

DECEMBER 1953

HUGO GERNSBACH, Editor

Science-fiction *plus*

preview of the future

*complete
short novel*

THE TRIGGERED DIMENSION

by HARRY BATES

(author of "Death of a Sensitive.")

+

THE TRANS-HUMAN

by Murray Leinster

+

BITTER END

by Eric Frank Russell

+

THE VAMPIRATE

(a novelette)

by James H. Schmitz

+

many other stories

35¢



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NEXT ISSUE

**THE
MALIGNANT WHITE**

by
Murray Leinster

The stand-out feature of our next issue will be a complete short novel by the master science-fiction story teller, Murray Leinster. *The Malignant White* is a dramatic story of space-adventure, with the flavor and verve that gives good science-fiction its special appeal, and physical and philosophical aspects that add richness to the tale.

Leinster has taken some of the most provocative elements of space travel and combined them to form a solid and satisfying tale of interplanetary travel. Shipwreck on an unknown world; relics of a once mighty civilization; evidence that intelligent menace still persists; strange creatures in the Weinbaum tradition, and most baffling of all, the incredible mystery of *The Malignant White*. All these elements, combined with adroit craftsmanship add up to royal science-fiction entertainment.

+

SCIENCE-FICTION+ has made it a consistent policy to keep many of its outstanding stories and features a surprise. You will be pleased when you open the next issue of SCIENCE-FICTION+ and note the choice science-fiction which has been compiled to please the discriminating reader.

Science-fiction plus

preview of the future

DECEMBER, 1953

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will be paid by this magazine for each Short-Short Science-Fiction Story. These stories must be real science-fiction, not fantasy, and should not run over 1,000 words. The Short-Short + will occupy one full page.



This design, symbolizing science-fiction, is displayed with all stories of a serious scientific-technical trend. Such stories contain new scientific ideas which are certain to be realized in the future.

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Intelligence factor

A Short-Short †

by CORWIN F. STICKNEY

FOR UNTOLD MILLENIA the virus mass had drifted over the arid wasteland, knowing that it was the only sentient life on the planet. Yet ceaselessly and tirelessly, driven by instinctive need, it searched for the perceptive host that did not exist. The dying world barely sustained the virus mass, the irreducible remnant of its life, and, inevitably, when all air and warmth were dissipated, death would come to both.

But a time came when the thin atmosphere was disrupted by shock waves and a blast of welcome heat. The virus mass drifted curiously toward the source of the disturbance, toward the cylinder of gleaming metal, towering in the desert. . . .

"Take it easy, Neville!" complained the puffing little biologist. He struggled with the catch of his helmet, secured it, and snapped on the battery-powered microphone. "I'm as anxious as you to set foot on solid ground, but Mars is no place to break a leg!"

The larger man grunted impatiently, spun the knob that opened the airlock, and stepped quickly through. When Wilmer was beside him he closed the lock and put a gauntleted hand on the outer-hull door. Pausing, Neville glanced amusedly at the rotund biologist, whose heavy breathing filled his earphones.

"With your *avoirdufois*," he commented, "you could fall a mile and not worry. After you!"

An oval area in the gleaming cylinder swung outward, permitting the exit of the two suit-clad creatures who might or might not be suitable hosts to the virus that was unknown to them. The virus approached. However, the creatures proved unsuitable; their surfaces were entirely nonporous. The virus floated past the oval area just before it closed, and explored the interior surfaces of the ship. They, too, were nonporous.

Finding itself confined, the virus waited for a period that was inconsequential in its lifetime of waiting. Then the opening reappeared and the men entered.

"The planet is dead," muttered Wilmer, shedding his spacesuit. "Totally dead. What a letdown our report will be!"

Neville was equally depressed. "Yeah," he drily agreed. "There's hardly any point in testing with your pets. I wouldn't wish this place on my mother-in-law, much less Jackie and Jo-Jo."

At mention of his beloved monkeys, Wilmer's interest revived. "Oh, no," he said, starting toward their cage, "I must make the tests anyway. We have to learn—"

Neville looked up as Wilmer's voice became a strangled sound, saw his face turn green, his eyes roll wildly, saw him become violently sick and crumple to

the floor. Then Neville, staring, was swept by waves of nausea. The rocket compartment rotated dizzily about him as his kinesthetic centers went abruptly out of control. . . .

These two creatures *were porous*, after all! The virus mass had split and each half was surging through layer after layer of warm, pulsing tissue, hungrily seeking the vital centers where sustenance and fulfillment lay. Each perceived the nearness of its goal—and at almost the same instant each came to a frustrating, shocked halt.

These creatures were already virus-occupied!

Immediately the invaders unleashed furious attacks, attempting to envelop the resident viruses. But in neither case could the edge of surprise endure; in seconds each invader knew that its aroused foe was too numerous and too firmly entrenched.

There was nothing to do but withdraw.

Reunited, the virus evaluated its adversaries. Clearly, from their intraneural location, they too were symbiotic, performing the age-old function of stimulating and coordinating the host. But, judging from their hosts' limited capabilities, these symbiotes might be of a lower order, or else perhaps there was a chance they had become sluggish and inefficient. Perhaps unified assaults—first on the short, rounder host, whose occupant viruses had come nearer to defeat . . . but wait! There were *other* creatures here, other likely hosts.

The virus drifted toward the other pair of creatures. They somewhat resembled, in miniature, the two they had found to be occupied. The virus mass split. . . .

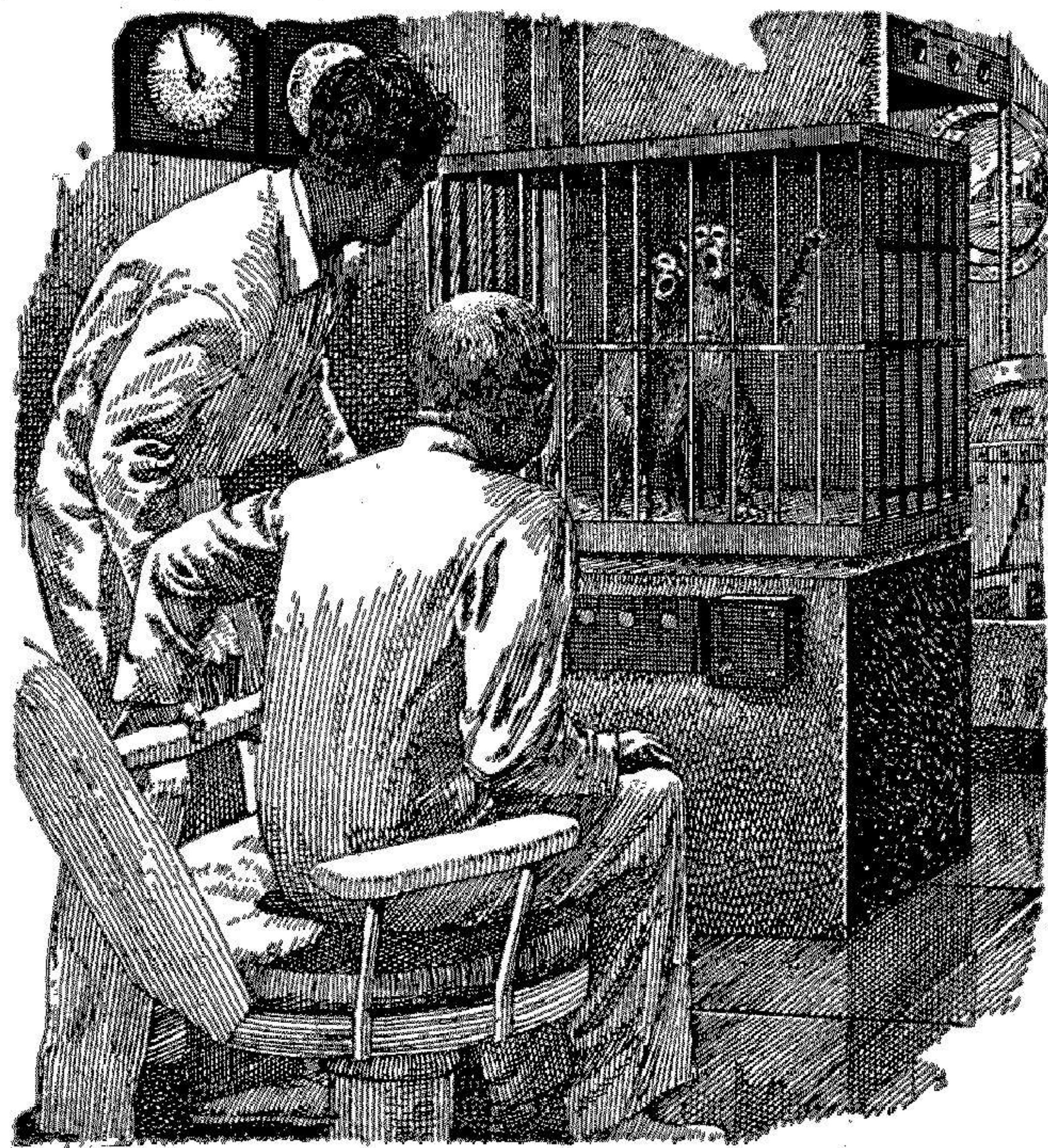
A moment ago to the monkeys it had seemed the most fascinating and natural pursuit in the world to be painstakingly grooming each other's body through the bars of their separate compartments. As the virus entered them, the game seemed to become pointless. It even seemed to Jackie and Jo-Jo to have become boring.

The brown rhesus monkeys drew apart and their eyes met in a long, intensely searching look, such as no two *Macaca rhesus* had ever before exchanged. . . .

Their hosts, each virus discerned, were imperfect in some ways. Compared to the first creatures—and the

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(Illustration by Lawrence)



"Look at your monks now, Wilmer."

liquid, shivering in the ecstasy of gorging. Frazer waited until she had finished the last drop before shooting her carefully through the back of the skull; and Sally sank forward without a quiver and lay still.

"Hated to do it, Sally!" he apologized gravely. "But I just couldn't take you along. We carnivores can't ever really be trusted!"

Which was, he decided somewhat wryly, the simple truth! He might accept the human role, at that; but, depending on the circumstances, never quite without qualification—

It was almost his last coherent thought. The very brief one that followed was a shocked realization that the sudden, terrible, thudding sensation in his spine and skull meant that a Deen gun was being used on him!

On that note of surprise, he blacked out.

LANE RAWLINGS remained motionless in the door-frame behind Frazer, leaning against it as if for support, for a good three minutes after he had dropped to the floor and stopped kicking. It wasn't that she was afraid of fainting; she only wanted to make very sure, at this distance, that Frazer was going to stay dead. She agreed thoroughly with his last remark.

The thought passed through her mind in that time that she could be grateful to the Nachief of Frome for one thing, at any rate—it had amused him to train his secretary to be a very precise shot!

After a while, she triggered the Deen gun once more, experimentally. Frazer produced no reactions now; he was as dead as Sally. Lane gave both of them a brief inspection before she pocketed the little gun and turned her attention to the food containers in the wall cabinet. With some reluctance, she opened one and found exactly what she expected to find. Now, the mainland humanoids Frazer had talked about might have a less harried existence in the future!

She looked down at Frazer's long, muscular body once more, with almost clinical curiosity, and then left the room and locked it behind her. She had no intention of entering it again; but there was evidence here that would be of interest to others—provided she found herself capable of operating the type of communicators used by the station.

Thirty minutes later, with no particular difficulty,

INTELLIGENCE FACTOR

comparison had to be made—they had serious structural shortcomings. But necessity could devise compensations for physical handicaps—especially since their hosts received the virus without unfavorable reactions. The symbiotes luxuriated in their new-found cellular warmth and vitality, the while prudently considering their hosts' most urgent problem, lack of intergenus communication . . .

The monkeys looked at each other and knew that they were alone and utterly alone, because they were unique. The knowledge had been deduced and flashed between them in a wordless process that was in itself unique. For Jo-Jo and Jackie would never need words now, not with pure concepts originating from the virus phoenix-like in their minds, clear for each other to see and elaborate on.

But there was this constant, disturbing awareness of self, this loneliness and yearning for others of their kind! And wasn't there danger, too? They were confined here. The humans were larger than they and stronger . . . stronger?

Jackie flashed Jo-Jo an idea. Approvingly, he signaled her a somewhat modified picture, and after

she had contacted the area headquarters of the Bureau of Agriculture. She gave them her story coherently; and even if they didn't believe her, it was obvious they would waste no time in getting a relief crew to the station. Which was all Lane was interested in. After the Bureau concluded its investigations, somebody might do something about providing psychological treatment for the Frome colonists; but she wasn't concerned about that. She was returning to the Hub Systems.

She remained seated in the dim light of the communications cell for a time, watching her dark reflection in the polished surfaces of its walls and listening to the intermittent whirring of a ventilator in the next office, which was all that broke the silence of the station now. She wondered whether she would have become suspicious of Frazer soon enough to do her any good, if she hadn't known for the past few weeks that she was carrying a child of the Nachief of Frome. For the past three days, she had been wondering also whether saving her life, at least for a while, by informing the Nachief of the fact, would be worth while! It was easy to imagine what a child of his might grow up to be.

Unaware, detail by detail since their meeting, Frazer had filled out her mental picture of that. So she had known enough to survive the two feral creatures in the end—

As soon as she returned to the easy-going anonymity of the Hub Systems, this other one of their strain would die unborn! The terrible insistence on life on their own terms which Frazer and the Nachief had shown was warning enough against repetition of the nightmare.

Lane caught herself thinking, though, that there had been something basically pitiful about that inward-staring, alien blindness to human values, which forced all other life into subservience to itself because it could see only itself; and she stirred uneasily.

The ventilator in the next office shut off with a sudden click.

"Of course, it will die!" she heard herself say aloud in the silence of the station. *Perhaps a little too loudly . . .*

After that, the silence remained undisturbed. A new contemplation grew in Lane as she sat there wondering about *Frazer's* mother. +

(Continued from page 11)

several rapid exchanges it had become a plan. She chattered with excitement as for a moment they hugged each other through the bars. Then their heads turned in unison toward the two men. . . .

"Look at your monks now, Wilmer." Neville wiped sweat from his forehead. "Whatever it was that hit us, it didn't miss them altogether. *Did you ever see such a frightened pair?*"

The biologist stared at the silent creatures. He was still rather green. "I'm ready to go home," he announced finally. "If they're scared, I guess we all are ready to go back."

"No tests, then?"

"Not worth the chance we'd take, opening that airlock again. I'd rather die on Earth!"

"I'm with you all the way on that," said Neville. "Let's blast off!"

Neither man thought it strange that the next thing Wilmer did was walk to the cage, open it, and give the monkeys freedom of the compartment. The virus-coördinated Jackie and Jo-Jo had worked a plan, and its essence was freedom—freedom for self-fulfillment.

Freedom to propagate their kind. . . . +