

A GOD NAMED SMITH — He Created A Universe

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Editor

PAUL W. FAIRMAN

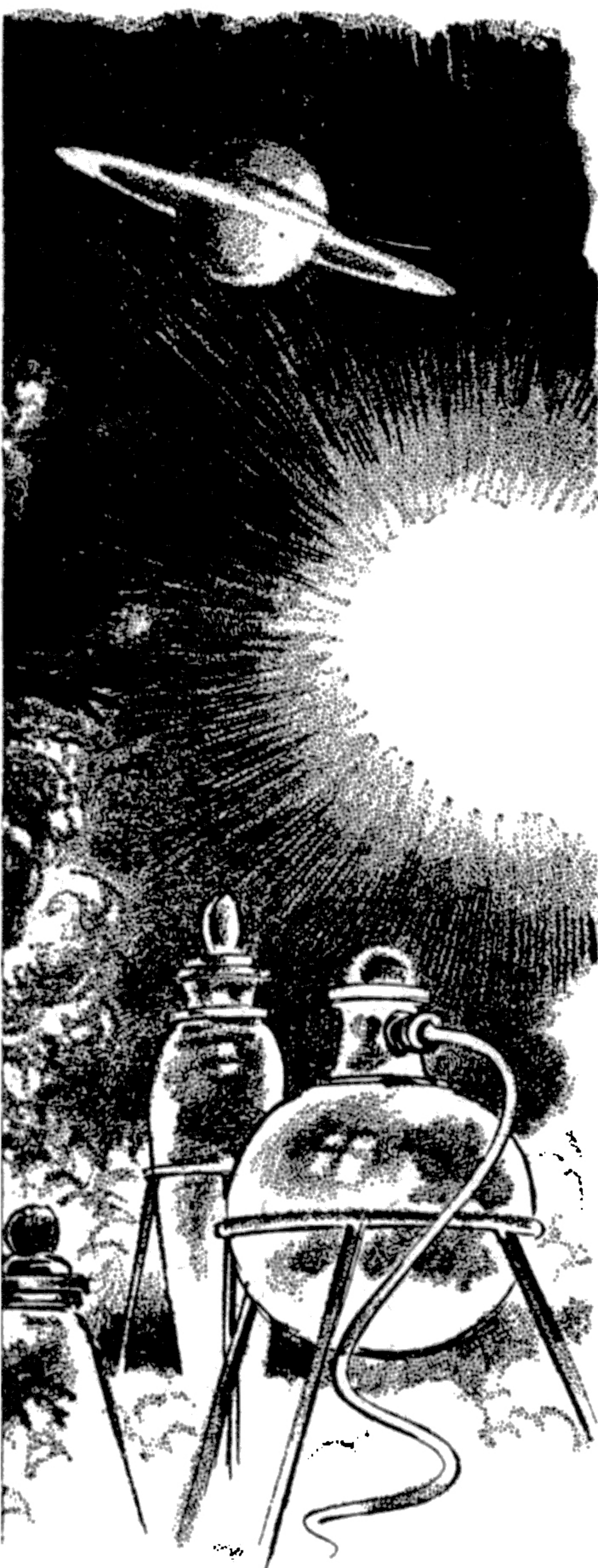
Managing Editor
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If the universe is a dream of God,



A GOD NAMED SMITH

By HENRY SLESAR

"What Man can imagine, Man can do." A sublime premise indeed, but Smith thought of an even more staggering one. "What God can imagine, Man can do," he said. God built a universe. Could Smith do the same?

HE HAD a first name when I met him. He wasn't just Smith; he was Robert Smith or Ronald Smith, something like that. But in the incredible years that followed our first meeting, his Christian name was either lost or buried, and he became simply Smith. Not Smith, the Man. Just Smith. Smith, the God.

A thousand reporters have poised their pencils at me and asked about that meeting. I told them the same story every time.

"Well, there wasn't much to it," I'd say. "We were students at Ardmore University.

cannot Man have a similar dream?

He was the Boy Wonder, of course, only thirteen years old, and I was a sophomore of nineteen. But we hit it off okay, and became good friends. That's all there was to it."

That's what I used to say. It wasn't much, and it never made headlines. But I was shy of talking about Smith in those days. Now things are different. Now I have to talk, or the Smith-facts that have piled up inside me will blow up in some spontaneous eruption, and me along with it. I have to talk, even though there's a thin and icy voice in the back of my brain that says, "Keep your silence, Luke. Smith isn't dead. You can't kill Smith."

I was a sophomore, and I was no different from a hundred other wise-eyed young men at Ardmore University. We dressed the same way, did the same things, shared the same beliefs. Naturally, we were fashionable atheists. The only kind of Hell we believed in was the kind we could raise at frat parties. The only kind of Heaven we cared about was the kind that involved a bottle of 100 proof Irish and an obliging coed. We could quote you Voltaire and Shaw and Joyce and

Nietzsche. We thought the world was our oyster, but we were cynical about finding pearls in it.

I met Smith on one of my Hangover Days.

I was sprawled out on the cot in my room at the Psi Gamma House, clutching a No Parking sign to my chest, still wearing my best blue serge from last night's binge. It was Sunday, and I was content to sleep until Monday's classes. But I didn't. I began to sense that somebody was looking at me, so I pulled my eyelashes apart and peered out through the scarlet mist. A figure took shape.

"Pardon me," Smith said. "Is this Mr. Wingate's room?"

My eyes widened a little. Smith was something I didn't expect. He was a long-headed kid about twelve or thirteen, with a sad mouth and half-closed eyes and hair the color of dry straw. He was carrying a suitcase that was putting a strain on his thin arms and shoulders.

"I'm sorry to disturb you," the kid said. "But I was told to come up here. My name is Smith."

I groaned and struggled to an approximation of sitting position. I said: "Look, kiddo, didn't your mother teach you

manners? Be a good boy and blow."

He stiffened, and his eyelids flew open. I found myself looking into twin caverns. Even in my sorry state, the sight of Smith's dark and empty eyes made me shiver. I said: "I'm Wingate, son. What can I do for you?"

"I don't know." He looked around the room uncertainly. "A fellow named Curtis told me to come here, see you about something."

"Curtis?" Gil Curtis was a barrel-chested senior, the class clown. It didn't take a slide-rule to determine what had happened. It was a Curtis special, the old left-handed monkey wrench, the striped paint, the phoney errand. Only why the hell was Curtis picking on kids?

Then Smith explained. "It's my first semester here. I've been transferred from Crowley."

I pushed aside the No Parking sign on my bed. "Now I gotcha," I said. "You're the boy prodigy they've been talking about. Did Curtis maybe mention a left-handed monkey wrench?"

"Something like that."

"You're being ribbed, Smith. Curtis is Society's Funniest Man. He knew I was blacked out here, so he sent

you up. You wouldn't have an aspirin in that carpetbag?"

Smith shook his head, and his tight lips made his pale face look smaller.

"I don't see what's so funny," he said.

"Neither do I. But no harm done." I looked at him with interest. "How old are you, Smith?"

"Thirteen."

"You must be a pretty bright boy. That oughta make you the youngest freshman they ever had at Ardmore."

"No, it doesn't." Smith turned towards the door. "I'm a senior." There was more than a tinge of superiority in his tone.

I didn't see Smith for a couple of weeks after that, until pledging time rolled around. We had a typically unparliamentary meeting in the frat house, and somebody mentioned his name as a candidate, half-serious, half-joking. Somebody said:

"You'll have to admit he's a novelty. And he's got brains. We could use a few brains around this dump."

"Why'd he leave Crowley College?" I asked. "And in his senior year?"

"Dunno. Some kind of trouble or other."

"Nuts," Gil Curtis said. "We don't want any runny-

nosed kid around here. I say no."

We put it to a vote, and there was a limp raising of hands on the issue. For some perverse reason, I voted to pledge Smith. But I was the only one.

That same afternoon, I had the bad fortune to be walking in the same direction as Gil Curtis. He was loud-mouthed and clownish as usual as he strolled beside me, and when he spotted the frail form of Smith coming in the other direction, his eyes lit up.

"Hey, here comes the egg-head."

"Lay off," I growled. But it was too late; Curtis put out a beefy hand and laid it on Smith's small flat chest, blocking his path.

"Hey, junior," he said. "How's the left-handed monkey wrench coming?"

Smith looked at him without blinking. "I think I've found one all right. I'm staying at the Ivy House, if you'd care to take a look at it."

Curtis smothered a guffaw. "Sure, Junior, let's have a peek. You coming, Luke?"

I said yes, and the three of us cut across the campus towards the auxiliary dormitory building that had been

added to the University structures with the increased enrollment. Smith had a small, bare room on the third floor, and it looked even more cramped due to a conglomeration of electronic apparatus he had brought with him from Crowley. I surveyed the confused mass of equipment, and recalled hearing that Smith was some kind of scientific prodigy. I was a journalism student myself, and any gadget more complex than an electric razor made me want to lie down with a cold compress on my head.

Smith threaded his way through the junk, and picked up a shiny-new wrench from some canvas-covered object in the corner. He handed it to Curtis, and the buffoon took it in his right hand, an uncertain sneer on his face.

"Very funny," he said, hefting the tool. "You're not just a genius, you're a real comedian."

"Try it," the kid said coldly. He handed Curtis a large nut and bolt. "Take this apart. If you can."

I watched Curtis grab the nut-and-bolt from the kid's hand and apply the wrench. No matter how he twisted, the nut wouldn't turn. Finally, he took it off by hand and examined the screw-thread.

"It's not the thread," Smith said. "The thread is right-handed. It's the wrench that's left-handed."

"A real comedian," Curtis muttered. But no matter how he tried, he couldn't remove the nut. His fleshy face began to redden, and his neck swelled.

Smith said: "I guess you didn't understand me, Mr. Curtis. It's a left-handed monkey wrench. That means you have to use your left hand."

Curtis glared, and switched the wrench to his other hand. When he applied it to the nut, it slipped easily off the bolt. He stared at the pieces in his hand, cursed, and threw everything on the bed. Then he stalked out.

I stayed behind, and watched the kid pick up his tool and put it away. Then he started fooling with his electronic set-up. There wasn't much expression on his face, not even a small glow of triumph. I said: "What kind of a trick was that?"

"Simple," he shrugged. "I just sent an ordinary wrench through a Moebius-warp. It came back in a left-handed molecular arrangement."

"Are you kidding?"

He stopped fussing, and turned his dark, empty eyes

in my direction. There was a frozen hardness in his face that had nothing to do with his young age.

"Why should I kid you?" he said tonelessly.

"No reason." I shrugged and went to the door. Something made me turn back and say: "I hope you like it here, Smith."

It's hard to say whether the monkey-wrench episode was the beginning of the friendship between Smith and myself. It was a juiceless relationship; Smith wasn't somebody you could warm up to. We spent time together after class, and once in a while we'd go down to the coffee shop and talk. That is, Smith talked. Not about himself, but about the work he was doing, his studies, his plans for future research. It didn't take long to get the impression that there was contempt in Smith's attitude towards his instructors, and I began to realize that the student-teacher roles were hopelessly disjointed. Smith knew more about physics, mathematics, cosmology, and practically every other science than anybody on the staff, and there was an atmosphere of despair among the faculty.

Before long, I realized that

my friendship with Smith was costing me the friendship of virtually every other student. I guess I was always an outgoing kind of personality, and it was hard for me to believe that I wasn't wanted in any society. But that truth was spelled out for me clearly. Especially when my own fraternity brothers sent a delegation to tell me my status. Curtis was the ring-leader and spokesman, and he put the case bluntly. Stop hanging around Smith, or quit the fraternity. I got hot-headed at the crude proposition, and told them all to perform a freak biological act. Then I stormed up to my room and packed my bags.

That was how Smith and I got to share a room at Ivy House. And that was how I discovered the Bible.

It was a Saturday afternoon, and Smith had taken the train into the city to attend some scientific symposium or other. I was in my favorite position, horizontal, on the bed, having a cozy dream about a redhead. I woke up around two, and drifted around the room with the vague idea of reading a book. Usually, I passed up the books on Smith's shelf, having little interest in the

jawbreaker titles that lined it. But this time, I looked, and with some surprise, spotted a dogeared edition of the Old Testament. I lifted it out, and opened the first cover. There was an Ex Libra stamp that said: "TO OUR CHAMPION BIBLE STUDENT, FROM REV. HARLOW MOORE."

The first page read: "*The Holy Bible, translated out of the original tongues in the year of our Lord MDCXI.*"

I flipped the pages of dedication to King James. When I came to the First Book of Moses called Genesis, my eyes went wide as I saw the pencilled corrections on the text. Reading with Smith's changes, the first paragraph read:

"In the beginning Smith created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of Smith moved upon the face of the waters. And Smith said, Let there be light; and there was light . . ."

I have to admit it. Atheist as I professed to be, the sight of that altered page turned me cold and fearful. I looked out of the window as if expecting to see God's revengeful lightning crackling over

the peaceful campus of Ardmore University. The fact that Smith had rewritten God out of the Bible seemed like the ultimate blasphemy, and I felt as if my very reading of Smith's revisions had entangled me inextricably with Smith's own brand of damnation.

"And Smith said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And Smith made the firmament . . ."

I closed the book and put it back on the shelf. Then I hurried back to the bed and sat down.

Was it some kind of prank? I shook my head. If anything, Smith was humorless. Perhaps it was some kind of twisted vengeance Smith was taking upon the world; maybe it was a simple case of childish rebellion over a restricted childhood. Maybe he'd been tormented by fanatical parents, driven into a religious scholasticism which he had secretly hated. The explanation seemed logical, but I couldn't let it go at that. I had to know more.

So I asked Smith.

He returned from the city at eight that evening, his small face showing that pe-

culiar exhaltation that any scientific conversation produced in him. When I made a casual reference to the altered Bible, his features froze again.

"Don't mess with my things, Luke. I've asked you before."

I displayed some of my famous temper, and slammed out of the room.

I spent a couple of hours getting solitary drunk. When I returned to Ivy House, I was singing a hymn at the top of my lungs. Nobody heard it; the students were all at frat parties or in town. Nobody but Smith.

He said: "Luke, I want to show you something."

"Show me what?"

"Something to do with that Bible you saw. I've thought about showing you for sometime, but I didn't know if you could keep the secret."

"Say, listen—" I said thickly.

"Never mind. Just look at this."

He walked to the corner of the room, towards the large object that remained covered by canvas. He whipped off the concealing cloth, and I saw that the object underneath was a tall cabinet about the height of a man, and four feet wide, the top

half glass-enclosed, the bottom half studded with dials and switches.

"What's that?" I said. "Looks like some kinda coffin—"

"Just the reverse," Smith said. "Things are born here, not buried. Would you like to see it work?"

I shuffled up to it and pressed my nose against the glass. "Don't see nothin'. What's it do?"

Smith started to fool with the controls. The thing emitted a low-pitched whine. Otherwise, nothing happened.

"The glass encloses a group of noncondensable gases," Smith said. "Like hydrogen, and helium. There are dust particles, too, like water, iron oxides, ice crystals, silicon compounds. You can't see them now, but they're there, just as they might form within the rotating envelope of the sun. This device is activating those gases and particles at enormous speed, causing them to collide. They're being mutually exploded by each other, but are also becoming imbedded with each other's mass. Within a few minutes, you'll see them aggregate until the mass is visible to the naked eye."

My naked eye wasn't see-

ing so well, but I continued to peer through the glass. After five minutes, I thought I could see the pinpoint of something in the center of the cabinet. I blinked at it, and saw it grow larger. Before another ten minutes had gone by, I saw the pinpoint enlarge into a ball almost an eighth of an inch in circumference.

"What the hell is it?" I said.

"It's a world," Smith answered.

"A what?"

"A small planet. A very small planet, created out of an artificial cosmos. Right now, its heat intensity is almost great enough to shatter the retaining glass. So we'll have to start the cooling process."

He tugged at a switch on the panel, and I saw his small face go white.

"What's wrong?"

"The refrigeration switch is jammed. Something's wrong."

"Can't you fix it?"

"There isn't any time—"

I put my hand over his small fingers and tried to help, but even our combined strengths didn't do any good. I suddenly realized that Smith's anxiety was serious;

I'd never seen so much emotion on his face.

"Still growing," I said, looking into the cabinet. I put my hand on the glass and yanked it away. "Ouch! The damned thing is *hot*."

"We'll have to do something!" Smith's eyes were wild. Right then, he seemed like nothing more than a frightened kid. "If we don't stop the process—"

"Hey! Is this thing dangerous?"

"Get out of here!" Smith screamed at me. "Warn them! Get them out of the building!"

I hesitated. "There's nobody in the building. Just us."

"Then get out of here, Luke! There isn't much time—"

I took one look at the cabinet glass, and saw it begin to glow ugly white. "How about you?"

"I've got to try—"

"Nuts to that," I said, and put my arms around Smith's narrow waist, yanking him off the controls. He began to kick at me, screaming shrilly, while I tried to drag him towards the door. There was a hum in the cabinet that seemed to be coming from the expanding, spinning speck inside the glass, and I could

actually feel the room growing warmer.

"Let me down!" he screamed. "Let me down, Luke!"

"Sorry, pal." There was unusual strength in his scrawny frame, and I remembered something I'd learned in swimming class. I cocked my right arm and let go a short, snappy punch to the kid's chin. He sagged unconscious into my arms, and I hoisted his light body over my shoulder. Then, with one backward look at the menacingly glowing gadget in the room, I headed out the door and down the stairs.

I was halfway across the campus when Ivy House was destroyed, in a shattering explosion that knocked out windows in the village twelve miles away.

The story of Smith's expulsion from Ardmore University is well known, and there's nothing I can add that can't be found in the newspaper accounts. The feature writers really had a field day with the item, no matter how hard the Ardmore faculty tried to put a clamp on the details. It was one of the standard silly season stories newsmen rely on: the scientist fooling around his homemade laboratory and blowing

up the building. It was good for a chuckle on a lazy Sunday afternoon, and it served to confirm the popular notion that scientists, as a class, were a pretty dunderheaded lot.

It was on the day of Smith's departure from the Ardmore railway station that I first learned any facts concerning Smith's childhood. I helped him carry his bags to the train, but the 6:42 arrived late, and we got to talking.

His father had died when he was three, and his mother had been a solid, God-fearing woman who was frightened by her son's precocious abilities, and thought that a heavy dose of religious training would perhaps balance his intense interest in the sciences. His only contribution to that training had been his astonishing feat of learning the Bible, Old Testament and New, by rote, word for word. Thus the award from Reverend Harlow Moore. Then his mother had been killed in an air crash, and an uncle named Howard Cherney had been appointed Smith's guardian. Cherney had no qualms about Smith's genius; he immediately arranged for his formal education, and witnessed Smith's incredible

progress through every school grade, leading to his enrollment, at the age of ten, in Crowley College.

Smith stopped reminiscing at this point, as if reluctant to reveal the reason why he had transferred to Ardmore in his senior year. But it was obvious that he had run into similar troubles at Crowley.

When the train pulled in, Smith turned to me and said:

"I haven't thanked you, Luke. I want to now."

"What for?"

"For my life, of course. My life is very important to me. Important to you, too, for that matter."

I gagged a little at that speech, but swallowed hard and stuck out my hand.

"Lots of luck, kid," I said. "And take it easy on the world-building."

"I'll know better next time," Smith said.

He got on the train, a pathetic and fragile little figure, toting a bag too heavy for him. I didn't see him again for six years, and when I did, he was well on his way to becoming Smith, the God.

On graduation from the University, I talked my way into a cub's job on the *Times-Express*. It was a nice little

plum, and there were forty guys in my graduating class that were keening for the opportunity. I must admit that I used my association with Smith to develop the lead. My first contribution was a series of articles about Smith, that rapidly developed into a popular series concerning other "wild-eyed" scientists. I knew I was feeding a myth, but my conscience didn't trouble me. I was a reporter; that was all that mattered.

After a while, the series ran its course, and I settled down into the real drudgery of newspaper work. It was three years before I could call myself a full-fledged reporter, and even then my assignments were on the minor side. I didn't earn a byline until my fifth year on the job, but when I did, you can be sure my circle of friends knew all about it.

Among those friends was Evelyn.

Evelyn was a fresh-faced kid only a couple of years my junior, and sassy as they come. Young as she was, Evelyn was already an accomplished actress, with two fat stage roles behind her. I guess I was attracted by the facts of her success more than her beauty; that came later. She had a lovely, imp-

ish face, wore her golden hair mannishly short, and had a star-quality in her eyes, a brightness that made heads turn in the street. I think Evelyn knew that I wasn't such a big-shot journalist as I pretended to be, but she also didn't care.

It was Evelyn who brought Smith back into my life, quite accidentally. I had been dating her casually, so had no real reason to take offense at meeting her with somebody else draped on her arm. But somehow, my temper got triggered when I saw her strolling into a restaurant with a man more than twice her age.

I called on her the next day, and began to ask questions.

"None of your business," she said, curling up on the sofa and looking mischievous. "I like older men. They have an air."

"They have an air, all right. And it smells like money, I'll bet."

"At least they're honest. They don't pretend to be what they're not. Howard doesn't, anyway."

"Howard who?"

"Howard Cherney, the man you saw last night. He's really *very* nice."

"And rich?"

"And rich. He's some kind of patent attorney, I think. From what he told me, he's worth something like eighteen or twenty million dollars."

I frowned at her. "I didn't think you were the type."

"Oh, don't be so moral. Can't I like a rich man?"

"Sure, but—hey, wait a minute. This guy's name is familiar." I chewed on my lip and tried to jog my memory. Finally, I came up with: "Smith. That's where I heard it."

"You mean that creepy college chum of yours?"

"He had an uncle named Howard Cherney. He became his guardian when Smith's mother died. The thing fits. Maybe the patents he's attorneying for are Smith's patents. Maybe my friend Smith is a millionaire now, too."

"How delightful," Evelyn said. "You must introduce me."

That was the beginning of my new relationship with Smith. Evelyn got the facts from her rich boy friend, and sure enough, he turned out to be Smith's guardian, a man who had made a fortune on Smith's electronic genius. He told her that his nephew was

living in seclusion in a suburb called Harmel. I found out where and wrote Smith a letter. His reply read:

Dear Luke,

Will expect you on the 7th, at 2:30.

Smith

I expected to find something palatial, but Smith's address in Harmel turned out to be nothing more than a huge, poorly-renovated barn. When I knocked on the door, Smith himself answered. I had no trouble recognizing him. He had grown upwards and outwards in six years, but his face still had its sad, boyish expression, and his eyes when they turned on me were dual caverns of disturbing darkness. He looked tired, yet somehow elated, inspired by a hidden power.

Our first greeting was hesitant, and slightly embarrassed. We didn't even shake hands. Smith led me inside the place, and I smelled an accumulation of dust and grime and ozone that wasn't pleasant on the nostrils.

"I've been working," he said, wiping his hands on his trousers."

"Understand you've done pretty well, Smith."

"I've done very well. I'm

almost ready for it now. Another two or three years—”

“I meant your inventions. Evelyn, the girl I wrote you about, she says your uncle’s loaded. I guessed that you must be fairly well off, too.”

“Toys,” Smith said grimly. “The only reason I bothered with the inventions was to get money for equipment. It’s a costly business; you have no idea.” He looked at me sharply. “How much money does my uncle have?”

It was a strange question, but I answered it. “I dunno. Evelyn says eighteen or twenty million. Don’t you know?”

“No. I haven’t kept track of the finances; I’ve been too busy. But I suppose I’ll have to start thinking about money soon. I’ll be needing a great deal.”

“What for?”

He moved his lips in what passed for a Smith-smile. “You should know, Luke. You saw the original model.”

Then I remembered the glass-enclosed cabinet, and the tiny ball of growing matter, and the dreadful moment at the refrigeration switch. I heard the terrible whine of the device in the soundbox of my memory, and then the deafening roar of the explosion . . .

“You’re kidding,” I said feebly. “You’re not still messing around with that world-building machine?”

“Not messing around. Concentrating.”

He walked to a door that led to the basement stairs.

“Come have a look,” Smith said.

We went down the steps, and I halted half-way down to clutch the rail in amazement. Virtually the entire basement floor was occupied by a cabinet much like the one Smith had demonstrated to me at Ardmore. But it was wider; easily forty feet across, and some ten feet high. The bang of gauges and switches on the control panel were multiplied in the dozens.

I descended the rest of the stairs slowly, recalling the holocaust caused by the first device, and not wanting to speculate on the destructive possibilities of this one.

“Don’t worry,” Smith chuckled dryly. “A simple mechanical failure can’t occur again. The machine is controlled by a servo-mechanism that’s self-correcting. Would you like a demonstration?”

“No!”

“That’s just as well,” Smith said, and I sighed. “I’ve been

putting the machine through a number of experiments today; I'd just as soon let it rest. Basically, the same principles are applied as the model you saw at Ardmore, although I've made some important improvements. I've learned enough since then to create not only worlds, but actually worlds with their own satellites, and in any orbital relationship I choose. My problems with the world-machine are just about ended, Luke. But I have a far more difficult project underway now—and I suppose I'm ready to concede failure."

"Failure?" I said. "That doesn't sound like you, Smith. What could you fail with?"

There was a tubular metal chair facing the machine. Smith sat in it, wearily.

"Life," he said.

"What?"

"Oh, not simple cellular life. I solved that particular problem two years ago, created a crystal grouping that was bio-chemically assimilable. I trust you won't mention this to anyone; I'm not interested in that kind of publicity. But that's the fact: I've created laboratory life. The problem is to evolve it into something more than activated slime."

"I'm sorry," I said. "You're more unintelligible to me than ever, Smith. I don't know what you're talking about."

Smith pushed himself out of the chair and walked to the other side of the basement. He wheeled over an ebony-black cabinet with a high-powered microscope on its top surface.

"This will make it clear," he said. "One of my manufactured worlds is inside this cabinet; the microscope is focused to give you a good picture of its terrain—and its inhabitants."

"Inhabitants?"

"See for yourself."

I went to the microscope and put my eyes to the twin lenses. Smith made some adjustments for my focal range, and I looked at his manmade world.

It was a rocky, pitted, unlovely world. There were deep grooves and cavities and blemishes on its surface. It was arid and devoid of greenery.

Then I saw the thing coming out of a crevice.

It was sluggish, uncertain of its movements. It crawled with a clumsy locomotion of its gelatinous body, and seemed to be getting nowhere. It was colorless, and

almost transparent, and completely revolting.

"Ugh!" I pulled my eyes away and looked at Smith in disgust. "What the hell was that?"

"A Smith-creature," Smith said wryly, perhaps even with amusement. "Nothing I'm proud of, you can be sure of that. But a Smith-creature nevertheless, created by Smith, nurtured by Smith, kept alive or made dead by Smith. But unfortunately, without the sense or intelligence to worship Smith, or make Smith proud of his accomplishment."

I didn't like what he was saying, and I began to move back towards the stairway.

"Don't be horrified," he said. "My meager effort isn't even worth that. It's made me realize that there is a limit to what I can do, in the time I want to do it. So I'm through with creating life, Luke. The project can't afford to wait so long."

"What project?"

Smith bent down and peered into the microscope. Then he sighed, and opened a panel in the side of the cabinet. There were four simple dials. He turned one of them, and looked into the lens once more.

"Farewell," he said softly.

"What have you done?"

"Smith giveth," he said, "and Smith taketh away..."

"You've killed it?"

"With simple heat. Like fire from heaven."

"You're crazy!"

I bit down hard on my lip as the words came out of my mouth. It was a thought I'd never permitted my own mind to have, and a thought I meant never to express to anyone—especially Smith.

But he didn't take offense. He said: "At times, a little madness is an asset. Just a little. But let's go upstairs and have coffee, Luke. We've got a lot to talk about." He turned and led the way.

We had coffee, and Smith and I sat around for an hour in the dim room upstairs, talking about our college days. I began to relax, until Smith put down his cup and said:

"I'm going to create a world, Luke."

"What?"

"A better world. A world without fault, and a world without end. A world where Nature is subservient to Man, and Man subservient to God. A world where beauty and perfection are more important than hate and lust. A world where Man can live in

peace and harmony and eternal truth."

I stared at him. The pat little speech had come out of him without emotion. I had the impression that this, too, was something learned by rote, the way Smith knew the Bible.

"Are you serious?" I said.

"Deadly serious. Within two years or three, I'm going out into space and add another planet to this solar system of ours. The problems are vast, but not insurmountable. I had hoped to evolve my own breed of life for this planet, create my own kind of homo sapiens by artificial evolution. I know now that this was only childish dreaming. Worlds are far easier to create than Man. Man calls for time; I don't have that kind of time at my disposal."

I didn't know what to say.

"I've calculated carefully," Smith went on. "I've worked on nothing else since leaving Ardmore. Now I'm almost ready to begin." He frowned suddenly. "Money," he said.

"Money?"

"You're right; I'll need a great deal of it, an enormous amount. You say Howard has eighteen million?"

"That's what I hear."

"It'll do for a start. Do you

have any connections in the stock market, Luke?"

"No. Unless you count Briggs, the financial editor of the paper."

"It doesn't matter. I can learn what I don't know. My problem will be to develop a trading system which will give me the funds I need without crippling the national economy. I don't want to inaugurate Smith's world by having a planetary enemy."

"Now, look," I said weakly, annoyed at this last expression of ego. But Smith wouldn't be interrupted. He fixed his eyes on my face and asked:

"What do you say, Luke? Will you join me in this enterprise?"

"What's that?"

"I want you to join me, help me. I know it's a great deal to ask; I'm sure your journalism career is important to you. But I want you on Smith's World, Luke. I want you to be by my side when I create it, people it, manage its affairs, bring it to a state of glory this silly globe of ours will never see."

It took me awhile before I could muster up the right words to refuse Smith's offer.

"You're being foolish, Luke. I'm serious about this world I'm going to create.

You know me; I mean to do what I say. I'm offering you the opportunity to be my principal assistant. To be—" He paused, and his eyes stopped seeing me. "To be God's right hand."

I turned my back and went to the stairs.

"Don't decide hastily," Smith said. "If the scientific or spiritual aspects of my plan don't interest you, perhaps the materialistic will. If it's money you're interested in, I can make you the richest man of Smith's World, Luke. Women? You'll never have such opportunities on Earth as I plan to provide on my planet—"

"Cut it out," I said. "I don't want to hear any more about it, Smith. I suppose you know what you're doing, and I don't doubt that you will. But let's get this clear. I like the world under my feet right now. I don't want any other. And don't forget, Smith. I'm the old atheist, remember. I don't believe in God; not even your kind."

His face changed slowly, but it changed. For a moment, he was almost pouting, like a thwarted child. Then he was the Smith I knew: frozen-faced, sufficient unto himself.

"We'll see," he said quietly. "There's still time, Luke."

Maybe you'll change your mind."

Six months went by before I knew definitely that Smith's plans were beyond the dreaming phase. The realization came when Lou Briggs, the *Times-Express* financial editor, called me into his office and offered me a chair.

I was flattered. The *Times-Express* was an important business paper, and its financial chief a man of consequence.

"You know Smith?" he asked. Briggs was a small, sallow-skinned man with bad teeth. He looked worried.

"Yes, I know him. Why?"

"Been following the Wall Street news?"

"Not particularly. Anything happening?"

Briggs grunted. "Your friend's decided to take a flyer on the market. He didn't do so well at first; dropped almost a million dollars in two days of trading. We didn't play up the story; some of our friends on the Exchange don't like that kind of publicity."

"So what?"

"Well, he's been doing better. He's recouped his losses, and he's been gathering strength ever since. From what I hear, he's displaying

the shrewdest trading sense since the days of the old Wall Street barons. The talk on the street is—" Briggs began to worry his lower lip. "He's out for a killing. Maybe the biggest in the history of the market. If his luck holds out—"

"What are you telling me, Mr. Briggs?"

"If this madman continues successfully, he'll cause a panic. There'll be millions lost. It's crazy to think that he'll succeed; the law of averages is against him; he's violating every sound law of finance—"

I couldn't prevent the snicker. "If I know Smith, Mr. Briggs, he's got the law on his side."

"Then you think he can do it?"

"I don't know anything about the stock market. But I do know that Smith's a genius. If he wants something bad enough, he'll get it."

Briggs's yellow face got paler. "I've invested myself," he said. "Invested heavily. He can ruin me . . ."

I stood up. "Is that all, Mr. Briggs?"

"Maybe you can talk to him. He's your friend—"

"Sorry. He's not the kind to take advice."

"Goddam him!" Briggs hit the desk with his fist. "What he's doing is immoral—illegal! We'll get the SEC on him! He can't do this thing—"

I walked out of the office, and my hands were so unsteady that I shoved them into my pocket. Then I sat at my desk and thought about Smith, and the more I thought, the more depressed I became. I was glad when the phone rang half an hour later, especially when I recognized the voice of Evelyn Armour.

"Hi, Sara Bernhardt," I said. "I was thinking about calling you. Doing anything tonight, or did your sugar daddy run out of glucose?"

"Luke—"

The choked quality in her voice took the flippancy out of mine. "What's wrong, kid?"

"It's Howard. Howard Cherney."

"What about him?"

"He—he was supposed to call for me tonight. But I changed my mind, I didn't want to see him. I called his office a while ago, and found out what happened . . . Luke, please come see me."

"I don't quite understand, sweetie? What's the matter with Cherney?"

"He's dead. He shot himself. Something to do with the stock market. I didn't think people did that sort of thing anymore—"

"Look," I said quickly. "Hang up the phone and stay right where you are. I'll come over as fast as I can."

I found Evelyn huddled into the corner of her sofa when I arrived, looking pale and helpless. All the shiny, theatrical brightness was gone from her appearance, but somehow, that made me like her all the more. Suddenly, she looked not only available, but human and desirable. Before we spoke, I took her in my arms. We didn't talk about Howard Cherney's suicide for almost an hour. We found other things to talk about.

I knew that Smith's invasion of the Stock Exchange was part of his master plan for what he called Smith's World, and I knew that he had been callous enough to put a down payment on that plan with the life of his own uncle. But now Smith and his ambitions didn't seem very important to me, not in comparison with the discovery I made that afternoon in Evelyn's apartment. My collegiate, sneering attitude about

love had been radically altered in a matter of minutes, and nothing in the universe seemed half so important to me as Evelyn.

We began talking about marriage at once, I began to make plans for setting the newspaper world on its ear. I had a purpose and direction in my life suddenly, and I guess, in my own way, I was as dedicated as Smith was in his.

That's why the letter hurt so much, the letter that lay on my mail stack just two months after the Smith Panic in Wall Street.

It was short and to the point:

We are sorry to inform you that your services are no longer required.

*H. Culver, Pres.
Times-Express*

I went raging into the offices of the city editor with the letter, but all I got was a shrug. That afternoon, I spent four hours on the telephone, calling up every friend or acquaintance I had in the business, rooting out job information. None were particularly helpful, so I decided to make the rounds in person.

I saw the employment manager of every newspaper in

the city. Without exception, they pleaded "no openings."

Evelyn was understanding. She suggested I try some out-of-town papers, and I followed her advice for the next two months. In all, thirty-four papers on the east coast, six on the west, and five in the middle states of the country told me the same story.

No openings.

It took me almost four months, until the year had ended, to realize what had happened to me. It wasn't slack season in the newspaper game. It wasn't my lack of ability or experience. It was much simpler than that. Somehow, for some reason, I'd been blackballed, marked lousy, struck off the lists.

"Smith," Evelyn said one night.

"What's that?"

"Remember what you told me, Luke? About the offer he made you? Do you suppose *he* had anything to do with your not getting work? He's practically a billionaire now. He could apply a lot of pressure . . ."

I denied her idea at first. Then I thought it over, and began to wonder. I sat down and drafted a blunt letter to Smith, putting the question in clear terms.

A day later, I got a clear reply, in the form of a telegram beneath my door.

It read:

YOU ARE CORRECT. HOWEVER GREAT EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY AWAITS YOU IMMEDIATELY. SALARY ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS A YEAR. REPLY AT ONCE IF INTERESTED.

SMITH

I showed Evelyn the telegram, and to my surprise, she began to laugh.

"What is it? What's so funny?"

"You are!" she said. "You're dying to take this job with Smith, aren't you? You've always wanted to take it, really. I can tell from the way you talk about him. You're Smith's greatest admirer and you hate to admit it. You're not fighting Smith, Luke. You're fighting yourself."

I crumpled the telegram into a ball.

"Maybe you're right. A hundred grand a year can't be sneezed at. I couldn't make that much in ten years on the paper. With a salary like that, we wouldn't have to wait any more, would we?"

There wouldn't be any need—"

"No," Evelyn said. She came close to me.

"I'll call Smith."

"Tomorrow," Evelyn said.

I was the first employee of Smith, Inc. to move into the 87-storey Smith Building that had been erected in Flushing Meadows, New York.

I suppose no building ever erected on this Earth has caused so much controversy as the Smith Building, with the possible exception of the Tower of Babel. Architects were enraged by its outlandish size and freak construction, at the way its curved surfaces twisted back into itself with all the hellish cunning of a Klein bottle. Economists were infuriated at the sudden drain of manpower it caused. Smith hired eight thousand clerical and stenographic workers in the first three months of the building's operation; almost four hundred of the nation's best programmers to handle his giant computers; three thousand engineers; six thousand scientists in every conceivable field; thousands of other skilled workers in assorted pursuits of industry. But undoubtedly, the most

controversial aspect of the Smith Building was its function as a recruiting center for the superior race of Man that would inhabit Smith's World.

I still remember the first announcement ad prepared by Smith to introduce his recruiting drive. Many others followed, and a barrage of publicity that blanketed every form of communications. But that first ad is indelibly impressed on my mind.

WANTED

One Million Superior Men and Women

If you believe you have superior and/or mental capabilities, and are interested in joining other men and women of your caliber in the most important enterprise of human history, you are invited to write for full details concerning the establishment of a new planetary home for the human race. This is an unprecedented opportunity to begin life anew on a better world: a world without fault and without end, where Nature is subservient to Man, and Man subservient to God; where beauty and perfection are more important than hate or lust; where Man can live in peace and harmony and

eternal Truth. Send complete details about yourself to

SMITH, INC.

Flushing Meadows, New York

It's hard to say whether the first national reaction to the Smith - advertisement was shock, rage, laughter, or puzzlement—probably a combination of all. But whatever emotions Smith's recruiting drive provoked, it also produced replies. Replies by the thousands, and then replies by the millions. In three months, twenty-five million letters in all poured into Flushing Meadows, causing a major crisis for the local postal authorities, and necessitating an additional clerical staff at the Smith Building of almost five hundred.

Smith was overjoyed at the response, but his happiness was short-lived. The first eliminations of the letters left only twelve million. The first interview of candidates eliminated another three million. Then the testing procedure began, and it became apparent that the Smith-standards, as personally set by Smith, were far too demanding to produce the One Million Superior Men and Women the advertisement requested.

I had seen wholesale test-

ing procedures before, but never on a scale like this. There were rugged medical examinations, physical tests so exhausting that they actually broke the health of many candidates, mental tests that were severe enough to cause breakdowns among even the most intelligent and stable.

Nine million people in all, motivated by the Smith-promises of Nirvana in their lifetime, submitted themselves to the grueling examinations.

After almost a year of testing, only sixty thousand candidates were marked "ACCEPTABLE" by the Smith-standards.

As for myself, I was given the title of Assistant to the President, paid regularly, awarded the deference my title commanded, stationed in a six-window office the size of a small railroad terminal, and given nothing to do.

It wasn't long before I realized that my function in the organization was practically non-existent. I had no talents that could be applied to either the formation of the plans for Smith's World, or the testing of candidates. My journalistic abilities had no place in Smith's schemes. Once, when I suggested that

his World would require an historian, he nodded assent and had me recruit a staff of five of the country's most respected historic writers, and merely laughed dryly when I suggested that I become a member of their team.

"You do what you're doing," Smith told me. "We can hire all the specialists we need."

The answer depressed me, but I didn't argue. I knew that what I was "doing" was nothing at all, that my place in Smith's plan was to serve as his paid companion, errand boy, confidant, friend. If I dwelt on the thought, it would torment me. So I didn't think about it. I reported to work every day, shuffled meaningless papers on my desk, read a little, wrote a little, inspected the various operations of the building, and waited eagerly for payday. I convinced myself that what I was doing was justified: I was making money, and saving it towards the day when I could give Evelyn the secure life she was entitled to. When we had that security, I would leave this empty, purposeless job, leave Smith and his egotistical designs, re-join the human race and live the life that Evelyn and I wanted to live.

That was how I rationalized my life. Yet even as I argued with myself over its logic, I knew that I was becoming corrupted in Smith's service, that this easy life and its lush rewards were having a drugging effect upon my will.

Evelyn knew it, too. And one day, she told me her viewpoint in terms that left me no choice.

"I want you to quit," she said. "For your own sake, Luke. I want you to leave Smith."

I tried to laugh off her words.

"I'm serious. I was wrong to tell you to take this job, Luke. I—I didn't know what kind of monster he really was. He's sapping your strength. He's making you into some kind of jackal—"

I said: "Let's be realistic, sweetie. In another year or so, he'll have that manufactured world of his ready to be launched. Then the whole enterprise will be ended as far as we're concerned. We can take our money and live a little."

"Do you really believe that? What makes you think *you* won't have to go to Smith's World, too, Luke? He's so dependent on you—"

I laughed again. "Dependent on me? You don't know Smith. He's not dependent on anybody. Since when does God need a friend?"

"I tell you he is! In some kind of crazy way, Smith needs you. He won't let you go! But I need you, too, Luke. Don't you see what will happen? It's going to end up in a contest, a rivalry. And I have a feeling Smith will win. He always wins."

I put my arms around her. "You don't know what you're saying. Nothing could make me lose you, Evelyn. Nothing in the universe."

"Don't." She broke away from me. "I mean it, Luke. Quit now, or you'll never quit. Quit now, or—" She turned away from my eyes. "Or we're through."

"Evelyn!"

"That's how I feel, Luke! I'd rather lose you now than later. It would be easier for both of us. That's all I have to say. No more talk will help. You must make a choice."

The next day, I sent my letter of resignation to the head office. I didn't show up at the Smith Building. I told myself that I wouldn't take the risk of having Smith's arguments sway my decision, but I also knew that I was

simply afraid to face Smith in this hour.

That night, I received a telegram.

ACCEPT YOUR RESIGNATION WITH GREAT RELUCTANCE. HOWEVER IMPLORE YOU TO PERFORM ONE LAST IMPORTANT ERRAND FOR ME. PLEASE VISIT DR. MARTIN CORCORAN AT SALO LABORATORIES S A N FRANCISCO AND DO WHAT YOU CAN TO ENLIST HIS INTEREST IN OUR ENTERPRISE. IF YOU ARE SUCCESSFUL WILL TERMINATE OUR CONTRACT WITH BONUS OF TWENTY-FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS. BEST WISHES.

SMITH

The reply startled me; it was nothing like the response I had anticipated from Smith. I called Evelyn and read her the telegram. She was equally dumbfounded.

"I guess one more errand won't hurt," I said. "And we could sure use the money. What do you say?"

She hesitated about saying yes, but finally did. I called the airport and made a reservation on the next west-bound flight. Then I contact-

ed the Personal Information Service at the Smith Building and had them deliver a file on Dr. Martin Corcoran to my home.

Dr. Corcoran turned out to be an extremely prominent biophysicist, one of the leaders in his field. He was a virile man of some sixty years, so totally immersed in his work that he knew amazingly little of the Smith-publicity of recent times. It took me almost a week to make contact with him, and still another before I could entice him away from his laboratory long enough to listen to an hour's conversation about the Smith-project.

At first, he was amused by my solicitation, and completely negative. But I had learned enough about Smith tactics to take the proper approach to a man like Corcoran. I painted a portrait of Smith's World that was a picture of idealized research conditions, a Paradise for the scientific worker, free of all materialistic demands, abundant in facilities and funds, ripe with opportunities for work and study. It was the right approach. Within another week, Dr. Corcoran was calling me at my hotel, wanting to know more about the plan, asking questions. The hook had been baited. By the end of the

month, Dr. Corcoran was nodding his head yes to the Smith-proposal.

I returned to New York after thirty-five days in California, thinking gleeful thoughts of the bonus Smith had promised.

My first stopping-place was Evelyn's apartment.

I had never seen her looking so lovely. She seemed taller, more ethereal. She had been letting her golden hair grow, and now it seemed longer than ever, spilling behind her back in a glittering cascade. There was a brightness surrounding her that was even more radiant than the hard star-brightness that used to shine in her eyes.

But when I held her and kissed her, I found her lips cold.

"What's the matter?" I said.

"Nothing, Luke. Why?"

"I don't know. There's something different about you."

She laughed. "Don't be silly. Was the trip all right?"

"It was fine; Smith will be pleased. Dr. Corcoran is joining the organization next month."

"Will he have to take the test?"

"I don't think Smith will

ask that. Not for a man of Corcoran's reputation; he needs him too much."

I pulled her towards me, and again I felt resistance. Something *was* wrong.

"What the hell!" I said angrily. "What happened since I went away, Evelyn? You're different."

"No, I'm not. It's just that I've been—well, I've been so busy. Rehearsing."

"What?"

"I've been given a part, Luke. In a new play."

I grinned with relief. "Is that all? I thought it was something serious."

"It is serious. It's a wonderful play; the finest I've ever read. It's a chance like nothing I've ever had before, Luke. That's why I'm so on edge, I suppose. I don't know how to tell you—"

"Tell me what?"

"It has something to do with Smith."

"I don't understand."

"Right after you left the city, somebody from Smith, Inc. came to see me. It seems that Smith hired Arthur Trumbull, the playwright, to write a play about—about Smith's World. That's the general theme, anyway. It's a beautiful play, really it is, Luke. And Smith wants me to play the lead."

I stared at her. "I don't get it. Why you?"

"Why not?"

"Oh, I don't mean it that way, Evelyn. But what's the reason? Smith always has a reason."

"How should I know? All I know is that the opportunity is so marvelous, Luke—"

I didn't know what to think. I didn't like the idea, but I couldn't find any arguments against it. Smith had never demonstrated any particular interest in the arts, no more than was necessary. Was this some kind of public relations scheme on behalf of his beloved project? And why choose Evelyn, *my* Evelyn, for the starring role? There were hundreds of actresses with more stature.

Then I began to feel guilty about my attitude, and said:

"I think it's wonderful, honey. If Smith's behind it, the play's bound to be a smash. He won't let himself be associated with any kind of failure."

"I knew you'd understand, Luke."

I said: "What's the part like?"

Her eyes grew distant.

"I play Eve."

A month before the opening of Smith's play, the first

Smith-rocket was launched from Death Valley.

It wasn't the first man-carrying rocket which had left Earth. By now, the Air Force Interplanetary Corps had launched half a dozen manned vehicles on exploratory flights in the Earth's orbit, and two successful landings had been made on the Moon.

But the Smith-vessel, a sixty-rocket, 10,000-ton monster, dwarfed anything that had been previously launched into space. Its time of departure, its cargo, its destination, its purpose, were all kept under a security cloud.

Two days later, a second Smith-rocket departed, and days apart, two other ships left the Death Valley desert, heading out to join the other vessels on some mysterious mission in outer space.

I won't conceal the fact that the mechanics of how Smith planned to create his world in actual space mystified me thoroughly, despite my closeness to Smith. Perhaps not even the thousands of scientists now in his employ understood it completely, although many submitted learned articles on Smith's world-building process to their trade journals. I tried to extrapolate the method

from what I had seen in the Smith world-machine at the University and his suburban laboratory in Harmel, but the problems of creating a planet away from those controlled conditions seemed so vast that my head ached when I thought about it. Vaguely, I reasoned that he would have to attract an enormous amount of interstellar particles to some central point, and recreate the conditions that took Nature billions of years to produce in an incredibly abbreviated time. The task seemed impossible. But I knew Smith.

Then the play opened.

Few of us who were there will ever forget that first performance of Arthur Trumbull's *The World*. On the surface, it seemed no different from a hundred other first-nights on Broadway, but there was a tangible air of special excitement the moment the audience faced the gigantic curtain in the city's largest theatre. No backstage visitors were permitted, so I didn't get the chance to see Evelyn before curtain time. I took my seat in the fifth row, and studied the program notes.

Then Smith came in.

His arrival created a reac-

tion on that audience such as no stage performance could have equaled. When he took his seat down front, every head turned to see the man whose genius was at this very moment creating a new planet for the solar system.

He nodded to me briefly before sitting down, and the nod brought awed and curious glances in my direction. I stirred uncomfortably, trying not to feel pleased at this tribute.

Then the curtain rose.

You've probably seen *The World*, or read it in book form, and you know its merits and faults as a work of theatrical fiction. Perhaps you were even fortunate enough to see Evelyn Armour in the role of Eve. But unless you were among the audience on that opening night, you can't imagine the intensity of emotion that play or that performance could generate in the human soul.

Some critics call *The World* a religious play, and I suppose with some truth. But only those who knew Smith as I did realized the deeper significance of the play's action, the terrible meaning concealed in the glib, poetic dialogue. For as I watched the stage, I knew that Smith

had subtly guided Trumbull's efforts in a manner calculated not to praise the God of our Fathers, the God of Sinai or Judah, the God of Calvary, the God of Jesus; the God of the Jews or Christians or Moslems, or any other religion, creed, or sect. There was only one God to whom the words on the stage were directed.

Smith.

Smith, the God.

Evelyn's performance was brilliant. Her radiance seemed to light the stage with evangelical fire. But somehow, I couldn't merely feel proud of her. I felt afraid, too, as if the role she was playing was more truly herself than the Evelyn I knew.

The curtain descended to thunderous applause, and when the house lights returned, I saw that Smith was no longer in his seat.

I tried to reach Evelyn backstage, but the attempt failed. I went out into the street and spent three hours at a neighboring bar, getting thoroughly stoned. Then I went up to her apartment, and pushed open the door without knocking.

"Luke—"

She turned to me, and her eyes were wide and frightened over the shoulder of the

man who was holding her in his arms.

I felt nothing; not rage, not injury, nothing.

"I'm sorry," Smith said quietly. "I'm really very sorry, Luke."

"It's nothing," I muttered stupidly. "Think nothing of it."

Evelyn began to cry, and Smith comforted her.

"It's all right," I said. "Really, Evelyn, it's all right. I understand."

Then the numbness passed, and an emotion too complex for me to name swept through me.

I dropped to my knees and folded my hands beneath my chin.

"Thank you, O Lord," I said. "Thank you for all our many blessings." Once I began I couldn't stop.

Smith said: "Get up, Luke."

"Smith is my shepherd, I shall not want . . ."

"You're drunk," Smith said coldly. "Get up and go to bed, Luke. We can talk about this tomorrow."

"All hail," I said, and ridiculously, there were tears in my eyes. "Hail to our Lord Smith, God of the Universe, Lord of all Creation. Praise Smith unto the Highest . . ."

Then I fell forward, grate-

ful that I had drunk enough to be rewarded with oblivion.

The year that followed is a year I don't like to remember, and a year in which the events following the launching of the Smith-rockets into outer space were public knowledge. You know the basic facts, of course. The fact that Smith's World, a planet the size of Mercury, 3,000 miles in diameter, provided with an atmosphere perhaps even more favorable for the sustainment of life than our own, became part of the orbital pattern of the solar system, equidistant to Earth and the planet Mars.

You know that the exodus from Earth to Smith's World was coincided with one of the most disastrous economic panics in the nation's history. You know the story of the east coast riots, and the unsuccessful attempt to indict Smith on the charge of high treason. The whole incredible tale of that year that has been chronicled many times, and by journalists better equipped than myself to detail them.

It was a year of Hell for many people. It was a year of Hell for myself.

There's one thing I wish to make clear. Without under-

standing of this point, this whole recording of my Smith-facts loses meaning. The year that I spent in the sanatorium at Boonsocket had nothing whatever to do with the health of my mind, not in any pathological sense. That's a fact which can be verified. I became a simon-pure alcoholic; there was never any question about my sanity.

Nor should there be any doubt as to whether my stay in the sanatorium was voluntary or not. It was; Smith had nothing to do with it. After Evelyn made her decision to join Smith on his World, I sought my solace in the brown bottle and found it waiting for me there. I drank myself into that sanatorium; there was no effort on Smith's part to have me put away. On the contrary—Smith continued to make overtures to me, offerings of money and other help. It seems he never forgot the obligation he felt towards me, because of what happened that night of the explosion at Ardmore University. Say what you will of Smith. He was grateful to me.

I was in the sanatorium for nine months, before I was able to re-enter the outside world.

It was a different world I

found. A quieter, more humble world, a world no longer certain of its superiority in the cosmos.

There was no news from Smith's world.

A few tales would trickle in but nothing noteworthy.

After a while, I found a job. It wasn't much of a job: I became the assistant editor on a low-circulation picture magazine, that probably hired me in the hope I would someday give them the rights to the Smith-story as I knew it. They didn't press me for it; they were content to wait. But I was trying hard to forget everything about Smith, particularly as he concerned Evelyn. I knew now that Smith's seduction of Evelyn had begun merely as an attempt to remove her influence from me, so that I would continue as Smith's paid companion without interference. Then the seduction had become something else, and Smith had found a Queen for his new kingdom.

But I didn't think about it. I did my job conscientiously, if not brilliantly. The large amount of money I had earned in Smith's employ had dwindled as a result of my alcoholic year, and I needed the dollars that came in my

pay envelope every two weeks.

I took a small room in a boarding house in a moderate section of the city. I kept regular hours, had few friends, and slept a great deal.

That was the only time I was unable to keep Smith out of my mind: when sleep came. Because sleep brought dreams, and my dreams brought me a vision of Smith that was repeated without variation; night after night the same thing appeared.

I would see the panorama of space, the star-studded blackness of the void, awesome and mighty and beautiful.

Then I would see a great spaceship leaving the green planet which was its home, a spaceship throbbing with the humanity inside it.

At first, the ship remained evenly on its course, heading for some rendezvous with a better world.

Then the hand would appear.

A giant hand, the hand of a God, fingers galaxy-sized would reach forth towards the spaceship, as if dissatisfied with its destination.

Then the fingers would close slowly around the vessel, slowly encircle it, hold it

in its palm, crush it, destroy it.

It was the hand of Smith. I knew it could be no other.

But except for that dream, my conscious mind knew nothing of Smith. It wasn't Smith that troubled my waking hours. It was someone else.

And every evening, I'd look out of my window and see the pinpoint of light in the heavens that was Smith's World, and I would fight off my thoughts of Evelyn.

Then the Ghost came.

I was sleeping when it arrived, and when its hoarse voice awakened me, I thought that the delirium of drink which had plagued me months before had returned.

The Ghost was standing at the foot of my bed, shimmering as if in waves of heat, staring at me with hollow eyes.

I wanted to scream, but my throat was dry.

Then I recognized the uncertain form.

It was Smith. The Ghost of Smith.

"Luke," the hoarse voice said, a grating distortion of Smith's own mellow tones.

"Who are you?" I said.

"You know me. I am Smith. Don't be frightened; this is

no mumbo-jumbo, Luke. This is Smith, your friend."

I covered my eyes with my hands.

"Listen to me," the Ghost said. "You are not seeing phantoms. This is merely an electronic projection of my own image, a purely mechanical trick. I'm not quite sure how I appear to you; the device is still imperfect."

"Where are you?"

"I am on Smith's World, in my own chambers. This is the first such projection I have made, and it is not a complete success. I am unable to see you clearly, Luke. If you can see and understand me, please signify."

"Yes," I said. "I can understand you. What do you want?"

"Only to talk to you, Luke. I understand that you haven't been well. I'm sorry."

I snorted.

"You are still angry with me over Evelyn. I'm sorry for that, too, Luke. But we have no time for apologies; this contact may be broken at any moment. I wish to ask you to join us on Smith's World."

"Never," I said. "You're wasting your time, Smith. I don't want any part of it."

"You must think it over, Luke. Let me tell you about

what my world is like. It is a world of perfection. A world of alabaster cities and human harmony. A world of beauty. Look at me, Luke. Can you see what I am holding?"

The Ghost lifted something round in its hand. I couldn't make it out.

"It's an apple, an apple straight from a new Garden of Eden, twelve inches in diameter. And not one of your monstrous chemical-grown fruits, Luke. A tender, juicy apple, typical of our farm produce, symbolic of the difference between the old world and the new. Our grass and trees are the greenest you have ever seen, Luke. Our waters are clear as mirrors, and our weather is the balmiest you have ever known. There are birds of rarest beauty, and wild life of exquisite perfection. Our cities are wonders, and our culture is already a thriving, vital thing. It is Heaven, Luke."

"Go away!" I buried my face in the pillows.

"I want you on Smith's World, Luke. You will be happy here. There are women of extraordinary loveliness who want you here."

I said: "How is Evelyn?"

The Smith-Ghost said nothing.

Then: "I'm offering you Paradise, Luke. Will you refuse me for the sake of Evelyn alone? Is that the one factor which makes you say no?"

"Yes," I said angrily. "I'm sorry if it seems trivial to you, Smith. But that's how I feel, and I say the hell with you!"

"Then you refuse?"

"Yes!" I shouted. "I refuse! I won't worship you, Smith! You're not my God!"

"Do you have a God?"

"Maybe I do." My voice trembled. "Maybe you've made me see God, Smith. Maybe you've converted me, all by yourself. Imagine that!" I started to laugh. "You make me want to pray, Smith, pray to the God of Earth. And if I do, I'll mention you in my prayers. I'll ask forgiveness for you, Smith, forgiveness . . ."

I couldn't stop the sobs that came into my throat.

"I'm sorry," Smith said gently.

The Ghost vanished.

I suppose that was the first contact Smith made with Earth since his departure. But it wasn't his last. Five months after the Ghost's visit to my bedroom, the first Smith-vessel made a return

trip to Earth, containing a delegation of Smith-men appointed to establish relations with the planet of their birth. They came not as visitors, but as representatives of another interplanetary power to the United Nations.

At first, the UN debated their sovereignty, and their right to deal with the Earth nations as a separate and distinct entity. There were days of arguments among the UN members, and a special commission was formed to study the question. Finally, they ruled that Smith's World was not a legally constituted entity, and therefore not entitled to recognition.

The delegation didn't seem surprised at the decision, and merely asked that the UN set up a trading commission between the planets, by which Earth could benefit from the fruits of the scientific progress made on Smith's World, in exchange for those materials which Earth could most readily provide. There were scientific demonstrations held in the now nearly-deserted Smith Building in Flushing Meadows, demonstrations of electronic marvels that were unknown on Earth. An agreement of interplanetary trading rules was drawn up, and Smith's World was given its

first unofficial recognition as a separate power.

It soon became apparent that the "material" most in demand on Smith's World was Manpower.

The testing began again, and lights, were burning brightly once more within the vast halls of the Smith Building. The Smith-standards were no longer so rigid, and of the four or five million candidates who volunteered in the year that followed, almost half a million were accepted for relocation on the new planet.

The Smith-rockets left every week, bringing a new cargo of human material to the tiny glowing pinpoint in the heavens.

To make the record clear, I want to state that the plot to kill Smith didn't originate with me. I no longer know whose scheme it was, which member of the Anti-Smith League was responsible for drafting the plan. One thing I'm sure of is that Alita herself wasn't the originator, although I heard the proposal from her lips first.

I met Alita by what I later realized was a staged incident. I was assigned by the magazine to cover a lecture that was being held in Town Hall

by a Reverend Moore, a lecture provocatively titled: "Is Smith a God?" I accepted the job reluctantly, but my editor assumed that my past connection with Smith would be an asset in the preparation of such a story.

It wasn't the first time a religious leader had made public condemnation of Smith; pulpits all over the world had been ringing with phrases accusing Smith of usurping holy rights. But I suppose this event had greater significance, since the Reverend Harlow Moore had been Smith's own religious instructor in the by-gone days of Smith's childhood.

Reverend Moore was a burly man with a humorous mouth and shaggy white hair in need of trimming. He did no pulpit-pounding when he spoke of Smith. He spoke quietly to the Town Hall audience, a large crowd that filled every seat in the auditorium. He spoke at length about Smith, the child, describing his prowess as a Bible student, remarking upon his feat of learning Old and New Testaments word for word.

"I was impressed," he said with a twinkle. "Greatly impressed, having such a poor memory myself. But I must confess that I mistook this

ability of Smith's. Our friend Smith didn't learn the Bible 'by heart'—only by mind. His heart was never involved, and his soul failed to grasp the deep meaning of the sacred writings. You have heard that the Devil can quote scriptures to his purpose; well, that means the Devil must have a good memory, too."

The lecture continued without heat or rancor, more of a plea for understanding than condemnation. When it was over, I pushed my way down the aisle of the hall. Somehow, in the crush to the exits, I found myself stepping hard on someone's toe, and a woman's voice cried out in pain.

"Gosh, I'm sorry—"

The face that turned towards me was of such striking beauty that I couldn't help staring. Her skin was creamy white, her eyes vividly sea-green, her mouth wide and sensuous. Her black hair was unusually long, and the total effect was of something pagan. She stumbled, and I put my arm out to help her through the crowds filling the aisle. Even through the fabric of her sleeve, her skin felt warm and good to the touch.

When we reached the street, she said: "They say liquor's good for snakebite. How about a crushed toe?"

"I don't know. We can try."

Five minutes later, we were in a cocktail lounge with a highball in front of her and a soft drink for me, learning each other's names and occupations, and discovering a mutual interest in Smith. Her name was Alita Morgan; she was a fashion designer and model. And her interest in Smith—

"Vincent and I were going to be married in the Fall," she told me, her eyes downcast, her knuckles white around the glass. "Then he got interested in Smith's World, and wanted us to take the examinations together at Flushing Meadows. I refused, but Vince went on alone. He passed."

I said: "I'm sorry."

"Don't be. It was something that couldn't be helped. I'm glad I found out so soon. If Vince thought some man-made Heaven was more important than me—"

"And why didn't you go? Why didn't you take the examination?"

"Because," she answered coldly. "Because I'm too content with the God I have. I don't want any other, no matter how much Paradise he's selling."

"I guess that's how I feel," I said. "But who knows? May-

be we're both wrong. Maybe Smith doesn't demand that much of the people on his world."

She was studying my face.

"Luke Wingate," she said softly. "Now I remember. You were Smith's friend in college. You even worked for him some years ago."

"That's true."

"But you didn't go to Smith's World?"

"No. I like it here. I like it even better now."

She smiled. "Would you like to come to a party, Luke Wingate?"

The party was at Alita's Greenwich Village apartment, and there were no cocktails served, no jokes told, no hilarity at all. The atmosphere was grim and purposeful. The two dozen participants, the majority of them men, were obviously gathered by more serious motives than conviviality. They didn't call it that, but I realized that I was attending one of the earliest meetings of the Anti-Smith League.

One of the speakers of the group was a thin, scholarly man of middle years named Burgess. He was a professor of history at Columbia, and he told us:

"The future is already clear. Almost three-quarters of a

million people have made the transference from Earth to Smith's World, and as the testing procedures go on, that figure will double and treble.

"But the mere number does not tell the whole story. It is the caliber of the people we are losing. Our best scientists in every field. Our trained engineers. Our most competent artists, writers, journalists, researchers. Many of our best business executives have been lured by the Smith-promises. And that's only the beginning.

"We must face the situation realistically. The attractions of Smith's World are so great that the drain on our most skilled and essential manpower is already becoming crucial. The crisis point looms—a crisis that may well result in a chaos that not even atomic war could bring."

"But what can we do?" Alita whispered.

"Fight," someone said. "Fight with every means at our command. Fight within the UN organization, fight within the sovereign nations, fight with legislature, with pressure, with sanctions. And if necessary—fight with great force."

I hadn't meant to say anything; I was only willing to be a spectator. But at these last words, I said:

"We would lose."

They looked at me.

"We would lose a battle by force. I know Smith. And you know yourself the accumulation of brainpower on Smith's World. Force is no answer, believe me."

"Whatever the answer," Burgess said, "we must try to find it."

There were hours more of sober conversation, and then the crowd departed. I stayed behind, and Alita and I shared some after-party coffee.

We sat at opposite ends of the sofa, talking quietly. It was the first time in over a year that I had been in such attractive feminine company, and the sight of her slim, long-legged figure beside me stirred my pulse.

She said: "I know how to fight Smith."

I moved closer to her.

"I'm tired of talking about Smith. There's been too much talk of Smith."

She didn't resist as my arms went around her.

"Let's forget Smith," I said. "Just for a little while. I'm more interested in you, Alita."

"All right," she said. "How many eggs do you like for breakfast?"

But in the middle of the night, Alita shifted and rose

A GOD NAMED SMITH

in the bed to light a cigarette. I muttered something, and she put the cigarette to my lips for a puff. Then she said:

"I know how to fight Smith."

"All right," I moaned. "How?"

"Kill him."

Alita held my arm tightly as we entered through the first doorway of the Smith-testing Division of the Smith Building. I patted her hand and said something meant to be reassuring.

The first clerk, wearing the gray Smith-uniform with the golden "S" on his sleeve, was cordial. He said:

"Your names, please?"

I cleared my throat.

"Mr. and Mrs. Lukas Wingate."

He walked to the computer and threw the activating switch. The machine chattered, and produced a narrow white punchcard. He came back with it, and handed it to us.

"Carry this with you at all times," he said. "You do understand the regulations concerning married couples? If either one of you fails to be accepted, the acceptable partner cannot gain permission to enter Smith's World without the consent of the other."

"We understand."

"Good. We wish to express to you our gratitude for your interest in Smith's World, and hope your examinations prove successful."

"Thank you," Alita said throatily, and we moved into the first testing zone.

I thought I knew what to expect the moment we got beyond the welcoming-stage of the Smith-testing, but I quickly discovered that the process of examination as I knew it during my employment had changed drastically. The physical tests were no more demanding than standard military service examinations. The mental tests were still strict, but the passing grade standard had been lowered to allow mentalities as average as my own to be passed. The psychological tests were simpler, too, but when the time came for me to face the inquisitor sitting behind the cold metal desk, I had my first doubts about my ability to attain my goal,

"Nice to see you, Mr. Wingate."

The psychiatrist was a dry-lipped, narrow man with brilliantly-polished spectacles.

"You're rather a well-known name around this organization," he said lightly,

but without humor in his eyes. "Quite a lot has happened since you left Smith-employment."

"That's right," I said. "A lot happened."

"You were ill, I believe?"

"You can call it that. I was an alcoholic."

"I see. And how do you feel about liquor now?"

"It's all right for other people."

He nodded his head.

"And now you're married. That's quite a change in a man's life."

"Yes."

"Mrs. Wingate is a very attractive woman."

"Yes."

"How long have you two been married?"

"About four months."

"Uh-huh. And is everything—satisfactory?"

I frowned. "We were born for each other."

"I see. And if you don't mind the question, Mr. Wingate, what are your feelings about—" He looked down at the papers on his desk as if the name was written there. "About Evelyn Armour?"

"Who?"

"Come now, Mr. Wingate."

"Look, isn't this rather personal? Your boy Smith's invited me up there a dozen times. I'm no different now. Do we

have to scrape around the past?"

"No, of course not," the psychiatrist said smoothly. "Then I gather that the old wound is—well, closed?"

"Absolutely. I love my wife and she loves me, and I'm dying to be Queen of the May. Now let's get this farce over with."

The psychiatrist smiled blandly.

"And what about Smith?"

"What about him?"

"How do you feel about Smith, Mr. Wingate? After all, it's no secret that Evelyn Armour was your fiancée before she joined Smith on our World. Do you harbor any resentment?"

"Naturally. As a matter of fact, the only reason I want to get to Smith's World is to punch him right in the nose."

The psychiatrist stiffened, and I saw that I had pushed my joke too far.

"Look, doc," I said, with a feeble grin. "I'm only kidding. Smith was one of my best friends, and I don't have any resentment left. We had some problems about Evelyn, but I'm over that now. Now I'm happily married, and everything's changed. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly." He took off his glasses and tried to shine even

more brilliance into the lenses. "That's all, Mr. Wingate."

At the end of the testing line, my punchcard was hand-back to me. I gave it to the final Smith-clerk, and he put it through a computer. When it emerged, he handed it back with a shrug of his shoulder.

Stamped across the card, in red ink, was one word.

"REJECTED."

"Sorry, Mr. Wingate," he said. "If you have any questions as to exactly why this decision was made, or if you wish to argue the case further, you may write to the Smith Appeals Board, at this address. If you're unsuccessful, perhaps you will want to take the Smith-tests again, after the official six-month lapse."

I met Alita outside.

Her card was stamped: "ACCEPTABLE."

"What do we do now?" I said glumly. "I suppose all that's left is for me to give my consent."

"No!" she said violently. "I won't leave without you, Luke."

"Hey, wait a minute." I pulled her towards me. "This was the deal, remember? It's strictly a business proposition. If both of us can't complete the assignment, then one of us must."

She began to cry, soundlessly.

"I can't go without you Luke. I don't care about the Anti-Smith League. I won't go anywhere without you."

"We'll talk about it," I said. "At home."

We were living at Alita's apartment in the Village, but before returning there, we stopped off at the apartment of Burgess, the history professor, to tell him the bad news.

When we finally reached home, there was a telegram beneath the door.

It was addressed to me, and it read:

HAPPY TO INFORM YOU
THAT SPECIAL DISPEN-
SATION HAS BEEN MADE
IN YOUR CASE. MRS. WIN-
GATE AND YOURSELF
MAY PREPARE TO LEAVE
FOR SMITH'S WORLD ON
NEXT SMITH FLIGHT
JUNE 10.

DIRECTOR
SMITH TESTING DIV.

That was how Alita and I came to Smith's World.

We expected to find a world designed in Hollywood concepts, with sweeping skyscrapers and Disney landscapes, where the populace paraded about in clean white

togas among green arbors, where the sun always shone and the birds sung sweetly, and everything was milk and honey and sweetness and light.

It was almost true, but not quite.

From the moment we debarked from the great Smith-rocket that brought us to Smith's World, we knew that Smith had designed a very practical planet. Much of its terrain was almost Spartan in its simplicity. Trees were planted only where shade was needed. Buildings were constructed for their functional requirements. Birds and animals were confined to restricted sanctuaries and woodland areas, and the game animals were severely bred and controlled for the purpose of providing food. There was just so much farm land, and just so much city area. There was no surface vehicle traffic whatsoever; the air was utilized for all transportation. There were no arbors for casual strolling, and no togas anywhere in evidence. Both men and women wore modified Earth clothing, made distinctive only by subtleties of color. There was an air of industry about the streets of the city, but no sound of laughter. Uniformed

Smith-officials were everywhere. I would say that nothing was more immediately apparent than those gray-suited Smith-officials with the golden "S" on their sleeves. None carried weapons, not overtly, and all were exceedingly polite and helpful. But there were so many of them—so many.

The rocket that delivered us to the new planet held over five hundred men and women. But it was clear that we were to be singled out for special attention. After the initial briefing and speech of welcome at the Smith Reception Center, the new Smith-dwellers were herded off into another section of the building for further orientation. But Alita and I were drawn aside by a smooth-faced Smith-official.

"Mr. and Mrs. Wingate?"

"Yes?"

"Would you be so kind as to follow me? You have been requested to share the evening meal with Smith."

Alita looked at me.

"That's fine," I said. "Be good to see the old boy."

The Smith-official's face did not alter.

At the copter station, waiting for the craft that would take us to the quarters of the planet's overlord, we had a moment to ourselves. Alita

whispered to me: "So soon, Luke! To get the chance so soon!"

The thought chilled me, and I gripped her hand.

"Maybe we shouldn't. Maybe we should wait . . ."

"No. The sooner the better," Alita answered grimly. Then her dark expression was exchanged for a sunny smile as the Smith-official returned to our side.

We boarded a copter that lifted us above the streets of the capital city, and swayed in the direction of the tallest edifice to be seen on Smith's World—a white steeple of a building, crowned in glass. We were hovering above it in seconds, and the copter pilot was guiding the craft expertly to the landing platform that formed a balcony around the top of the needle-shaped structure.

Upon landing, another Smith-official took us in tow, this time openly carrying a weapon.

First, there was a corridor, stretching towards a white door. We were scanned photo-electrically. Alita passed the scrutiny, but the metal of my belt buckle set off a warning buzzer. The guard asked me to remove my belt, and I did. This time, the metal-seeking

eyes were silent. Alita and I exchanged glances as we were told to go ahead, thinking the same thought. We were carrying a weapon, but not one which would respond to Smith's warning system. At that moment, I lost some respect for Smith, at his inability to know about the deadly device concealed in Alita's long black hair.

Then the doors opened, and we were in the Chambers.

I expected a throne room, but I was wrong. It was a room furnished in the manner of a supermodern executive suite, with polished marble floors and an enormous crescent-shaped desk. And behind the desk, his dry-straw hair now streaked with gray, but otherwise unchanged: Smith.

I can't recall now what was said in those first few minutes of our reunion. They were all pleasant words, commonplace words about simple things, words ill-suited to the situation of a disbeliever reunited with a God. There was no handshake; there never was with Smith. But he was courteous; there was a smoothness in his manner I'd never known before. He was gallant towards Alita, and made a pretty speech to me about my good taste in women.

"You flatter me," Alita said. "I understand from Luke that you have good taste yourself."

Smith didn't react to the thinly-veiled mention of Evelyn. Instead, he smiled and gestured towards the curved dome of glass that surrounded his quarters.

"What do you think of my world, Luke?" he said. "Have I done things well?"

"Very well. It's not what I expected though—"

"There was no sense in being too radical, not at first. One of our most serious problems on Smith's World is—well, call it nostalgia, homesickness, what you will. So I designed my planet to give us the best of the old as well as the new. In time, there will be changes. I have many plans. I'm glad you've come to share them with me."

I looked at Alita, and saw her hand toying with her hair.

I gasped and said: "Wait!"

"What is it?" Smith said.

"Nothing." My pulse was almost audible. "I—I have a favor to ask, Smith. One small favor."

"Anything, Luke."

"I want to see Evelyn."

I could see the dismay in Alita's face, but I went on.

"For old time's sake, Smith. You can understand that."

"Surely," he said. "I anticipated that you would, Luke. She's in the next room, right now." His eyes went to a doorway at the side of the room. "She's alone. Why not go in now?"

"All right." I looked at Alita. "Wait for me."

Her mouth was sullen, but I turned on my heel and went to the door. Before I touched it, it slid back to reveal a barren gray-walled room, with one chair. Rising to greet me was Evelyn. The door closed behind me.

What had I expected? What effect did I anticipate upon seeing Evelyn again? I didn't know myself.

She was lovelier than ever, but her loveliness seemed to have mellowed with time. There was no longer a star-brightness about her; she radiated a soft, golden light of a summer's moon. She was dressed simply, in white.

"Evelyn," I said.

"Hello, Luke. I'm so glad you came to our World."

"It's been a long time." I felt inane and foolish, my tongue thick and heavy.

"Yes, it has," Evelyn said.

"Are you—happy?"

"Very happy, Luke."

I frowned at the answer. I wanted to hurt her suddenly. I

said: "I'm married now, you know."

"So I've heard. I'm glad for you, Luke. They tell me your bride is very beautiful."

I took a step towards her.

"Evelyn—"

She must have seen what was in my eyes, because she answered: "Don't, Luke. Don't touch me. I love Smith. I worship Smith."

"Worship?" My mouth jerked at the word.

"Yes, worship. He's a God, Luke. I know that now. He's truly a God."

"You don't know what you are saying. He's got you hypnotized. You're playing Trilby to his Svengali—"

"You're wrong, Luke. He is a God." Her eyes shone. "You thought you knew Smith, but you didn't, not really. Nobody knows him as I do. If you could see the things he can do. He can appear and disappear at will, Luke. He is everywhere, anywhere. He can work miracles, Luke!"

"Tricks!" I said angrily. "You've been taken in by his tricks, Evelyn. He's got some gadget that projects his image around the place. He used it on me, one night back on Earth. It's only a machine—"

She shook her head, and there was an indulgent smile on her face. "You're wrong.

You don't know. You just don't know, Luke."

The door behind us slid open again.

"Was it a pleasant reunion?" Smith said, still standing behind the desk.

"Very pleasant," Evelyn smiled at him.

I walked back into the main chamber, trying to hide the emotion crossing my face. The door closed behind her, as if it were a vault closing upon some fragile jewel of great worth.

"Now," Smith said softly, "we can dine together."

"Yes," I said to Alita. "Now."

Her hand went to her hair, in a womanly gesture. But when her fingers emerged, they were holding a thin cylinder of bamboo. It was an ancient, primitive weapon, and strangely fitting to end the life of a super-scientist on his man-created world. She placed the cylinder to her lips, and a puff of her breath sent the poison-drenched splinter towards the figure behind the desk.

He continued to smile.

"I'm sorry, Smith," I said. "This had to be done."

Alita stared, waiting for his fall.

It didn't come.

Then Smith laughed.

"I apologize," he said. "There is no humor in this moment for you, I know that. But as for me, the spectacle is amusing. I must congratulate you on the simplicity of your attack. Other assassins have been far more clever in their techniques—and never got this far. But a blowgun and a poisoned dart—" He chuckled, but he didn't die.

"I don't understand," Alita gasped. "I didn't miss. I couldn't have—"

"No," Smith said. "You didn't miss, my dear."

Then I knew why our scheme had failed. We weren't looking at Smith at all; he hadn't trusted us to that extent. We were the guests of a spectral host; Smith's body was in another room of the citadel; our dart had whistled through a phantom image, electronically projected.

"I'm sorry to find you still an enemy," Smith said sadly. "I had hoped that things had changed between us, Luke. Now you leave me no other choice but to forget my debt to you."

Behind us, the white door was sliding open, and the Smith-officials were entering with drawn weapons.

It was a shock for me to realize that there was a prison

on Smith's World; it was an admission of imperfection and discontent. It was even more of a shock when I discovered that the subterranean cells, located some eighty miles from Smith's citadel, numbered in the thousands—and were all occupied.

Alita and I were separated, and I was marched through long stone corridors from one dismal chamber to another. There was little modernity in evidence; it might have been the catacombs of any ancient prison on Earth. It was damp and poorly-lighted, and the officials assigned to its ugly duties bore the same stamp of insensitive cruelty that marked jailers of every period in history. I was fingerprinted, photographed, and treated with callow disrespect. My head was shaved and my body deloused, and my first taste of the food in Smith-prison told me that my God-like friend had little interest in the well-being of those who broke his holy laws. My cell was cold; the walls wet; the cot sagging and springless; the light a naked bulb of meager wattage. It was more of a dungeon than a prison; a storage place for the human refuse of Smith's World.

But miserable as my life in Smith's prison was to be, it

was there that I discovered Smith's weaknesses as a God. And it was in the Smith-prison that I learned that Smith's World had an Anti-Smith League, too.

I determined that fact slowly, on those few occasions when the Smith-prisoners were permitted an exchange of low-voiced conversation. An elderly man, with a dragging left leg and a palsied hand, borrowed a cigarette from me one day and said:

"The Earth looks red to-night."

"What's that?"

"My cell window faces west; I can see the Earth glowing at night. It glows redder and redder all the time. They say a day will come when the Earth will bleed, and Smith's World will burn."

I thought he was feeble-minded, and began to move away. He put his arm on mine.

"No!" he said hoarsely. "You must listen carefully. You're new here." He peered at me more closely. "And your face is familiar. Did we meet back on Earth?"

I looked at him again. My throat tightened when I recognized Dr. Martin Corcoran, the brilliant biophysicist I had personally lured into Smith's service during my California

trip. I grasped his trembling hand, and asked his forgiveness.

"Only Smith is to blame," he said. "Smith and all of us who mistook him for a God. But he is a man, and an imperfect one. I have been here many months, in this prison, and I have learned more within these walls than I could have in freedom on Smith's World. I will tell you what I have learned, Mr. Wingate. Perhaps the facts will be useful to you some day."

"What did you mean?" I said, "about the Earth turning red?"

He looked about him cautiously.

"There are almost three thousand prisoners here. But this is not a criminal prison. Do you see what that means?"

"No."

"These are not thieves and murderers. These are rebels, rebels against Smith. Three thousand out of a population of less than two million. Can you imagine the great number still not discovered and imprisoned?"

"A revolt?" I stared at him. "But how? Why?"

"Why is the simpler question. You must have lived on Smith's World to know. You must have learned about your duties on this planet; duties

only to Smith, never to yourself, to your children, to your friends, to humanity. There are no churches on Smith's World; each building is a temple designed for the worship of Smith. Do you know how much of your mind, and your body, and your soul Smith demands? All of it, my friend."

"But how can you fight him? It's *his* world—"

"Perhaps. But many of us have decided to fight. To fight or to die. That is enough."

"And when will it happen?" Corcoran shrugged wearily. "Younger bodies than mine must fix the date."

A Smith-guard approached us, and the old man fell silent.

As the weeks dragged on, I spent as much time as I could in Corcoran's company, listening to him tell of life on Smith's World: a world without end; a world where Nature was subservient to Man, and Man subservient to Smith. . . .

Then I met the others. Scientists, researchers, writers, engineers, artists, philosophers. There were two of the historians I myself had hired for Smith's World. There were four rocket-pilots among the prisoners, and what I learned from them was startling and deeply disturbing. I met them and I listened to them, and the

more I heard, the more I wanted to dig my way out of the Smith-prison, with my bare fingernails, if no other escape could be found.

One day, I spoke to Corcoran about escape.

He shook his head. "No, Luke. Smith has been careful. He has executed no prisoners, fearing repercussions from Earth. He is not yet strong enough to ignore Earth's enmity. But he has made certain that no escape is possible. The prison is ringed by a series of radioactive screens. Guards and prisoners arrive and depart by a single copter on the roof, and that is protected night and day, by a stringent security system. The precautions are great; no successful escape has been made."

"Then it's hopeless?"

"From within, yes. But I see the Earth from my window, and each day, it grows redder and redder."

Then he turned and shuffled away.

I had been in Smith's prison for eight months, when Evelyn came into my cell.

I thank God for the strength of the vessels that bring blood into my heart, for if there had been weakness there, it would have destroyed me that night. When I heard

the whispering sound within the cell, and stirred to see what caused it, the sight of Evelyn shocked me so greatly that I literally reeled and almost fainted.

But I recovered, and saw Evelyn, lovelier than ever, dressed coolly in white, her long blonde hair flowing behind her like a golden cloud.

"Luke," she whispered, tears glistening on her cheeks. "Luke, it's Evelyn. I must talk to you."

I couldn't speak.

"Don't be frightened. It's Smith's machine, his electronic projection device. I'm at Smith's citadel. Smith isn't here; there's some kind of trouble in the farmlands; he had to go there."

"Evelyn!" I gasped finally. "For the love of God, are you crazy?"

"Luke, listen to me. I have to explain something. I—I was troubled about what you told me, about Smith's ability to appear and disappear. I asked him point-blank after your arrest. He laughed and admitted it. He showed me the machine, taught me how to operate it—"

"Then you know he's not a God. Do you know that, Evelyn?"

She hid her face in her hands.

"I don't know anything, Luke! I'm so confused—"

I put my arm out towards her, my fingers aching to touch her. But I knew there was only air in the lovely body at the foot of my prison cot.

Then she straightened up and said: "Luke, I want to help you. He's talking wildly at you. He says you're the most dangerous man on his world. I don't know why he thinks that, but he does. He's fighting with himself over you, Luke. Part of him wants to save you, the other part wants to kill you. But he's beginning to change, Luke. All this trouble is changing him—"

"What trouble?"

"I don't understand it exactly. There have been strikes, riots, outbreaks. I don't know why; I don't see why people aren't happy. He's given them everything, Luke. Why should they not be happy?"

I sneered, but said nothing.

"There's some awful movement underway, Luke. There's been talk about a Bleeding Earth. I don't know what they mean by it, but it frightens me. There—there was another assassination attempt last week. It failed, of course. They always fail. But I'm so worried, Luke—"

She began to sob.

"Get hold of yourself," I said. "Did you mean that—about wanting to help me?"

"Yes!"

"Then you can get me out of here, Evelyn. You can get me out right now. Do the prison officials know you?"

"Yes."

"Then you can have me released. Make it a command, Evelyn; they'll listen to you."

She gasped. "They won't! Only Smith can order a release."

"Tell them your orders come from Smith. They're so frightened of him that they'll listen, Evelyn. Appear before the prison warden. He'll be afraid to disobey you, Evelyn; afraid of anyone so close to Smith as you are—"

She turned away.

"All right," she said at last. "I'll try, Luke."

That was how I made my escape from Smith-prison, the only man to accomplish the feat.

I had been gambling with the fears of the Smith-officials in telling Evelyn to speak for Smith, and the gamble had won. Within an hour after her visit to my cell, a trio of Smith-guards came and unlocked my door. They guided me to the roof of the prison, and a copter took me back to

the relative freedom of Smith's needle-shaped citadel.

I found Evelyn waiting for me in Smith's chamber. But the moment I saw her, I made a mistake. I asked:

"What have they done with Alita?"

Her moist eyes became dry and hard.

"I don't know. What does it matter, Luke? You don't love that woman. You married her as part of the scheme to assassinate Smith. That's the truth, isn't it?"

I didn't answer. I rubbed my heavy-whiskered cheeks and said: "I'd like to shave."

"In there."

In Smith's enormous bathroom, I took my first shower in eight months, and felt the good sensation of a sharp razor against my cheeks. I dressed myself out of Smith's private wardrobe, and came back to the Smith-chamber.

Evelyn was at the dome, looking at the glowing ball over our heads, the planet of our birth.

"It's so red tonight . . ."

"Red?"

I pushed her aside and looked out at the horizon of Smith's World. The sky was red, the clouds red, and even the speck in the sky appeared reddened by some mysterious distant fire.

"It is red," I said. "There are flames somewhere, flames to the east . . ."

"The farmland!" she whispered.

"They're burning the fields! Is that the trouble you meant?"

"I don't know!" She clutched at her throat. "Smith didn't tell me anything. He just said—trouble."

"It's started," I muttered. "The Earth is bleeding."

"Oh, Luke, I'm frightened!"

She was in my arms, soft and warm and yielding.

Neither of us heard the door sliding open behind us.

"Well," Smith said. "What's fair is fair, eh, Luke? Isn't that what the old Bible said? But of course. 'An eye for an eye' . . ."

I turned to face him, holding Evelyn behind me.

"Your world is burning, Smith."

He laughed. "So I understand. Nero's world burned, too, as I recall. But he managed all right."

Smith looked very fatigued. When he came towards us, his steps were faltering. Evelyn moaned at his approach, but he passed us by and went to the glass.

"What is it?" I said. "The Bleeding Earth?"

He smiled at me, wryly. "Then you know of my little rebellious movement? Yes, the Bleeding Earth. A pretty name for the renegades. Almost Biblical." He put his head against the cool glass. "*'And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.'* . . ."

Evelyn whimpered, and cowered against me.

"*'...and Moses' anger waxed hot,'*" Smith said. "*'and he cast the tablets out of his hands, and break them beneath the mount.'* . . ."

Smith laughed, and turned to me.

"Now you see my mistake, Luke. Not to have continued with my evolution experiments. To have relied upon this sorry breed to people my new world . . ."

"Your world, Smith?"

He looked at me sharply. I pushed Evelyn aside and stepped towards him.

"Is it truly your world, Smith? Created by your marvelous world-building ma-

chine? Is that how it came into being?"

He said nothing.

"Or is it really God's world, Smith? Did you find that your fine machine didn't really work in the limits of space? That you weren't nearly so capable of creating planets as you thought?"

"What are you saying, Luke?" His voice was still unruffled.

"I know the truth, Smith. You never created Smith's World out of the dust of the cosmos. This was a God-created planet, Smith. Your ships captured and steered it into the orbital paths of this solar system; you didn't 'create' it at all. Am I speaking the truth?"

From the window, the sky blazed redder, and the crimson cast fell across Smith's face.

"You're a great scientist, Smith. No one denies you that. But you're not a God. Not nearly a God. You can make marvels, yes, but small marvels compared to the wonders of God. You can't make miracles, Smith. It's only a pose—a pose of your insane ego. You're crazy, Smith!" I was shouting now. "You're crazy!"

I never reckoned what effect my words would have on him. At first, all his reaction was in his eyes. They burned

out at me with such terrible rage that I was forced to look away. Then his hands started to jerk, his fingers moving convulsively, until he had to clench them into fists to stop their involuntary motions. Then he raised his arms above his head and began to speak. The words were unintelligible; but they were Holy Writ; I could tell that from their sonorous, rhythmical cadence; but his voice had lost all power to distinguish between vowels and consonants, words and animal sounds.

Then he lowered his arms, slowly, and spoke quietly to us, almost conversationally.

"It's all very well," he said. "This little rebellion of theirs. They think they're fighting for their freedom, but they're wrong. It's not freedom they'll win, Luke. Only death."

"What are you talking about?"

"The citadel. This building. They'll be coming here, finally. That's the logical thing for them to do. They'll storm it as the French stormed the Bastille, crying words of liberty and equality." He made a noise in his throat, and it was ugly. "But they'll be surprised, Luke. Terribly surprised at what happens."

"What about the building?"

"Why, it's not a building at

all. Not really. These are the only chambers, you see. Just these rooms, for Evelyn and myself. The rest of the structure is really a stockpile, Luke. An atomic stockpile; the final precaution you might say."

I went cold down to my feet; the very floor beneath me held a threat.

"You're lying," I said.

"I'm telling you the truth, Luke. If my rebels come here, they destroy Smith's World and themselves." He chuckled. "It was one of my best ideas, Luke. Don't you agree?"

I wheeled towards the window. The fire was angrier in the night sky, and my ears picked out the sound of voices below.

"We'll have to get out of here," I said. "Evelyn—"

She was looking at Smith, but she said to me: "There's a copter on the roof—"

"Then let's go—"

I grabbed her arm, but she jerked away from me. Her eyes were still fixed on Smith, and the God of Smith's World was going to his knees.

This time, his words were audible.

"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? Why art Thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O, my God, I cry in

the daytime but Thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent . . . ' "

"Smith!" Evelyn shrieked.

"Look at his eyes," I said.

"He can't hear you now—"

"We must go, Evelyn—"

"I can't! I can't leave him."

"You'll have to leave him. If the mob reaches the citadel—"

"But he *needs* me, Luke!"

Now I heard the shouts clearly in the street far below. I tried again to make Evelyn come with me, but her arms were steel-strong around the stooped body of Smith.

I left her, and went to the roof.

There were people running everywhere in the streets when I brought the copter to ground. Some tried to climb aboard, shouting:

"To the spaceport! Please take me! The spaceships are leaving! I want to go home!"

The spaceships! The words struck me with their message of hope. If I could find Alita and reach the Smith-rockets before the mobs attacked...

Then I realized how hopeless it was. Alita was a prisoner in some unknown quarter of Smith's World, and only minutes were delaying the eruption of Smith's planet into atomic dust.

My mind rocked with the

decision I had to make. To leave Alita behind, and take my chance of getting to safety—or to search the unknown streets and terrain until the moment when the pile was triggered, and all problems ended.

It was then I realized that my love for Alita was no manufactured thing. I loved her for what she was, and I knew that I would never see her again.

I guided the copter back into the sky, and followed the running crowds to the spaceport of Smith's World, and heard the rockets already beginning to explode, promising return to the planet of our birth and our true God.

These are my Smith-facts.

As you know by now, some sixty Smith-rockets left the planet before the atomic explosion that turned Smith's World into a black cinder. And you know that Alita was a passenger aboard one of those ships, one of three hundred women prisoners released by the rebels. Even now, I cannot speak of our reunion on Earth without clouded eyes.

We have a son, Alita and I. He believes in God. We do, too.

THE END

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