

Weird Tales

ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

JANUARY, 1951

Cover by Charles A. Kennedy

NOVELETTE

- THE HAND OF SAINT URY** Gordon MacCreagh 12
An old theory has it that a thought of hate can be a powerful enough force to persist after the death of its originator.

SHORT STORIES

- THE SIXTH GARGOYLE** David Eynon 34
For the occupant of the fifth grave the choice fell between two men—the murderer himself, or the fifth of his victims.
- THE FISHERMAN AT CRESCENT BEACH** Allan Masterson 39
The girl was gone and there was only the empty sea. And the fisherman—hunched and silent, unmoving, unnoticed—and the gulls over head.
- SOMETHING FROM OUT THERE** August Derleth 50
" . . . it was by accident that we three students stumbled on a strange chapter of occult lore that would have been much better hidden."
- PROFESSOR KATE** Margaret St. Clair 59
It wasn't the dead ones the boy feared; but Kate felt the living were guided by them.
- THE OLD GENTLEMAN WITH THE SCARLET UMBRELLA** Frank Owen 64
The old gentleman was quite merry and harmless—that is if the bite of a sand-vampire is harmless.
- THE UNWANTED** Elizabeth Counselman 68
*Eleven children were to be listed for Uncle Sam in that high mountain cabin.
Yet were they really there?*
- SCOPE** Allison V. Harding 76
The one thing that had actually happened the scientists had never expected—that they would be unable to interpret what they saw in the great and secret lens.

THE EYRIE 6

VERSE

- FOR A SEA LOVER** Dorothy Quick 49
MY TIMID SOUL Page Cooper 63

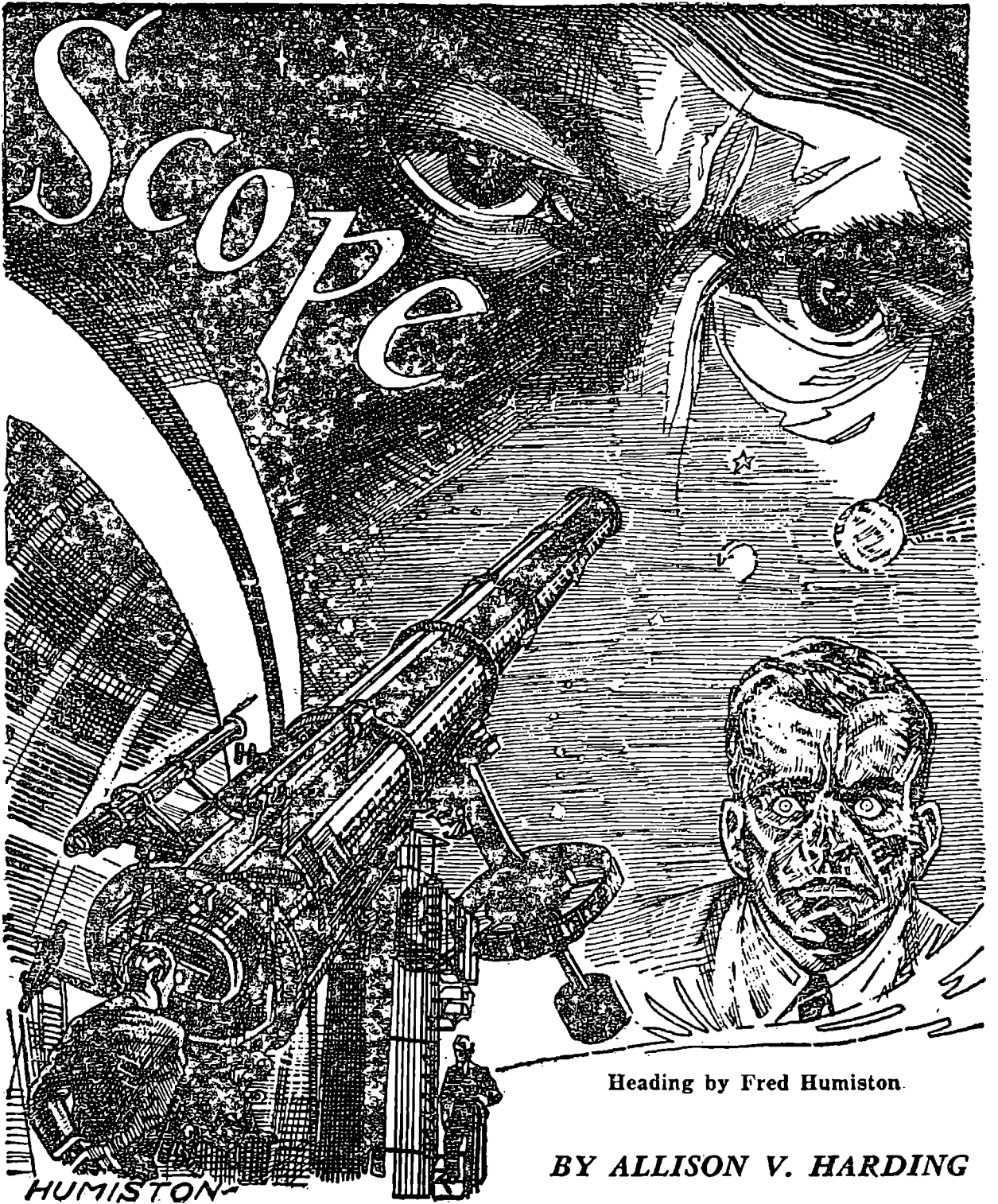
Published bi-monthly by WEIRD TALES, 9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y. Reentered as second-class matter January 26, 1940, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. *Subscription rates:* One year in the United States and possessions, \$1.50. Foreign and Canadian postage extra. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession.

Copyright, 1950, by Weird Tales. Copyright in Great Britain. Title registered in U. S. Patent Office.

 178
 Vol. 43, No. 2

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

D. McLLWRAITH, Editor



Heading by Fred Humiston.

BY ALLISON V. HARDING

THIS is the observatory atop Cruick's Mountain. We are the highest point for many miles around. Were I speaking instead of writing, I am sure that "We" would stick in

my throat. But force of habit is an extraordinary thing.

I have always liked upper New England, and Danover is New England at its pleasantest. Below me, below Cruick's Mountain

*That most provocative of all questions.
By what process was the universe formed?*

and the other surrounding hills, the picturesque little college of Danover rests comfortably in the palm of the valley. From up here, (as Professor Merrick used to remark) the stone and brick buildings are toy. Now the whole miniature scene is as though sprinkled by a giant teaspoon of sugar. It is the January snow—time for skis and skates and bobsledding.

I, myself, have many times dared the slope on the far side of Cruick's. Brewster occasionally went with me, but he was endowed with a less robust constitution than I and would return to the dormitories before long, chattering with cold. The downhill this side falls away sharply into the valley and is too abrupt and treacherous for sport. Even the little footpath that tries to tame the steepness by winding circuitously down the slope is not easy to negotiate.

IN RECENT years as a post-graduate I never planned to go out on that slope with Brewster without receiving Professor Merrick's good-natured tut-tut.

"I need you and Ethan, John," he would say to me, his bright eyes twinkling because he knew he would lose the argument. "We're coming to the most important part, and plaster casts and broken limbs have a way of cluttering up any laboratory!"

Professor Merrick was the only astronomer I ever knew who referred to his observatory as a laboratory. Brewster and I, of course, always survived our ski runs, and after cocktails or hot buttered rum down at the Faculty Club, would wend our way back up Cruick's Mountain. In these last months we have been sleeping atop Cruick's with Angus Merrick.

I must tell you of the wind. Wind is an important part of New England; its character and fancies change with the seasons. The wind is soft and strong, gentle and rough. Up here at the top of the world it is never totally absent—and in that sly way of New England winds, it seems to find ways to come indoors despite shut windows and secured portals.

I thought of the vagaries of the wind before this night and I think of them again now as I write in our record room be-

low the observatory proper. The single bulb above my head pushes the darkness into the outer corners of the large chamber. Feeble light glints against the darkwood with which the room is finished, and on the rough, bare rafters overhead. You see, it was the wish both of the University Council and Professor Merrick that all of the money coming from the Cruick's estate should go directly into the telescope and scientific equipment, rather than into elaborate quarters for the staff.

When I first came upon *him* earlier—and the terror of that moment is still thankfully cushioned by the numbness of my mind—Ethan Brewster still moved. Slightly, perhaps, but he did move. Gently, gently, like the dying pendulum of a run-down clock. Here behind locked doors. That was what put the totally irrelevant and trivial thought of the wind into my mind even as my eyes and comprehension gaped at the useless sack-like thing defying man's laws by *hanging* in mid-air of the dark-shadowed room. All this, of course, a fractional second before I saw that this black suspended thing was not just a sack, before I saw the rope holding it from the rafter. But as I say, it must have been the wind, or the *thing's* strong remembrance of life which, like with a child's swing, continues motion after the child has left his play.

Professor Merrick? Merrick went off into the night; I could not stop him. Let's see, it's near three a.m. now—that was a couple of hours ago. I searched, running and screaming his name through the stinging sleet that lashed at our mountain. They may find him—I don't know. You see, Merrick had *changed*, too. Some deep buried instinct may take him down the treacherous slope into the valley. He may fall outside in the snow, but it won't make any difference.

Brewster was the first to go. You'll remember though—there were three of us. I shall be the last.

DANOVER COLLEGE was one of those New England institutions of learning which considers smallness a virtue. Its tradition had grown richly like the ivy on its walls. Here arrived the sons of men who

themselves had known and loved the pine-paneled study halls, the dorms and libraries, cherished it and remembered it as they went out into the world, still able to call each of their fellow classmates by first name.

It was one of those twists of fortune that Joseph W. Cruick, the railroad tycoon, had come to Danover to live out his days. In typical manner, the hard-minded multimillionaire had bought the mountain which was later to bear his name, and surrounded by the accoutrements of his wealth, he had become something of a legend in the region. An irreverent trustee, it was rumored, had suggested once behind closed doors that perhaps Cruick on his hill had been softened and mellowed by his closeness to God; that perhaps as the seasons came and went—the distinct and wonderful seasons of upper New England, the sharp snows, the soft, hissing rains, the greenness and then the crescendo of autumn colors and equinox—Cruick came to looking down with growing peace and some pleasure from his height into the valley where Danover College stood in neat design.

Whatever prompted his unexpected actions, the facts were these. One day, unannounced, he turned up at the president's residence. It was then that the circumstances of his life became important to Danover. He was wifeless, childless, without a close relative. And he had been thinking he would like to leave a bequest; in fact, the substance of his fortune. Did the College . . . would they suggest a worthy outlet?

At that time the brilliant Professor Angus Merrick, internationally known astronomer whose name has been linked with Hooker and Hall, with Mount Wilson and with Palomar, had just joined the faculty. Danover now had the outstanding nuclear physicist in the world, and lacked only a terrestrial observatory to utilize his gifts.

It was settled in a few short months. The Mountain and his residence would be turned over by Cruick to the college and the funds made available to build the world's finest observatory and biggest telescope. It would quite dwarf the 200-inch Hallscope used at Palomar. The residue of his estate would be for the appointment and

maintenance of a small staff whose chief, of course, would be Angus Merrick.

THE several years after Joseph W. Cruick's death, with the subsequent administering of his bequest, were memorable ones for Danover. Newspaper and newsreel audiences first heard of the project with reports of a strange procession led by the twenty-eight wheel trailer trucks and its precious cargo, the giant glass disk weighing 18½ tons. But the process of grinding and polishing such a disk and the construction of such a complex mechanism as the world's largest telescope, a highly technical and laborious task, had started long before. The job goes on through months and years—almost without notice most of the time—while those directly concerned are energized to great efforts by the intriguing promise of being able to see farther into the Universe than man has ever been able to see before. From the day of the earliest and smallest telescope, scientists have been concerned with the fundamental problem of astronomy and astronomers, that most provocative of all questions: By what process was the Universe formed?

There were nights in the little observatory—gay, excited nights over hot mugs of coffee—when we three, Professor Merrick, Brewster, and myself, John Douglas, would speculate on the adventures ahead of us. It hardly needs to be recorded that I look back on those innocent imaginings now with a certain fatalistic envy.

The considerably publicized fact that Danover now had the world's largest telescope naturally centered a considerable amount of attention upon the small New England college. But Angus Merrick was not impressed by publicity.

"I shall leave the conclaves, the dinners and endless conferences to those who enjoy them. For me—I have my telescope."

Without us for companionship, Merrick would certainly have fitted the rôle of hermit. He mixed little with other faculty members, preferring instead to keep to himself. When he was not examining or adjusting the vast and intricate mechanisms of the new scope itself, he was poring over

some problem of astronomical portent to be considered and solved, or was working, in the observatory basement laboratory on one of his innumerable projects.

With a wry smile and a shake of his thin-featured head, the Professor often complained that he resented even the time needed for eating and sleeping. Those moments away from his telescope, away from his scientific equations and his astronomical data were begrudged.

"You, John, and you, Ethan—you still have time and the inclination to court enjoyment of the senses." (We knew what was coming. Merrick had said it long ago at the beginnings of our triumvirate.) "A hearty meal, a good liqueur, a pretty girl—these are the things that mean so much to the young. But when one reaches my stage of life, the moments left—because they are ever fewer—become so much more precious. The young may have many enthusiasms; the old should have but one."

For Ethan and for me there had been the usual undergraduate sports and escapades—the latter particularly for myself, I should add. The proms and dances, sleigh rides in the snow with girls whose faces were legion, indistinguishable except that all were young, all were pretty as the young are. But gradually as we'd gone further along in our post-college work, as we came to know Merrick, some of the scientific detachment of the man, some of his unconcern over the mundane and the prosaic, and greater concern over the cosmic—some of these attitudes had attached themselves to us.

As I said, there had been girls, and then one girl for each of us. Then came justifying remarks like, "Well, no woman wants to marry a scientist," a few regretful backward looks, occasional memories that occurred when the undergraduates in the valley below came and went, doing things we had once done. But then at last, for Ethan and me, like Angus Merrick, there was confirmed bachelorhood. We were wedded to our telescope.

It was, of course, Professor Merrick's "invention" that did it. The man's one flaw, if it could be called that, was a certain

secretiveness. The trait probably grew out of the very intensity of his scientific fervor. Nothing which could not absolutely be proved and reproved was so. He was not a boaster; in fact, on occasions that his name would be mentioned in scientific treatise—as happened more than once—with references to the fact that he was one of the world's leading astronomical experts, Merrick was positively gruff with embarrassment. It was typical, therefore, that he worked on the lens project for those first three years by himself.

Brewster and I knew nothing but that the Professor spent most of his nights down in the basement workshop. Among other things, our laboratory was outfitted for optical work. We might have guessed what was going on but actually did not until that evening three years after the scope, in all its mightiness, had been assembled.

I REMEMBER every detail of that important night well: Brewster, who now did much of our cooking, had prepared an omelet for supper. If Professor Merrick's thin frame and equally dainty appetite ever displayed characteristics of the epicure, it was when faced with omelet. This one Brewster has worked hard over. It was good. But Angus Merrick had barely sat down at the table when he shot up from his chair as though propelled by springs. I looked at him with exaggerated disapproval and made a mock remark about how hard our "chef" had worked to please him and now he wouldn't even sit down long enough to sample the dish. Merrick hesitated, and with a visible effort again seated himself, helped himself to a small portion of the omelet and worried it absently with his fork. Ethan and I exchanged amused glances. It was obvious to both of us that the good Professor's mind was on something other than food.

Finally Merrick could contain himself no longer, but with a mumbled and embarrassed excuse to Brewster, fled from the table and clattered down the basement stairs into the laboratory.

We looked at each other, and Brewster said, "What's he up to?" I shook my head.

I recall we ourselves did justice to the omelet and then sat reading in the great room, both of us grimly determined to wait Angus Merrick out, challenge him when he emerged from the laboratory and ask him what he was up to.

The Professor reappeared at two-thirty a. m. I had dozed over the "*Astronomy Quarterly*," but the excited voices awoke me.

"Ethan, I've got it! You boys come down and look!" He still referred to us as his "boys" though we were both well past the middle thirties.

I WAS fully awake in a second more and I followed the other two downstairs. I have said before, I think, that I am the "lightweight" scientifically of our triumvirate. What Merrick exhibited was quite beyond me—I can only report what I saw. It was a lens, to be sure, a large one carefully placed on horses and held in place by bracketing, but it was of a peculiar and irregular shape, its prisms and angles most complicated and eccentric. Merrick immediately launched into an involved mathematical explanation to Brewster who inclined his head. Even Ethan, though, with his considerable knowledge of practical and theoretical physics seemed perplexed.

Reduced to simplest terms the element about the lens that I did grasp was this. Its outré and eccentric shape allowed for a revolutionary process of bending and utilizing sight waves and images, adding a fabulous potential to what was already the world's largest telescope.

In looking back now I wonder if Merrick had some premonition. At the time, we ascribed the fact that he refused to have any outside help in hauling the lens up to the telescope proper to his mania for secrecy. I might add that this task of installation had been tremendous, and I had endeared myself to the other two with my unscientific strength without which the huge, ungainly, homemade lens would never have been got into place.

Merrick had for some time been working on a sub-socket to fit in the telescope base. We had wondered, but he had dismissed

our questions with glib talk about using it as a "recess for photo equipment." Now we saw the socket's true purpose. It was of imposing metal cagework—manufactured elsewhere—and fitted in such a way as to allow whatever was to be superimposed within it to rest securely. The whole could then be locked securely into place with a rude but effective mechanism which to my eye somewhat resembled that used in the dogging of sea doors or compartments aboard ship.

The Professor tinkered and fussed over the instrument as with a first-born. He was without sleep and virtually without food for those days where he was worrying and puttering the mechanism into place. And if he cautioned us once, he cautioned us twenty times not to say a word of the new lens attachment to anyone.

We both agreed, of course, but I could see that Merrick's warning only added to Brewster's impatience. Ethan's usually pallid face had more color in it than I'd seen since the day the construction detail had finished the placing of the telescope and we were ready for our first peek. And now the Professor's elaborate concern about secrecy merely heightened the tension.

ANGUS MERRICK was finally satisfied. It was the night of the fourth day that he gathered us together in his study in the sleeping quarters of the observatory building.

"Ethan and John," he said in a voice that was edged with excitement, "I want you both to promise me that you will not peer into the scope until all factors are figured out."

Without question, of course, we agreed. I should interject here the information that the astronomy class at Danover made a once-a-month sojourn up Cruick's Mountain to study the heavens for a full day. I realized immediately that Merrick had locked his own lens into place just after their last visit. Therefore we had nearly a month—a month in which time we would not be disturbed on any account.

I think it was then that I came to realize that Merrick's excitement was tinged not only with the eager anticipation of a scien-

tist, the pleasurable looking-forward to the achievement of some great purpose. That excitement was also tinged with fear.

As he gathered up together in his cozy, cheerful study for what I now recognize was to be our last long talk, he had a final word for us. It came after Brewster had asked so many questions, and I a few. Brewster was thinking, I thought, in rather outlandish, fantastic terms. I was mainly concerned with whether, if the Professor's lens was successful, we would not certainly be able to tell if life existed on the other planets.

Professor Angus Merrick stopped our chattering with a half-raised hand. There was silence for a moment as we watched him. It was as though he was seeking the right words, and then he said very simply:

"I cannot say much, Ethan and John, because if this contrivance is successful, it should prove how very *little* we know. Most of all, I want to say this in caution. If it works . . . if it works, we cannot *know*, we cannot guess *what we will see!*"

IT IS NOT so simple as just to put one's eye to a telescope and peer out into the universe. Much has to be done. Too, with his newly constructed lens attached to the already fabulously powerful scope, Professor Merrick warned us that great care would have to be used in the early stages. Looking through magnifying lenses of such fabulous power could prove highly dangerous for the individual. The light intensity, for instance, of a distant star, possibly not seeable by the naked eye, when brought into the radius of the Cruick's Mountain scope would probably blind the viewer if precautions were not observed. Fumbling hands at the mechanism that controlled the directional guide could cause the scope to swing, for instance, across the path of the sun. If the focussing were improper, the reflected energy and luminosity of that great heavenly body could easily blow up the whole observatory. Of this Merrick, Brewster, and myself were well aware.

Several days passed before Merrick decided conditions were right for our first peek. He had selected nighttime as being

most suitable. Brewster, as I have said, had hardly weathered the waiting period, his impatience was so great. Those last few days before our test, I must confess, I was the only one of our threesome who ate and slept with any degree of regularity. Angus Merrick referred to me, not unkindly, as "Good old Douglas, the steady member of our concern. Whatever would we do without him." It was typical, though, that I was last to look through the scope that first night.

Professor Merrick was the first to mount the platform. I can remember him now, his spare frame in the scandalously rumpled gray suit which he'd not taken off the last few days. He stood for a moment on the platform and turned to look at us standing below him watching expectantly. I remember he smiled a little and then characteristically wiped his hands nervously along his suit coat. Merrick was a nervous man; even so, he seemed more agitated and intense than I'd ever seen him before. Then he turned, wedged himself into the little chair, and with quick motions began to adjust the scope, consulting as he did, a small card with the required mathematical adjustments.

I could feel Brewster tense beside me, and I must admit that my own excitement was growing. It seemed an eternity that the Professor, seemingly turned to stone, sat there with his eye fixed to the view-piece of the scope. He turned away for a moment and fixed his gaze at the floor, looked upward quickly, stretching his neck. It is a trick astronomers have for reducing the muscular tension induced by long work at a telescope. Then he was back at the eyepiece again.

When he finally turned away, his expression was one of complete perplexity. Without a word he got up from the chair, and Brewster was quickly onto the platform within a matter of seconds. I was content to let my confrère precede me despite my own growing anticipation, for I think Ethan would not have been able to contain himself much longer. Merrick stood beside me then.

"What can you see?"

He turned his face towards me, and the puzzlement on it found words.

"I don't know, John. I'm not sure."

After Brewster's turn, I went to the scope. I could hear the other two talking below me on the observatory floor but I had no mind for that. I hunched into position, being larger than the other two and not wanting to take the time to readjust the seat. My eye found the viewer and I worked my hands on the sensitive optical adjustor.

I WAS the chronicler of our threesome, as I have said. Brewster never had the patience, nor Professor Merrick the inclination. It fell to me to put our experiments and tests into words and yet I can honestly say that I did not know how to describe what I saw afterward when I sat writing in this journal.

At first look, what one perceived was not the heavenly bodies of the planet world but simply lines. There was a suggestion of color about the whole thing. I remember the thought came to me of technicolor. As I looked, the lines took on a certain irregular regularity, if I may be pardoned the contradiction. But it is impossible to describe the shades of color, the refinements of substance and shadow that I saw, that I registered, and yet that my mind was not able fully to catalog.

We took turns at the scope the rest of the night, and only the first streaks of dawn in the east took us from our vigil. Essentially the visual experiences of all of us coincided. Likewise our perplexity. We got through the day somehow, although I was thoroughly infected now with Brewster's feverish excitement. Professor Merrick, meanwhile, closeted himself in his study, buried in astronomical and scientific tomes—some so old that I recall the extraordinary care with which he had to turn the pages for fear of their crumbling, and as these books were long out of print, they were both priceless and irreplaceable.

For the rest of that week we caught but brief moments of sleep during the day. I think once when Brewster and I were in the small kitchen preparing something to

eat—and it became a matter of sustaining life, for none of us had much appetite—I actually dozed off leaning against a cupboard. We spent our nights at the scope from the moment it was dark till dawn. Periodically, Professor Merrick tried different adjustments of the prisms and angles of his own lens, plus those of the monster Cruick's Mountain telescope.

WITH each readjustment, a new pattern opened up to us. I use that word because as yet we had not been able to interpret or even guess at what we saw. The passing of the days spurred our efforts. Merrick, for the first time in the years I'd known him, grew cranky. The reason was obvious. We were now well past the middle of the month. There were not many days before his experimental lens would have to be removed from the scope so that the regular meeting of the Danover astronomy group could be accommodated. If at first Brewster and I had wondered about Merrick's unwillingness to reveal to his own institution if not to the world, this remarkable lens he had perfected, we no longer did. This must be our secret. We were as jealous of it as the Professor.

The most exasperating part was that of all our suppositions, all our hopes of what it could prove to us, reveal to us, the one thing that had actually happened we had never expected: That we would not be able to interpret what we saw.

Merrick explained to us that the possible combination of adjustments with his new lens in juxtaposition with the Cruick's telescope lens was legion. We had had time to try but a few, and each one revealed new visual mysteries of color, of formation, of angle and shadow.

We were in our last week before the lens must be dismantled when Brewster and I, taking a turn around the observatory for a much-needed breath of air, heard Merrick shout from inside. There was still light in the sky. We thought it was too early for use of the scope. We went inside as quickly as we could, and Merrick met us at the door of the observatory chamber. The man was ashen, and as with a thing of ashes,

seemed to shake as ashes might in a wind. It is probably typical that my prosaic reaction was that his alarming state was due to the overwork that he had been doing.—I did not guess the terrible thing that had been revealed to him. But Brewster with his more imaginative turn of mind, was a jump ahead.

"Professor, you've discovered something with the scope?"

Angus Merrick nodded, for words failed him. He gestured mutely towards the machine as though daring us to verify what he had seen. Brewster went quickly to the apparatus, Merrick at his side rechecking adjustments of the mechanism. Brewster looked, and I saw his hands and then his whole body become rigid. After long moments he got up, wet his lips and looked at the Professor wordlessly. Merrick nodded towards me.

"You try, John," he ordered. "Quickly, John, quickly!"

My heart was thundering as I sat in place and fixed my eye to that of the gigantic scope. We still did not know, I don't think any of us did, what exactly had caused the obscure to become the obvious. Whether it was the still-light of early evening or some new adjustment of the Professor's, we did not at that time know. Or care.

But this time there was no mistaking what the telescope showed. It was an eye—an open, staring eye . . . to be described by someone who must describe what his mind believes to be impossible, as *a human eye*. There were eyelashes. Furthermore, I could see—so help me—pits that were pores, lines that are those in skin from close up. There was the suggestion of shadowed something above the eye, and the corner of the scope under closer study proved it to be the eyebrow.

I turned away, looking from one to the other of my confrères. But they remained silent after reassuring themselves that I had seen what they had seen. We all took another turn at the scope. Then we trooped downstairs to Merrick's study.

The Professor spoke in measured terms almost as though trying to convince him-

self that a weighty, scientific discussion could bring some more commonplace explanation to the incredible thing we had seen.

"We must realize that we are utilizing an instrument the power of which is hardly imaginable. In our first days of work with the scope and the new lens we have devised for it, I considered this possibility: Was our inability to interpret what we viewed because *what* we saw had never before been seen? Man learns and knows through experience—his own and other peoples'. Something new *must* be seen and interpreted in the light of past experiences. In short, gentlemen, in the first days I seriously considered the possibility that we had looked *beyond this universe*.

"If we had succeeded in so doing, what is it we would see? No living man knows. On the other hand, this . . . this new development is quite inexplicable. It is almost anti-climatic. But we shall continue on in our investigations day and night until we have something to say to the world!"

FROM that moment on, with the few days left to us before the Danover astronomical class would meet again at the Cruick's Observatory, our work was unceasing. We kept a cauldron of coffee simmering in the lab; we stuffed our pockets with slices of bread and cheese, but there was no conscious thought of anything but the scope and that strange utterly preposterous thing it had revealed to us.

Merrick still considered that using the scope in the full light of day might be dangerous for us, but by mutual agreement, we decided to take the chance. We wore heavily constructed optical goggles, and with a round-the-clock study, our investigations continued on.

Movements of the telescope revealed more, but always pieces of the same whole. For there was no question of one thing. We were looking at what the human mind had to interpret as the features of some giant face. The implacable fact that a face must not, *could* not be up there in the sky in the outer reaches of our universe counted not one whit. The massive mon-

ster-ridge of a nose could be detected to what we could only call the east. Directly at a designation which might be called 1200, or straight up and down, was the valley where nose met cheek to run up eye-ward.

An abrupt adjustment of the scope to completely opposite positions, which we did not dare chance for a while for fear of losing our precious objective, ultimately showed a strange nebulous void impossible to describe. It was a *nothingness*, made up of *some things*; made up of colors and smoke and shadow—kaleidoscopic. After a short search in every direction, we always came back to the entity of the eye, the face.

We began to explore pore by pore, fractional inch by fractional inch, the face and outward, as we could. Professor Merrick was almost incoherent in perplexity and agitation. A scientific man is appalled by what he cannot even remotely understand, much less explain. Brewster seemed almost in a trance, and I alone of the three thought of the idea of using some of our lower-power telescopes with which the observatory was equipped, to view the heavens in the direction of the eye. The others paid no heed to my efforts but I must admit I am used to such treatment.

My examination was profitless. The galaxies—stars and planets—were in their accustomed places. There was no hint of this monstrous thing we had discovered somewhere out there in space.

The Danover astronomy class was to meet next Tuesday. We had previously agreed that all day Monday would be sufficient to dismantle Merrick's special lens. Our incredible discovery changed everything, though. Brewster had first noticed and commented to the rest of us on a strange, shadowed something in a direction which I can only describe as easterly, with the eye as centerpoint. Through a meticulous manipulation of the telescopic controls, we were able to focus finally after hours of difficulty on this new objective. It was both as incredible and as easily understandable as the eye, the nose, the face. For this was—plainly—a finger. And next it were other fingers of a hand raised as

though approximately parallel to nose or head as in the action of a salute. We puzzled over this, but it was no more astonishing than some of the other revelations.

IT WAS Merrick, in the early hours of Friday morning, who gave it an interpretation. Some of his priceless tomes had been brought up to the floor of the observatory. He had set up a rude army cot from the basement, placing it by the scope for convenience when those moments of cumulative fatigue overwhelmed him. The floor was strewn with papers, the papers covered with minute figures and equations.

I think Brewster and Merrick drew a bit away from me then. My knowledge was not the equal of theirs, and although I had seen everything they had seen, my feet were still more surely on the ground, for as I have said, Brewster seemed in a trance, and Merrick, through the strain of this dreadful period, was no longer what could be called entirely normal. But then what genius is entirely normal—and certainly Angus Merrick earns that genius title if any man has in the history of our universe that was even then, in its last numbered hours.

I remember Merrick smiled when he said it to Brewster. He was sitting at one end of the cot, Ethan at the other, books and papers between them. I had had another go at the scope. The finger fascinated me. The pattern of its prints would have done justice to an FBI file. Merrick's voice brought my eyes away from the telescope.

What he said to Brewster then, I did not believe; I *could* not believe, because up to that moment and through that moment, I insisted that there must be an explanation that would fit in properly with our little valley at Danover, with beloved upper New England, with our world and all the things we understand.

I heard every word Merrick said, mark you, but I did not believe. His words, and I know now, brilliant interpretation were unacceptable to me, for of our threesome, I was not only the least scientific—I was the most normal, and of all the things in

the world that denies normalcy, that defies all the things we have been taught and believed in since we were delivered of our mothers—this was the most incredible and impossible of all.

Friday and Saturday were days of unbelievable excitement. It was at the end of Saturday that Brewster and Merrick suddenly seemed to shun the telescope, and I, still a disbeliever, took to it more. Again and again I eyed and examined the fixed and now-familiar objects we had studied so many, many times before in these fateful weeks—the eye, unblinking and staring, even its colors discernible; the lashes and eyebrow; the skin; the long mountain-range of the nose, and then with a quick adjustment of the great scope to the east, the fingers, the hand. I tried to tell myself that the prints in those fingers were not deeper ridges now, for that would verify some of Merrick's hypothesis. I tried to say that that was a trick of my eye, a new or better angle of the scope.

I was alone in the observatory for some hours there, and when I came from it, it was dark outside. It was then that shockingly, terrifyingly, I saw the grotesque thing hanging in our great room, swaying silently, mockingly.

It was Brewster. Numb with horror I cut him down, but the intelligence that I had admired so, the personality of the man who had been friends with me for so long was gone forever with the precious life-spark.

It took me some time to find Merrick. I called and I chased around. I came upon him finally in the basement laboratory. He was crouched in a corner, and perhaps strange to say, he provided a much greater shock to me than even poor Brewster, upstairs now on the couch where I had gently laid him—for Professor Merrick was no longer rational.

I AM writing all this out of compulsion and also from a sense of duty. A moment ago—and it is the middle hours of the night—I was attracted back to the observatory floor by the sounds there, but I was too late. Before I could reach him,

stormy night after his destructive work on the Cruick's scope was finished. I ran after him but the man was beside himself. He disappeared in the snow and finally I had to return here alone. Overwork, of course, must explain these terrible happenings. I shall keep this record only for myself and say nothing, *nothing* to anyone else. Certainly Merrick and Brewster are tragic victims of their own enthusiasm and intensity. They are heroes in their way. No word of mine shall besmirch them. That was my resolve as dawn came. For still *I did not believe.*

The light comes first to Cruick's Mountain, high as it is above the rest of the world there at Danover. I watched it come for a long time and remorse shook me. I suppose I had been too dulled for a while with my own fatigue, but I broke down suddenly and sobbed like a child. I knew I must get overshoes and coat on soon and go out and look again for Professor Merrick. The snow of the night before had slackened. I think I knew then that Merrick would be beyond recall, but as soon as I could muster enough strength, I dressed for the out-of-doors.

I got to the observatory door and opened it. Then it was that some compulsive thing made me go back for this record book that I had already secreted. I took it and slipped it into the pocket of my overcoat.

Automatically I noted the observatory clock as I left again. It was nine a.m.

Down below the early morning church services would be nearly finished. I would see President Fairchild and discuss this with him. People would have to be sent to find Professor Merrick if he had not already found his way into the village.

I was not ten yards from the observatory when I noticed it. The dawn had changed into brighter, early morning light. The snow lying down the slope of the hill and across the neat valley lent brightness to the sky as it blossomed into full light.

But there in the east was darkness—a strange gloom which set my mind working and my heart to pounding. I ran then, as fast and as hard as I could, down Cruick's

Merrick had irreparably damaged his lens, the goal of three years' work. He had used both an acetylene torch and some explosive, which was still on hand from construction of the observatory. As I say, he did his work well, and I fear that even some of the great lenswork of the original telescope may have received damage.

Strange how strong he was. I am big and thirty years his junior, yet I could not hold Angus Merrick by words or physical force. He tore loose from me and ran out into the

Mountain, away from the observatory, away from that gigantic scope that pointed from its roof into the sky towards the east from whence came that creeping gloom. Down the hill on which I'd skied so many times, on which I had tobogganed with Brewster and other acquaintances of my undergraduate days. I fell once, twice, several times and the record book skittered from a pocket. I clutched it in my hands and continued on. The white-steepled church was beneath me now, and I could see the people coming out, still small for I was some distance away, but there, unmistakably, was Dr. Fairchild in the lead.

Halfway down the hill with the snow beneath my churning legs turned whiter by comparison with the ever-darkening sky, I *believed*. I *believed* as suddenly as though I'd been slapped, and that is an apt phrase. Now I could understand the force of this terrible thing that had killed Brewster and driven Merrick insane.

FOR to know the whole of civilization, its eons of evolution, its centuries of struggle, its heartbreak of races and nations—and to know now the absolute uselessness, the obscene, meaningless truth of it all. *That this universe is no more than a cinder on the face of some great being of another dimension, of another time cycle—unbelievably slower, more ponderous than ours—and that we have lived our eons in the moment that that cinder lodged and lived there on the incredibly massive human organism of this Great one . . . that in the moment it took for that cinder to itch and for a giant hand to come up as we slap a mosquito or brush dust out of an eye. For that hand to come up and scrape us away, annihilate us, this universe, its pathetic, miserable doomed people. Only an instant—all of us, all we know, all we have hoped for—in the eternity of this Great One.*

I *believed* it as I came tumbling down the mountain, for the darkness in the east was final proof, was the next-to-last stage of our universal obliteration, the doom of our pathetic hopes of immortality, immortality at least if not for ourselves, for our

Then somebody said something, and he looked up, up at Cruick's Mountain. There was a figure, a black bobbing moving thing tearing down the incline. It fell, to pick itself up again on the slopes, and somebody at Fairchild's side murmured, "Good heavens! He'll kill himself running down the mountain like that! I wonder what's up?"

The figure waved its arms wildly for a moment in their direction and then with that very action seemed to lose its balance, to fall pinwheeling, over and over, down and down. The little group stood silent, shocked, and then they rushed forward.

"Whoever it was," panted one of the professors at Fairchild's side, "he never could have survived that fall, poor devil."

They hurried forward with the puffing gait of men not accustomed to running, and even as they did, the snow seemed to become brighter and the day darker. The heavens were streaked with fast-fading brightness. And before the growing gloom clouds fled away as though afraid of tarrying in the sky over Danover.

They reached him finally—John Douglas, lying there twisted and broken from his fall. He must have died instantly. There was a book at his side and it was open. Dr. Fairchild picked it up and started to read the first few sentences: But under the sudden canopy of dreadful darkness unrolling across the sky above him, he was unable to read further.

images, our world and universe. I *believed* as I spurned the more circuitous path and struck out over the treacherous, ice-sheathed cliffs that led directly downward. Bursting with this dread knowledge, I knew nothing but the imperative necessity of sharing this awful truth, this fate with others.

"I THOUGHT Chaplain Brooks delivered a very fine sermon today," Dr. Fairchild chatted with his faculty members as they emerged from the chapel. Wind ran into the valley from the east; it moaned and shrilled in the nude trees, tugged at church-going hats and Sunday-best mufflers.

The president of Danover raised the collar of his coat quickly. It seemed even colder than earlier in the morning. He and his wife had hoped to take a ride that afternoon with the visiting provost of a nearby college. But the day had suddenly turned chill and ominous. He frowned at the threatening sky.