, he remembered the "Top Secret" earplugs. Hastily, averting his face lest the other man see his embarrassment, he returned his plugs to their box, and did the same with Whitlow's.

Whitlow was glad when the door closed behind them.

"My office is this way," said Webb, striding off in a stiff military manner.

Whitlow, with a forlorn shrug, could do nothing but clutch his brief case and follow.

"It's this way," General Webb began, once they were seated uncomfortably in his office. From a pocket in his khaki jacket, Webb had produced a big-bowled calabash pipe, and was puffing its noxious gray fumes in all directions while he spoke. "Up until the late fifties, war was a simple thing . . ."

Oh, not the March of Science Speech! said Whitlow to himself. He knew it by heart. It was the talk of the Capital, and the nightmare of military strategists. As the general's voice droned on and on, Whitlow barely listened. The general, Top Secret or no Top Secret, was divulging nothing that wasn't common knowledge from the ruins of Philadelphia to the great Hollywood crater . . .

All at once, weapons had gotten *too* good. That was the whole problem. Wars, no matter what the abilities of the death-dealing guns, cannon, rifles, rockets or whatever, needed one thing on

the battlefield that could not be turned out in a factory: Men.

In order to win a war, a country must be vanquished. In order to vanquish a country, soldiers must be landed. And that was precisely wherein the difficulty lay: landing the soldiers.

Ships were nearly obsolete in this respect. Landing barges could be blown out of the water as fast as they were let down into it.

Paratroops were likewise hopeless. The slow-moving troop-carrying planes daren't even peek above the enemy's horizon without chancing an onslaught of "thinking" rockets that would stay on their trail until they were molten cinders falling into the sea.

So someone invented the supersonic carrier. This was pretty good, allowing the planes to come in high and fast over the enemy's territory, as fast as the land-to-air missiles themselves. The only drawback was that the first men to try parachuting at that speed were battered to confetti by the slipstream of their own carriers. That would not do.

Next, someone thought of the capsules. Each man was packed into a break-proof, shock-proof, water-proof, wind-proof plastic capsule, and ejected safely beyond the slipstream area of the carriers, at which point, each capsule sprouted a silken chute that lowered the enclosed men gently down into range of the enemy's rocket-fire . . .

This plan was scrapped like the others.

And so, things were at a stalemate. There hadn't been a really good skirmish for nearly five years. War was hardly anything but a memory, what with both sides practically omnipotent. Unless troops could be landed, war was downright impossible. And, no one could land troops, so there was no war.

As a matter of fact, Whitlow *liked* the state of affairs. To be Secretary of Defense during a years-long peace was a soft job to top all soft jobs. And Whitlow didn't much like war. He'd rather live peacefully with his mystery stories and ham sandwiches.

But the Capitol, under the relentless lobbying of the munitions interests, was trying to find a way to get a war started.

They *had* tried simply bombing the other countries, but it hadn't worked out too well: the other countries had bombed back.

This plan had been scrapped as too dangerous.

And then, just when all seemed lost, when it looked as though mankind was doomed to eternal peace . . .

Along came General "Smiley" Webb.

"Land troops?" he'd said, confidently, "nothing easier. With the government's cooperation, I can have our troops in any country in the world, safely landed, within the space of one year!"

Congress had voted him the

money unanimously, and off he'd gone to work at Project W. No one knew *quite* what it was about, but the general had seemed so self-assured that—Well, they'd almost forgotten about him until some ambitious clerk, trying to balance at least *part* of the budget, had discovered a monthly expenditure to an obscure base in the southwest totalling some millions of dollars. Perfunctory checking had brought out the fact that "Smiley" Webb had been drawing this money every month, and hadn't as much as mailed in a single progress report.

There'd been swift phone-calls from Denver to Project W, and, General Webb informed them, not only was all the money to be accounted for, but so was all the time and effort: the project was completed, and about to be tested. Would someone like to come down and watch?

Someone would.

And thus it was that James Whitlow, with mystery stories and ham sandwich, had taken the first plane from the Capital . . .

"... when all at once, I thought: Speed! Endurance! *That* is the problem!" said Webb, breaking in on Whitlow's reverie.

"I beg your pardon?" said the Secretary of Defense.

Webb whacked the dottle out of his pipe into a meaty palm, tossed the smoking cinders rather carelessly into a waste-

basket, and leaned forward to confront the other man face to face, their noses almost nudging.

"Why are parachutes out?" he snapped.

"They go too slow," said Whitlow.

"Why do we use parachutes at all?"

"To keep the men from getting killed by the fall."

"Why does a fall kill the men?"

"It— It breaks their bones and stuff."

"Bah!" Webb scoffed.

"Bah?" reiterated Whitlow. "Bah?"

"Certainly bah!" said the general. "All it takes is a little training."

"All *what* takes?" said Whitlow, helplessly.

"Falling, man, falling!" the general boomed. "If a man can fall safely from ten feet— Why not from ten times ten feet!?"

"Because," said Whitlow, "increasing height accelerates the *rate* of falling, and—"

"*Poppycock!*" the general roared.

"Yes, sir," said Whitlow, somewhat cowed.

"Muscle-building. That's the secret. Endurance. Stress. Strain. Tension."

"If— If you say so . . ." said Whitlow, slumping lower and lower in his chair as the general's massive form leaned precariously over him. "But—"

"Of *course* you are puzzled,"

said the general, suddenly chummy. "Anyone would be. Until they realized the use to which I've put the Whirligig!"

"Yes. Yes, I suppose so . . ." said Whitlow, thinking longingly of his ham sandwich, and its crunchy, moist green smear of pickle relish.

"The first day—" said General Webb, "it revolved at *one* gravity! They withstood it!"

"What did? Who withstood? When?" asked Whitlow, with much confusion.

"The men!" said the general, irritably. "The men in the Whirligig!"

Whitlow jerked bolt upright. "There are *men* in that thing?" It's not possible, he thought.

"Of course," said Webb, soothingly. "But they're all right. They've been in there for thirty days, whirling around at one gravity more each day. We have constant telephone communication with them. They're all feeling fine, just fine."

"But—" Whitlow said, weakly.

General Webb had him firmly by the arm, and was leading him out of the office. "We must get to the stands, man. Operation Human Bomb in ten minutes."

"Bomb?" Whitlow squeaked, scurrying alongside Webb as the larger man strode down the echoing corridor.

"A euphemism, of course," said Webb. "Because they will fall much like a bomb does. But they will not explode! No, they will land, rifles in hand, ready

to take over the enemy territory."

"Without parachutes?" Whitlow marveled.

"Exactly," said the general, leading the way out into the blinding desert sunlight. "You see," he remarked, as they strolled toward the heat-shimmering outlines of the reviewing stand, its bunting hanging limp and faded in the dry, breezeless air, "it's really so simple I'm astonished the enemy didn't think of it first. Though, of course, I'm glad they didn't— Ha! ha!" He oozed self-appreciation.

"Ha ha," repeated Whitlow, with little enthusiasm.

"When one is whirled at one gravity, you see, the wall—the outside rim—of the Whirligig, becomes the floor for the men inside. Each day, they have spent up to ten hours doing nothing but deep knee-bends, and eating high protein foods. Their legs will be able to withstand *any* force of landing. If they can do deep knee-bends at thirty gravities—during which, of course, each of them weighed nearly three tons—they can jump from any height and survive. Good, huh?"

Whitlow was worried as they clambered up into the stands. There seemed to be no one about but the two of them.

"Who else is coming?" he asked.

"Just us," said Webb. "I'm the only one with a clearance high enough to watch this. You're

only here because you're *my* guest."

"But—" said Whitlow, observing the heat-baked wide-open spaces extending on all sides of the reviewing stand and bull's-eye, "the men on this base can surely watch from almost anywhere not beyond the horizon."

"They'd *better* not!" was the general's only comment.

"Well," said Whitlow, "what happens now?"

"The men that were in that Whirligig have—since you and I went to my office to chat—been transported to the airfield, from which point they were taken aloft—" he consulted his watch, "five minutes, and fifty-five-point-six seconds ago."

"And?" asked Whitlow, casually unbuckling the straps of his brief case and slipping out his sandwich.

"The plane will be within bomb vector of this target in just ten seconds!" said Webb, confidently.

Whitlow listened, for the next nine seconds, then, right on schedule, he heard the muted droning of a plane, high up. Webb joggled him with an elbow. "They'll fall faster than any known enemy weapon can track them," he said, smugly.

"That's fortunate," said Whitlow, munching desultorily at his sandwich. "Bud dere's wud thig budduhs bee."

"Hmmf?" asked the general.

Whitlow swallowed hastily. "I say, there's one thing bothers me."

"What's that?" asked the general.

"Well, it's just that gravity is centripetal, you know, and the Whirligig is centrifugal. I wondered if it might not make some sort of difference?"

"Bah!" said General Webb. "Just a minor detail."

"If you say so," Whitlow shrugged.

"There they come!" shouted the general, jumping to his feet.

Whitlow, despite his misgivings, found that he, too, was on his feet, staring skyward at the tiny dots that were detaching themselves from the shining bulk of the carrier plane. As he watched, his heart beating madly, the dots grew bigger, and soon, awfully soon, they could be distinguished as man-shaped, too.

"There's— There's something

wrong!" said the general. "What's that they're all shouting? It *should* be 'Geronimo' . . ."

Whitlow listened. "It sounds more like 'Eeeeeyaaaaa,'" he said.

And it was.

The sound grew from a distant mumble to a shrieking roar, and the next thing, each man had landed upon the concrete-and-paint bullseye before the reviewing stand.

Whitlow sighed and re-buckled his brief case.

The general moaned and fainted.

And the men of the Whirligig, all of whom had landed on the target head-first, did nothing, their magnificently-muscled legs waving idly in a sudden gentle gust of desert breeze.

THE END

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THE OBSERVERS

By G. L. VANDENBURG

You can't be too suspicious when security is at stake. When everybody who is after a key military job wears a toupee, it is obviously a bald case of espionage.

A JOB as laboratory technician with the Army Weapons Development Center carried about as much prestige as a bat boy in a World Series.

George Fisher was a laboratory technician.

He was a shy but likeable fellow, a diligent worker and trustworthy. He didn't talk. He was rarely talked to. He had no burning ambition to push himself ahead in the world. Being an assistant to the brains was good enough for him. He had a commendable talent for minding his own business.

In a security job these qualities counted ahead of scientific knowledge.

One day George Fisher turned up dead. The initial shock and concern experienced by his superiors was soon overcome by the coroner's finding. Suicide.

Harry Payne was the Civilian Personnel Director of Fort Dickson. It was his job to find a replacement for George Fisher.

"Miss Conway!" Harry's voice lashed into the intercom.

There was an interminable pause. He cursed under his breath.

Then, "Yes, Mr. Payne?"

"Where the hell were you? Never mind. Bring me the file on George Fisher."

"George Fisher?" Miss Conway was in her favorite state of mind . . . confusion. "But he's dead, isn't he?"

Harry let out a deep anguished groan. "Yes, Miss Conway, he's dead. That's why I want his file. That answer your question?"

"Yes, sir. Be there in a jiffy!"

Harry could tell she was bubbling over with smiles as she

spoke. A few more centuries would pass, he thought, before they manufactured another broad as dumb as Miss Conway.

He stuffed his hands in his pockets and looked out the window. Across the parade ground he could see the Army Weapons Development Center. He had no idea what new bomb they might be working on behind those heavily guarded fences. He didn't care.

He was only concerned with the people who worked there. The rest of Fort Dickson used mostly Civil Service Personnel. But the barricaded security jungle across the parade grounds was more particular about its hired help. A person's record had to be spotless almost from the day of his conception . . . or a person could not even gain entrance.

Harry had never been inside Weapons Development. He had once been to traffic court as a roaring juvenile eighteen years before. That was enough to bar him from even visiting. He realized, though, that the army couldn't afford to take chances.

Hiring new technicians required an arduous screening process. Harry loathed it. He was thankful that the personnel at Weapons Development were highly paid and usually permanent. He never had to hire more than one person a year.

Miss Conway swept into the office and handed Harry the folder.

"Thanks," he muttered.

"Don't mention it, boss."

Harry called after her as she went back toward the reception room.

"Stay by your desk, will you? The government may need you."

A muffled giggle was her only response.

Miss Conway was a civil service employee. She had been Harry's secretary for six months. Like most other civil service personnel, according to Harry's way of thinking she was a tower of inefficiency. His chief annoyance stemmed from the fact that the army had arbitrarily placed her in his office. He had been given no choice in the matter. It was one hell of a way to treat a personnel director, he thought.

He sat at his desk gloomily aware of the headaches he'd have to face in his quest for George Fisher's replacement. He opened the folder and glanced at the vital statistics.

Fisher, George—Age: 40—weight: 160—Height: 5'9"—Eyes: Green—Hair: None—Complexion: Light—Date of Employment: 10/7/58—Date of Departure: 4/12/59—Reason: Suicide—etc., etc. Harry yawned. Statistics bored him.

He turned to a page marked "Qualifications" and started reading. The phrase "Education and experience in nuclear physics required," caught his eye. The requirement was no surprise to him. But whenever he saw it he took a few minutes off to in-

dulge his curiosity. What *was* the big project at Weapons Development? He'd love to know. He wouldn't find out, of course. And the inability to find out naturally gave his imagination the widest latitude. His most persistent theory involved an atomic powered rocket capable of knocking the Russians' manned satellites out of space. The Russians were still ahead of everyone and their latest satellites were heavily armed. As usual they were lording it over the rest of the world. And the rest of the world had not come up with an effective answer to this challenge.

Harry closed the folder. He glanced at a list of technical schools. He would call each of them and ask them to submit a list of lab technicians. He would also look over the field of technicians still left in private enterprise.

The intercom buzzed.

"What is it, Miss Conway?"

"Miss Ralston is here."

"Who is Miss Ralston?"

"She has an appointment with you."

"An appointment!" Harry was baffled. "Who made it?"

"I did. I guess I forgot to tell you."

Harry closed his eyes and counted to ten. "Thank you, Miss Conway. Will you step into my office for a moment?" He tried to control his mounting anger.

She breezed into the office.

"Now, Miss Conway, will you

please tell me who is this Miss Ralston?"

"She operates 'Ralston Personnel Consultants'. I think she wants to talk to you about the replacement for George Fisher. You know, the one who died."

"Yes, yes, I know. And *you* know, Miss Conway, we don't do business through agencies."

"Oh, Miss Ralston doesn't run an agency. She told me. Her business is much more exclusive than that. She handles very highly specialized people. That's the reason why . . ."

"I know. That's why you gave her an appointment with me," said the exasperated personnel director. "Well, you can go right back out and tell her I've cancelled the appointment. This is a security job we're filling and . . ."

Before Harry could utter another syllable his attention was drawn to the doorway. The view to the outer office was blocked by a bundle of curves. The most alluring female bombshell his eyes had ever beheld put everything important out of his mind.

"I didn't realize you were being so inconvenienced, Mr. Payne. I'm terribly sorry." Her eyes drooped. "I can take my business elsewhere." Miss Ralston's voice was just above a half whisper. The words came out warm and intoxicating.

"No, wait! Wait a minute, Miss Ralston." Harry was out of his chair and at the door. He took her arm. "Who said any-

thing about inconvenience? Come in. Come in. That'll be all Miss Conway. Thanks."

The secretary giggled and left. Miss Ralston sat down and lit a cigarette. Harry noticed she was wearing a beige knit suit with a neckline that spoke volumes. Every curve was in the right place. Every movement had another movement all its own.

Harry knew she was bound to talk business and he knew there wasn't much he could do for her in that direction. But at thirty-five, and eligible, he just couldn't let this woman leave his office. Harry Payne was a sucker for a gorgeous face. He knew it and he knew the gorgeous face knew it.

"Tell me, Miss Ralston, when did my secretary arrange this appointment for you?"

"I called yesterday."

Harry arched his eyebrows and smiled. "Yesterday? What prompted you to call me?"

"You're looking for a laboratory technician, aren't you?"

"What gave you that idea?" he asked, not caring in the slightest what gave it to her.

"I make it my business to comb the papers every day, Mr. Payne. I came across the news of George Fisher's suicide and called you. Simple as that."

"You don't waste any time."

She smiled and pursed her lips. "Do you?"

"I try not to."

"I have seven clients who would qualify for the job. I'd appreciate it if you'd see them."

"Well, as a matter of fact, Miss Ralston . . ."

She leaned forward with an inquisitive "Yes?"

Harry cleared his throat. "As a matter of fact I'm not supposed to do business with civilian agencies."

"Mr. Payne," she smiled demurely, "do I look like an agency? Or do I look like a Personnel Consultant?"

Now there was an opening, Harry thought, but it might be best to avoid it. "You're working to get someone a job. It amounts to the same thing."

"I see. Then how do you go about hiring your new personnel?"

"I do the soliciting myself. Sorry, Miss Ralston, but I don't make the rules and regulations."

But the lady was undeterred. She crossed her legs and sank further into the easy chair. Her eyes sparkled at Harry.

"These clients of mine are all top men, Mr. Payne. Why couldn't I just leave you their names? You can still do the soliciting. I'd be happy to forego my regular commission on this job. Call it the value of prestige."

Harry recognized another opening and this time plunged in. "Suppose we talk it over later. There's a place at Fourth Avenue and Woodward called 'Maria's.' Best Italian food in captivity. I'm through at five. What about you?"

She didn't have to say any-

thing. Her eyes told him he would be having an Italian dinner that night. And not alone. She rose and walked in front of his desk.

"I'm so glad we have something in common, Mr. Payne. I can't think well on an empty stomach either."

After walking her to the outer office he came back to his desk. He took a deep breath and loosened his tie. Dreams like Miss Ralston didn't materialize every day. For a first meeting he figured he hadn't fared too badly at all. And if this first date went well he was sure he'd be seeing a lot of this girl.

It did not escape Harry's mind that here was a girl who was in the habit of getting what she wanted. But why not? Her powers of persuasion were Grade-A. They were so good they presented him with one big problem. He had regulations. Army regulations. He couldn't violate them. Miss Ralston, it was obvious, was going to meet him solely for the purpose of getting a client a job. Would he be able to see her again after she knew he had no intention of hiring that client?

The following morning Harry entered the office to find his secretary unusually busy. She was pecking away furiously at the typewriter.

He handed her a sheet of paper and said, "Miss Conway, copy these names and addresses and when they . . ."

"When they come in you'll see them at half-hour intervals." She smiled benignly. "Miss Ralston just called and told me. Pretty smart chick, huh, boss?"

Harry did a slow burn and ambled into his office. Miss Conway was right, of course, and that's what annoyed him. It had been quite a night. He wined and dined her. They did all the bright spots. And, wonder of wonders, on the first date they wound up at Paula Ralston's apartment. She was a captivating hostess, an exquisite dancer and something of a sorceress. After one kiss, an unforgettable one, Harry had agreed to interview her seven clients.

But all this was last night, Harry reminded himself. Today was a different matter. He was in the sanctity of his office now and capable of clearer thinking. Paula Ralston had accomplished the first phase of her mission. The next move was his. *Seeing* the clients, he rationalized, was not violating the regulations. And for the moment it satisfied her.

She certainly was a determined girl. Anyone would think, watching her operate, that a lab technician was a job of world shaking importance. What the hell, he shrugged, if the girl didn't look out for her own interests she wouldn't have a successful business. There's only one way to keep clients happy and that's to keep them busy.

Besides, her maneuvering wasn't going to work anyway. He

just couldn't hire any of them. His problem now was to stall her for a couple of days so he could keep seeing her. In the end he might possibly tell her the army had refused to accept any of them.

He glanced out the window and saw the Weapons Development Center across the parade ground. Business appeared to be going on as usual. Routine. Quiet. Cautious. *High time I start thinking seriously about that replacement*, he thought.

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in."

Miss Conway bounced in. "They've started to arrive. The first one is a mister Thompson."

"Okay, let's get started. Send him in."

Thompson was a small, roundish man in his mid-forties. He remained quite at ease during the interview. Harry began the session in the usual dull manner, formulating his questions from the several sheets of information Mr. Thompson had brought with him.

It wasn't long before Harry detected something unusual about the man. But he couldn't determine what it was. He became more alert, more interested as the interview progressed.

"Where are you from originally, Mr. Thompson?"

"Chicago."

"Oh, yes," he glanced at the written information, "I see you went to the University."

"Yes, sir. My practical experience is documented on the second sheet."

What was it about this guy? He was overly polite but that could hardly be considered strange. His answers were brief, to the point, even curt. That was just a personality trait, Harry supposed. Couldn't condemn a man for that.

"How long did you live in Chicago?"

"Twenty-one years, sir."

"Are you married?"

"No, sir."

He had noted before that Mr. Thompson had a distracting habit of patting his hair. Now he knew why. He was wearing a toupee. Harry wondered if the poor guy was sensitive about it. If he *was* that conscious of it, it might account for his strange attitude.

"Thank you for coming in, Mr. Thompson. I'll submit your papers to Colonel Waters. If he has any further interest in you don't be surprised if you receive a visit from a couple of Intelligence agents. That's routine for this job. I just tell you in advance so you won't worry."

"I understand," he said, rising and checking his toupee once more. "Many thanks to you, sir." He shook Harry's hand and left the room.

Harry glanced at the papers again. Mr. Thompson's background was impressive indeed. There didn't seem to be much question as to his ability. But what a queer duck he was!

The second applicant was a short, wiry man named Chase. Like his predecessor, he was brief and to the point with his answers. He let his qualification papers speak for themselves. He was formal and polite.

Midway through the interview Harry noticed that he too was wearing a toupee. If that wasn't the damndest coincidence! Fortunately Mr. Chase didn't have the annoying habit of patting his head every thirty seconds. Harry guessed he either had a more expensive one or was just endowed with more confidence that it would not slip off.

The interview over, Mr. Chase offered his thanks and strolled out.

Harry had a few moments to himself before Paula's third client arrived. He thought about the first two men. Funny thing about toupees . . . even the most expensive ones could always be detected. He couldn't quite understand why the two men wore them. They were often used by playboys, actors, self-styled over age Romeos, people whose niche in society depends upon their looks. But not scientists or technicians. In fact Harry couldn't remember ever having known one such person who shunned his baldness in this manner. That didn't mean they had no right. But it did seem peculiar as hell.

By the time the third interview was over Harry Payne's curiosity was ablaze. Applicant number three, Mr. Boles, was

not only wearing a toupee but had gone one step further. Just north of his mouth there was a mustache! A good looking mustache, well groomed and shaped, but phoney as a wax banana.

For a moment he thought Paula Ralston might be perpetrating a joke of elaborate proportions. He rejected the idea as fast as it came to him. He didn't know the girl very well yet, but he knew her well enough to know she was strictly business. *She wanted one of these men to get that job.*

He flipped the intercom button for Miss Conway. She might be able to tell him . . . indirectly.

"You wanted me, Mr. Payne?"

"Yes, Miss Conway. The three men who've already been in here . . . have you noticed anything strange about them?"

Her eyebrows merged and spelled perplexity. She pursed her lips and gave the matter the gravest consideration. Then she concluded, "Yes, something very strange."

Harry was hopeful. "What was it?"

"None of them did very much talking. Strictly anti-social types."

Harry groaned, realizing he should have known better. "Thank you, Miss Conway. That's all."

"The fourth guy is waiting outside."

"Let him sit for a couple of minutes, then send him in."

He decided to put the whole matter out of his mind and get

the interviews over as fast as possible. There were other, more serious duties to attend to. The toupee episode was probably nothing more than a crazy coincidence anyway. Strictly an item for Believe-It-Or-Not.

By two o'clock that afternoon the four remaining candidates had come and gone. And Harry Payne sat at his desk in the immediate aftermath questioning his sanity. All seven men wore toupees! It was incredible but true. And now the matter was one of deep and abiding concern to him. There was nothing funny about it. There was a touch of the macabre in it that rendered his flesh cold and weak.

He lit a cigarette and tried to pull his thoughts together. Seven men applying for the same job; seven men with one thing in common; seven men as bald as Doctor Cyclops. Harry had to abandon the notion that sheer coincidence brought these men together. That was too fantastic. They were brought together by design.

Their backgrounds varied in that they had all worked and come from different parts of the country. But those facts were only on paper. It was an odds-on bet they all knew each other. There was even something about the order in which they arrived at the office that indicated a pattern or an over-all plan. Numbers three, five and six had worn false mustaches.

If it was true the seven men were well acquainted then Paula Ralston could undoubtedly give him some answers. Harry had another dinner engagement with her at five o'clock. But this date, he told himself, would be different. *He* was going to be all business until he learned exactly what she was involved in.

He picked up the phone, got an outside line and dialed. Frank Barnes was a private detective. A good one. Harry was sure he could rely on him for a small favor.

A subdued, resonant voice answered on the other end.

"Frank, Harry Payne here."

"Harry! Where you been hiding?"

"I need a favor."

"Only time you ever call me, you ingrate."

"There's a dame called Paula Ralston. Runs a business called Ralston Personnel Consultants. How soon can you get anything on her?"

"How soon do you need it?"

"Today, if possible. You can call me at home. Any hour."

After promising Frank to meet him for lunch one day Harry sank into an easy chair and tried to shake the unnerving effect the seven men had had on him.

Maybe he shouldn't have called Frank. This might be something he should have informed the army about. No. They'd want to know what business he had seeing the seven men in the first place. He didn't have much of an answer for that one.

Driving along Woodward Street toward Fourth Avenue Harry was beset with one nagging question. Why had Paula Ralston never brought any of her clients to see him before? He was the dispenser of over a hundred good jobs that offered high salaries. The answer was just as persistent as the question. *Lab Technician was the only security job he handled.* She was determined that one of her men get that job at any cost.

It wasn't a very pleasant thought. Harry didn't want to believe it. He didn't want to believe that Paula Ralston was going to mean trouble for him. And yet he knew that's exactly what she meant.

She was waiting for him at Maria's. She kissed him as he slipped into the booth beside her. Through four drinks and a six-course dinner he watched her smile. That smile could melt down the door on a bank vault. He noticed how she laughed at all of his wisecracks. When it was her turn to talk she talked about him. She offered a toast to their closer friendship, with special emphasis on the word "closer."

But she did not mention the seven men. That was the smart approach, Harry ventured. She'd save that until she got home and slipped into something more comfortable.

He stood alone in Paula's living room nursing a scotch on the

rocks. The night before he had been too concerned about his progress with this latter-day Aphrodite to give a damn about the place she lived in. He glanced around the room. Every inch reeked of success. The furniture was sleek, modern, exquisitely contoured . . . like its owner. There wasn't much question about it, Paula Ralston made a lot more dough than he did. But how? That was the question.

She came out of the bedroom and mixed herself a drink. She was a living dream in a black lace negligee. Transparent. It figured. A lot of things were beginning to figure.

"Shall I tell you a secret?" she asked.

"I didn't think you had any left." He couldn't take his eyes from the negligee.

"I think Mr. Chase and Mr. Boles are the best of the seven. I think they come closest to what you're looking for." She lifted her glass and clinked it against his.

Harry smiled. He wasn't looking at her anymore. It was more of an education to look through her. She was good. Damn good. She could lull you into believing the Grand Canyon was brimming over with silver dollars, all yours for the taking. It was next to impossible to doubt the sincerity in her face.

"I liked all seven of them," he said. "But since you know them better than I do I'll take your recommendation that Chase and Boles are the best."

She moved closer to him. He could feel the warmth of her body.

"We're making some progress, Harry. We've narrowed the field down to two candidates."

Harry kept her maneuvering. "Paula, I'm still faced with the problem of finding a way around the regulations. I can't hire either one of them until I solve that."

Nothing stopped this girl. Nothing even slowed her down. She moved still closer to him. "There's a way around anything if a man has the right incentive to look for it."

He knew what the right incentive was. He didn't have to go looking for that. He laid his drink down, put his arms around her and kissed her. They walked to the sofa. Paula stayed close to him, the ever thoughtful, loving female companion. She rubbed his back and neck and sprinkled him with soft moist kisses. She never mentioned her clients again. And Harry promised to hire one of them the following day.

He was anxious to get back to his apartment to find out if Frank Barnes had called. As he drove back along Woodward Street he couldn't put Paula out of his mind. He already had her character pegged. But what was she up to? What was her goal? He wasn't doing all this for a lousy commission. The stakes were bigger than that.

In a way it was too bad she

was going to have to settle for less than she bargained for. If her seven clients hadn't been so phoney she might have gotten away with it. But why was it necessary for them to be phoney? Why should a girl as shrewd as Paula send seven men in disguise to see . . .

Disguise! Somehow that word threw a different light on the matter. The men had all been disguised in places where hair should grow. They were *not* bald. There was something abnormal about them. And Harry was ninety percent certain what it was. The answer was incredible. There was still a ten percent margin for error. For Miss Paula Ralston's sake he hoped he was wrong.

Frank Barnes' message was waiting for him at the switchboard in the lobby. The word "urgent" was written on it.

He raced upstairs and picked up the phone. Frank answered on the first ring. He sounded like a man with a gun at his back.

"Harry, what the hell kind of a mess have you gotten yourself into?"

"Why? Something go wrong?"

"You bet your sweet life. An hour after you called me to check on that Ralston dame a guy came into the office and told me to lay off."

Harry was silent. And scared. His answer looked better all the time.

"What did the guy look like?"

"He looked important, Harry."

And he meant business. He had a big bulge in his pocket and he made it very clear I'd be up to my funny bone in hot lead if I relayed any information about this girl to you."

"Frank, was the guy wearing a toupee?"

"A what?"

"A toupee, a hair piece!"

"How the hell should I know. I wasn't interested in his coiffure. He was wearing a black overcoat, he kept his hand on that bulge and he didn't care much for smiling. Harry, you in trouble with this dame?"

"What did you find out about her, Frank?"

"Between the time you called and the time the guy strolled into the office I found out she's only had this Personnel Consultant racket for about three months."

"You didn't learn anything else?"

"After I got warned I decided to wait'll I talked with you."

Harry was silent again. His mind was working.

"Frank, what causes baldness?"

"Baldness! Geez, Harry, you're in a fat mess of trouble and you're worrying about losing your hair?"

"It's important, Frank. I must find out what causes total loss of *all* hair."

The detective grunted. "Well, let's see, there are three or four diseases I know of. Some people claim it's hereditary. Sometimes a deficiency in the genes . . ."

"Okay, Frank, that's enough."
"What do you want me to do about the girl?"

"Just as the man told you. Lay off. I'll call you tomorrow and let you know what this thing is all about."

He hung up the phone and paced in front of his sofa for several minutes. It was inconceivable that the seven men all had the same disease, the same gene deficiency or the same hereditary shortcomings. So his own answer must be much closer to the truth. He'd have to wait until morning to put it to a test. If he was right he would call Colonel Waters and dump the whole bizarre set-up right into the army's lap where it belonged.

Again he found himself hoping he was not right and more important that Paula Ralston wasn't what he was beginning to think she was.

Miss Conway was already in when Harry arrived at the office. He managed a half smile for her.

"Miss Conway, two of the seven men are coming back this morning and . . ."

"And Mr. Boles is the one who's getting the job."

"Who called you this time?" he asked with exasperation.

"Colonel Waters."

Harry's stomach muscles contracted. "Colonel Waters?"

"That's right. When you were gone yesterday the colonel dropped in to see you. He asked me if you were working on the re-

placement for George Fisher . . . I told him you were right on the job. And I showed him the information sheets you had on all seven men."

"You did what!!"

"And Colonel Waters liked the man named Boles best of all. So I guess when Mr. Boles comes in you can tell him the job is his."

"You nitwit!" he bellowed. "You brainless, knuckleheaded . . ." He stomped into his office, and slammed the door.

It was difficult for him to think clearly. He knew he had to make a move. And fast.

He stood by the window and gazed at the Weapons Development Center across the parade ground. The low gray buildings had a quiet peaceful aura about them. If it weren't for the guards marching in front of the great wire fences anyone might think the place was used for manufacturing canopeners, automobile parts, any one of a thousand harmless products.

But it wasn't. Weapons Development represented a vital link in the country's defense program. He no longer figured they were developing a weapon to counteract Soviet aggression. They were working on something far more important. He was just ninety percent sure of that.

Mr. Boles was the first to arrive. He sat in an easy chair which Harry had moved close to his desk in order to better observe the man.

"Mr. Boles, my secretary tells me Colonel Waters was looking at your qualifications yesterday and was very impressed. I gather from that that the job is yours."

"Thank you, sir."

Harry shoved his chair closer to him. The toupee was intact. So was the mustache.

"Now it'll take the government about two weeks to complete a security check-up."

He could see plainly now that the man was also wearing false eyebrows and had no beard. That did it.

"I understand, sir," Boles replied.

"So all I can tell you at the moment is that you'll be hearing from us as soon as possible." Harry got up thinking the interview was over.

Mr. Boles remained seated.

"Miss Ralston would like to see you, Mr. Payne."

"Oh, yes," Harry chuckled, "I'm going to see her this evening."

"She wants to see you now."

"Afraid I can't make it right now. I have a pile of work to do. Besides I'm expecting another client of hers. Have to let him know he didn't get the job."

"Mr. Chase is waiting for us downstairs in the car. You will come with me, Mr. Payne." The order was clear and firm.

Harry didn't like it. "I don't get it. What's so important that Miss Ralston has to see me . . ."

He stopped at the sight of the gun leveled at his chest.

"When we pass your secretary's desk, you will tell her you are taking an early lunch. I will return you in an hour if you cooperate."

Harry Payne knew better than to argue.

Mr. Chase was seated behind the wheel of a blue sedan. Boles and Harry climbed into the back seat. They drove away from Fort Dickson toward the city.

The two men remained silent during the trip. Harry had plenty of time to think. Why this sudden move of Paula's? He must have done something to motivate it. But what?

The only person he had talked to was Frank Barnes and he hadn't divulged anything to him. She couldn't be sore because he had asked Frank to check on her. Routine investigation was part of his job. She knew that. He failed to come up with an answer. He was worried. He knew who the seven men were but he didn't know where they came from. It could have been any one of a million different places. Heaven only knew what kind of people they were.

The shades were drawn in Paula's apartment. There was no sign of her. But as soon as Harry entered the room he forgot about her anyway. His gaze rested upon the small, roundish man sitting in the contour chair, the bald man with no eyebrows and no beard.

"Please be seated, Mr. Payne."

The man's tone was soft and courteous.

"Which one are you?" Harry asked.

The man was amused. "I am Mr. Thompson."

"Oh, yeah," said Harry, "you're the one who kept patting your skull. Couldn't you find one that fit you?"

Nobody was amused. Boles and Chase took positions on either side of Thompson. Their faces were drawn and sober. They resembled two bankrupt morticians.

"Where is the body beautiful?" Harry asked. "Or is she no longer the body beautiful?"

"Take a look for yourself." It was Paula's voice. The familiar sultriness was missing.

Harry swung around to see her emerge from the bedroom. "Well, well, well! If it isn't Miss Lonelyhearts. Mind if I ask why I'm here? I mean the gun and all?"

He had to be flippant. It was the only way he knew to conceal the terror he felt in their presence.

She sat beside him on the sofa. "Harry, you've disappointed me. You haven't been playing the game fair and square."

"If you're referring to the private eye I put on you . . ."

"I'm *not*, Harry. You put him on, we took him off. Those things even themselves out."

Harry shrugged. "Okay, I give up. What did I do wrong?"

"Show him, Mr. Thompson." She lit a cigarette and folded her legs under her.

Mr. Thompson reached into his pocket and produced a small object. He tossed it into Harry's lap. Harry examined it.

"Do you recognize it?" Mr. Thompson asked.

"It's a microphone," Harry replied.

"That's just what it is." Paula savagely flung her cigarette to the floor. Her own disguise, the one concealing her true, ruthless self, was gone. Her voice was cold and harsh. "How much do you know, Harry? How much?"

Harry folded his hands, rested his full weight on the arm of the sofa and crossed his legs. "How much is it worth to you?"

Paula's hand struck with fury across his face. His cheek went numb. Blood ran from an uneven gash left by the diamond in her ring. He took out his handkerchief and dabbed at the wound.

"You're real high class, aren't you, Paula? They don't make traitors as high class as you anymore."

She raised her hand and aimed for the other cheek. Thompson bolted out of his chair and grabbed her.

"I suggest you have a drink, Miss Ralston. Let us handle the rest."

Paula was furious. "He's not going to tell you anymore . . ."

"We'll handle the rest!!"

Thompson didn't raise his voice. But there was a firmness, a deadly conviction in his inflection. Paula went for a drink.

Harry didn't like that. Paula

had a temper. He could deal with her. But the others . . . they displayed very little emotion. He had no idea how to handle them.

Thompson sat down again facing Harry.

"The fact is," he began gracefully, "we discovered this microphone and four others like it here in Miss Ralston's apartment. One in each room. Now we are very cautious people, Mr. Payne. We are quite certain no one knows our whereabouts. It is logical then that the microphones have not been here long. Miss Ralston's only visitors are ourselves and you. You have known her two days. So you are the only person who knows this apartment well enough to have planted these tell-tale devices in a hurry."

"Why should I want to plant them?"

"You took the trouble to have Miss Ralston investigated. But more than one means of investigation produces better results. The microphones were wired to a small radio which we located in the basement of this building. We have assumed that everything spoken into them was transmitted over the radio and recorded at your end. That makes sense, doesn't it?"

Harry was confused. "So far, so good."

"We want those recordings, Mr. Payne."

They seemed to be convinced the microphones were his. Only Harry knew it wasn't true. But to admit it might mean he

wouldn't leave Paula's place alive. He derived no comfort from the knowledge that someone else was interested in Paula's activities. That wasn't helping him with his problem of the moment. He could see no clear way out. He had to keep stalling. And as long as they were so sure of themselves it might even be to his advantage to maintain a certain arrogance.

"I might as well tell you, Thompson, I have no intention of cooperating until I know a few facts about you and your friends. Like who you are, where you're from, what you're after . . ."

"It is not necessary, in order to tell us where the recordings are," smiled Mr. Thompson, "that you know anything more about us."

"It isn't necessary," said Harry, "but I want to know."

Chase started to voice an objection but Harry broke in.

"And don't tell me you have more persuasive ways of making me talk. You can use force but it'll take time. Your time is valuable or you wouldn't have hustled me over here as fast as you did. So let's *not* waste your time. You tell me, then I'll tell you."

Thompson glanced at his two compatriots. Their faces registered dissatisfaction. Their silence said that Harry was right. Time was valuable. They would follow the path of least resistance.

"Our point of origin," Mr.

Thompson began, "is Correylla, roughly seven-eighths the size of Earth, in the Syrybic Galaxy. It is approximately . . . in your figures . . . seventy-five trillion miles distant."

"Must be quite a trip." Harry tried to be placid.

Mr. Thompson was momentarily amused. "Travel through Time and Space is something we take for granted. The farthest corners of the Universe are ours for the reaching. That is the foremost reason for our visit to your Earth. You might call us Galactic Observers. You see, we already control the twelve inhabited planets in our own Galaxy. And at this time we have no desire to take on any more responsibility than that. But neither do we want interference from another Galaxy . . . such as this one!"

Harry was surprised. "You're giving this world a lot of credit. We've barely moved off the Earth. What makes you think we could cause your people any trouble?"

"By merely projecting yourselves into space you have eliminated the major obstacle to space travel. Remember it took thousands of years for someone on your Earth to discover electricity. But observe the wonders you have accomplished with it in the relatively few years *since* it was discovered. The same principle applies to your conquest of space. We are not here to do you harm, Mr. Payne. It

is merely our intention to warn you, when the time comes, of the dangers you face should you decide to venture too far."

"For people who intend no harm I'd say you and your friends are putting on quite an unconvincing show."

"I assure you, Mr. Payne, our visit to Earth was intended purely for observational purposes!"

"What do you mean, *was?*"

Thompson's face was grim. The easy chair that had accommodated his small roundish frame so perfectly now appeared to be uncomfortable for him. A redness crept into his cheeks and spread over his smooth tight scalp.

"The fact is that your government has known about us for six months. Our exact whereabouts has been a well guarded secret . . . but they *were informed* of our presence here on Earth."

"Informed! But who could tell them . . ."

Chase broke in impatiently. "We are wasting time! We must get those recordings!"

The interruption was dismissed with a wave of Thompson's hand.

"Your government was informed by George Fisher."

"George Fisher!" Harry gulped.

"You see, Mr. Fisher . . . that wasn't really his name, you understand . . . was one of us . . . a member of our observation team. After we arrived here . . . well,

you might say he defected, gave your government the benefit of his somewhat limited knowledge."

Harry whistled. "And because of him your mission is no longer observational."

"That remains to be seen."

Harry leaned forward on the sofa. "You have any ideas, Mr. Thompson, about why he defected? I'm curious to know why a man is unhappy enough with his own lot to run away and put himself in the hands of a civilization that is in every way alien to him."

Thompson's answer was brief and deliberately ambiguous. "Mr. Fisher was a traitor. What more can be said of him?"

"So he didn't commit suicide," Harry muttered.

"That's right, Mr. Payne."

"I take it you're not sure of how much Fisher told the government before you got to him."

"Mr. Fisher's limitations were familiar to us. It is the potential of your own scientists now that they have his information that we are most concerned with."

Keep stalling, Harry reminded himself . . . keep speculating, guessing, theorizing, anything for time.

"So you know the project that Weapons Development is working on but you don't know how much progress has been made. And you want to place one of your own people in there to find out."

"Thanks to you, we have succeeded in doing just that."

Thompson smiled with satisfaction, having kept his part of a bargain. "Now about those recordings . . ."

"I'm not through asking questions."

"But I'm through answering them, Mr. Payne. Tell us where the recordings are."

Harry studied the clean smooth surface of Thompson's face. There was a gentleness in his large round eyes. There was also an unfriendliness. Harry had to keep stalling. He knew any answer he gave them would shorten his life expectancy by about thirty-five years.

"You've gotten me into a mess of trouble, Mr. Thompson. I think you owe me a little more. My memory might prove clearer if I knew what was going on at Weapons Development."

Thompson glanced at his two companions. They showed no sign of dissent.

"Very well, Mr. Payne. For some years now our people have been working on a method of reversing the polarity of the atom. We have tried to create an electro-magnetic field which would repel rather than attract. Once we are able to accomplish this we can develop an instrument capable of disturbing the molecular structure of any object in the universe."

"In other words . . ." Harry frowned at him, "a weapon capable of disintegration?"

"Precisely!"

Harry sat there, stunned. A

few moments seemed hardly enough to digest the knowledge that Weapons Development was working on the most incredibly advanced weapon of all time. And Mr. Thompson and company were out to sabotage it. Their people could not afford to allow another world to beat them to the punch. Who controlled this weapon controlled the universe. Stalling the aliens was more important than ever now. He couldn't heighten the danger to his own life. It wasn't worth a lead nickel anyway. If it had been Thompson wouldn't have consented to tell him this much.

Someone else had wired Paula's apartment. It was reasonable to assume it was someone on his side.

"The recordings, please!!" Boles was becoming very impatient.

Harry looked up and found a gun at his head. "The recordings are at my office," he lied.

Thompson walked to the telephone table and brought the instrument to him. "You will call your secretary," he said, "and tell her you have been detained at lunch. You are sending Mr. Chase to pick up the recordings."

Harry glanced around the room. Paula was sulking at the bar near the door. Drowning her conscience, he thought. They must have paid her a fortune to sell out her own people. Boles and Chase both had their guns poised. Thompson picked up the receiver and extended it to him.

There was no way out, no stalling them any longer. To make a break for it would be suicidal. In the state of confusion his mind was in he could think of only one thing to do. When he reached Miss Conway, he would have to warn her somehow—a few desperate words and pray that she would be alert enough to realize he was in trouble and get the information to the authorities.

He took the phone and dialed. He gave the Fort Dickson operator his office extension. He waited. The phone rang. It rang again. Then three more times. Damn that girl! Her coffee breaks were extended vacations!

Finally the phone was picked up. But the voice that answered was male.

"Who is this?" Harry demanded.

The voice replied, "Colonel Waters."

"This is Harry. I'm at Paula Ralston's apartment . . . emergency . . .!"

The three men were on top of him. Chase smashed the butt of his gun across Harry's knuckles. The receiver fell to the floor. Harry let out a pained groan as Boles' gun butt struck him on the temple. Thompson replaced the receiver. Harry was on the floor. He put his hands to his head for protection as Chase savagely kicked at him. His vision blurred but he managed to see that Paula was still at the bar sipping a drink, sadistically enjoying the whole show.

"He's no longer any use to us," Thompson declared. "You may do your job!"

Harry shook his head, fighting to stay conscious. His vision cleared long enough to see Chase and Boles standing over him, their guns pointed at either side of his head.

There was a volley of deafening shots. There was smoke, voices, people running in every direction. More gunfire. Glass shattering. Furniture knocked over.

But Harry felt no pain.

When he looked again Chase and Boles were no longer to be seen. He caught a glimpse of Thompson running for another position of cover. A final gunshot brought him to the floor.

Harry struggled to a sitting position. Then he saw Chase and Boles dead on the floor beyond the sofa. Half a dozen soldiers were in the process of subduing a swearing, clawing Paula Ralston.

And in the doorway he saw Miss Conway.

She looked incongruous as hell with a smouldering revolver in her hand. She crossed the room and knelt beside him. She pulled him around to let his head rest on the sofa.

"Harry! Harry," she whispered, brushing his hair back, "are you hurt badly? What did they do to you?"

He tried to get up.

"You stay right where you are, honey." Her voice was soothing and gentle. There was a soft,

compassionate light in her eyes. No longer that dumb stare. She leaned over and kissed him. "There. You're going to be all right."

"What the hell are you doing here?" Harry bellowed.

"Now you just sit back and relax. I'm just doing my job."

"Your job . . ." A low steady wail rolled off his lips. "Oh, no! Say it isn't so. Tell me I'm really dead. I know I deserve to be."

"I may be the world's lousiest secretary, but I'm considered not bad in the counter-intelligence department."

Harry repeated the wail.

"We were afraid from the time George Fisher turned himself over to the government," she continued, "that his days were numbered. But the longer he remained alive the more apprehensive his people would become. We figured one day they'd make a

wrong move. And that would be their big mistake. Well, their move was to kill George Fisher and try to get one of their own agents into Weapons Development. That meant exposing themselves. It also meant you had to be watched . . . among others. That's where I came in."

"And playing it about as dumb as I've ever seen."

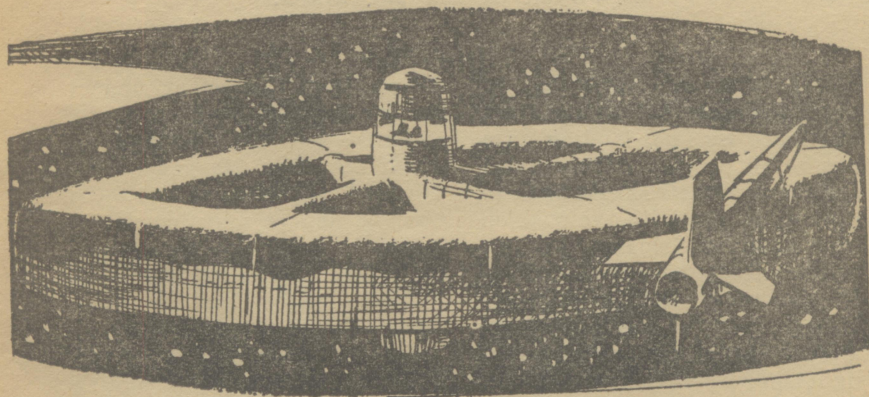
She laughed. "Sounds like I played the part a little too convincingly."

She stood up and helped him to his feet. "You're coming with me."

"Where to? Hey, what are you doing?"

"There's something about this place that I don't like. I'm no sultry brunette, but I'm not a dumb blonde either." She kissed him, then took a last look at Paula's place and led him out the door.

THE END





SHEPHERD OF THE PLANETS

By ALAN MATTOX

ILLUSTRATOR SUMMERS

*Renner had a purpose in life. And
the Purpose in Life had Renner.*

THE star ship came out of space drive for the last time, and made its final landing on a scrubby little planet that circled a small and lonely sun. It came to ground gently, with the cushion of a retarder field, on the side of the world where it was night. In the room that would have been known as the bridge on ships of other days, instrument lights glowed softly on Captain Renner's cropped white hair, and upon the planes of his lean,

strong face. Competent fingers touched controls here and there, seeking a response that he knew would not come. He had known this for long enough so that there was no longer any emotional impact in it for him. He shut off the control panel, and stood up.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "that's it. The fuel pack's gone!"

Beeson, the botanist, a rotund little man with a red, unsmiling face, squirmed in his chair.

"The engineers on Earth told

us it would last a lifetime," he pointed out.

"If we were just back on Earth," Thorne, the ship's doctor, said drily, "we could tell them that it doesn't. They could start calculating again."

"But what does it mean?" David asked. He was the youngest member of the crew, signed on as linguist, and librarian to the ship.

"Just that we're stuck here—where ever that is—for good!" Farrow said bitterly.

"You won't have to run engines anymore," Dr. Thorne commented, knowing that remark would irritate Farrow.

Farrow glared at him. His narrow cheekbones and shallow eyes were shadowed by the control room lights. He was good with the engines which were his special charge, but beyond that, he was limited in both sympathy and imagination.

Captain Renner looked from face to face.

"We were lucky to set down safely," he said to them all. "We might have been caught too far out for a landing. It is night now, and I am going to get some rest. Tomorrow we will see what kind of a world this is."

He left the control room, and went down the corridor toward his quarters. The others watched him go. None of them made a move to leave their seats.

"What about the fuel pack?" David asked.

"Just what he said," Farrow

answered him. It's exhausted. Done for! We can run auxiliary equipment for a long time to come, but no more star drive."

"So we just stay here until we're rescued," David said.

"A fine chance for that!" Farrow's voice grew bitter again. "Our captain has landed us out here on the rim of the galaxy where there won't be another ship for a hundred years!"

"I don't understand the man," Beeson said suddenly, looking around him belligerently. "What are we doing out here anyway?"

"Extended Exploration," said Thorne. "It's a form of being put out to pasture. Renner's too old for the Service, but he's still a strong and competent man. So they give him a ship, and a vague assignment, and let him do just about what he wants. There you have it."

He took a cigar from his pocket, and looked at it fondly.

"While they last, gentlemen," he said, holding it up. He snipped the end, and lit it carefully. His own hair had grown grey in the Service, and, in a way, the reason for his assignment to the ship was the same as Renner's.

"I think," he said slowly, "that Captain Renner is looking for something."

"But for what?" Beeson demanded. "He has taken us to every out-of-the-way, backward planet on the rim. And what happens? We land. We find the natives. We are kind to them. We teach them something, and leave them a few supplies. And

then Renner loses interest, and we go on!"

"Perhaps it is for something in himself," David offered.

"Perhaps he will find it here," Thorne murmured. "I'm going to bed."

He got up from his seat.

David stood up, and went over to one of the observation ports. He ran back the radiation screen. The sky outside was very black, and filled with alien stars. He could see absolutely nothing of the landscape about them because of the dark. It was a poor little planet. It hadn't even a moon.

In the morning they opened up the ship, and let down the landing ramps. It was a very old world that they set foot upon. Whatever mountains or hills it had ever had, had long ago been leveled by erosion, so that now there was only a vaguely undulating plain studded with smooth and rounded boulders. The soil underfoot was packed and barren, and there was no vegetation for as far as they could see.

But the climate seemed mild and pleasant, the air warm and dry, with a soft breeze blowing. It was probable that the breeze would be always with them. There were no mountains to interfere with its passage, or alter its gentle play.

Off to one side, a little stream ran crystal clear over rocks and gravel. Dr. Thorne got a sample bottle from the ship, and went over to it. He touched his fingers to the water, and then touched

them to his lips. Then he filled the sample bottle from the stream, and came back with it.

"It seems all right," he said. "I'll run an analysis of it, and let you know as soon as I can."

He took the bottle with him into the ship.

Beeson stood kicking at the ground with the toe of his boot. His head was lowered.

"What do you think of it?" Renner asked.

Beeson shrugged. He knelt down and felt of the earth with his hands. Then he got out a heavy bladed knife and hacked at it until he had pried out a few hard pieces. He stood up again with these in his hands. He tried to crumble them, but they would not crumble. They would only break into bits like sun dried brick.

"It's hard to tell," he said. "There seems to be absolutely no organic material here. I would say that nothing has grown here for a long, long time. Why, I don't know. The lab will tell us something."

Renner nodded.

For the rest of the day they went their separate ways; Renner to his cabin to make the entries that were needed when a flight was ended, even though that ending was not intentional; Beeson to prowling along the edge of the stream and pecking at the soil with a geologist's pick; and Farrow to his narrow little world of engines where he worked at getting ready the

traction machines and other equipment that would be needed.

David set out on a tour of exploration toward the furthestmost nests of boulders. It was there that he found the first signs of vegetation. In and around some of the larger groups of rocks, he found mosses and lichens growing. He collected specimens of them to take back with him. It was out there, far from the ship, that he saw the first animate life.

When he returned, it was growing toward evening. He found that the others had brought tables from the ship, and sleeping equipment, and set it up outside. Their own quarters would have been more comfortable, but the ship was always there for their protection, if they needed it, and they were tired of its confinement. It was a luxury to sleep outdoors, even under alien stars.

Someone had brought food from the synthesizer, and arranged it on a table. They were eating when he arrived.

He handed the specimens of moss and lichen to Captain Renner, who looked at them with interest, and then passed them on to Beeson for his study.

"Sir?" David said.

"What is it, David?" Captain Renner asked.

"I think there are natives here," David said. "I believe that I saw one."

Renner's eyes lit up with interest. He laid down his knife and fork.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"It was just a glimpse," David said, "of a hairy face peering around a rock. It looked like one of those pictures of a cave man one used to see in the old texts."

Renner stood up. He moved a little way away, and stood staring out into the growing dark, across the boulder studded plain.

"On a barren planet like this," he said, "they must lack so many things!"

"I'd swear he almost looks happy," Dr. Thorne whispered to the man next to him. It happened to be Farrow.

"Why shouldn't he be?" Farrow growled, his mouth full of food. "He's got him a planet to play with! That's what he's been aiming for—wait and see!"

The next few days passed swiftly. Dr. Thorne found the water from the little stream not only to be potable, but extremely pure.

Farrow got his machinery unloaded and ready to run. Among other things, there was a land vehicle on light caterpillar treads capable of running where there were no roads and carrying a load of several tons. And there was an out and out tractor with multiple attachments.

Beeson was busy in his laboratory working on samples from the soil.

David brought in the one new point that was of interest. He had been out hunting among the boulders again, and it was almost dark when he returned. He told Renner about it at the

supper table, with the others listening in.

"I think the natives eat the lichen," he said.

"I haven't seen much else they could eat," Beeson muttered.

"There's more of the lichen than you might think," David said, "if you know where to look for it. But, even at that, there isn't very much. The thing is, it looks like it's been cropped. It's never touched if the plants are small, or half grown, or very nearly ready. But just as soon as a patch is fully mature, it is stripped bare, and there never seems to be any of it dropped, or left behind, or wasted."

"If that's all they have to live on," Thorne said, "they have it pretty thin!"

The natives began to be seen nearer to the camp. At first there were just glimpses of them, a hairy face or head seen at the edge of a rock, or the sight of a stocky figure dashing from boulder to boulder. As they grew braver, they came out more into the open. They kept their distance, and would disappear into the rocks if anyone made a move toward them, but, if no attention was paid them, they moved about freely.

In particular, they would come, each evening, to stand in a ragged line near one of the nests of boulders. From there, they would watch the crewmen eat. There were never more than twelve or fifteen of them, a bandy legged lot, with thick, heavy torsos, and hairy heads.

It was on one of these occasions that Dr. Thorne happened to look up.

"Oh, oh!" he said. "Here it comes!"

Renner turned his head, and rose to his feet. The other men rose with him.

Three of the natives were coming toward the camp. They came along at a swinging trot, a sense of desperation and dedicated purpose in their manner. One ran slightly ahead. The other two followed behind him, shoulder to shoulder.

Farrow reached for a ray gun in a pile of equipment near him, and raised it.

"No weapons!" Captain Renner ordered sharply.

Farrow lowered his arm, but kept the gun in his hand.

The natives drew near enough for their faces to be seen. The leader was casting frightened glances from side to side and ahead of him as he came. The other two stared straight ahead, their faces rigid, their eyes blank with fear.

They came straight to the table. There they reached out suddenly, and caught up all the food that they could carry in their hands, and turned and fled with it in terror into the night.

Somebody sighed in relief.

"Poor devils!" Renner said. "They're hungry!"

There was a conference the following morning around one of the tables.

"We've been here long enough

to settle in," Renner said. "It's time we started in to do something for this planet." He looked toward Beeson. "How far have you gotten?" he asked.

Beeson was, as usual, brisk and direct.

"I can give you the essentials," he said. "I can't tell you the whole story. I don't know it. To be brief, the soil is highly nitrogen deficient, and completely lacking in humus. In a way, the two points tie in together." He looked about him sharply, and then went on. "The nitrates are easily leached from the soil. Without the bacteria that grow around certain roots to fix nitrogen and form new nitrates, the soil was soon depleted.

"As to the complete lack of organic material, I can hazard only a guess. Time, of course. But, back of that, probably the usual history of an overpopulation, and a depleted soil. At the end, perhaps they ate everything, leaves, stems and roots, and returned nothing to the earth."

"The nitrates are replaceable?" Renner asked.

Beeson nodded.

"The nitrates will have formed deposits," he said, "probably near ancient lakes or shallow seas. It shouldn't be too hard to find some."

Renner turned to Farrow.

"How about your department?" he asked.

"I take it we're thinking of farming," Farrow said. "I've got

equipment that will break up the soil for you. And I can throw a dam across the stream for water."

"There are seeds in the ship," Renner said, his eyes lighting with enthusiasm. "We'll start this planet all over again!"

"There's still one thing," Beeson reminded him drily. "Humus! Leaves, roots, organic material! Something to loosen up the soil, aerate it. Nothing will grow in a brick."

Renner stood up. He took a few slow paces, and then stood looking out at the groups of boulders studding the ancient plain.

"I see," he said. "And there's only one place to get it. We'll have to use the lichens and the mosses."

"There'll be trouble with the natives if you do," Thorne said.

Renner looked at him. He frowned thoughtfully.

"You'll be taking their only food," the doctor pointed out.

"We can feed them from the synthesizer," Renner answered. "We know that they will eat it."

"Why bother?" Farrow asked sourly.

Renner turned on him.

"Will the synthesizer handle it?" he asked.

"I guess so," Farrow grumbled. "For awhile, at least. But I don't see what good the natives are to us."

"If we take their food," Renner said, "we're going to feed them. At least until such time as the crops come in, and

they are able to feed themselves!"

"Are you building this planet for us, or for them?" Farrow demanded.

Renner turned away.

They put out cannisters of food for the natives that night. In the morning it was gone. Each evening, someone left food for them near their favorite nest of rocks. The natives took it in the dark, unseen.

Gradually, Captain Renner himself took over the feeding. He seemed to derive a personal satisfaction from it. Gradually, too, the natives began coming out into the open to receive it. Before long, they were waiting for him every evening as he brought them food.

The gathering of the lichen began. They picked it by hand, working singly or in pairs, searching out the rocks and hidden places where it grew. From time to time they would catch glimpses of the natives watching them from a distance. They were careful not to get close.

On one of these occasions, Captain Renner and David were working together.

"Do they have a language?" Captain Renner asked.

"Yes, sir," David answered. "I have heard them talking among themselves."

"Do you suppose you can learn it?" Renner asked. "Do you think you could get near enough to them to listen in?"

"I could try," David offered.

"Then do so," Renner said. "That's an assignment."

Thereafter David went out alone. He found that getting close to the natives was not too difficult. He tried to keep out of their sight, while still getting near enough to them to hear their voices. They were undoubtedly aware of his presence, but, with the feeding, they had lost their fear of the men, and did not seem to care.

Bit by bit he learned their language, starting from a few key roots and sounds. It was a job for which he had been trained.

Time passed rapidly, and the work went on. Captain Renner let his beard grow. It came out white and thick, and he did not bother to trim it. The others, too, became more careless in their dress, each man following his own particular whim. There was no longer need for a taut ship.

Farrow threw a dam across the little stream, and, while the water grew behind it, went on to breaking up the soil with his machines. Beeson searched for nitrate, and found it. He brought a load of it back, and this, together with the moss and lichen, was chopped into the soil. In the end, it was the lichen that was the limiting factor. There was only so much of it, so the size of the plot that they could prepare was small.

"But it's a start," Renner said. "That's all we can hope for this first year. This crop will furnish

more material to be chopped back into the soil. Year by year it will grow until the inhabitants here will have a new world to live in!"

"What do you expect to get out of it?" Farrow asked bitingly.

Renner's eyes glowed with an inner light.

Renner's beard grew with the passing months until it became a luxuriant thing. He let his hair go untrimmed too, so that, with his tall, spare figure, he took on a patriarchal look. And, with the passing months, there came that time which was to be spring for this planet. The first green blades of the new planting showed above the ground.

The natives noticed it with awe, and kept a respectful distance.

That evening, when it was time for the native's feeding, the men gathered about. Little by little the feeding had become a ritual, and they would often go out to watch it. It was always the same. Renner would step forward away from the others a little way, the load of food in his hands. The natives would come to stand before him in their ragged line, their leader a trifle to the front. There they would bow, and begin a chant that had become a part of the ritual with the passing time.

With the first green planting showing, there was a look of deep satisfaction in Renner's eyes as he stepped forward this night. His hair had grown quite long by now, and his white beard blew softly in the constant wind. There was a simple dignity about him as he stood there, his head erect, and looked upon the natives as his children.

The natives began their chant. It became louder.

"Tolava—" they said, and bowed.

As usual, Farrow was nettled.

"What does the man want anyway?" he asked out loud. "To be God?"

Renner could not help but hear him. He did not turn his head.

"David!" he said.

"Sir?" David asked, stepping forward.

"You understand their language now, don't you?" Renner asked.

"Yes, sir," David said.

"Then translate!" Renner ordered. "Out loud, please, so that that the others may hear!"

"Tolava—" the natives chanted, bowing.

"Tolava—our father," David said, following the chant. Suddenly he swallowed, and hesitated for a moment. Then he straightened himself, and went sturdily on. "Tolava—our father—who art from the heavens—give us—this day—our bread!"

THE END

SCIENCE AND SUPERMAN: AN INQUIRY

By POUL ANDERSON

THERE is an old saying, which I have used before but cannot resist bringing forth again, to the effect that: "The optimist thinks this is the best of all possible worlds; the pessimist is afraid he's right." It's as applicable to the biological future of the human race as it is to politics and personal relationships.

Since our ancestors, a million or so years ago, were presumably rather apish creatures, it seems natural to extrapolate the curve of their development and predict that our descendants will be very near to gods. It's a fascinating concept, which I've played with myself. Olaf Stapledon, Stanley Weinbaum, and A. E. van Vogt produced science fiction classics on this theme. But I think we're also obliged to take a hard, critical look at the underlying as-

Every s-f fan knows and enjoys Poul Anderson's stories. Now the brilliant young writer presents a startling theory in an essay on the development of man . . . You may agree with Anderson's ideas . . . we don't . . . but they are certainly worth thinking about.

sumptions. If nothing else, such a re-examination often suggests new fictional treatments of an apparently exhausted motif.

We can begin by dismissing any Homo Superior born of normal human parents. The three writers I mentioned made some quasi-mystical postulates to justify this in their stories: unity of life and so on. That's legitimate science fiction, of course; it might even, conceivably, be true. But scientific speculation proper must ground itself firmly on what we know. And all our present knowledge denies the possibility of such a birth.

True, there have been some fairly spectacular hereditary abnormalities. One thinks of colorblindness, hemophilia, or the English "porcupine man." On examination these cases turn out

to involve a very few genes, usually a single one. Following such a mutation, the whole genetic complex then readjusts itself often requiring some generations to do so. For example, when industrial melanism* was first observed in the British peppered moth, the dark new variety still had some white spots; now it doesn't. In other words, the mutated characteristic of black coloration was at first only relatively dominant, but has since become almost absolutely so. Incidentally, it's quite unusual for a mutation to be a dominant in any degree.

Man's genetic structure is exceedingly complicated. Something like twenty separate genes are involved in as simple a matter as hair color. (The same genes also participate in other combinations governing other traits.) "Improbable" is hardly the word for all the billions of exactly correct simultaneous alterations which would have to occur at the same instant, to produce a zygote of a new species without throwing the genetic balance hopelessly out of kilter. Water will freeze on a hot stove long before any such thing happens.

And even if a Homo Superior embryo should somehow be formed, I doubt very much if it would survive. Its enzyme and hormone systems would be too

*In areas where coal dust has blackened the landscape, dark coloration has become advantageous and has actually developed.

different from the mother's. It would probably die and be resorbed before it even got to the fetus stage.

No, unless that "unity of life" really exists—there's no evidence for it, and plenty against it—evolution will have to proceed in man as gradually as in every other genus. The question before the house is, Will it actually do so?

If asked what improvements could be made in our race, we think at once of getting rid of the vermiform appendix. Those who have considered the subject a bit more will advocate some changes in the spine, such as fusing the bottom few vertebrae; and they will ask for a rupture-proof abdomen and properly draining sinuses. Anyone with flat feet can wistfully imagine a stronger arch. The little toe, while harmless, has no real function and would seem fated to disappear; likewise body hair, except the pubic and axillary—even this is sexual display only and could be dispensed with—and the male beard. Beyond gross anatomy, we could use eyes less subject to optical deformation, veins less likely to go varicose on us, arteries which don't harden or blow out. We would like immunity to all diseases, including the mental ones. This latter development presupposes not only a well-adjusted biochemistry, unable to develop those imbalanced which apparently cause schizophrenia, but a nervous system too stable

for neurosis. Enormous power of intellect's almost a defining quality of the traditional superman. Most people would in addition make him less selfish and predatory than today's human-kind.

These and similar traits are straightforward developments from man-as-we-know-him. We can now walk around our Homo Superior and hang totally new powers such as telepathy and conscious control of all body functions on him, like ornaments on a Christmas tree. But I do not plan to discuss these. All the arguments that followed will apply equally well to such speculative characteristics.

One small but important objection can be raised at once to our picture of superman. Quite a few of his differences from us are desirable only in the context of our own social and technological culture. The human foot, for example, is perfectly well adapted for walking on soft earth. Hard pavements and badly designed shoes bring on fallen arches, not any inherent deficiency. Arteriosclerosis, some mental disease, and various other forms of breakdown seem to be closely connected with diet, exercise, and/or nervous strain. It would make far more sense to adjust our mode of living than to wait for evolution. And this is doubtless what we will do, albeit unconsciously: for who believes that the present-day form of civilization will last forever?

Certain other goals are just plain impossible, e.g. permanent natural immunity to all diseases. Bacteria and viruses evolve too. After a few years of wonder drugs, we are beginning to see wonder drug-proof germs. Imagine a strain of man suddenly appearing, with metabolism so alien that no existing micro-organism could live in him. How long would it take first one, then two, then many germ species to develop adaptations which would enable them to use this free lunch counter!

We do have many built-in flaws, such as our sinuses, which try to drain straight out of our faces as if we were still quadrupeds. But at this point our own cleverness intervenes. Sanitation makes unnecessary any degree of natural immunity to a host of diseases. Immunization reinforces our inborn defenses against most others. Surgery restores the slipped spinal disc, drains the inflamed cavity, patches up the hernia. And now a chemotherapeutic arsenal is being accumulated, which will doubtless before long cure such maladies as schizophrenia. We shall have more to say later about the role of the doctor; for the time being, the most unimaginative extrapolation of medical progress will show us that there is probably no biological problem which we *must* solve by evolution. True, it would be convenient not to get appendicitis, but it is no longer a question of

life and death. And natural selection works through differential survival—the relative number of descendants which an organism has—not through minor individual afflictions.

Mutatis mutandis, the same argument applies to great muscular strength, hawklike eyes, super-fast reactions, and similar Boy Scout ideals. We have machines (or will have them, in the foreseeable future) which can so far outdo us in all these respects that there is no evolutionary point in our own improvement.

If civilized man is under no pressure to develop much further physically, and therefore apparently will not do so, what about his mental capacity? What use is his brain power to man? It has enabled him to become the supreme animal on Earth . . . at least, outside the microscopic realm. But what competition is left? Only the harshest struggle between individuals, prolonged for many generations, would now give any noticeable advantage to the genius over the average man. (It would also put a premium on innate ruthlessness, so that the eventual superman would be an even meaner cuss than his twentieth century ancestor.) Such highly personal struggles are a rare and short-lived historical phenomenon. It tends to be whole organizations, whole countries, empires, and societies, which clash. Our much-touted American Free Enterprise, to the extent that it has ever existed at

all has involved companies far more than single persons.

Even given a pure anarchy, the strong, intelligent men will quickly gather followers and build up disciplined groups. The superior clan or gang—superior more by virtue of effective organization than gifted individuals—wins out. Historical cases in point include the medieval Icelandic republic and our own hillbillies. And after a relatively short time, a still larger organization (the Norwegian crown, the state government) stepped in and knocked the feudists' heads together.

But will not competition between groups put a premium on brains, if only in the leading classes? Not much of one, I'm afraid. We are also developing artificial supplements to our own intelligence. The oldest of these is probably writing; the abacus and the slide rule are venerable enough; now we have electronic computers, tomorrow we will have Lord knows what. Once again, a battery of specialized tools can do a job better and quicker than slowly evolving flesh. Victory will go to the side with the best robots. Insofar as human qualities are important, in war or less violent conflict, they tend to be courage and steadiness of purpose rather than intellectual complexity.

What about intrasocietal competition? The qualities emphasized by it vary from culture to culture, but in general—almost

by definition—ability at politicking and at sliding between cranies in the rules makes you richer and more powerful than ability to think abstractly. Even the classic Chinese civil service system laid value on memorization rather than originality.

In fact, throughout past history, any victorious organization soon begins to discourage creativity. The people on top are satisfied with the status quo and do their best to freeze it; their underlings slide meekly enough into a groove which offers, at the minium, status security. If the organization happens to be an empire, it takes outside invasion to destroy the ultimate petrified culture, which otherwise (as in Egypt and China) persists virtually changless for thousands of years.

Seidenberg's *Posthistoric Man* goes so far as to suggest that the world society of the future will, in the course of millennia, destroy first individuality and then consciousness itself. I myself doubt matters will ever get that far. If nothing else, secular changes in climate, soil, etc., will at last force the culture to change, or break it down and thus make room for something new. However, it cannot be denied that there is a strong anti-intellectual tendency in all civilization. There is some reason to think that the average IQ may already be dropping by an estimated ten points per generation. We must come back to this later,

under the general topic of dysgenics.

Civilized man will not be quite static biologically. Certain atrophies can be expected to continue, such as the dwindling of the appendix and the little toe. When an organ is no longer useful, when there is no longer any reason to have it in good shape, then natural selection ceases to operate on it, ceases to weed out the occasional bad mutations. The organ accumulates these, gets progressively more degenerate, and finally vanishes. Medicine will hasten this day by saving those people with really bad appendices, who would otherwise not have survived to reproduce. But apart from such minor clearing up of unfinished business, I don't see evolution doing much to improve civilized humanity.

To be sure, nowadays it may seem a rather big assumption that civilization will endure. If it doesn't, if we all go back to the primitive and stay there, then I suppose we can look for radical, if gradual, development of our bodies, along the lines already discussed. I doubt, though, if our brains would evolve much further: even the crudest savages have enough intelligence to cope with any foreseeable wild beasts or change of climate.

Thus we seem to have a choice of retaining our scientific culture-basis, and—at best—improving very little biologically; or going back to the woods and developing some truly fine bi-

pedal bodies, but no particularly dazzling intellects.

Wait, objects a Shavian in the audience. You haven't said a thing about the third possibility. Let's keep our machines, but breed our own supermen.

The first retort to that proposal is: Why? We have already shown that scientific man doesn't really need to evolve. A glance at the current headlines may provoke you into saying we could use some brains. But it isn't our intellects which have failed us today; hydrogen warhead missiles and strategic analyses are tremendous intellectual achievements. It's our attitudes, our culture if you like, which are at fault, and this is not in the province of biological evolution.

Now it would certainly be nice to have well-designed sinuses and so on. (The reader will have deduced that I live on a sea-coast.) It might be even nicer to have an IQ of 400, if such a number means anything. . . . Or would it? The work of Renshaw and others, not to mention traditional Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist disciplines, have proven we're nowhere near realizing our existing potentialities, either physical or mental. It makes no sense to tinker with our structure until we know its limitations—and these we have not yet touched.

Futhermore, I would rather have a few aches and scars, even a shorter life, and my civil liberties, than the essentially totali-

tarian existence required by any of these man-breeding schemes. You need only sketch out a few of the compulsions involved to see what I mean.

Then there's the fact that we don't have enough knowledge or wisdom to undertake such a project. We have bred plenty of species for this or that set of characteristics, often with great exactitude. The typical result has been a freak unable to survive except with elaborate human care: a cabbage, a pouter pigeon, a Holstein cow. Some of the less thoroughly bred animals can go wild successfully, but then they take only a few generations to shed their human-imposed traits and revert to the efficient form of dingo, alley cat, mustang, razorback. I doubt very much if we'd have better luck breeding for, say, high intellect. We'd probably get an inferior sort of computer, devoid of vigor and emotional warmth. I have already pointed out that genes seem to operate in complexes, rather than singly; their delicate balance is not lightly to be tampered with.

Finally, even granting us a perfect knowledge of genetics, an ability to design any sort of man we want and make him viable, there's still the question of what we do want. It seems all too likely to me that the artificially created "superman" would be a monster tailored to an ideology. He might be too gentle to fight—and therefore too effete to

explore, create, and reform. He might represent the attainment of the obscene Soviet goal, men with an instinctive need to work for society. Where I come from, we call 'em ants.

It seems to me that true conservatism, as opposed to reaction, consists in the belief that one man, or one generation, can at best make only a small contribution to the accumulated wisdom of the race. If we expand this idea to mean the biological experience of a billion years, we will be cautious about all these eugenic schemes. We will even be cautious about plans at some future date, to knock undesirable genes right out of the germ plasm. I suppose there is no objection to eliminating the appendix and similar minor improvements, intended merely to strengthen the humanness we already possess. Even this is only worthwhile if it can be done without regimenting individuals. And beyond this, we can too easily get ourselves in trouble.

The foregoing arguments refer only to the positive side of eugenics. There is a negative aspect, far more serious and urgent, which is already with us. I refer to species degeneration.

Mutation (which will go on at an increased rate in the future, thanks to our recklessness with radiations) is nearly always for the worse rather than the better. There are far more ways for such a random process to do things wrong than to do them right. Until fairly recently, the

most disastrous results of this were kept out of the race. The victims died early, or they were sterile, or if they reproduced it was at a much lower rate than the healthy norm. But nowadays our civilization has to some extent eliminated natural selection. I have said that men don't need to become any faster or stronger than they are; but under modern conditions, if these outlast the Atomic Age, men don't even need to be that good. A slow, ill-coordinated, dim-witted oaf, who wouldn't have lasted ten years in a forest unless some normal man took him on as a slave, can now become a television executive.

Still more insidious and important are the effects of medicine. The child who gets an old man's illness like cancer can be saved—to pass on his defect. The sterile woman can undergo operations to create fertility—and how many of her descendants will need the same operation? Soon the man who goes insane under moderate pressure will be returned to society, with a bottle of pills to make him as good as new. Eventually, no doubt, even the congenital idiot can be propped up with chemicals; this has already been done in the case of cretinism.

I have sketched out the process by which organs and functions, no longer needed for survival, will degenerate and atrophy. It works just the same for strength, resistance, and in-

telligence. Lately some children, inoculated against diphtheria, have been getting the disease anyway: they come from an extremely susceptible line, which without vaccination would never have lasted long enough to develop its susceptibility to the present degree.

I say nothing against the doctor who repairs the damage of accident and war. If anything, this favors the race, since strong and active people are probably slightly more exposed to such injuries. Nor do I object to ordinary sanitation, since this only restores a sparseness of pathogens which has always marked unruined nature. But if we keep on supplying our hereditarily unfit with artificial aids, and then turning them loose to breed, at last the entire species will need such help . . . and be as sickly, crippled, and defective as ever in its past. If then that elaborate, overwhelmingly expensive medical system breaks down, humanity will be *kaput*. This consequence of simple genetic law is no more equivocal than any engineering prediction.

The answer is not the murder of the unfit, nor the denial of care to them, but their sterilization: a quick and painless procedure which does no harm to the sexual function. It may seem an infringement of their rights; but if we can put typhoid carriers under certain mild restrictions, why not the carriers of childhood cancer?

Various compensations, such as money, could be granted these unfortunates. As a matter of fact, some foreign countries and American states do have laws governing certain cases, chiefly mental deficiency. We need only expand the precedent.

It will, of course, be a knotty problem to define "unfitness." I would say that those are unfit who develop certain diseases and defects prior to the age of about forty. (What happens afterward makes no evolutionary difference, since nearly everyone has finished reproducing by then.) What these troubles are, though, is a somewhat open question. Hemophilia, yes; but bad teeth? And if so, how bad? I suggest that the basic criterion be: "Would this person have a reasonable chance of surviving and reproducing to the age of forty, under more or less 'natural' conditions?"

Inevitably, a degree of arbitrariness remains. "Art, like morality," said G. K. Chesterton, "consists in drawing the line somewhere." The important thing is that we do draw a reasonable line. We needn't do it at once; but neither can we wait many more centuries.

The evolutionary prospect for man is, I think, one of rather small change for the better, provided that he does not realize his all too great chances for degeneration. What we do now to avert the latter seems a good test of our worthiness for the former, a million years hence. **THE END**

I am adequate. And when I want a little more than quiet satisfaction, I can probe out and destroy one of my neighbor's Walls perhaps, or a piece of his warner. And then we will fight lustily at each other for a little while from our Strongholds, pushing the destruction buttons at each other

in a kind of high glee. Or I can just keep home and work out some little sadistic pleasure on my own. And on the terms the flesh-man wanted—truth, beauty, love—I'm practically sure there is no Happiness Machine out there anywhere at all. I'm almost sure there isn't.

THE END

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the
Spectroscope

by S. E. COTTS

ONE AGAINST HERCULUM. *By Jerry Sohl. 124 pp. Ace Books. Paper: 35¢.*

Jerry Sohl is another example of S-F fan turned writer. He has been an avid reader since the early days of the Gernsback pulps. Now the tangible results of this long exposure to the milieu of the future can be seen in his latest novel, and quite an original one it is.

Overpopulation has become such a problem in the galaxy that citizens must spend ten years on one of the domed outpost worlds to gain the right to go back and live on their own planets. Advancement on these worlds is based on the yearly tests given by machines—a seemingly incorruptible system. Then one candidate, Alan Demuth, finds out that graft and intrigue exist even there. Thwarted in his rightful attempt to advance, he applies for a crime license. Under this, he is given twenty-four hours to commit his crime, or suffer the penalty himself.

Apart from some occasional stiffness in the dialogue, this is a commendable book. Mr. Sohl has paced his action so skillfully that he accomplishes all he set out to do, even though his novel is unusually short.

TOMORROW TIMES SEVEN. *By Frederik Pohl. 160 pp. Ballantine Books. Paper: 35¢.*

This is the latest collection of "Pohl-ianna"—seven stories that have appeared in various magazines, brought together for the first time between covers. The book is such a treasure house that it is hard to know what to applaud first.

Perhaps the most outstanding feature is Pohl's own brand of humor which provides the main tone of the volume. He does not try to force it on the reader by blunt or obvious satire. It is humor

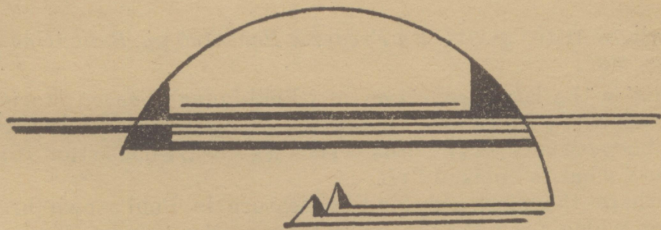
of a far more elusive kind. As nearly as it can be pinned down, it seems to rely on taking some of Earth's seedier characters and putting them in contact with some of the most original outworlders this reviewer has ever seen. Thus, in "Survival Kit," we follow the fortunes of a petty crook as he tries to make a dishonest dollar out of a time traveler. In "The Gentle Venusian," an alcoholic survey man from Earth has a run-in with the law on Venus, where the creatures spend their entire lives playing games. In "The Day of the Boomer Dukes," a New York gang collides with another time traveler.

The spice and originality of these ideas are further enhanced by the author's invention of certain delicious words for names of men and objects, and by the contrasting dialogue between the Earth people and the Spacers. And if in the ends of most of the stories, the aliens seem to get the best of us or have the last word, no one can really object because it is all such good fun.

SECRET OF THE LOST RACE. *By Andre Norton. 132 pp. Ace Books. Paper: 35¢.*

In this novel, Miss Norton attempts a more complex subject than is usual with her; unfortunately, she does not completely succeed. She gives us her usual high standard as far as the adventure aspects of the story go, but the reasons behind the adventure don't carry the excitement and conviction that have become her hallmarks.

What we have is a chase to end all chases. The hero, a young man named Joktar, seems to be the sole object of a search and attack by all the forces of the galaxy. He runs and plans and tricks and fights constantly, all without knowing why he seems to be the object of everyone's hatred. As mentioned before, the author generates plenty of suspense and puts her hero in some interesting locales. But when we discover the reasons behind all this activity, they seem strangely unexciting and anticlimactic. She hasn't left herself enough time or space to make the reader really believe or care.





Or so you say

Dear Editor:

May I add these footnotes to the excellent article by Isaac Asimov: "The Unused Stars" (July *Amazing*.) First, Astor and Pollux were in mythology the twin sons of Jupiter and Leda, and should not be confused by readers with the Romulus and Remus of Roman proto-history.

Second, as to Regulus in Leo (also called cor leonis, "heart of the lion"). Since Regulus more nearly follows the course of the sun through the zodiac than does any other prominent star, may not the ancients have named this star "the little kind" as a sort of secondary player to the great Apollo?

The last of these remarks within the realm of naked-eye astronomy concerns the practice of outlining constellations and asterisms by "drawing lines" from star to star. The age of star names must frequently be measured in millennia—time enough for apparent shift in position of some stars. Not enough time, perhaps, for significant change in man's innate perceptivity; but time enough, possibly, for an increasing opacity in Earth's atmosphere to obscure those configurations in depth and form among the star masses and dust clouds of the night sky which were so full of portent to people of another time. Occasionally on the clearest of nights one may sense a bison shape in Taurus that is far different from the outline of that constellation shown in any handbook for stargazers. Sometimes, in season and with luck, the most sophisticated may see within and around the northern cross some hint of that feathered beauty which his ancestors may have seen more clearly as the south-seeking swan.

Claire Beck
1142 N. Oak St.
Ukia, California

● *Thank you for some interesting (and nicely put!) speculations on the constellations.*

Dear Editor:

Being an artist, I can greatly appreciate the covers and interior illustrations in *Amazing*. I've been reading s-f for eight years and by now I'm pretty disgusted with the corny illustrations. However, your magazine offers first-rate pictures with first-rate stories. Let's have more of it.

I think you should have a few cartoons each month to add still another department to your already great magazine. Something to illustrate the problems encountered in future exploitations.

Chris Roe
710 Somerset Ave.
Taunton, Mass.

● *Good—really good—s-f cartoons are hard to come by. When and if we get 'em, we'll run 'em.*

Dear Editor:

I was particularly interested in the article, "The Unused Stars," by Isaac Asimov which appeared in the July *Amazing*. I've been an amateur astronomer of sorts for six or seven years.

I think Mr. Asimov has made a few errors in his description of Mizar and Alcor. First, he says that Mizar means "veil" and Alcor means "the weak one." I would like to know where he got that translation. I have before me a copy of *Field Book of the Skies*, by Olcott & Mayall. On page 62 it says: "The Arabs called these stars the 'Horse and Rider.'" They are referring to Mizar and Alcor. I have found this translation in several astronomy books, but I have never heard them called "veil" and "the weak one."

I would also like to comment on the part about Mizar and Alcor being a test for good eyesight. If the Arabs used these stars as an eyesight test, they must have had poor eyes. I have normal vision and I can see Alcor almost anytime I see Mizar. I think it's as much a matter of knowing where to look as having good eyesight. They should have used Epsilon Lyrae. That's a lot harder than Mizar.

Craig Wisch
11490 Bradhurst
Whittier, Calif.

● *How about it, Isaac? Been to the optician lately?*

Dear Editor:

I have subscriptions to both *Fantastic* and *Amazing*, but have one complaint: quit using amateur writers who you call "brilliant new

writers." Use a story by Ed Hamilton even if it does cost you a little more.

Kenneth E. Cooper
4641 Clintonville Rd.
Pontiac, Mich.

● *Even Hamilton was an amateur when he started. So were all the others. How are we going to uncover new s-f writers unless we expose a few to the critical readers?*

Dear Editor:

Recent issues seem to prove what I had hoped for but didn't really expect. That *Amazing* could really come back to the standards set in "the good old days."

The March issue was pretty special. Any issue that starts off a new Doc Smith story can't help being rather remarkable. But as you said, This was no one shot issue, all the featured stories since then have been very fine and the most recent, Lloyd Biggle's "A Taste of Fire" is as fine a case of good old space opera as it has been my pleasure to read in many a year.

You really seem to have shot the works on the matter of short stories, which is something that wasn't even done in the old days. The names of the writers in recent months are practically a who's who of s-f writers. But of them all I would like to single out one for special praise; Les Collins. He shows signs of becoming one of the very best of the newer writers in the field.

Reading some *real* s-f again after these many years is enough to make an old-timer such as myself almost admit that the good *new* days just might be even better. You have surely made a good start at it.

Clayton Hamlin
28 Earle Ave.
Bangor, Me.

● *We're glad you mentioned Les Collins, Mr. Hamlin. He's a talented young writer who merits recognition.*

Dear Editor:

Nuetzell's work is great. Don't lose him. Keep up your long novels. I'm looking forward to the sequel to "Hunters Out of Time" that

...OR SO YOU SAY

you said might be obtained soon. Where are those Frosty cartoons? Please illustrate your novels a little more like your old novels.

Michael Carroll
112 Tobar
El Paso, Texas

● *We have a brand new Nuetzell cover on tap and the sequel to "Hunters Out of Time" is really in the works.*

Dear Editor:

I hadn't had much experience with *Amazing* before, because most of the time I have my nose in a book of s-f. Then my family got me a year's subscription to the magazine. I glanced through it, not thinking I'd find much, after all. I got a pleasant surprise and so am now planning to spend a lot of time with *Amazing*.

This magazine is unquestionably one of the finest I've known. I acquired my disgust for these things because of some of the lower-rate, uninteresting material in some of them. This one has raised my hopes for daily material.

Jonathan Yoder
1105 Monroe St.
Evanston, Ill.

● *Readers take note: No more racking your brains to find the ideal gift for friends and family. A year's subscription to Amazing will put you in solid!*

Dear Editor:

Have just finished reading your June issue from cover to cover. "A Handful of Stars," by Poul Anderson is one of the finest novels I've read in three years of reading science fiction magazines.

Richard C. Keyes
San Francisco, Calif.

● *You and all other Poul Anderson fans have a treat coming your way when the December issue of Fantastic (Amazing's sister mag) goes on sale next month. It will feature another great novel with Dominic Flandry headlining the action.*

Dear Editor:

I have just finished Lloyd Biggle's novel "A Taste of Fire." It is one of the best I have ever read in *Amazing*. An entirely different twist to the psionic powers plots. Keep up the good work in this part of your magazine.

(Continued on page 146)



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(continued)

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STORY Criticism 4/10¢ a word plus return postage, Snouse, 2508 Hart Avenue., Santa Clara, Calif.

... OR SO YOU SAY

(Continued from page 144)

The cover was excellent. Summers is to be congratulated on a beautiful piece of work. Just one suggestion though: why don't you have your covers illustrating the novel or a short story appearing in that issue. One good illo does wonders for a story.

The short stories were all good.

I'm glad to see that one of my favorite authors, Murray Leinster is going to appear in the next issue with a full-length novel. It should be great.

Billy Joe Plott
P.O. Box 654
Opelika, Alabama

● *We agree with you about illos, Mr. Plott. So much so that we feel it would be a shame to turn down a fine s-f cover just because it doesn't explicitly describe a particular scene in a story. You'll find that the cover usually bears some connection to a story in the issue. At times the representation is exact, at other times it is symbolic or abstract, but nevertheless it's there.*

Dear Editor:

It's always one of the nicest things to me to see that a highly advertised *Amazing Novel* lived up to all of former expectations. I am speaking of "Long Ago, Far Away," by Murray Leinster. Congratulations. All in all, a very fine issue. Beautiful big, orange cover also.

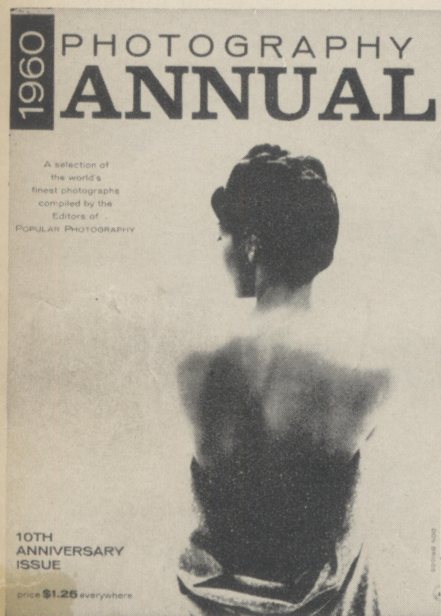
James W. Ayers
609 First St.
Attalla, Alabama

● *Thank you very much. And thank you, too, Mr. Leinster.*

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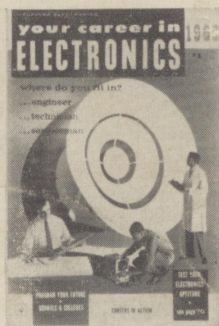
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