

# Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 2, No. 4

AUGUST, 1951

Superiority	by ARTHUR C. CLARKE	3
Prolog	by JOHN P. MCKNIGHT	12
Wilfred Weem, Dreamer	by ROBERT ARTHUR	15
A Peculiar People	by BETSY CURTIS	28
The Punishing of Eddie Jungle-Spit		
	by GARRETT OPPENHEIM	40
The Embarrassing Dimension	by H. NEARING, JR.	52
Solitary Confinement	by PHILIP MACDONALD	61
The Man Who Could Smell Land	by JOHN LANGDON	65
The Daughter of the Tree	by MIRIAM ALLEN DEFORD	74
Recommended Reading	by THE EDITORS	83
John Thomas's Cube	by JOHN LEIMERT	85
The Collector	by H. F. HEARD	93
The Rat That Could Speak	by CHARLES DICKENS	116
Cattivo	by ALAN NELSON	120

*Cover illustration by Chesley Bonestell*

*(Space ship in trouble with meteor swarm; Europa and Jupiter in background)*

*The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Volume 2, No. 4, AUGUST 1951. Published bimonthly by Fantasy House, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription, \$2.00 in U. S. and possessions; \$2.50 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. General offices, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y. Editorial office, 2643 Dana St., Berkeley 4, Calif. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Concord, N. H. under Act of March 3, 1879. Printed in U. S. A. Copyright, 1951, by Fantasy House, Inc. All rights, including translation into other languages, reserved. Submissions must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.*

Lawrence E. Spivak, PUBLISHER

Anthony Boucher & J. Francis McComas, EDITORS

Robert P. Mills, MANAGING EDITOR

Joseph W. Ferman, GENERAL MANAGER

George Salter, ART DIRECTOR

*Science fiction doesn't always have to explore possibilities of the future. A curve may be extrapolated from known data in either direction; and there are moving story-possibilities in those supreme moments of the past when the fumbling hand of primitive man first reached out to grasp a revolutionary technique.*

## Prolog

by JOHN P. MCKNIGHT

A SHARP SOUND crackled in the quiet of the morning, and the hairy man-creature drowsing before his cave came abruptly awake.

In one swift movement, he was on his feet. He swung to the young one, where it lay on the deerskin at the cave mouth. But the child slept peacefully, no danger near it.

Ungainly, the man shambled then to the lip of the narrow stone ledge and, blinking against the spring sunlight, peered out across the tall trees to the river below. There at dawn and at dusk the animals came to drink. But now, its bank was deserted. In the glade . . .

In the glade a sapling bent. A moment after, the crack of its breaking reached the man. A great dark shape bulked momentarily in the dappled shade. The biggest beast was feeding.

Instinctively, the man reached for the sharp stone he had found at the river bank two winters ago. He cuddled it in his hand; his palm fitted snugly against it; his fingers found good purchase. It was a good thing, this stone. With it, he had flayed the deer the evening before, and killed the creeping thing coiled before the cave this morning. In some ways, it was a better thing than a club. If he had a club, with a stone like this at its end . . .

The man looked about him once more, and went back to his place near the child. He squatted there; and almost at once his eyes closed again.

The man idled in the sun because he had fed to his full the night before, and there was yet meat in the cave. Coming back empty-handed from the hunt, he had chanced upon a saber-toothed tiger's leavings a moment after the gorged killer lazed off to a cane-brake to sleep. He had packed the torn carcass of the deer up to the cave, and the woman had charred gobbets of the sweet tender flesh over the fire they kept always burning, and they had eaten until their swollen stomachs would hold no more.

Awaking in the bright dawn, the man was still surfeited. A cold marrow bone and some grubs he found under stones at the brookside had sufficed to break the fast of the night. So he sat somnolent in the sunshine, motionless but for his fingers, that ceaselessly explored the mat of hair covering his chest and belly. Now and then the searching fingers routed out lice; and these the man, grunting in sleepy triumph, cracked between powerful jaws and ate: despite his satiety, the morsel was tasty; and satisfaction at disposing of an old enemy sauced the tidbit.

Beside him, now, the young one woke. It moved on the deerskin, waving its hands and kicking its feet. It made little gurgling sounds. Across the man's mind, as he listened sleepily to the liquid syllables, there flitted pictures of the brook that bubbled from the hillside high above the cave to go chuckling down to the river. "Wa, wa, wa," the child babbled: the man thought of the clear cool water plashing over the big rock where he sometimes sat to watch the slender fish skittering about the green depths of the pool below. "Coo, coo," the child piped: the man thought of the birds in the tall trees calling to each other at nightfall.

But then, the child's noises changed. They grew fretful. Its lips, moving loosely against toothless gums, made the sound, "Ma, ma." Over and over, it whimpered, "Ma, ma; ma, ma."

Disturbed, the man made to rise. But the woman was there before him, swift and silent on bare feet, taking the child up from the skin, holding it to her breast. At once, the child's wails stopped: there was the soft slup-slup of its lips as it suckled.

In the man's brain, memory stirred. Dimly, he recalled another child — the child that the great soft-padding sabertooth had carried off before their eyes. That child, too, had fretted and whimpered, and made the sound "ma, ma" when it hungered. And at the sound, he remembered, the woman, leaving her tasks in the cave, had gone to it and given it suck.

The man took up the sharp stone again and began scratching aimlessly at the rock of the ledge. Something about the pictures his brain made excited and disturbed him. They roused in him the same vague uneasiness he had known the day he climbed all alone to the top of the highest hill and gazed out across the unimagined vastness of the plains beyond the river. In his perturbation, he got to his feet, tossing lank black hair back from his sloping forehead, and went to the rim of the ledge to stare down toward the river. But its bank was deserted; the glade too was empty, the saplings still in the tranquil morning; in the cane-brake, nothing moved.

Behind him, the woman put the child down and, noiselessly, went back into the cave. The child cooed, and burred, and was at last silent. The man turned to look at it. It was sleeping again.

In the growing warmth, the man mused. On a time many winters past, memory told him, he himself had been a child; and so he must once have been a tiny helpless creature like this one, that wailed when it was hungry and fed at a woman's breast. He wondered idly if he had made the same noises that this baby, and the other, made when they hungered. Tentatively, silently, he shaped his thick lips to form the sounds . . .

A leaf rustled behind him. He wheeled, in sudden prescience of danger.

In a low thicket beside the cave mouth, a great wild dog crouched. It was mangy, gaunt from hunger. Its red-rimmed eyes were fixed on the sleeping child.

Stealthily, belly to ground, the dog inched upon its tiny prey. In the instant after the man turned to see, it was near enough. It gathered for the spring.

The man's eyes measured quickly. He was too far away.

He could not reach the child in time.

Before he could traverse half the distance, the dog would pounce, clamp slaving jaws on the infant, and be off into the underbrush.

A moment the man stood frozen, in the paralysis of helplessness.

Then his lips shaped to remembered sounds. To his surprise the great roar of his voice shattered the stillness.

"Ma-ma!" he bellowed. "Ma-ma!"

The dog started. It jerked bared fangs at the man. Then its eyes went back to the child; it tensed again.

But as it did, the woman appeared in the cave mouth. Old practice of peril schooled her. In an instant, she scooped up the child, and stepped back to safety.

The dog's spring fell on the empty deerskin, and at the man's rush it skulked off into the thicket.

Carrying the child, the woman came back.

The man's brain at last reached the end of the thing that had disturbed it.

He put out one hand and pointed it at the woman.

"Mama," he said. "Mama."

