

# PLANET STORIES



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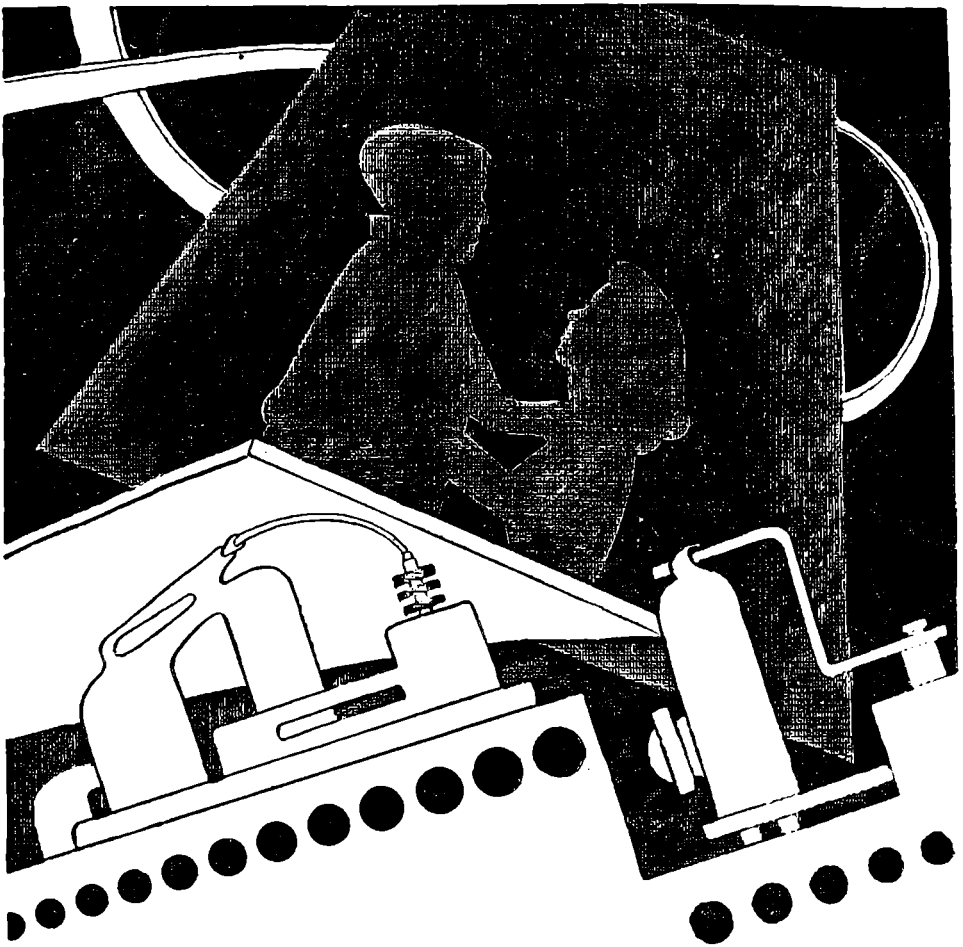
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# HIGHWAY J

By CHARLES ERIC MAINE

*He was Ingram of 1953, inventor of J-rotation . . . and—  
along with his lightweight bicycle—directly responsible for  
the most gigantic nuisance of the 25th Century.*

**I**NGRAM was carefully outlining the main functions of the equipment to Breen, but it was tough going. Even when you've associated with a person and worked alongside him for ten years or more, it isn't easy to make him understand new and complex ideas outside his own field. Breen was essentially a ballistics man. He had the hard practical outlook of a seasoned

engineer who liked his science laid out before him on the workshop bench, or in the assembly sheds. The paper work and the higher maths he took for granted.

Ingram, on the other hand, was one of the basic research men of Neutronic Projects Inc., the backroom wizards with the shiny bald heads and the pale, bespectacled eyes. The equipment, which was nameless, stood

on one side of the small bare room, and comprised a number of rack and panel units fitted with meters, lamps, and various forms of instrumentation, together with a desk-like console crammed with electronic apparatus.

A transparent plastic cylinder, about seven feet tall, stood erect in one corner of the room.

It resembled a gigantic lamp chimney, but was sealed off at the top and bottom by metal discs, to which were connected a number of multi-cored cables originating in the panel racks.

"Here are the power controls, Breen. Four of them—one for each bank."

"Kinda critical, aren't they?"

"They have to be. The field force has to be exactly right for a perfect J-rotation. Otherwise you get a vector, and an enormous dissipation of power in three dimensions."

Breen winced. "There you go again, Ingram. I don't get this J-angle. It's one thing making up a prototype machine to your specifications—I didn't have any trouble there—but when it comes to knowing how it works, or why—then I'm lost. I don't think it will work."

"Why?"

"Because I think time travel's a fallacy."

Ingram smiled a slow thin smile that ruled a horizontal line across his pallid triangular face. "Sure it is, Breen." His voice was quiet and pleasant. "I don't deny it. But the principle involved here is not time travel but ordinary space travel, of the kind everyone knows about."

"You said that before but it amounts to the same thing as time travel."

"Not at all. Only, as it were, by coincidence. Look at it this way. We are, according to the evidence of our senses, which provide all the data on which science is based—we are three-dimensional creatures in a three-dimensional environment. And we can move at will in any of the three dimensions of space."

"That's obvious enough."

"But we also know that the universe is, in fact, multi-dimensional. Our own world of reality takes up dimensions 1, 2 and 3 of the many-dimensioned whole. Dimension 4, which is at right-angles to the first three,

is an extension of space which we normally interpret as time. Dimension 5 has been called the dimension of probability, or chance, where everything that might be and might-have-been exists, and is real. Dimension 6 and the rest—well, who can suggest an interpretation for them? They defy the imagination."

"In other words they are only mathematical abstractions."

"Perhaps, perhaps not. At present we have no way of finding out."

"Then where does it get us?"

"Quite a long way, Breen. Since all of the dimensions are an extension of space, there is no logical reason why a creature of three-dimensional perceptions could not be equally at home in any trio of adjacent dimensions. For instance we are aware of and bounded by—dimensions 1, 2 and 3. But why not 2, 3 and 4? Or 3, 4 and 5? It doesn't matter where you start in the series—three adjacent dimensions will give you a three-dimensional world."

"Sure, as an abstraction. That doesn't provide the answer to time travel."

"Agreed. But you will appreciate that if a man—a physical three-dimensional man—could be rotated through 90 degrees into hyperspace, he would then occupy dimensions 2, 3 and 4, and would be free to move in any of those dimensions, which to him would be merely directions of space."

"But what about time?"

"To him, time would then be dimension 5. He couldn't travel in that. But he could move about in dimension 4 which is time to us."

"Yeah, but not to him."

"Exactly. And that is the only way in which time travel can be accomplished—by making dimension 4 one of the ordinary physical directions of three-dimensional space. It means losing one of the other dimensions—1, 2 or 3, whichever you like—it makes no difference. In practice, by rotating the traveller through one dimension, he occupies 2, 3 and 4. In effect, he is multiplied by the factor J—the square root of minus one—a mathematical operation which produces a change of 90 degrees in orientation."

Breen scratched his head in some perplexity. "Okay, Ingram. I'll assume you

know what you're talking about. The point is, what do I do?"

"I want you to memorize everything I am going to tell you about the machine." Ingram fingered the switches demonstratively. "Tonight I'm going to carry out the first live experiment—on myself. I'll need you to control the equipment in order to make sure that I get back safely. The theory doesn't matter. You can forget it if you like. But you must remember the practical details, the operation and adjustment."

"That should be easy. I built the thing, or most of it. I know the layout of the controls. All I need to know is when to do what."

Ingram smiled, a confident satisfied smile. "That's exactly what I intend to tell you," he stated calmly.

HALF-AN-HOUR later, his brain spinning with a mass of practical information about the J-rotation equipment, Breen left the room and went down a flight of stairs to the lounge immediately below. A young attractive woman sat in an easy chair reading a picture magazine, but when he entered the room she stood up and crossed over to him, smiling in a manner that implied more than just a greeting. He took her in his arms and kissed her.

"Charles is still in the lab, honey," he said. "He's going to be busy for a long time."

"Is it definitely tonight, darling?"

Breen nodded. "If you want my opinion he's as mad as a hatter."

"You don't think it will work?"

"How can it? He talks about multiplying himself by the square root of minus one. Does that make sense? And another thing—do you know what I saw in the lab—all folded-up and new-looking. . . ?"

"I can't imagine."

"A bicycle! One of those latest lightweight folding bikes that you can carry around, and erect whenever necessary. What do you suppose he wants it for?"

"I don't know. Didn't you ask him?"

"Yeah, I asked him. I said 'why the bike?' and he replied—'for time travelling.' He said, 'I'll be able to cover more time in less time'. Then he laughed."

The girl looked worried. She released

herself from Breen's embrace and returned to the easy chair. He followed her, and sat on the arm, with his hand resting lightly on her shoulder. "I tell you, Verna, he's crazy," he added insistently. "You could go ahead and get a divorce on those grounds alone."

She shook her head thoughtfully. "It's not as easy as that, Raymond. You see, I couldn't hurt the guy. Not like that."

"But you've got to hurt him sometime, honey."

"Later. When this work of his is finished. Then we can tell him the truth about us, gently, so's it won't hurt too much."

Breen laughed sardonically. "It's going to hurt just the same whichever way you do it. Why don't you make a clean break, Verna? Come away with me now. Charles will get over it. He's too crazy to care much, anyway."

"He can't be so crazy. Neutronic Products rate him high among their research scientists, and. . . ."

"Yeah, but they don't know about this time travel stuff. Why, if P. J. Verringer even suspected that Charles was playing with that sort of thing in his spare time he'd fire him. A big company like that can't jeopardize its reputation by employing scientists with screwball ideas. Think of the damaging publicity there'd be if this got into the tabloids."

"Maybe you're right, Raymond." Verna's voice was tired, almost depressed. She lay back against the soft upholstery of the chair while Raymond's hand caressed her hair. He eyed her appreciatively, warmly.

"How did you ever come to marry a guy like Charles, honey? I—I just can't understand it."

She shrugged her shoulders. "Oh, I don't know. I used to be his personal assistant at Neutronics. We saw a lot of each other. I know he's not a handsome he-man but, I guess I must have felt sorry for him. He always seemed so lonely, and yet, for all that, so self-sufficient, and so alert mentally. Maybe I was crazy too."

"Sure you were. He's not the guy for you."

"Who is?"

"I am."

She turned her face up to be kissed again.

AT EIGHT o'clock that same evening Ingram entered the tall transparent cylinder in the lab through a narrow sliding panel in its side. He was dressed simply in a gray well-worn suit, with an off-white shirt, which, in combination with his untidy appearance and meek but keen face, gave him the appearance of an out-of-work clerk. The bicycle was already in the container, lying on the metal disc floor. There had been a certain amount of bantering cross-talk about this item between Ingram and Breen, but the older man had refused to go into detailed explanations. "I've already told you, Breen, I'm expecting to find myself in the kind of three-dimensional space we already know. If I'm to travel at all in the fourth dimension then I'll have to walk. Why walk when there are folding bicycles available?"

Breen didn't argue the point but simply raised a significant eyebrow at Verna who had come to see the departure of her husband. Ingram's final instructions, shouted from the cylinder were "Whatever you do, leave the equipment on until I return. The J-rotation needs continuous power."

He gave a pre-arranged signal—a nonchalant raising of the right hand—and Breen pulled the first switch on the console. There was a set procedure for activating the equipment, a circuit preamble determined by relays and flashing pilot lamps. Vacuum tubes glowed dull red, and a characteristic smell of warmth rose from the large vitreous resistors in one of the panel racks. There was the unmistakable odor of ozone in the air.

Verna, watching soberly, with eyes just a little wide, felt an increasing tension, an increasing sense of oppression. It wasn't anything physical—perhaps the heavy breathing of her lover at the console, the curious beetle-like appearance of Ingram inside the cylinder, like some zoological specimen inside a preserving jar, or the faint click-click of hidden relays marking the inevitable build-up of power and energy; but above all the sense of imminence, of some dramatic event that would alter the whole course of her life.

The actual moment of departure came suddenly, unexpectedly, with no blinding lights or crackle of power. One moment

Ingram was there, in the cylinder, a feeble diminutive figure, supporting the bicycle in one hand—and then he was gone. Neither Verna nor Raymond actually saw him go. He simply wasn't there any longer.

For a moment or two they stared in astonishment at the vacant cylinder. Then Breen exclaimed: "Well, what do you know! Bicycle too!"

Verna eyed him anxiously, as though seeking some kind of reassurance. He walked over to her and took her in his arms.

"Do you suppose he's actually gone into time, Raymond?"

"Nothing that gink could do would surprise me. How do I know? He's disappeared all right. He's multiplied himself by the square root of minus one and vanished."

"What happens now?"

"Search me! I leave the equipment running and wait for him to come back."

"How long?"

"Your guess is as good as mine, honey. Five minutes—an hour—a week—a month . . . he didn't say. He didn't even know."

"I don't like it, darling. It's just a little sinister."

Breen smiled and kissed her. "Don't you worry, Verna. Either Charles is crazy or he isn't. If he's crazy, then my guess is he won't come back, and that will save us the trouble of divorce action. If he isn't crazy, then he's probably pedalling on his bike like fury into the far distant future. I only hope he gets a flat tire and has to walk back."

Verna laughed. "You don't suppose he can see us or hear us now, do you, Raymond?"

"No—I guess not."

"Then kiss me and tell me you love me. I need something to cheer me up."

Breen was only too pleased to oblige.

## II

DURING the next two weeks, the J-rotation equipment functioned day and night in the small laboratory. Breen was a frequent visitor, not only to carry out his routine inspection and adjustment of the apparatus, but also to see Verna Ingram, and discuss plans for the future. Ever present in his mind was the possibility that In-

gram might not return. Such a situation would be very convenient. He saw no great difficulty in having his death established as a legal fact—Verna had witnessed the disintegration—and then he could go ahead and marry the woman he loved.

As the days went by with no sign that Ingram was still alive or intended to come back, he grew more and more impatient, and became resentful that he should be committed to look after the machine that would, sooner or later, bring back the man he least wanted to see in the world.

It occurred to him, quite suddenly, that even if Ingram were still alive, and perhaps thriving in some future age, a failure of the equipment could prevent him from returning. A technical breakdown would leave him stranded in time, and there would be no possibility of repairs being effected, because Ingram himself was the only person who really understood the principles and circuitry of J-rotation.

From this startling realization, it was a short logical step to the thought that such a breakdown could be conveniently engineered.

With little effort the equipment could easily be destroyed beyond repair. Ingram would be permanently out of the way, and from that moment on things would run smoothly for himself and Verna.

The idea seized his imagination and obsessed him so that he became restless and uneasy whenever he was alone in the lab. With so little effort so much could be accomplished . . . yet he hesitated. Something was bothering his conscience, and it wasn't the thought of Ingram left high and dry in the future—or maybe the past. . . ? He decided he would feel much better about it if he were to talk it over first with Verna, and once he had made up his mind on this point, he hesitated no longer, but went to see her the same evening. He kissed her, then said, "I've been thinking, honey, supposing Charles never comes back?"

"But he may, Raymond. We can't be sure."

"Supposing we were sure. We knew he wasn't coming back."

She considered this for a moment. "I guess we could go and see a lawyer. Maybe they'd regard him as dead. In any case, I'd

be able to get a divorce on grounds of desertion, maybe."

"Sure. Then we could get married."

"That would be just fine, darling."

"Is that what you want?"

"Of course, darling. Don't you?"

"Yes. Then listen to me, honey. I can fix it so that Charles won't come back."

She stepped backwards, regarding him in surprise. "What do you mean by that, Raymond?"

"Just what I say. I can put the equipment out of action, and close the door on Charles. He'll be stuck in the future forever."

There was consternation—almost horror—in her eyes, and it was the first time he had ever seen her look that way. He took her hand in his. "What's the matter, honey?"

"You can't do that, Raymond. It would be murder."

"Nonsense!" He laughed a loud confident laugh. "How can it be murder when you don't kill a guy? He'll still be alive, only in a different age. It's not a criminal offense to close the door on someone."

"It's wrong, darling. I don't care what you say, it's criminal. You can't do it, and I won't let you do it."

Breen became irritable. He pulled her towards him and held her firmly by the arms. "Now look here, Verna. You just said it would be fine if Charles never came back. We could get married and that's what we both want. All right, I can fix it that way. What's the objection?"

"If Charles doesn't come back—either because he's dead, or because he doesn't want to—then that's okay, Raymond. But if you deliberately prevent him from returning, then that's a criminal and dishonest act. I won't let you do it."

"You won't stop me," said Breen fiercely.

He released her and went straight up to the laboratory. There was no doubt or hesitation in his mind now; Verna's opposition to the scheme had simplified the situation so far as he was concerned. He knew exactly what he was going to do. First, throw the main power switch, then go to work on the vacuum tubes with a hand wrench, and finally—just to make sure—tear out bunches of the fine inter-stage wiring with a pair of wire clippers. It took him exactly three

minutes, and when he had finished, the J-rotation equipment was dead, and unlikely to function again.

He went downstairs to the lounge, to find Verna standing by the telephone, white-faced and wild-eyed. "All right, honey," he announced triumphantly. "Stop worrying. Charles won't come back ever."

"Raymond, forgive me," she said quietly. "I've called the police. They're sending a homicide squad."

Even before she had finished speaking, the wail of a police siren filtered up from the street below.

CHARLES INGRAM'S first experience of J-rotation was decidedly unpleasant. From the moment when Breen had pushed the switch that set the preamble relays in operation, the interior of the cylinder had seemed to close in on him. The transparent walls had become somehow scintillating and unreal, and there was an electric tension in the air that made his heart thump faster. There was no pain as the power surged through him, only a terrifying paralysis, then vertigo, then darkness. For a fractional moment he was a nonentity suspended in a cold formless void, but this was replaced, quite suddenly, by . . . at first he couldn't identify the scene before his eyes. It was familiar but fantastically different. Slowly recognition crystallized in his brain. It was the laboratory just as it had been before the equipment was switched on, but it was flat and dimensionless like a luminous projection on a vast movie screen. Except that there was no movement of any kind. Breen was over at the console, poised motionless, with one hand awkwardly raised in the air above a switch. Verna was there too, a flat cut-out Verna, with one hand raised to her mouth in a frozen gesture of alarm. The red second-hand of the large laboratory clock was not moving. There was no sound, no movement no reality. Everything was a plane, a still picture, spread out before him, yet he himself seemed to be part of it. The transparent wall of the cylinder was in the picture too, as unreal as the rest, yet he himself was solid and substantial and alive. He was a three-dimensional being in a two-dimensional environment—a human in Flatland.

Ingram's first reaction was one of blank stupefaction. For a moment he thought the experiment had failed, but his keen analytical brain soon recovered from the shock, and commenced to examine systematically the evidence of his eyes. The truth of the matter, he realized, was that he had never attempted to visualize how the world would appear to a J-rotated observer. He had steeped himself in the pure mathematics of the process, but had failed to consider the more mundane aspects.

Somewhere at the back of his mind had been a vague picture of worm-like life-lines meandering and undulating across a featureless gray plain or substratum, but that naive impression apparently bore no relation to the reality. The gray substratum was there, in a sense, for he felt himself standing on a firm smooth surface, like the floor of the laboratory. It seemed to stretch all around, beyond the two-dimensional image of Breen and Verna in the work room.

He stepped forward slowly towards the image but as he moved, it receded, and his eye caught a movement. Breen's hand had dropped about two inches towards the control console. The red second-hand of the clock had flicked forward a degree or two. Verna's expression was slightly different. A great truth in Ingram's mind—he had walked forward in time! While he remained still, the picture before him was static and motionless; but when he moved, then the picture changed, became animated, exhibited the phenomenon of time sequence.

His alert senses leapt to the obvious corollary: if moving forward caused time to advance in the two-dimensional world he was observing, then walking backward should cause time to be reversed—like a motion picture run through in reverse. He tried to take a step to the rear, but found he couldn't. There was an inflexible barrier pressing into his back that locked all his movements. He turned round and found himself facing the image of the rear wall of the laboratory, then stepped forward—successfully, but again could not step backwards. The barrier had moved round with him, and still blocked his movements to the rear. When he turned again to face the center of the room, the clock had advanced another two or three seconds.



Gradually it came to him that there was only one temporal direction in which he was free to move, and that was forward. The road to the future was a one-way road; he had come up against something fundamental in time travel—you can't go back. Time was irreversible—that was the law of entropy.

In a sudden panic he stooped down and groped for the bicycle, but it was still there, at his feet. He picked it up and unfolded it, pushing the supporting struts into place with an agitated motion, and began to walk forward, slowly and cautiously, observing the animation of the scene before his eyes. Breen, Verna and the laboratory clock started into motion, slowly at first, but speeding up into normal activity as he increased his walking pace, pushing the bicycle along by his side. At the same time sound became audible—the sound of their voices talking—wavering and varying curiously in pitch, because his speed was not perfectly constant. It was like watching a cine-film running through a faulty projector.

As he walked, he tried to figure out the exact significance of what he had seen, and soon the solution became clear. He had overlooked one important fact. Because of the J-rotation, he was now extended physically in dimensions 2, 3 and 4. The rest of the world he was observing had remained in dimensions 1, 2 and 3. The only dimensions they had in common were 2 and 3, and they were the only two he was capable of observing.

Dimension 1 no longer existed for him: dimension 4 was a formless gray expanse behind the picture plane into which he was advancing. The world he knew had effectively been reduced to a flat two dimensional world so far as his J-rotated senses were concerned. If he had carried the rotation a stage further, into dimensions 3, 4 and 5, his world would have become a one-dimensional thread suspended, presumably, in a gray void. And from the viewpoint of dimensions 4, 5 and 6 . . . ? A point—a dimensionless atom of being in an eternity of . . . what? He couldn't even begin to guess, but he had a feeling that he had touched upon a profound aspect of metaphysics just beyond the eager grasp of his understanding.

HE WAS abruptly startled out of his reverie by what was happening in flatland. Breen was embracing and kissing his wife, and what was worse, she was responding in no uncertain manner. Ingram stopped and stared, and the picture became inanimate—a still color-photo of a lovers' embrace against the austere background of a laboratory—his laboratory.

An insane jealousy swept over him. He rushed forward, as though to thrust the two apart, and the picture jerked into sudden movement again, but receded as ever, so that he was unable to make any advance on it. He was confined to the relative position of the cylinder, observing the lab form behind its transparent walls, and couldn't break out. Any movement he made simply took him forward in time.

He saw Verna and Breen leave the laboratory arm in arm, and then the light went out, and he was left in almost complete darkness, with only the faint crimson glow from the vacuum tubes to cast a pale glow on the equipment.

Ingram mounted his bicycle, anxious to hurry on until someone came into the laboratory again. With his mind a confusion of bitter thoughts, he pedalled fiercely into the future, with no means of knowing his rate of progress. Verna was unfaithful. That was the salient fact that had assaulted his mind. Breen, friend throughout many years, had abused his hospitality by making love to her behind his back. He wondered how long it had been going on.

In a sense, he realized that it was partly his own fault. He had been intensely absorbed in his work for many years. He had no illusions about himself. He was as dull and prosaic a husband as you would find anywhere in the world. It had always been a mystery to him why the girl had ever been attracted to him in the first instance. It was one of the eternal enigmas of life. Sure, he had neglected her, and Breen had come along—a younger, more attractive, more virile man. It was only natural that this should have happened. He rode on along the time highway full of anger, jealousy, contrition and—strangely enough—understanding. He couldn't find it in him to blame anyone except himself.

The laboratory flashed into full brilliance,

then snapped into darkness again before he had time to squeeze the brakes. In the space of about one second Breen had entered the room, carried out a number of long and intricate adjustments to the equipment, and had left again—the whole operation being performed with such incredible rapidity that Ingram was unable to follow his movements. He stopped in the darkness to think it over. The speed of that transitory incident was much greater than he would have anticipated, even allowing for the velocity of the bicycle. Breen had rushed in and out at a tremendous rate. There had been no accompanying sounds, probably because the speeding-up process had pushed the frequency of the audio waves up into the supersonic spectrum.

It seemed to Ingram that as he traveled through time, at what he imagined to be a constant speed, so the rate of progress accelerated. It wasn't a linear progression, but apparently followed a square-law—like the increasing acceleration of a body falling through space under the influence of gravity. That was another factor he had overlooked, but it made sense in his mind. Acceleration denoted a fundamental curvature in the nature of multi-dimensional space, and that tied up conveniently with the relativists.

But there was a more important significance in this discovery—the fact that increasing acceleration through time placed the far distant future within his reach. Provided he kept pedalling long enough, there was virtually no limit to the distance he could travel in dimension 4.

Curiosity about Breen and Verna, however, prevented him from seizing this opportunity at first. He felt compelled to make frequent stops, dismounting and walking, in order to observe laboratory scenes at a normal rate of movement. It was in this way that he saw—about an hour after the J-rotation had taken place—the destruction of the delicate equipment by Breen, armed with a large steel wrench. Ingram's stomach turned over at the sight—not because of the vicious sabotage of ten years of intensive work, but because of the effect it would have on himself—when he eventually caught up with the time that he was now seeing in advance. He was witnessing a

preview of his own predicament. There was no accurate way of estimating how long had elapsed in Breen's world between the moment of the original J-rotation, and the act of sabotage. Possibly ten days, or two weeks—or maybe more. He had seen it happen in an hour, because his time angle had shifted, but when those days had elapsed he would inevitably find himself in the time highway, cut off from a source of rotation power. He wasn't quite sure what would happen, but he didn't like the prospects.

Breen's motive was fairly clear to him. It was a simple case of the eternal triangle—the solution being, as always, the elimination of one of the sides. He was the unwanted side on this occasion—and it didn't feel good.

There seemed to be only one thing to do, and that was press on at full speed into the future, until he was able to make contact with an age of great scientific advancement. He wanted to put everything right in his life—even if it meant going back several years, and treating Verna with less indifference. Above all, he wanted to make sure that Breen would never have the opportunity to steal his wife in the way he was witnessing. He couldn't see how it would be possible—but perhaps scientists of a future period would have solved the problem of traveling backward in time. With their help he might be able to put the clock back and make a fresh start, treating Verna in the way a young and vivacious woman wants to be treated, and at the same time maintaining his interest in J-rotation.

In such a mood, his thoughts jumbled and incoherent, lacking their usual precision and logic, Ingram mounted his bicycle again, and set off at full speed down the time highway.

### III

**D**URING the next few hours Ingram was able to observe the future history of the laboratory. At first he stopped and dismounted at frequent intervals, in order to study the scene at his leisure, but each time he re-started, the acceleration he had achieved was gone, and it became necessary to build it up again from zero. The labora-

tory flickered into illumination and darkness in a manner that tired the eyes. Once, early in the journey, he thought he caught a glimpse of uniformed police examining and photographing the equipment. Then later, the room was in darkness for a long time, denoting the passage of weeks or possibly months.

When the light finally came on again the equipment had gone, and the room was furnished in the conventional way with a table and chairs, and a man and a woman moving around. But they were strangers to him. He tried to interpret the meaning of what he saw as he went along. It looked as though Verna had moved out of the house; there was certainly no further image of her, or for that matter, Breen. And he saw nothing to indicate that he himself ever returned to his own era.

On and on he went, observing with a more practiced eye the swift intermittent images as they came and went on the two dimensional screen before him. Through the decades—slowly at first—then more and more swiftly. He saw the man and the woman grow older. Children appeared, grew up, and vanished from the scene. Then the man, now stooped and white haired, was gone too, and only the old woman remained. But soon she was no longer there.

A new generation of strangers took over the house, and the furnishings changed in appearance becoming more futuristic in style. A large stereo-television cabinet came into view, on which, in brief glimpses, he saw newsreels that astonished him—giant flying-wing airliners, passenger-carrying rockets ascending into space, jet-powered hover-cars, and the official opening of a tunnel beneath the Atlantic for traffic and freight. Science was playing an increasingly greater part in the life of mankind. In fact, it was rapidly becoming the cornerstone on which civilization depended.

As though to contradict his thoughts the scene dissolved in a blinding white flash that rendered him momentarily blind. He kept moving instinctively, rubbing his aching eyes with one hand. When he was able to see again, the room had disappeared, and in its place there was smoking rubble. He seemed to be at the edge of a vast crater, the center of which had a shiny fused

appearance. All around, as far as the eye could see, was desolation. The sky was stained and darkened by a gigantic mushroom of dense smoke rising up for miles.

Nothing further happened for a long time. He was effectively in the open now, though the scene was still two-dimensional. The alternate flicker of night and day blended into a continuous soft gray luminescence. He was traveling too quickly to observe individual motions of men, but as green vegetation began to appear among the ruins, so new structures raised themselves up in the distance—larger and more magnificent buildings towering up into the sky. In no time at all, it seemed, every trace of the atomic explosion had been eradicated, and the crater became the foundations of a tremendous skyscraper in shining metal.

Until the next atomic explosion . . . and the next . . . and the next. Ingram marveled at the resilience of man, his inherent stubbornness, that enabled him to rebuild in order to destroy, then rebuild again. Always the architecture was finer and greater, as though war and devastation raised his creative powers to higher and higher levels.

There was a long interval of peace, during which he was looking out and down on an ultra-modern city from a point apparently located in space some thirty feet above street level. Aerial highways spanned the chasms between skyscrapers. Airborne traffic streamed by at pre-determined levels, from the ground high up into the skies. He caught a glimpse of metallic saucer-like objects suspended in space, like miniature moons, and saw rockets moving towards and away from them. Then the view brightened. There was no more night, only perpetual day produced by a ring of artificial suns encircling the earth like an enormous fiery girdle suspended in space.

A new building arose and encompassed him. In the space of a few seconds he found himself in a room, a gleaming box of a room, fitted with equipment of unimaginable purpose and incomprehensible design. People flashed here and there, but they were only a formless blur at the rate he was traveling.

He remained in the room for a long time, observing no change in content, and pedaled harder and harder in order to break

through to a new environment. This was an age of great scientific advancement. There was no doubt about that. But how much did they know about time travel? Could they provide the information and the facilities he required? And—an even bigger problem—would he be able to make contact with them from his extra-dimensional plane, and if so, would they understand him?

And then it happened. Quite unexpectedly he ran full tilt into an obstruction across the time highway—something hard and unyielding located obliquely across his path. The bicycle struck—crashed—and he was flung violently off. At the same instant he experienced a sickening electric shock that made every nerve in his body scream out in anguish. Blackness closed in, but as consciousness was dragged from his brain he heard a voice, a human voice, saying "Grab him tight. He's the guy who started all the trouble!"

**I**NGRAM recovered from his black-out a few seconds later to find himself securely held by two tall steel-muscled men. They were simply attired in white loose-fitting tunics and kilt-like shorts, with flat cross-strap sandals. A black belt around their waists held holsters from which protruded the butts of sinister looking pistols. But the thing that impressed Ingram most of all was the fact that the objective world was three-dimensional once again, and he was part of it. He had been forcibly dragged from the time highway for a reason he didn't know, but would undoubtedly soon find out.

"Take it easy, old timer. We're not going to hurt you—yet." The guard laughed sardonically.

"We've been waiting quite some time for you."

Although they spoke in the language and idiom that he knew, there was a quality about their voices—a subtle accent and inflection—which fell strangely on his ears.

"Come on you. The Provost Marshal's got something to say."

Ingram was conducted through a sliding door and down a cool wide corridor into another room. He had a fleeting impression of thick crimson carpet, curious cubist

chairs, and a battery of video screens set in a large panel on one wall. Then his eyes focused on the desk at the far end of the room, and the lean melancholy man behind it. The guards hustled him forward until he was standing before the Provost Marshal.

"Time immigrant, sir. Just pulled him in off Highway J."

"Hm. Mode of travel?" The Marshal's voice sounded bored.

"Archaic two-wheeled pedal-vehicle."

"Hm. A bicycle. Original, at any rate. Most immigrants seem to favor jet cars."

The Marshal stood up and scrutinized Ingram as one would inspect a biological specimen.

"Not very rugged. But intelligent—yes intelligent. What's your name?"

"Charles Ingram."

"He's the guy that started the trouble," one of the guards pointed out.

"I'm aware of that. Ingram of 1953. The inventor of J-rotation. Do you realize, Ingram, that you are directly responsible for the biggest nuisance of the 25th century?"

"Who me?" asked Ingram in perplexity.

"Yes you, in spite of your innocent manner. Ever since you started this J-rotation business, people have been time traveling for the past five hundred years. Yes, thousands upon thousands of them. We've had several centuries of war, during which the population of this planet has been reduced to less than half a million. Finally we have attained a new zenith of progress and culture, a tightly organized self-sufficient world with a very high standard of living. Naturally all the time travelers by-pass the atomic wars, and decide to settle in on us—here and now."

"Thousands you say?" Ingram queried.

"Tens of thousands. You are the last of them, I think. The others all got here before you, because they didn't have so far to travel, and they used a faster means of locomotion."

"Amazing!"

"Most of them tried to go on a little further into the future—to a period of still greater stability and achievement. The government of Terra a hundred and fifty years from now got tired of this endless stream of immigrants—people from the decadent ages with atavistic traits and no knowledge

of modern techniques. We received orders to erect a fifth-dimensional barrier across the time road—Highway J. We have equipment to rotate immigrants back into the three dimensions of space. In other words, we are a security check point to stop illegal immigration."

"Tens of thousands!" breathed Ingram. "Then my discovery must have attained general recognition?"

"It sure did. That's why you're in trouble."

Ingram ignored this last statement. "You say you received orders from the future to stop immigrants. That means you have time travel too. Both ways."

"Yes. We have. Ironically enough, we use your system—J-rotation."

"That's what I came into the future to find out—how to travel backwards in time."

The Marshal smiled sardonically. "Forget it, Ingram. You'll be lucky if you live long enough to travel anywhere. I'm going to read Section 64a of the Terran Security Regulations of 2416. That is the particular regulation under which you are being arrested and charged." He selected a pink docket from a file on his desk. "Here we are—Section 64a—relating to the threat to social and economic stability caused by excessive time immigration from the belligerent centuries. Immigration by time, whether by Highway J, sub-dimensional transit, pathological hibernation, or whatever method, is an offence under the Stability of the Social Order Act of 2416, for which the maximum penalty is compulsory euthanasia. That means death, of course."

"But I don't want to stay. I only want to go back."

"There is no going back, Ingram. Every time-immigrant knows the secret of time travel. If he is allowed to go back, he will inevitably spread that knowledge to others. He must stay here, either dead, or alive on a penal satellite."

Ingram was seized with a kind of unreasoning panic. "You can't do that to me," he shouted, thumping the desk with his fist. "I demand justice. You can't kill a man or imprison him without a trial."

"We could, but we won't," said the Marshal calmly. "You'll get your trial. Meanwhile you must be held in custody. You'll

find it quite pleasant, once you get used to free fall. You'll be with other time immigrants; too."

The interview was at an end. Ingram found himself being forcibly conducted out of the room and into an elevator, which ascended suddenly and silently, causing his knees to sag with fierce acceleration.

"Where are you taking me?" he demanded indignantly.

"We ask the questions around here, old timer."

They came out on a flat roof under a clear blue sky. The ring of miniature suns he had seen from the time highway shone fiercely down with almost tropical heat. Glancing up he saw a myriad flying machines in the sky, flying in well-defined lanes. The air up here was thin and attenuated, and gazing downwards as they neared the parapet at the edge of the roof, he nearly collapsed at the tremendous height of the building—indeed, height was hardly an adequate word—altitude was more accurate. He guessed they were about three miles above the ground.

The guard whisked him into a small cigar-shaped vehicle standing on the roof, and strapped him into a springy bucket seat, then they moved into the fore compartment and slammed the cabin door. There was a sudden throbbing of booster pumps, followed by a roar that assailed his ears with an intolerable deluge of sound. He felt a giant hand pushing him backwards into the padding of the seat, sucking the air from his lungs, pressing violently into his stomach. And then, for the second time that day, he blacked out.

#### IV

**P**ENAL SATELLITE No. 7 was a large metal saucer-like disc circling the earth in a fixed orbit at a radius of about 22,000 miles. It was, perhaps, two hundred yards in diameter, the whole structure being covered and sealed in with a transparent dome of extremely tough plastic material. Here Ingram found himself mingling with some twenty other prisoners in a circular arena at the center of the satellite. Around the edge of arena, behind a shiny metallic wall, were the administrative offices, the quarters

of the satellite staff, the small hospital ward, the thermo-pile generators and associated power equipment, and the radio and radar room. The whole structure was clean and tidy, with fresh circulating air and adequate warmth.

Ingram spent the first few hours of his stay on Satellite 7 by being sick in spite of the precautionary shots of trinitamine they had given him in the arm. Free fall meant no gravity, and that meant instability of the semi-circular canals of balance in the ears. He found himself unable to move without experiencing violent dizziness. But eventually he grew accustomed to the sensation, and his body settled down to something like normal behavior.

His companions in crime were a curiously mixed bag—all presumably from periods of time future to his own—and wearing a wide variety of garments of differing design and texture. There were no women, which seemed to indicate that time-traveling was an essentially male pastime, but later he discovered that some thirty female time immigrants were imprisoned on Penal Satellite No. 3.

It wasn't long before he had made friends with a man named Katz, a short, thick-set individual wearing peculiar heavy spectacles whose birth-year was 2098. Katz spoke to him on the first occasion that he was sick.

"Don't let it worry you, friend. You'll get used to it."

Ingram made a non-committal reply that sounded more like a grunt.

"What's your name and where are you from?" asked Katz.

"I'm Ingram—from 1953."

The other man whistled in astonishment. "Not *the* Ingram—who discovered J-rotation?"

"Yes. That's me."

Katz suddenly became confidential in manner. "Better not tell the others. They stay here on these penal satellites for their predicament. Me—I don't care. I'm an easy type."

"What's in store for us?" asked Ingram.

Katz shrugged his shoulders. "Some immigrants are euthanased—the ones they consider most dangerous. Others—well, they stay here on these penal satellites for a long time—perhaps years—then a few

are allowed to settle in as citizens. The brighter ones—those who seem likely to do useful work."

"And the remainder . . .?"

"They usually get sent to the ore workings on one of the inner planets. Mars is favorite. The bad types go to the moon, and believe me, that's grim. No one likes the moon."

"So they have achieved interplanetary travel?"

"Sure. They had already accomplished that in my day in a crude sort of way, with clumsy liquid fuel rockets. You ought to see the modern helio-drive clippers! Pioneer work on the outer planets is going on. An expedition returned from Jupiter a few days ago."

"And they have time travel too—both ways?"

"They sure have but there are so many restrictions and legal angles. It's very unpopular. The attitude of the government is that everyone should stay in his own period."

"Hm—time nationalism," Ingram observed. "In my day it used to be every man to his own country. Now it's periods that matter."

"Sure! Why not? Next thing there'll be time wars—with the people of one age fighting other people of another age, who are either unborn or long dead. Funny, isn't it!"

"I think it's profoundly depressing," said Ingram. "Human nature hasn't changed."

Katz chuckled. "It stopped changing when man began to adapt his environment to himself instead of vice versa. Civilization and evolution are bitter enemies."

Ingram considered this for a moment. "You mean that civilized man can't evolve?"

"That's the way it is. Brahne taught that principle in 2061. The moment man evolves sufficiently to mould his environment to his own needs and convenience, he ceases to develop. He just saturates the intellect that he has attained, and reaches stagnation."

"That doesn't sound too good for me," said Ingram. "If the men of today are no better than the men of my own age, then they are likely to kill me—just as the Provost Marshal said."

"Sure they are! Nothing more certain! You're Ingram, aren't you, the guy who started J-rotation? They'll kill you without a doubt."

"But isn't there anything I can do?"

"Such as what?"

"Go back, or even forward, to a more tolerant age."

Katz shook his head. "Not a chance! You'll spend about two weeks here on Satellite 7 and then you'll have your trial, and that will be that." He snapped his fingers expressively.

Ingram moved, felt his stomach turn over, and decided to be sick again.

KATZ had been right about the trial. It was exactly two weeks after Ingram's arrival on the penal satellite that he found himself being escorted by two uniformed guards to a small rocket moored to the outer rim. He waved forlornly to Katz, and to several others whom he had grown to regard as friends during his brief stay, then settled into the bucket seat, ready for whatever was to come. This time there was no heavy acceleration, only a barely audible throb as the space craft pushed itself out of the weak gravity field of the satellite.

The descent to Earth was accomplished by air braking, the vehicle sweeping in a vast arc around the planet before using jets to control flight. They settled upon the flat roof of a tall slender building in the center of the metropolis which he had left a fortnight earlier.

High in the sky, against the glare of the artificial suns, the minute saucers of the satellites glittered like stars. He regarded them pensively, thinking of the other immigrants, like himself, who were there, suspended in space, comfortable perhaps, but without hope. Then through a sliding door, between the guards, and into an elevator that fell noiselessly into the depths of the building. Increasing air pressure made his ears click uncomfortably. He swallowed to equalize the pressure but his mouth was dry and the effort was painful.

He was deposited in a circular room with a simple metallic chair and table, and told to wait. That was easy—there was

nothing else he could do but wait, but as he sat there he experienced a vague unpleasant awareness of watching eyes. The walls were quite smooth and of unbroken surface, but he realized that they were no guarantee of privacy. He wondered how long he would be left to cool off in that tiny cell—minutes or hours?

Three days passed by, three uncomfortable days that nearly drove him insane. At intervals the door slid open and one of the guards deposited a bowl of thick syrupy gruel on the table; he found it unappetizing, but it kept hunger at bay. There was no bed or mattress on which he could sleep, but he managed to rest by laying on the hard floor, using his rolled up coat as a pillow.

He felt unclean and weary and impatient. Since the moment of the J-rotation he had not shaved, and his face was already covered with a substantial bristly beard. He decided that it was all part of the demoralizing procedure, calculated to wear down any stubbornness in the victim, and to produce an unfavorable impression on the jury, if such a body existed.

It all came to an end quite suddenly when he had just finished his tenth bowl of gruel, and was earnestly hoping that he would never have to start on the eleventh. The door opened with a smooth hiss, and two guards stood at the entrance, beckoning him. He staggered out thankfully, and found himself being supported under the arms. Back into the elevator they went, then down again, and finally out into a wide brightly illuminated corridor that terminated in a black door.

They went into a large gray room, and stopped in the center. Ingram looked around with curious interest. This apparently was the court room, where he was to be tried, but there were no seats, no judge, no jury—nothing at all, except a massive gleaming machine atop of which, half hidden by projecting control panels and instruments, sat a small wizened man. The guards saluted, then stepped smartly to the rear, leaving Ingram to face the unwavering gaze of the master of the machine.

"Charles Ingram," came a thin reedy voice—whether from the man or the machine he could not at first decide. Then the

thin lips opened slightly. "You are called before the adjudicator to make whatever statement you wish in your own defense. Allow me to explain. This apparatus is an electronic brain of strict impartiality which receives the evidence presented to it—both for and against the accused person—then, after a scrupulous computation based on facts, circumstance and motive, delivers its judgment, and specifies the punishment to be awarded in the event of a conviction.

"The charge against you has already been recorded—that of illegal time immigration. The State evidence for the prosecution has already been absorbed in the circuit. The fact that you are the originator of the process of J-rotation is a very important factor in your indictment and trial. You are now invited to speak in your own defense."

Ingram stood appalled. "Do you mean that I am to be condemned by a machine without even hearing the case against me?"

"It would be wrong for you to hear the State evidence," stated the man on the adjudicator. "Your judgment would be colored by what you heard, and you would be tempted to distort the truth in order to present your own case in a more favorable light."

"Then what am I to say?"

"You may say what you wish, bearing in mind that the charge is illegal time immigration."

"But I didn't know it was illegal."

"Ignorance is no excuse in law."

"I am a scientist of the twentieth century. What do I know of time immigration laws in an unborn future? I experimented with J-rotation in good faith."

"All time immigrants arrive in good faith. It does not alter the law."

"But somebody had to make the first time journey! There had to be an original J-rotation, otherwise time travel would never have been achieved."

"Obviously," observed the other tonelessly. "There is always a first of everything. That is neither a merit nor a demerit. The charge is illegal time immigration."

"But I ask for nothing other than the right to return to my own age. I have personal troubles of my own to attend to."

"You are not here to demand rights. You are here to be judged, and to state why you

think the judgment should be in your favor."

Ingram shook his fist at the little man. "This is a travesty of justice," he shouted. "How can a machine decide the fate of any human being! It is barbarism of the worst kind!"

The man on the adjudicator regarded him patiently. "If you have nothing more to say . . . ?"

"I have nothing to say to a machine . . ."

"Take him away."

The guards stepped forward and pulled the struggling Ingram backwards out of the room. The trial was over.

**I**N THE circular cell once more he sat on the chair with his chin in his hands and resentfully reviewed the events of the past hour. Perhaps he had been a fool. If the adjudicator really based its verdict on logical computations, then he had done virtually nothing to save his own skin. He could have lied—manufactured some fantastic story to sway the impersonal verdict to his own side.

But somehow he knew that with his trained scientific mind facile lying wouldn't have come easily; accuracy—an almost pedantic accuracy—came naturally to him. If the adjudicator also recorded intonation and inflection, and could detect insincerity, then he would have achieved very little either way. He resigned himself to what he considered to be inevitable—it was only a matter of time to the execution.

The guards returned after two hours.

"Well?" asked Ingram. "What's the verdict?"

Their heavy features remained impassive and uninformative. "You'll find out soon enough, old timer."

He was conducted to a different level, and found himself in a familiar room, standing before a familiar desk facing the sad drooping features of the Provost Marshal.

"Charles Ingram," the Marshal announced, reading from a slip of paper, "you have been fairly tried by the electronic adjudicator, and the verdict recorded is 60—95—40."

"What does that mean?" Ingram asked.

"It means," said the Marshal slowly,



"that you have been found guilty, and are sentenced to immediate execution in the nuclear chamber."

Even though everything had happened as he had anticipated, Ingram could not avoid a distinct shock. The worst possible occurrence in imagination is never so bad as the stark reality. A wave of sickness swamped him; the room seemed to spin and waver like an unsynchronized video picture.

"You won't kill me," he shouted defiantly, taking a step towards the Provost Marshal.

"Hold him," ordered the latter. The guards closed in, and at the same moment Ingram felt the vertigo return, more insistently and violently. The room was dissolving before his eyes, breaking up into fragments of distorted light; the hard grip of the guards' hands became feathery—then disappeared. There was momentary blackness, then bright blinding sunlight, and a terrifying sensation of falling. A vast yellow surface was rushing at him—closer and closer—until it struck him brutally on the head and body, and brought impenetrable night.

## V

INGRAM sat up slowly and painfully, rubbing his throbbing head, and peering through narrowed eyes into a glaring wilderness of sand and sky. Thoughts filtered into his brain with great difficulty—obscure interpretations of his new environment mixed with fleeting unreal memories of what had gone before. The Provost Marshal was gone—together with the guards, the room, the city—everything; and in its place was desert—looking baked and arid, but wonderfully twentieth century. Far away, to the east of the sun, a number of white cubes wavered in the heat haze—arab dwellings, without a doubt. More and more it was forced upon his consciousness that he was no longer in the future—nor in America—but in a tropical land. He had a vague uncomfortable feeling that he was in Africa, and that this was the Sahara desert.

Cautiously he picked himself up, and stood tottering and perspiring under the stabbing fingers of the sun, then step by

step made his way towards the distant village. In due course the explanation came to him—a cool and refreshing stream of logic in the heated torment of his body and brain.

He had finally caught up with the destruction of J-rotation equipment by Breen. Some seventeen days had elapsed since his departure, and the scene he had witnessed in two dimensions—Breen smashing tubes and clipping wires—had finally attained reality. The J-rotation had been effectively cancelled; the time field had collapsed; and there had been nothing to hold him in the future any longer. He had automatically returned to his own period.

But the displacement in distance—a displacement of thousands of miles from America to Africa? That was a more difficult problem to solve, but eventually he arrived at the answer. He had traveled physically—spatially—in the fourth dimension—along Highway J. At the collapse of the J-field the distance he had journeyed was converted from a fourth dimensional length into a third dimensional displacement; a curved period of time into a linear distance of familiar space. It was as simple as that. Merely the rotation of one length into another.

The squat white houses were nearer now, and he could see figures moving between them, and to the right—yes, unmistakably a camel. The scene swam before his eyes like an incandescent vapor, and the sun on his head was a consuming furnace. Before he realized it, he was on his knees in the burning sand, and sinking quickly into a sickening blankness.

And then, immediately, it seemed, he was staring at a smooth white wall, pierced by a long rectangular window having venetian shutters. He was laying in a bed, between cool white sheets, and there were other beds around him, arranged in rows on either side of the long room. Through a violent headache one word filtered into his mind—hospital.

During the next few hours things happened which failed to make coherent sense to him, because he was not yet fully conscious. A pretty uniformed nurse came and went several times, speaking softly in a strange tongue. A dark smooth doctor ma-

terialized and injected something into his arm. Later he felt better, and later still the doctor came back.

"Alors, mon ami. Et comment ca va?" He had clean regular teeth and a pleasant smile.

"I'm sorry," Ingram said quietly. "I don't understand."

"C'est un Anglais," came the liquid voice of the nurse.

"Non—non," said the doctor. "Un Americain, je crois."

Then, speaking quite good English, he continued: "You are an American, yes?"

Ingram nodded. "Where am I?"

"This is the Michelet Hospital at El Biar, close to Algiers. You were found in the desert, south of Biskra, by arabs. You have been very sick, but soon you will be well."

"How long have I been here?"

"A month. Perhaps a little less."

"A month!" Ingram repeated in astonishment. "Have I been unconscious a month?"

The doctor nodded. "Yes. You have a—what do you say—a fracture of the skull. There was also shock from the sun. You are not accustomed to the Algerian sun in summer."

"I guess not. How soon will I be well?"

"A few weeks, perhaps. It depends. Do not worry. We shall communicate with the United States consul."

"Yes—do that please," Ingram urged.

**THREE** weeks passed by in the French hospital—three idle pleasant weeks. An official from the consulate visited him, and listened to the story of his time journey with candid disbelief written in his eyes, but he promised to arrange routine details such as a passport, money, and a ticket to the U. S. as soon as Ingram was discharged. And he sent American papers and magazines for him to read.

It was in one of the New York dailies that he saw the bold italic headline: BREEN INDICTED FOR HOMICIDE. The name struck a familiar chord in his mind, but it was several seconds before he could place it. Alarm gathered within him as he read on—"Raymond Breen, 32-year old development engineer of New Jersey, today faced the jury in one of the year's most sensa-

tional murder cases. Accused of slaying colleague Charles Ingram in order to steal his wife, Breen is alleged . . ."—and then further on—" . . . a fantastic tale of time travel, which if true, introduces the knottiest legal problem in history. Can a man be murdered if he is still alive in some future world? Verna Ingram, wife of the victim, turned State witness, and declared her intention to help convict Breen. She described her affair with him as 'midsummer madness'."

Hurriedly Ingram scanned through the other papers—some of more recent date—seeking the outcome of the trial. And there he saw it—in a banner headline—BREEN CONVICTED—and underneath—Chair for Time-Slayer.

Ingram put the paper down and subsided on to the pillow. So Breen was to fry for a murder he had never committed. The intention had been there, no doubt, but the irony of it was that the very act of destruction that had been intended to leave him, Ingram, stranded in the future, had actually brought him back to the twentieth century. Breen had been convicted and he didn't even have the consolation of Verna's love. All the papers made it clear that she had undergone a complete reversal of affection once she had discovered the murderous intent of her lover.

He looked ahead into the near future. When he was fit, and back in New York once more, he would take up his life where he had left off, with Verna beside him once more. But this time he would ensure that she never had any cause for complaint, and was never driven by boredom into the arms of another man.

He called for the nurse, and she came smiling. "Consul—parler avec Consul," he demanded in halting French. She understood.

About twenty minutes later the official from the Consulate arrived at his bedside. "Well, Ingram, what's new?" he asked.

Ingram said: "I'd like you to send an urgent cable to New York for me. To the District Attorney, City Hall. Raymond Breen did not murder me. I am alive and well. . . ."