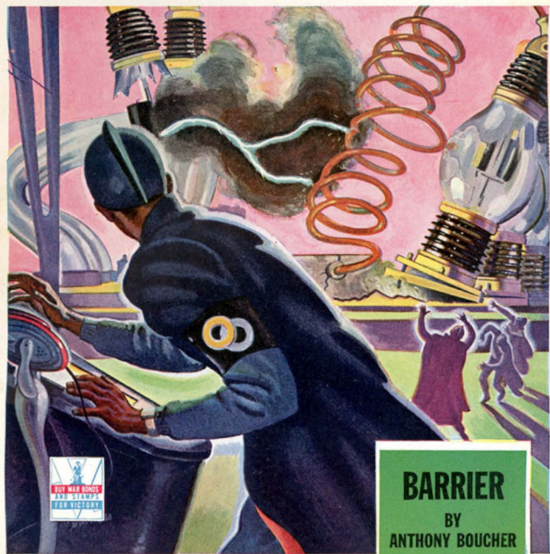


# ASTOUNDING

SEPT. '42

*Science-fiction 25¢*



## BARRIER

BY  
ANTHONY BOUCHER

SEPTEMBER  
1942

A STREET AND SMITH PUBLICATION

# ASTOUNDING

## SCIENCE-FICTION

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Contents for September, 1942, Vol. XXX, No. 1

John W. Campbell, Jr., Editor, Catherine Tarrant, Asst. Editor

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# THE BARRIER

By Anthony Boucher

● If time travel is, or ever will be possible in all time to come—why haven't time travelers appeared? Maybe this famous detective story writer has ferreted out the complete and reasonable solution!

Illustrated by Kolliker

The first difficulty was with language. That is only to be expected when you jump five hundred years; but it is nonetheless perplexing to have your first casual query of: "What city is this?" answered by the sentence: "Stappers will get you. Or be you Slanduch?"

It was significant that the first word John Brent heard in the State was "Stappers." But Brent could not know that then. It was only some hours later and fifty years earlier that he learned the details of the Stapper system. At the moment all that concerned him was food and plausibility.

His appearance was plausible enough. Following Derringer's advice he had traveled naked—"the one costume common to all ages," the scientist had boomed; "Which would astonish you more, lad: a naked man, or an Elizabethan courtier in full apparel?"—and commenced his life in the twenty-fifth century by burglary and the theft of a complete outfit of clothing. Iridescent woven plastics tailored in a half-clinging, half-flowing style that looked precious to Brent, but seemed both comfortable and functional.

No man alive in 2473 would have bestowed a second glance on the feloniously clad Brent, but in his speech, he realized at once, lay the danger. He pondered the alternatives presented by the stranger. The Stappers would get him, unless he was a Slanduch. Whatever the Stappers were, things that Get You sound menacing. "Slanduch," he replied.

The stranger nodded. "That bees O. K.," he said, and Brent wondered what he had committed himself to. "So what city is this?" he repeated. "Bees," the stranger chided. "Stappers be more severe now since Edict of 2470. Before they doed pardon some irregularities, but now none even from Slanduch."

"I be sorry," said Brent humbly, making a mental note that irregular verbs were for some reason perilous. "But for the third time—"

He had thought the wall beside them was solid. He realized now that part of it, at least, was only a deceptive glasslike curtain that parted to let forth a tall and vigorous man, followed by two shorter aids. All three of these wore robes similar to the iridescent garments of Brent and his companion, but of pure white.

The leader halted and barked out, "George Starvel?"

Brent saw a quiet sort of terror begin to grow on his companion's face. He nodded and held out his wrist.

The man in white glanced at what Brent decided must be an identification plaque. "Starvel," he announced, "you speaked against Barrier."

Starvel trembled. "Cosmos knows I doed not."

"Five mans know that you doed."

"Never. I only sayed—"

"You only! Enough!"

The rod appeared in the man's hand only for an instant. Brent saw no flame or discharge, but Starvel was stretched out on the ground and the two aids were picking him up as callously as though he were a log.

The man turned toward Brent, who was taking no chances. He flexed his legs and sprang into the air. His fingertips grasped the rim of the balcony above them, and his feet shot out into the white-robed man's face. His arm and shoulder muscles tensed to their utmost. The smooth plastic surface was hell to keep a grip on. Be-

neath, he could see his adversary struggling blindly to his feet and groping for the rod. At last, desperately, Brent swung himself up and over the edge.

There was no time to contemplate the beauties of the orderly terrace garden. There was only time to note that there was but one door, and to make for it. It was open and led to a long corridor. Brent turned to the nearest door. Once you've damned yourself with Authority, any private citizen chosen at random is preferable to meeting your nemesis. He started at the door, and it opened before him. He hurried into an empty room.

He looked back at the door. It was shut now, and no one was near to have touched it. He peered into the two adjoining rooms, whose doors were equally obliging. Bathroom and bedroom. No kitchen. And no exit but the door he had come through.

He forced himself to sit down and think. Anything might happen before the Stapper caught up with him, for he had no doubt that was what the white-robed man must be. What had he learned about the twenty-fifth century in this brief encounter?

You must wear an identification plaque. (Memo: How to get one?) You must not use irregular verbs (or nouns; the Stapper had said "mans"). You must not speak against Barrier, whoever or whatever that meant. You must beware white-robed men who lurk behind false walls. You must watch out for rods that kill (query: or merely stun?). Doors open by selenium cells (query: how do they lock?). You must—

The door opened. But it was not the Stapper who stood there, but a tall and majestic woman of, at a guess, sixty. A noble figure—"Roman matron" were the words that flashed into Brent's mind.

The presence of a total stranger in her apartment seemed nowise disconcerting. She opened her arms in a broad gesture of welcome. "John Brent!" she exclaimed in delighted recognition. "It has been so long!"

"I don't want a brilliant young scientific genius!" Derringer had roared when Brent answered his cryptically worded ad. "I've got 'em here in the laboratory. They've done grand work on the machine. I couldn't live without 'em, and there's not a one of 'em I'd trust out of this century. Not out of this decade. What I want is four things: A knowledge of history, for a background of analogy to understand what's been going on; linguistic ability, to adjust yourself as rapidly as possible to the changes in language; physical strength and dexterity, to get yourself out of the scrapes that are bound to come up; and social adaptability. A chimpanzee of reasonably sub-

human intelligence could operate the machine. What counts is what you'll be able to do and learn after you get there."

The knowledge of history and the physical qualities had been easy to demonstrate. The linguistic ability was a bit more complex; Derringer had contrived an intricate series of tests involving adjustment to phonetic changes and the capacity to assimilate the principles of a totally fictitious language invented for the occasion. The social adaptability was measured partly by an aptitude test, but largely, Brent guessed, by Derringer's own observation during the weeks of preparation after his probationary hiring.

He had passed all four requirements with flying colors. At least Derringer had grinned at him through the black beard and grunted the reluctant, "Good man!" that was his equivalent of rhapsodic praise. His physical agility had already stood him in good stead, and his linguistic mind was rapidly assimilating the new aspects of the language (there were phonetic alterations as well as the changes in vocabulary and inflection—he was particularly struck by the fact that the vowels a and o no longer possessed the diphthongal off-glide so characteristic of English, but were pure vowels like the Italian e and o), but his social adaptability was just now hitting a terrific snag.

What the hell do you do when a Roman matron whom you have never seen, born five hundred years after you, welcomes you by name and exclaims that it has been a long time? (This regular past participle of *be*, Brent reflected, gives the speaker something the quality of a Bostonian with a cold in the nose.)

For a moment he toyed with the rash notion that she might likewise be a time traveler, someone whom he had known in 1942. Derringer had been positive that this was the first such trip ever attempted; but someone leaving the twentieth century later might still be an earlier arrival in the twenty-fifth. He experimented with the idea hesitantly.

"I suppose," Brent ventured, "you could call five hundred years a long time, in its relative way."

The Roman matron frowned. "Do not jest, John. Fifty years be not five hundred. I will confess that first five years seemed at times like five centuries, but after fifty—one does not feel so sharply."

Does was of course pronounced *dooze*. All *r*'s, even terminal, were lightly trilled. These facts Brent noted in the back of his mind, but the fore part was concerned with the immediate situation. If this woman chose to accept him as an acquaintance—it was nowise unlikely that his double should be wandering about in this century—it meant probable protection from the Stapper. His

logical mind protested, "Could this double have your name?" but he shushed it.

"Did you," he began, and caught himself. "Doed you see anyone in the hall—a man in white?"

The Roman matron moaned. "Oh, John! Do Stappers seek you again? But of course. If you have come to destroy Barrier, they must destroy you."

"Whoa there!" Brent had seen what happened to one person who had "spokeed against Barrier." "I didn't... doedn't... say anything against Barrier. Not me."

The friendliness began to die from her clear blue eyes. "And I believed you," she said sorrowfully. "You telled us of this second Barrier and swore to destroy it. We thinked you beed one of us. And now—"

No amount of social adaptability can resist a sympathetic and dignified woman on the verge of tears. Besides, this apartment was for the moment a valuable haven, and if she thought he was a traitor of some sort—

"Look," said Brent. "You see, I am—there isn't any use at this moment trying to be regular—I am not whoever you think I am. I never saw you before. I couldn't have conceivably. Because this is the first instant I've ever been in your time."

"If you wish to lie to me, John—"

"I'm not lying. And I'm not John—at least not the one you're thinking of. I'm John Brent, I'm twenty-eight years old, and I was born in 1914—a good five and a half centuries ago."

You'd think a remark like that would have some effect. It sounds like an impressive curtain line. There should at least be a tableau of stunned reaction. But the Roman matron simply stared at him sadly and murmured, "I know, John, I know. Then why do you deny me and all our plans? What will Stephen think?"

The amazement turned out to be Brent's. "You... you know that I'm a time traveler?"

"John, my dear, why be you so foolish? You be safe from Stappers here. Stephen has treated walls against listening. And you know that to admit to being time traveler is as dangerous as to admit your plans against Barrier. Trust me, John."

"For some unknown reason, madam, I do trust you. That's why I'm telling you everything. I'm asking you to be my ally. And you persist in—"

The door opened. The man who entered was as tall as the Stapper, but wore the civilian's iridescent robes. His long beard seemed to have caught a little of their rainbow influence; it was predominantly red, but brown and black and white glinted in it. The hair on his head was graying. He might have been anywhere from forty-five to a vigorous and well-preserved seventy.

"We have a guest, sister?" he asked politely.

The Roman matron made a despairing gesture. "You don't recognize him? And John—you don't know Stephen?"

Stephen slapped his thigh and barked—a sound that seemed to represent a laugh of pleasure. "Cosmos!" he cried. "John Brent! I told you, Martha. I knew he wouldn't fail us."

"Stephen!" she exclaimed in shocked tones.

"Hang the irregularities! Can't I greet John with the old words that come—no, by Cosmos—came from the same past he came from? See, John—don't I talk the old language well? I even use article—pardon me, the article."

Brent's automatic mental notebook recorded the fact, which he had already suspected, that an article was as taboo as an irregular verb. But around this self-governing notation system swirled utter confusion. It might possibly have been just his luck to run into a madwoman. But two mad brains in succession with identical delusions were too much. And Stephen had known he was from the past, with no cue given him.

"I'm afraid," he said simply, "this is too much for me. Suppose we all sit down and have a drink of something and talk this over."

Stephen smiled. "You remember our bond, eh? And not many places in State you'll find it. Even fewer than before." He crossed to a cabinet and returned with three glasses of colorless liquid.

Brent seized his eagerly and downed it. A drink might help the swirling. It might— The drink had gone down smoothly and tastelessly. Now, however, some imp began dissecting atoms in his stomach and shooting off a bombardment stream of particles that zoomed up through his throat into his brain, where they set off a charge of explosive of hitherto unknown power. Brent let out a strangled yelp.

Stephen barked again. "Good bond, eh, John?"

Brent managed to focus his host through the blurring lens of his tears. "Sure," he nodded feebly. "Swell. And now let me try to explain—"

The woman looked sadly at her brother. "He denies us, Stephen. He says that he has never seed me before. He forgets all that he ever swore about Barrier."

A curious look of speculation came into Stephen's brown eyes. "Bees this true, John? You have never seed us before in your life?"

"But, Stephen, you know—"

"Hush, Martha. I said in *his* life. Bees it true, John?"

"It bees. God knows it bees. I have never seen . . . seed either of you in my life."

"But Stephen—"

"I understand now, Martha. Remember when he telled us of Barrier and his resolve?"

"Can I forget?"

"How doed he know of Barrier? Tell me that."

"I don't know," Martha confessed. "I have wondered—"

"He knowed of Barrier then because he bees here now. He telled me then just what we must now tell him."

"Then for Heaven's sake," Brent groaned, "tell me."

"Your pardon, John. My sister bees not so quick to grasp source of these temporal confusions. More bond?" He had the bottle in his hand when he suddenly stopped, thrust it back in the cabinet, and murmured, "Go into bedroom."

Brent obeyed. This was no time for displaying initiative. And no sooner had the bedroom door closed behind him than he heard the voice of the Stapper. (The mental notebook recorded that apartment buildings must be large, if it had taken this long for the search to reach here.)

"No," Stephen was saying. "My sister and I have beed here for past half-hour. We seed no one."

"State thanks you," the Stapper muttered so casually that the phrase must have been an official formula. His steps sounded receding. Then they stopped, and there was the noise of loud sniffs.

"Dear God," thought Brent, "have they crossed the bulls with bloodhounds?"

"Bond," the Stapper announced.

"Dear me," came Martha's voice. "Who has beed in here today, Stephen?"

"I'm a homeopath," said the Stapper. "Like cures like. A little bond might make me forget I smelled it."

There was a bark from Stephen and a clink of glasses. No noise from either of them as they downed the liquor. Those, sir, were men. (Memo: Find out why such unbelievable rotgut is called *bond*, of all things.)

"State thanks you," said the Stapper, and laughed. "You know George Starvel, don't you?" A slightly hesitant "Yes" from Stephen.

"When you see him again, I think you'll find he has changed his mind. About many things."

There was silence. Then Stephen opened the bedroom door and beckoned Brent back into the living room. He handed the time traveler a glass of bond and said, "I will try to be brief."

Brent, now forewarned, sipped gingerly at the liquor and found it cheerfully warming as he assimilated the new facts.

In the middle of the twenty-fourth century, he learned, civilization had reached a high point of comfort, satisfaction, achievement—and stagnation. The combination of atomic power and De Bainville's revolutionary formulation of the principles of labor and finance had seemed to solve all economic problems. The astounding development of synthetics had destroyed the urgent need for raw materials and colonies and abolished the

distinction between haves and have-nots among nations. Schwarzwald's "Compendium" had achieved the dream of the early Encyclopedists—the complete systematization of human knowledge. Farthing had regularized the English language, an achievement paralleled by the work of Zinsmeister, Timofeov, and Tamayo y Sárate in their respective tongues. (These four languages now dominated the earth. French and Italian had become corrupt dialects of German, and the Oriental languages occupied in their own countries something the position of Greek and Latin in nineteenth-century Europe, and doomed soon to the complete oblivion which swallowed up those classic tongues in the twenty-first.)

There was nothing more to be achieved. All was known, all was accomplished. Nakamura's Law of Spacial Acceleration had proved interplanetary travel to be impossible for all time. Charnwood's Law of Temporal Metabolism had done the same for time travel. And the Schwarzwald "Compendium," which everyone admired and no one had read, established such a satisfactory and flawless picture of knowledge that it was obviously impossible that anything remained to be discovered.

It was then that Dyce-Farnsworth proclaimed the Stasis of Cosmos. A member of the Anglo-Physical Church, product of the long contemplation by English physicists of the metaphysical aspects of science, he came as the prophet needed to pander to the self-satisfaction of the age.

He was curiously aided by Farthing's laws of regularity. The article, direct or indirect, Farthing had proved to be completely unnecessary—had not languages as world-dominant as Latin in the first centuries and Russian in the twenty-first found no need for it?—and semantically misleading. "Article," he had said in his final and comprehensive study "This Bees Speech," "bees prime corruptor of human thinking."

And thus the statement so beloved in the twentieth century by metaphysical-minded scientists and physical-minded divines, "God is the cosmos," became with Dyce-Farnsworth "God bees cosmos," and hence, easily and inevitably, "God bees Cosmos," so that the utter scientific impersonality became a personification of Science. Cosmos replaced Jehovah, Baal and Odin.

The love of Cosmos was not man nor his works, but Stasis. Man was tolerated by Cosmos that he might achieve Stasis. All the millenniums of human struggle had been aimed at this supreme moment when all was achieved, all was known, and all was perfect. Therefore this supernal Stasis must at all costs be maintained. Since Now was perfect, any alteration must be imperfect and taboo.

From this theory logically evolved the State, whose duty was to maintain the perfect Stasis of

Cosmos. No totalitarian government had ever striven so strongly to iron out all doubt and dissension. No religious bigotry had ever found heresy so damnable and worthy of destruction. The Stasis must be maintained.

It was, ironically, the aged Dyce-Farnsworth himself who, in a moment of quasi-mystical intuition, discovered the flaw in Charnwood's Law of Temporal Metabolism. And it was clear to him what must be done.

Since the Stasis of Cosmos did not practice time travel, any earlier or later civilization that did so must be imperfect. Its emissaries would cause imperfection. There must be a Barrier.

The mystic went no further than that dictum, but the scientists of the State put his demand into practical terms. "Do not ask how at this moment," Stephen added. "I be not man to explain that. But you will learn." The first Barrier was a failure. It destroyed itself and to no apparent result. But now, fifty years later, the fears of time travel had grown. The original idea of the imperfection of emissaries had been lost. Now time travel was in itself imperfect and evil. Any action taken against it would be an offering of praise to Cosmos. And the new Barrier was being erected.

"But John knows all this," Martha protested from time to time, and Stephen would shake his head sadly and smile sympathetically at Brent.

"I don't believe a word of it," Brent said at last. "Oh, the historical outline's all right. I trust you on that. And it works out so sweetly by analogy. Take the religious fanaticism of the sixteenth century, the smug scientific self-satisfaction of the nineteenth, the power domination of the twentieth—fuse them and you've got your State. But the Barrier's impossible. There's no principle on which it could work, and nuts to it." "Charnwood claimed there beed no principle on which time travel canned work. And here you be."

"That's different," said Brent vaguely. "But all this talk of destroying the Barrier is nonsense. There's no need to."

"Indeed there bees need, John. For two reasons: one, that we may benefit by wisdom of travelers from other ages; and two, that positive act of destroying this Barrier, which bees worshiped now with something like fetishism, bees strongest weapon with which can strike against State. For there be these few of us who hope to save mankind from this fanatical complacency that race haves fallen into. George Starvel beed one," Stephen added sadly.

"I saw Starvel— But that isn't what I mean. There's no need because the Barrier won't work."

"But you telled us that it haved to be destroyed," Martha protested. "That it doed work, and that we—"

"Hush," said Stephen gently. "John, will you trust us far enough to show us your machine? I think I can make matters clearer to Martha than."

"If you'll keep me out of the way of Stappers."

"That we can never guarantee—yet. But day will come when mankind can forget Stappers and State, that I swear." There was stern and noble courage in Stephen's face and bearing as he drained his glass of bond to that pledge.

"I had a break when I landed here," John Brent explained on the way. "Derringer equipped the machine only for temporal motion. He explained that it meant running a risk; I might find that the coast line had sunk and I'd arrive under water, or God knows what. But he hadn't worked out the synchronized adjustment for temporospatial motion yet, and he wanted to get started. I took the chance, and luck was good. Where the Derringer lab used to be is now apparently a deserted warehouse. Everything's dusty and not a sign of human occupation."

Stephen's eyes lit up as they approached the long low building of opaque bricks. "Remember, Martha?"

Martha frowned and nodded.

Faint light filtered through the walls to reveal the skeletal outlines of the machine. Brent switched on a light on the panel which gave a dim glow.

"There's not much to see even in a good light," he explained. "Just these two seats—Derringer was planning on teams when he built it, but decided later that one man with sole responsibility to himself would do better—and this panel. These instruments are automatic—they adjust to the presence of another machine ahead of you in the time line. The only control the operator bothers with is this." He indicated the double dial set at 2473.

"Why do you choose this year?"

"At random. Derringer set the outer circle at 2400—half a millennium seemed a plausible choice. Then I spun the inner dial blindfold. When this switch here is turned, you create a certain amount of temporal potential, positive or negative—which is as loose as applying those terms to magnetic poles, but likewise just as convenient. For instance if I turn it to here"—he spun the outer dial to 2900—"you'll have five hundred years of positive potential which'll shoot you ahead to 2973. Or set it like this, and you'll have five centuries of negative, which'll pull you back practically to where I started from."

Stephen frowned. "Ahead and back be of course nonsense words in this connection. But they may be helpful to Martha in visualizing it. Will you please show Martha the back of your dial?"

"Why?" There was no answer. Brent shrugged

and climbed into the seat. The Roman matron moved around the machine and entered the other seat as he loosed the catch on the dial and opened it, as one did for oiling the adjusting gears.

Stephen said, "Look well, my dear. What be the large wheels maked of?"

"Aceroid, of course. Don't you remember how Alex—"

"Don't remember, Martha. Look. What be they?"

Martha gasped. "Why, they . . . they be pure aluminum."

"Very well. Now don't you understand—Ssh!" He broke off and moved toward the doorway. He listened there a moment, then slipped out of sight.

"What does he have?" Brent demanded as he closed the dial. "The ears of an elkhound?"

"Stephen have hyperacute sense of hearing. He bees proud of it, and it have saved us more than once from Stappers. When people be engaged in motive work against State—"

A man's figure appeared again in the doorway. But its robes were white. "Good God!" Brent exclaimed. "Jiggers, the Staps!"

Martha let out a little squeal. A rod appeared in the Stapper's hand. Brent's eyes were so fixed on the adversary that he did not see the matron's hand move toward the switch until she had turned it. Then he shut his eyes and groaned.

Brent had somehow instinctively shut his eyes during his first time transit. *During*, he reflected, is not the right word. *At the time of?* Hardly. How can you describe an event of time movement without suggesting another time measure perpendicular to the time line? At any rate, he had shut them in a laboratory in 1942 and opened them an instant later in a warehouse in 2473.

Now he kept them shut. He had to think for a moment. He had been playing with the dial—where was it set when Martha jerked the switch? 1973, as best he remembered. And he had now burst into that world in plastic garments of the twenty-fifth century, accompanied by a Roman matron who had in some time known him for fifty years.

He did not relish the prospect. And besides he was bothered by that strange jerking, tearing sensation that had twisted his body when he closed his eyes. He had felt nothing whatsoever on his previous trip. Had something gone wrong this time? Had—

"It doesn't work!" said Martha indignantly. Brent opened his eyes. He and Martha sat in the machine in a dim warehouse of opaque brick.

"We be still here," she protested vigorously. "Sure we're still here." Brent frowned. "But what you mean is, we're still now."

"You talk like Stephen. What do you mean?"



"Or are we?" His frown deepened. "If we're still now, where is that Stapper? He didn't vanish just because you pulled a switch. How old is this warehouse?"

"I don't know. I think about sixty years. It beed fairly new when I beed a child. Stephen and I used to play near here."

"Then we could have gone back a few decades and still be here. Yes, and look—those cases over there. I'd swear they weren't here before. After. Whatever. Then, when we saw the Stapper." He looked at the dial. It was set to 1973. And the warehouse was new some time around 2420.

Brent sat and stared at the panel.

"What bees matter?" Martha demanded. "Where be we?"

"Here, same like always. But what bothers me is just *when* we are. Come on; want to explore?"

Martha shook her head. "I want to stay here. And I be afraid for Stephen. Doed Stappers get him? Let's go back."

"I've got to check up on things. Something's gone wrong, and Derringer'll never forgive me if I don't find out what and why. You stay here if you want."

"Alone?"

Brent suppressed several remarks concerning women, in the abstract and the particular. "Stay or go, I don't care. I'm going."

Martha sighed. "You have changed so, John—"

In front of the warehouse was an open field. There had been buildings there when Brent last saw it. And in the field three young people were picnicking. The sight reminded Brent that it was a long time since he'd eaten. How you could measure gaps between meals when you shoot about among centuries, he didn't know; but he was hungry.

He made toward the trio. There were two men and a girl. One man was blond, the other and the girl were brilliantly red-headed. The girl had much more than even that hair to recommend her. She— Brent's eyes returned to the red-headed man. There was no mistaking those deep brown eyes, that sharp and noble nose. The beard was scant, but still there was no denying—

Brent sprang forward with an eager cry of "Stephen!"

The young man looked at him blankly. "Yes," he said politely. "What do you want?"

Brent mentally kicked himself. He had met Stephen in advanced age. What would the Stephen of twenty know of him? And suddenly he began to understand a great deal. The whole confusion of that first meeting started to fade away.

"If I tell you," he said rapidly, "that I know that you be Stephen, that you have sister Martha,

that you drink bond despite Stappers, and that you doubt wisdom of Barrier, will you accept me as a man you can trust?"

"Cosmic zons!" the blond young man drawled. "Stranger knows plenty, Stephen. If he bees Stapper, you'll have your mind changed."

The scantily bearded youth looked a long while into Brent's eyes. Then he felt in his robe, produced a flask, and handed it over. Brent drank and returned it. Their hands met in a firm clasp.

Stephen grinned at the others. "My childs, I think stranger brings us adventure. I feel like someone out of novel by Varnicheck." He turned back to Brent. "Do you know these others, too?"

Brent shook his head.

"Krasna and Alex. And your name?"

"John Brent."

"And what can we do for you, John?"

"First tell me year."

Alex laughed, and the girl smiled. "And how long have you beed on a bond?" Alex asked.

A bonder, Brent guessed, would be a bond bender. "This bees my first drink," he said, "since 1942. Or perhaps since 2473, according as how you reckon."

Brent was not disappointed in the audience reaction this time.

*It's easy to see what must have happened, Brent wrote that night in the first entry of the journal Derringer had asked him to keep. He wrote longhand, an action that he loathed. The typewriter which Stephen had kindly offered him was equipped with a huge keyboard bearing the forty-odd characters of the Farthing phonetic alphabet, and Brent declined the loan.*

*We're at the first Barrier—the one that failed. It was dedicated to Cosmos and launched this afternoon. My friends were among the few inhabitants not ecstatically present at the ceremony. Since then they've collected reports for me. The damned contrivance had to be so terrifically overloaded that it blew up. Dyce-Farnsworth was killed and will be a holy martyr to Cosmos forever.*

*But in an infinitesimal fraction of a second between the launching and the explosion, the Barrier existed. That was enough. It is gone now. It is of no use to protect the people of this smug and sacred Stasis from raids from a more human future. But it existed at that one point in time, existed effectively enough to stop me dead.*

*Which makes keeping this journal, my dear Dr. Derringer, a magnificently silly act. In all likelihood neither you nor anyone else before 2423 will ever see it. (Will ever have seen it?) But you see, sir, I obey instructions. Nice of me, isn't it?*

*And I've been finding out all I can. Stephen is*



ood on history, but lousy on science. The blond young Alex reverses the combination. From him I've learned, or tried to learn, the theory back of the Barrier.

The Barrier established, in that fractional second, a powerful magnetic field in the temporal dimension. As a result, any object moving along the time line is cutting the magnetic field. Hysteresis sets up strong eddy currents which bring the object, in this case me, to an abrupt halt. Cf. that feeling of twisting shock that I had when my eyes were closed.

I pointed out to Alex that I must somehow have crossed this devilish Barrier in going from 1942 to 2473. He accounts for that apparent inconsistency by saying that I was then traveling with the time stream, though at a greater rate; the blockage lines of force were end-on and didn't stop me.

Brent paused and read the last two paragraphs aloud to the young scientist who was tinkering

with the traveling machine. "How's that, Alex? Clear enough?"

"It will do." Alex frowned. "Of course we need whole new vocabulary for temporal concepts. We fumble so helplessly in analogies—" He rose "There bees nothing more I can do for this now. Tomorrow I'll bring out some tools from shop, and see if I can find some aceroid gears to fit control."

"Good man. I may not be able to go back in time from here; but one thing I can do is go forward. Forward to just before they launch that second Barrier. I've got a job to do."

Alex gazed admiringly at the machine. "Wonderful piece of work. Your Dr. Derringer bees great man."

"Only he didn't allow for the effects of temporo-magnetic hysteresis on his mechanism. Thank God for you, Alex."

"Willn't you come back to house?"

Brent shook his head. "I'm taking no chances

on curious Stappers. I'm sticking here with Baby. See that the old lady's comfortable, will you?"

"Of course. But tell me: who bees she? She won't talk at all"

"Nobody. Just a temporal hitchhiker."

Martha's first sight of the young Stephen had been a terrible shock. She had stared at him speechlessly for long minutes, and then gone into a sort of inarticulate hysteria. Any attempt at explanation of her status, Brent felt, would only make matters worse. There was nothing to do but leave her to the care—which seemed both tender and efficient—of the girl Krasna, and let her life ride until she could resume it normally in her own time.

He resumed his journal:

*Philological notes: Stapper, as I should have guessed, is a corruption of Gestapo. Slanduch, which poor Starvel suggested I might be, had me going for a bit. Asking about that, learned that there is more than one State. This, the smug-gest and most fanatical of them all, embraces North America, Australia, and parts of Eastern Asia. Its official language is, of course, Farthing-ized English. Small nuclear groups of English-speaking people exist in the other States, and have preserved the older and irregular forms of speech. (Cf. American mountaineers, and Spanish Jews in Turkey.) A Slanduch is a member of one of these groups.*

*It took me some time to realize the origin of this word, but it's obvious enough: Auslands-deutsche, the Germans who existed similarly cut off from the main body of their culture. With these two common loan words suggesting a marked domination at some time of the German language, I asked Alex—and I must confess almost fearfully—"Then did Germany win the war?"*

*He not unnaturally countered with, "Which war?"*

*"The Second World War. Started in 1939."*

*"Second—Cosmic wars, John, you can't expect me to remember numbers of all those twentieth-century World Wars, can you?"*

*I am almost afraid to ask the more historically accurate Stephen.*

Brent paused, and wished for Stephen's ears to determine the nature of that small noise outside. Or was it pure imagination? He went on:

*These three—Stephen, Alex, and Krasna—have proved to be the ideal hosts for a traveler of my nature. Any devout believer in Cosmos, any loyal upholder of the Stasis would have turned me over to the Stappers for my first slip in speech or ideas.*

*They seem to be part of what corresponds to the Underground Movements of my own century. They try to accomplish a sort of boring from within, a subtle sowing of doubts as to the Stasis.*

*Eventually they hope for more positive action; so far it is purely mental sabotage.*

*Their motives are various. Some are crack-pots, pure and simple. Some are artists who rebel against the limitations imposed by the State. Some are scientists who remain unconvinced that Schwarzwald solved everything. Stephen says simply that he is a Christian—which most of the others consider an almost comic anachronism—and that Cosmos is a false god; but I think the Christian love of mankind is a stronger motive force in him than any doctrinary matter of the rivalry of names for godhead. Alex is a Seepy—a word the meaning of which I haven't yet been able to gather. Krasna—*

It was a noise. Brent set down his stylus and moved along the wall as quietly as possible to the door. He held his breath while the door slid gently inward. Then as the figure entered, he pounced.

Stappers have close-cropped hair and flat manly chests. Brent released the girl abruptly and muttered a confused apology.

"It bees only me," she said shyly. "Krasna. Doed I startle you?"

"A bit," he confessed. "Alex and Stephen warned me what might happen if a Stapper stumbled on my machine here."

"I be sorry, John."

"It's all right. But you shouldn't be wandering around alone at night like this. In fact, you shouldn't be mixed up in this at all. Leave it to Stephen and Alex and me."

"Mans!" she pouted. "Don't you think womans have any right to fun?"

"I don't know that fun's exactly the word. But since you're here, milady, let me extend the hospitality of the camp. Alex left me some bond. That poison grows on you. And tell me, why's it called that?"

"Stephen telled me once, but I can't— Oh yes. When they prohibited all drinking because drinking makes you think world bees better than it really bees and of course if you make yourself different world that bees against Stasis and so they prohibited it but they keeoped on using it for medical purposes and that beed in warehouses and pretty soon no one knowed any other kind of liquor so it bees called bond. Only I don't see why."

"I don't suppose," Brent remarked, "that anybody in this century has ever heard of one Gracie Allen, but her spirit is immortal. The liquor in the warehouses was probably kept under government bond."

"Oh—" she said meekly. "I'll remember. You know everything, don't you?"

Brent looked at her suspiciously, but there was no irony in the remark. "How's the old lady getting on?"

"Fine. She bees sleeping now at last. Alex gived her some dormitin. She bees nice, John."

"And yet your voice sounds worried. What's the matter?"

"She bees so much like my mother only, of course, I don't remember my mother much because I beed so little when Stappers taked my father and then my mother doedn't live very long but I do remember her some and your old lady bees so much like her. I wish I haved knowed my mother goodlier, John. She beed dear. She—" She lowered her voice in the tone of one imparting a great secret. "She cooked!"

Brent remembered their tasteless supper of extracts, concentrates, and synthetics, and shuddered. "I wish you had known her, Krasna."

"You know what cooking means? You go out and you dig up roots and you pick leaves off of plants and some people they even used to take animals, and then you apply heat and—"

"I know. I used to be a fair-to-middling cook myself, some five hundred years ago. If you could lead me to a bed of coals, a clove of garlic, and a two-inch steak, milady, I'd guarantee to make your eyes pop."

"Garlic? Steak?" Her eyes were wide with wonder. "What be those?"

Brent explained. For ten minutes he talked of the joys of food, of the sheer ecstatic satisfaction of good eating that passes the love of woman, the raptures of art, or the wonders of science. Then her questions began to pour forth.

"Stephen learns things out of books and Alex learns things in lab but I can't do that so goodly and they both make fun of me only you be real and I can learn things from you, John, and it bees wonderful. Tell me—"

And Krasna, with a greedy ear, devoured up his discourse.

"—and men were free," he ended. "Free to damn and ruin themselves if they choose, but free also to live nobly, enriching the world and themselves by their striving. For all perfection comes from within, and the 'perfection' that is imposed from without is as frivolous and stupid as the trimmings on gingercake. The free man may be bad, but only the free man can be good. And all the kingdom and the power and the glory—call it of God, call it of Cosmos—must arise from the free will of man."

He stopped, somewhat surprised at his own eloquence. The tyrannical smugness of this age was working upon him powerfully.

Krasna was kneeling at his feet. He could feel the warmth of her young body against his. "Go on," she whispered. Her large eyes glowed up at him.

"That's all. And damned if I know how I talked that long." His hand rested on the soft mass of her flowing red hair.

"You be wonderful," she murmured.

Brent coughed and said, "Nuts!" His hand stroked her head gently.

The rest of that evening was not recorded in the Derringer journal.

The machine was not repaired the next day, nor the next. Alex kept making plausible, if not quite intelligible, technical excuses. Martha kept to her room and fretted; but Brent rather welcomed the delay. There was no hurry; leaving this time several days later had no effect on when they reached 2473. But he had some difficulty making that point clear to the matron.

This delay gave him an opportunity to see something of the State in action, and any information acquired was apt to be useful when the time came. With various members of Stephen's informal and illicit group he covered the city. He visited a Church of Cosmos and heard the official doctrine on the failure of the Barrier—the Stasis of Cosmos did not permit time travel, so that even an attempt to prohibit it, by recognizing its existence affronted the Stasis. He visited libraries and found only those works which had established or upheld the Stasis, all bound in the same uniform format which the Cosmic Bibliological Committee of 2407 had ordained as ideal and static. He visited scientific laboratories, and found brilliant young dullards plodding away endlessly at what had already been established; imaginative research was manifestly perilous.

He heard arid stretches of intolerable music composed according to the strict Farinelli system, which forbade, among other things, any alteration of key or time for the duration of a composition. He went to a solly, which turned out to be a deceptively solid three-dimensional motion picture. It was a flat and undramatic exposition of the glories of Stasis; but Brent suspected the author of being an Undergrounder. The villain, even though triumphantly bested by the Stappers in the end, had all the most plausible and best written speeches, some of them ingenious and strong enough to sow doubts in the audience.

If, Brent thought disgustedly, anything could sow doubts in this smug herd of cattle. For the people of the State seemed to take the deepest and most loving pride in everything pertaining to the State and to the Stasis of Cosmos. The churches, the libraries, the laboratories, the music, the sollies, all represented humanity at its highest peak. We have attained perfection, have we not? Then all this bees perfect, and we love it.

"What we need," he expostulated to Alex and Stephen one night, "is more of me. Lots more. Scads of us pouring in from all ages to light firecrackers under these dopes. Every art and

every science has degenerated far worse than anything did in the Dark Ages. The surface attainment is still there; but everything's gone from under it. Man cannot be man without striving; and all striving is abolished. God, I think if I lived in this age and believed in the Stasis, I'd become a Stapper. Better their arrogant cruelty than the inhuman indifference of everybody else."

"I have brother who bees Stapper," said Stephen. "I do not recommend it. To descend to level of cows and oxes bees one thing. To become wolves and jackals bees another."

"I've gathered that those rods paralyze the nerve centers, right? But what happens to you after that in Stappers' hands?"

"It bees not good. First you be treated according to expert psychoanalytic and psychometric methods so as to alter your concepts and adjust you to Stasis. If that fails, you be carefully reduced to harmless idiocy. Sometimes they find mind that bees too strong for treatment. He bees killed, and Stappers be allowed to play with him first."

Brent shuddered. "Not nice."

"It'll never happen to me," Alex said earnestly. "I be prepared. You see this?" He indicated a minute plastic box suspended around his neck. "It contains tiny amount of radioactive matter sensitized to wave length of Stappers' rods. They will never change my mind."

"It explodes?"

Alex grinned. "Stay away from me if rods start waving."

"It seems," Brent mused, "as though cruelty were the only human vice left. Games are lost, drinking is prohibited—and that most splendid of vices, imaginative speculation, is unheard of. I tell you, you need lots of me."

Stephen frowned. "Before failure of Barrier, we often wondered why we never seed time travelers. We doubted Charnwood's Law and yet—We decided there beed only two explanations. Either time travel bees impossible, or time travelers cannot be seed or intervene in time they visit. Now, of course, we can see that Barrier stopped all from future, and perhaps you be only one from past. And still—"

"Exactly," said Alex. "And still. If other travelers came from future, why beed they not also stopped by Barrier? One of our friends havees had opportunity to search Stapper records since breakdown of Barrier. No report on strange and unidentified travelers anywhere."

"That cans mean only one thing." Stephen looked worried. "Second Barrier, Barrier you telled us of, John, must be successful."

"The hell it will be. Come on, Alex. I'm getting restless. When can I start?"

Alex smiled. "Tomorrow. I be ready at last."

AST—2K

"Good man. Among us, we are going to blow this damned Stasis back into the bliss of manly and uncertain striving. And in fifty years we'll watch it together."

Krasna was waiting outside the room when Brent left. "I knowed you willed be talking about things I doedn't understand."

"You can understand this, milady. Alex has got everything fixed, and we leave tomorrow."

Krasna put her soft hand gently in his and wordlessly walked back to the warehouse with him.

"Now," said Brent to Stephen after what was euphemistically termed breakfast, "I've got to see the old lady and find out just what the date is for the proposed launching of the second Barrier."

Stephen beamed. "It bees such pleasure to hear old speech, articles and all."

Alex had a more practical thought. "How can you set it to one day? I thinked your dial readed only in years."

"There's a vernier attachment that's accurate—or should be, it's never been tested yet—to within two days. I'm allowing a week's margin. I don't want to be around too long and run chances with Stappers."

"Krasna will miss you."

"Krasna's a funny name. You others have names that were in use back in my day."

"Oh, it bees not name. It bees only what everyone calls red-headed girls. I think it goes back to century of Russian domination."

"Yes," Alex added. "Stephen's sister's real name bees Martha, but we never call her that."

John Brent gaped. "I . . . I've got to go see the old lady," he stammered. "The old lady—the red-head—Martha—Krasna—Stephen's sister—"

Small wonder she was shocked when he didn't know her!

From the window of the gray-haired Martha-Krasna he could see the red-headed Krasna-Martha outside. He held on to a solid and reassuring chair and said, "Well, madam, I have news. We're going back today."

"Oh thank Cosmos!"

"But I've got to find out something from you. What was the date set for the launching of the second Barrier?"

"Let me see—I know it beed holiday. Yes, it beed May 1st."

"My, my! May Day a holiday now? Workers of the World Unite, or simply Gathering Nuts in May?"

"I don't understand you. It bees Dyce-Farnsworth's birthday, of course."

"Oh. Well, be out at the warehouse in half an hour, and we'll be off."

The young Krasna-Martha was alone in the

warehouse when Brent got there. He looked at her carefully, trying to see in her youthful features the worn ones of the woman he had just left. It made sense.

"I comed first," she said, "because I wanted to say good-by without others."

"Good-by, milady," Brent murmured into her fine red hair. "In a way I'm not leaving you because I'm taking you with me and still I'll never see you again. And you don't understand that, and I'm not sure you've ever understood anything I've said, but you've been very sweet."

"And you will destroy Barrier? For me?"

"For you, milady. And a few billion others. And here come our friends."

Alex carried a small box which he tucked under one of the seats. "Dial and mechanism beed repaired days ago," he grinned. "I've beed working on this for you, in lab while I should have been re-proving Tsvetov's hypothesis. Temporal demagnetizer—guaranteed. Bring this near Barrier and field will be breaked. Your problem bees to get near Barrier."

Martha, the matron, climbed into the machine. Martha, the girl, turned away to hide watering eyes. Brent set the dial to 2473 and adjusted the vernier to April 24th, which gave him a week's grace. "Well, friends," he faltered. "My best gratitude—and I'll be seeing you in fifty years."

Stephen started to speak, and then suddenly stopped to listen. "Quick, Krasna, Alex. Behind those cases. Turn switch quickly, John."

Brent turned the switch, and nothing happened. Stephen and Krasna were still there, moving toward the cases. Alex darted to the machine. "Cosmos blast me! I maked disconnection to prevent anyone's tampering by accident. And now—"

"Hurry, Alex," Stephen called in a whisper. "Moment—" Alex opened the panel and made a rapid adjustment. "There, John. Good-by."

In the instant before Brent turned the switch, he saw Stephen and Krasna reach a safe hiding place. He saw a Stapper appear in the doorway. He saw the flicker of a rod. The last thing he saw in 2423 was the explosion that lifted Alex's head off his shoulders.

The spattered blood was still warm in 2473.

Stephen, the seventy-year-old Stephen with the long and parti-colored beard, was waiting for them. Martha dived from the machine into his arms and burst into dry sobbing.

"She met herself," Brent explained. "I think she found it pretty confusing."

Stephen barked: "I can imagine. It bees only now that I have realized who that woman beed who comed with you and so much resembled our mother. But you be so late. I have beed waiting here ever since I evaded Stappers."

"Alex—" Brent began.

"I know. Alex haves gived you magnetic disruptor and losed his life, poor devil. But that bees fifty-year-old sorrow, and we have no time for it. Why have you beed so long?"

"I didn't want to get here too long before May Day—might get into trouble. So I allowed a week, but I'll admit I might be a day or so off. What date is it?"

"This bees May 1st, and Barrier will be launched within hour. We must hurry."

"My God—" Brent glared at the dial. "It can't be that far off. But come on. Get your sister home and we'll plunge on to do our damnedest."

Martha roused herself. "I be coming with you."

"No, dear," said Stephen. "We can do better alone."

Her lips set stubbornly. "I be coming. I don't understand anything that happens, but you be Stephen and you be John, and I belong with you."

The streets were brightly decorated with banners bearing the double loop of infinity, the sacred symbol of Cosmos that had replaced crescent, swastika, and cross. But there was hardly a soul in sight. What few people they saw were all hurrying in the same direction.

"Everyone will be at dedication," Stephen explained. "Tribute to Cosmos. Those who stay at home must beware Stappers."

"And if there's hundreds of thousands thronging the dedication, how do we get close to Barrier to disrupt it?"

"It bees all arranged. Our group bees far more powerful than when you knowed it fifty years ago. Slowly we be honeycombing system of State. With bribery and force when necessary, with persuasion when possible, we can do much. And we have arranged this."

"How?"

"You be delegate from European Slanduch. You speak German?"

"Well enough."

"Remember that haves beed regularized, too. But I doubt if you need to speak any. Making you Slanduch will account for irregular slips in English. You come from powerful Slanduch group. You will be gladly welcomed here. You will occupy post of honor. I have even accounted for box you carry. It bees tribute you have brought to Cosmos. Here be your papers and identity plaque."

"Thanks." Brent's shorter legs managed to keep up with the long strides of Stephen, who doubled the rate of the moving sidewalk by his own motion. Martha panted along resolutely. "But can you account for why I'm so late? I set my indicator for April 24th, and here we are rushing to make a date on May 1st."

Stephen strode along in thought, then sud-

denly slapped his leg and barked. "How many months in 1942?"

"Twelve, of course."

"Ha! Yes, it beed only two hundred years ago that thirteen-month calendar beed adopted. Even months of twenty-eight days each, plus Year Day, which belongs to no month. Order, you see. Now invaluable part of Stasis—" He concentrated frowningly on mental arithmetic. "Yes, your indicator worked exactly. May 1st of our calendar bees April 24th of yours."

Chalk up one slip against Derringer—an unthinking confidence in the durability of the calendar. And chalk up one, for Brent's money, against the logic of the Stasis; back in the twentieth century, he had been an advocate of calendar reform, but a staunch upholder of the four-quarter theory against the awkward and indivisible thirteenth months.

They were nearing now the vast amphitheater where the machinery of the Barrier had been erected. Stappers were stopping the few other travelers and forcing them off the moving sidewalk into the densely packed crowds, faces aglow with the smug ecstasy of the Stasis, but Brent's Slanduch credentials passed the three through every guard station, with short but infuriating delays.

"We'll make it." Stephen's eyes were afire. "Remember what you said to Alex and me? How State needs hundreds of you, to put explosive beneath it and blow it into awareness? If we—" He broke off speaking as they neared another Stapper.

This one looked at the credentials and grinned. "*Also! Sie wesen Slandsdeutsch und zwar aus Deutschland!*" He burst out in Zinsmeisterized German. "*Seit jahre habe ich kein Wort deutsch gehört. Mein eltere wesen von deutsch herkunft.*"

Brent's curious mind recorded the necessary notes on this perverted language, but there was no time to waste. He tried to avoid irregular slips as he replied, "*Freut mich sehr. Aber jetst habe ich kein zeit. Ich müsse eilen. Später vielleicht könne ich—*"

But the Stapper was, for a Stapper, amazingly friendly—a pleasing phenomenon at any other time, but hardly now. He rattled on in this correct speech until Brent glanced around to see that Stephen had precipitated action by dragging Martha on ahead. "Ach!" Brent cried. "*Mein freunde wesen schon gegeht. Verzeihen sie!*" And he sped after them.

The representative of the German Slanduch pushed his way into the crowd of eminent dignitaries just as Dyce-Farnsworth's grandson pressed the button. The magnificent mass of tubes and wires shuddered and glowed as the current pulsed

through it. Then the glow became weird and arctic. There was a shaking, a groaning, and then, within the space of a second, a cataclysmic roar and a blinding glare. Something heavy and metallic pressed Brent to the ground.

The roar blended into the excited terror of human voices. The splendid Barrier was a mass of twisted wreckage. It was more wreckage that weighted Brent down, but this was different. It looked strangely like a variant of his own machine. And staring down at him from a warped seat was the enormous and huge-eyed head of a naked man.

A woman in a metallic costume equally strange to this age and to Brent's own straddled the body of Dyce-Farnsworth's grandson, who had met his ancestor's martyrdom. And wherever Brent's eyes moved he saw another strange and outlandish—no, out-time-ish—figure.

He heard Martha's voice. "It bees clear that Time Barrier havees beed erected and destroyed by outside force. But it havees existed and created impenetrable instant of time. These be travelers from all future."

Brent gasped. Even the sudden appearance of these astounding figures was topped by Martha's speaking perfect logical sense.

Brent wrote in his journal: *The Stasis is at least an admirably functional organism. All hell broke loose there for a minute, but almost automatically the Stappers went into action with their rods—odd how that bit of crook's cant has become perfectly literal truth—and in no time had the situation well in hand.*

*They had their difficulties. Several of the time intruders were armed, and managed to account for a handful of Stappers before the nerve rays paralyzed them. One machine was a sort of time-traveling tank and contrived to withstand siege until a suicide squad of Stappers attacked it with a load of what Stephen tells me was detonite; we shall never know from what sort of a future the inhabitants of that tank came to spatter their shredded flesh about the amphitheater.*

*But these events were mere delaying action, token resistance. Ten minutes after the Barrier had exploded, the travelers present were all in the hands of the Stappers, and cruising Stapper bands were efficiently combing all surrounding territory.*

*(The interesting suggestion comes amazingly from Martha that all time machines capable of physical movement were irresistibly attracted to the amphitheater by the temporomagnetic field. Only such pioneer and experimental machines as my Derringer, which can move only temporally, would be arrested in other locations. Whether or not this theory is correct, it seems justified*

by the facts. Only a few isolated reports have come in of sudden appearances elsewhere at the instant of the Barrier's explosion; the focus of arrivals of the time travelers was the amphitheater.)

The Chief of Stappers mounted the dais where an infinity-bedecked banner now covered the martyred corpse of young Dyce-Farnsworth, and announced the official ruling of the Head of State: That these intruders and disrupters of the Stasis were to be detained—tested and examined and studied until it became apparent what the desire of Cosmos might be.

(The Head of State, Stephen explained, is a meaningless figurehead, part high priest and—I paraphrase—part Alexander Throttlebottom. The Stasis is supposedly so perfect and so self-sustaining that his powers are as nominal as those of the pilot of a ship in drydock, and all actual power is exercised by such subordinates as the Editor of State and the Chief of Stappers.)

Thanks to Stephen's ingenuity, this rule for the treatment of time travelers does not touch me. I am simply a Slanduch envoy. (I must remember to polish myself in that highly obnoxious Zinsmeisteriert German.) Some Stapper search party has certainly by now found the Der-ringer machine in the warehouse, which I no longer dare approach.

With two Barriers now between me and 1942, it is obvious that I am keeping this journal only for myself. I am stuck here—and so are all the other travelers, for this field, far stronger than the first, has wrecked their machines beyond the repairing efforts of a far greater talent than poor Alex. We are all here for good.

And it must be for good.

I still believe firmly what I said to Stephen and Alex: that this age needs hundreds of me to jolt it back into humanity. We now have, if not hundreds, at least dozens; and I, so far as we yet know, am the only one not in the hands of the Stappers. It is my clearest duty to deliver those others, and with their aid to beat some sense into this Age of Smugness.

"But how?" Brent groaned rhetorically. "How am I going to break into the Stappers' concentration camp and set free all these fellow travelers to aid me?"

Martha wrinkled her brows. "I think I know. Let me work on problem while longer; I believe I see how we can at littlest make start."

Brent stared at her. "What's happened to you, madam? Always before you've shrunk away from every discussion Stephen and I have had. You've said we talk of things you know nothing about. And now, all of a sudden—boom!—you're right in the middle of things and doing very nicely thank you. What's got into you?"

"I think," said Martha smiling, "you have hit on right phrase, John."

Brent's puzzled expostulation was broken off by Stephen's entrance. "And where have you been?" he demanded. "I've been trying to work out plans, and I've got a weird feeling Martha's going to beat me to it. What have you been up to?"

Stephen looked curiously at his sister. "I've been out galping. Interesting results, too."

"Galping?"

"You know. Going about among people, taking samples of opinion, using scientific method to reduce carefully choosed samples to general trends."

"Oh." (Mr. Gallup, thought Brent, has joined Captain Boycott and M. Guillotin as a verb.) "And what did you learn?"

"People be confused by arrival of time travelers. If Stasis bees perfect, they argue, why be such arrivals allowed? Seeds of doubt be sowed, and we be carefully watering them. Head of State haves problem on his hands. I doubt if he cans find any solution to satisfy people."

"If only," Brent sighed, "there were some way of getting directly at the people. If we could see these travelers and learn what they know and want, then somehow establish contact between them and the people, the whole thing ought to be a pushover. But we're up against that 'if only—'"

It was Martha who answered. "It bees very simple, John. You be linguist."

"Yes. And how does that—"

"Stappers will need interpreters. You will be one. From there on you must develop your own plans, but that will at littlest put you in touch with travelers."

"But the State must have its own trained linguists who—"

Stephen barked with pleasure and took up the explanation. Since Farthing's regularization of English, the perfect immutability of language had become part of the Stasis. A linguist now was a man who knew Farthing's works by heart, and that was all. Oh, he might also be well acquainted with Zinsmeister German, or Tamayo y Sárate Spanish; but he knew nothing of general linguistic principles, which are apt to run completely counter to the fine theories of these great synthesisists, and he had never had occasion to learn adaptability to a new language. Faced by the probably strange and incomprehensible tongues of the remote future, the State linguist would be lost and helpless.

It was common knowledge that only the Slanduch had any true linguistic aptitude. Brought up to speak three languages—Farthing-ized English, their own archaic dialect, and the language of the country in which they resided—



their tongues were deft and adjustable. In ordinary times, this aptitude was looked on with suspicion; ingenuity and cleverness in any field were obviously heretical threats to the Stasis. But now there would doubtless be a heavy demand for Slanduch interpreters, and there was no doubt that a little cautious wire pulling could land Brent the job.

"And after that," said Stephen, "as Martha rightly observes, you be on your own."

"Lead me to it," grinned John Brent.

"Isn't that Starvel?" Brent demanded.

Stephen paused and looked at the man on the other mobile walk. "So it bees indeed."

"The Stappers must have released him. Shall we—"

The man had noticed them and now crossed over. "George!" Stephen cried. "Cosmos! but it rejoices my heart to see you again."

George Starvel held himself aloof and glanced suspiciously at Brent. "I wished to speak to you, Stephen, only to tell you that I will not see you again."

"George!"

"Stasis bees perfect, Stephen. Your ideas for some little time deluded me, but now I know. Cosmos bees all-perfect and his perfection lies in his Stasis. If ever again you try to persuade me of lies to contrary, I will have to advise Stappers. Good-by." And he had left them.

Brent looked after him in amazement. "He meant that. He was perfectly sincere."

"I know. He haves haved his mind changed. He believes what haves been forced upon him, but he believes it honestly. It bees sad. He beed most vigorous and active Seepy I have knowed since Alex."

Stephen frowned. "It bees hard to explain. But most of rebels against Stasis come from old families holding old beliefs. Many, like me, be Christians, and some be Seepies. I do not know myself all their beliefs, but they belong to schism of Mark."

Brent contemplated this statement for a moment, and then burst into a loud guffaw. "By Hobson and Jobson, this is sweet! Schism of Mark, Mark schism, Marxism. Seepy, C. P., Communist Party. And right in there fighting shoulder to shoulder with the Christians!" His face became graver. "And let's remember one thing, Stephen. They can change the mind of an individual. But when it comes to thousands, and tens of thousands—it may be their own minds that'll change."

"Amen," said Stephen. It was the only time Brent ever heard him utter a characteristically Christian phrase.

The rabbitly little State linguist received Brent effusively. "Ah, thank Cosmos!" he gasped. "Travelers be driving me mad! Such gibberish you have never heard! Such irregularities! Frightful! It bees shocking! You be Slanduch?"

"I be. I have speaked several languages all my life. I can even speak pre-Zinsmeister German." And he began to recite *Die Lorelei*. "*Die Luft ist kühl und es dunkelt, und ruhig fließt der Rhein—*"

"Terrible! *Ist!* Such vile irregularity! And articles! But come, young man. We'll see what you can do with these temporal barbarians!"

There were three travelers in the room Brent entered, with the shocked linguist and two rodded Stappers in attendance. One of the three was the woman he had noticed in that first cataclysmic instant of arrival, a strapping Amazonian blonde who looked as though she could break any two unarmed Stappers with her bare fingers. Another was a neat little man with a curly and minute forked beard and restless hands. The third—

The third was hell to describe. They were all dressed now in the conventional robes of the Stasis, but even in these familiar garments he was clearly not quite human. If man is a featherless biped, then this was a man; but men do not usually have greenish skin with vestigial scales and a trace of a gill-opening behind each ear.

"Ask each of them three things," the linguist instructed Brent. "When he comes from, what his name bees, and what be his intentions."

Brent picked Tiny Beard as the easiest-looking start. "O. K. You!" He pointed, and the man stepped forward. "What part of time do you come from?"

"A pox o' thee, sirrah, and the goodyears take thee! An thou wouldst but hearken to me, thou might'st learn all."

The State linguist moaned. "You hear, young man? How can one interpret such jargon?"

Brent smiled. "It bees O. K. This bees simply English as it beed speaked thousand years ago. This man must have beed aiming at earlier time and prepared himself. . . Thy pardon, sir. These kerns deem all speech barbaric save that which their own conceit hath evolved. Bear with me, and all will be well."

"Spoken like a true knight!" the traveler exclaimed. "Forgive my rash words, sir. Surely my good daemon hath led thee hither. Thou wouldst know—"

"Whence comest thou?"

"From many years hence. Thousands upon thousands of summers have yet to run their course ere I—"

"Forgive me, sir; but of that much we are aware. Let us be precise."

"When then, marry, sir, 'tis from the fifth century."

Brent frowned. But to attempt to understand the gentleman's system of dating would take too much time at the moment. "And thy name, sir?"

"Kruj, sir. Or an thou wouldst be formal and courtly, Kruj Krujil Krujilar. But let Kruj suffice thee."

"And what most concerneth these gentlemen here is the matter of thine intentions. What are thy projects in this our earlier world?"

"My projects?" Kruj coughed. "Sir, in thee I behold a man of feeling, of sensibility, a man to whom one may speak one's mind. Many projects have I in good sooth, most carefully projected for me by the Zhurmandril. Much must I study in these realms of the great Elizabeth—though 'blood! I know not how they seem so different from my conceits! But one thing above all else do I covet. I would to the Mermaid Tavern."

Brent grinned. "I fear me, sir, that we must talk at greater length. Much hast thou mistaken and much must I make clear to thee. But first I must talk with thee others."

Kruj retired, frowning and plucking at his shred of beard. Brent beckoned forward the woman. She strode forth so vigorously that both Stappers bared their rods.

"Madam," Brent ventured tentatively, "what part of time do you come from?"

"Evybuy taws so fuy," she growled. "Bu I unnasta. Wy cachoo unnasta me?"

Brent laughed. "Is that all that's the trouble? You don't mind if I go on talking like this, do you?"

"Naw. You taw howeh you wanna, slonsoo donna like I dih taw stray."

Fascinating, Brent thought. All final consonants lost, and many others. Vowels corrupted along lines indicated in twentieth-century colloquial speech. Consonants sometimes restored in liaison in French.

"What time do you come from, then?"

"Twenny-ni twenny-fie. N were am I now?"

"Twenty-four seventy-three. And your name, madam?"

"Mimi."

Brent had an incongruous vision of this glantess dying operatically in a Paris garret. "So. And your intentions here?"

"Ai gonno intenchuns. Juh wanna see wha go."

"You will, madam, I assure you. And now—" He beckoned to the green-skinned biped, who advanced with a curious lurching motion like a deep-sea diver.

"And you, sir. When do you come from?"

"Ya studier langue earthy. Vyerit todo langue isos. Ou comprendo wie govorit people."

Brent was on the ropes and groggy. The fa-

miliarity of some of the words made the entire speech even more incomprehensible. "Says which?" he gasped.

The green man exploded. "Ou existier nada but dolts, cochons, duraki v this terre? Nikovo parla langue earthy? Potztausend Sapperment en la leche de tu madre and I do mean you!"

Brent reeled. But even reeling he saw the disapproving frown of the State linguist and the itching fingers of the Stappers. He faced the green man calmly and said with utmost courtesy, "Twas brillig and the slithy toves did gyre and gimble over the rivering waters of the hither-andthithering waters of pigeons on the grass alas. Thank you, sir." He turned to the linguist. "He says he won't talk."

Brent wrote in the never-to-be-read journal: *It was Martha again who solved my green man for me. She pointed out that he was patently extraterrestrial. (Apparently Nakamura's Law of Spatial Acceleration is as false as Charnwood's Law of Temporal Metabolism.) The vestigial scales and gills might well indicate Venus as his origin. He must come from some far distant future when the earth is overrun by inhabitants of other planets and terrestrial culture is all but lost. He had prepared himself for time travel by studying the speech of earth—langue earthy—reconstructed from some larger equivalent of the Rosetta Stone, but made the mistake of thinking that there was only one earthly speech, just as we tend imaginatively to think of Martian or Venusian as a single language. As a result, he's talking all earthly tongues at once. Martha sees a marked advantage in this, even more than in Mimi's corrupt dialect—*

"Thou, sir," said Brent to Kruj on his next visit, "art a linguist. Thou knowest speech and his nature. To wit, I would wager that thou couldst with little labor understand this woman here. One who hath so mastered our language in his greatest glory—"

The little man smirked. "I thank thee, sir. In sooth since thou didst speak with her yestereven I have already made some attempts at converse with her."

Mimi joined in. "He taws fuy, bu skina cue."

"Very well then. I want you both, and thee in particular, Kruj, to hearken to this green-skinned varlet here. Study his speech, sir, and learn what thou may'st."

"Wy?" Mimi demanded belligerently.

"The wench speaks sooth. Wherefore should we so?"

"You'll find out. Now let me at him."

It was slow, hard work, especially with the linguist and the Stappers ever on guard. It



meant rapid analysis of the possible origin of every word used by the Venusian, and a laborious painstaking attempt to find at random words that he would understand. But in the course of a week both Brent and the astonishingly adaptable Kruj had learned enough of this polyglot *langue earthly* to hold an intelligible conversation. Mimi was hopelessly lost, but Kruj occasionally explained matters to her in her own corrupt speech, which he had mastered by now as completely as Elizabethan.

It had been Stephen's idea that any project for the liberation of the time travelers must wait until more was learned of their nature. "You be man of good will, John. We trust you. You and mans like you can save us. But imagine that some travelers come from worlds far badder even than ours. Suppose that they come seeking only power for themselves? Suppose that they

come from civilization of cruelty and terror and be even more evil than Stappers?"

It was a wise point, and it was Martha who saw the solution in the Venusian's amazing tongue. In that mélange of languages, Brent could talk in front of the linguist and the Stappers with complete safety. Kruj and the Venusian, who must have astonishing linguistic ability to master the speech of another planet even so perversely, could discuss matters with the other travelers, and could tell him anything he needed to know before all the listening guards of the State.

All this conversation was, of course, theoretically guided by the linguist. He gave questions to Brent and received plausible answers, never dreaming that his questions had not been asked.

As far as his own three went, Brent was satisfied as to the value of their liberation. Mimi was not bright, but she seemed to mean well and

claimed to have been a notable warrior in her own matriarchal society. It was her feats in battle and exploration that had caused her to be chosen for time travel. She should be in some respects a useful ally.

Kruj was indifferent to the sorry state of the world until Brent mentioned the tasteless and servile condition of the arts. Then he was all afire to overthrow the Stasis and bring about a new renaissance. (Kruj, Brent learned, had been heading for the past to collect material for an historical epic on Elizabethan England, a fragment of prehistoric civilization that had always fascinated him.)

Of the three, Nikobat, the Venusian, seemed the soundest and most promising. To him, terrestrial civilization was a closed book, but a beautiful one. In the life and struggles of man he found something deep and moving. The aim of Nikobat in his own world had been to raise his transplanted Venusian civilization to the levels, spiritual and scientific, that had once been attained by earthly man, and it was to find the seed of inspiration to accomplish this that he had traveled back. Man degenerate, man self-complacent, man smug, shocked him bitterly, and he swore to exert his best efforts in the rousing.

Brent was feeling not displeased with himself as he left his group after a highly successful session. Kruj was accomplishing much among the other travelers and would have a nearly full report for him tomorrow. And once that report had been made, they could attempt Martha's extraordinary scheme of rescue. He would not have believed it ordinarily possible; but both he and Stephen were coming to put more and more trust in the suggestions of the once scatter-brained Martha. Stephen's own reports were more than favorable. The Underground was boring beautifully from within. The people of the State were becoming more and more restless and doubting. Slowly these cattle were resuming the forms of men.

Brent was whistling happily as he entered the apartment and called out a cheery "Hi!" to his friends. But they were not there. There was no one in the room but a white-clad Stapper, who smiled wolfishly as he rose from a chair and asked politely, "You be time traveler, be you not?"

This was the most impressive Stapper that Brent had yet seen—impressive even aside from the startling nature of his introductory remark. The others, even the one he had kicked in the face, or the one who killed Alex, Brent had thought of simply as so many Stappers. This one was clearly an individual. His skin was exceptionally dark and smooth and hairless, and two eyes so black that they seemed all pupil glowed out of his face and dominated the room.

Brent tried to seem casual. "Nonsense. I be Slanduch envoy from Germany, staying here with friends and doing linguistic service for State. Here bees my identification."

The Stapper hardly glanced at it. "I know all about your 'linguistic services,' John Brent. And I know about machine finded in deserted warehouse. It beed only machine not broken by Barrier. Therefore it comed not from Future, but from Past."

"So? We have travelers from both directions? Poor devil will never be able to get back to own time then." He wondered if this Stapper were corruptible; he could do with a drink of bond.

"Yes, he bees losed here in this time like others. And he foolishly works with them to overthrow Stasis."

"Sad story. But how does it concern me? My papers be in order. Surely you can see that I be what I claim?"

The Stapper's eyes fixed him sharply. "You be clever, John Brent. You doubtless traveled naked and clothed yourself as citizen of now to escape suspicion. That bees smartest way. How you getted papers I do not know. But communication with German Slanduch cans disprove your story. You be losed, Brent, unless you be sensible."

"Sensible? What the hell do you mean by that?"

The Stapper smiled slowly. "Article," he drawled.

"I be sorry. But that proves nothing. You know how difficult it bees for us Slanduch to keep our speech entirely regular."

"I know." Suddenly a broad grin spread across the Stapper's face and humanized it. "I have finded this Farthing speech hellishly difficult myself."

"You mean you, too, be Slanduch?"

The Stapper shook his head. "I, too, Brent, be traveler."

Brent was not falling for any such trap. "Ridiculous! How canned traveler be Stapper?"

"How canned traveler be Slanduch envoy? I, too, traveled naked, and man whose clothes and identification I stoleed beed Stapper. I have finded his identity most useful."

"I don't believe you."

"You be stubborn, Brent. How to prove—" He gestured at his face. "Look at my skin. In my century facial hair haves disappeared; we have breded away from it. Where in this time could you find skin like that?"

"A sport. Freak of chromosomes."

The black eyes grew even larger and more glowing. "Brent, you must believe me. This bees no trap for you. I need you. You and I, we can do great things. But how to convince you"—he

snapped his fingers. "I know!" He was still for a moment. The vast eyes remained opened but somehow veiled, as though secret calculations were going on behind them. His body shivered. For a moment of strange delusion Brent thought he could see the chair through the Stapper's body. Then it was real and solid again.

The Stapper's eyes resumed their light, and he looked about the room expectantly for a moment. "Delay," he muttered disappointedly. "But no matter. In a moment—"

"What bees this?"

"My name," said the Stapper, with the patience of a professor addressing a retarded class, "bees Bokor. I come from tenth century after consummation of terrestrial unity, which bees, I believe, forty-third reckoning from date of birth of Christian god. I have traveled, not with machine, but solely by use of Vunmurd formula, and, therefore, I alone of all travelers stranded here can still move. Hysteresis of Barrier arrests me, but can not destroy my formula as it shatters machines."

"Pretty story."

"I have sended myself back to Barrier again by formula, but trip from Barrier to now seems longer for me this time. I—" He broke off as the door opened. "Ah," he said. "Here I be!"

The Stapper in the doorway fixed Brent with his glowing black eyes and said, "Now do you believe that I be traveler?"

Brent gawped from one identical man to the other. The one in the doorway went on. "I need you."

"It isn't possible. It's a gag. You're twin Stappers, and you're trying to—"

Bokor in the chair said, "Do I have to do it again?"

Bokor-Sub-One in the doorway said, "I have hited Barrier twice. Therefore I exist twice in that one point of time. Therefore each of those two continues into present."

Brent said, "You may both be Stappers. You may turn out to be a whole damned regiment of identical multiple births. I don't give a damn; I want some bond. How about you boys?"

The two Bokors downed their drinks and frowned. "Weak," they said.

Brent shook his head feebly. "All right. We'll skip that. Now what the sweet hell do you need me for?"

Bokor closed his eyes and seemed to doze. Bokor-Sub-One said, "You have plans to liberate travelers and overthrow Stasis. As Stapper I have learned much. I worked on changing mind of one of your Underground friends."

"And you want to throw your weight in with us? Good, we can use a Stapper. Or two. But won't the Chief of Stappers be bothered when he

finds he has two copies of one man?"

"He will never need to see more than one. Yes, I want to help you—up to a point. We will free travelers. But you be innocent, Brent. We will not overthrow Stasis. We will maintain it—as ours."

Brent frowned. "I'm not sure I get you. And I don't think I like it if I do."

"Do not be fool, Brent. We have opportunity never before gived to man, we travelers. We come into world where already exists complete and absolute State control, but used stupidly and to no end. Among us all we have great knowledge and power. We be seed sowed upon fallow ground. We can spring up and engulf all about us." The eyes glowed with black intensity. "We take this Stasis and mold it to our own wishes. These dolts who now be slaves of Cosmos will be slaves of us. Stapper, whose identity I have, bees third in succession to Chief of Stappers. Chief and other two will be killed accidentally in revolt of travelers. With power of all Stappers behind me, I make you Head of State. Between us we control this State absolutely."

"Nuts," Brent snorted. "The State's got too damned much control already. What this world needs is a return to human freedom and striving."

"Innocent," Bokor-Sub-One repeated scornfully. "Who gives damn what world needs? Only needs which concern man be his own, and his strongest need bees always for power. Here it bees gived us. Other States be stupid and self-complacent like this. We know secrets of many weapons, we travelers. We turn our useless scholastic laboratories over to their production. Then we attack other States and subject them to us as vassals. And then the world itself bees ours, and all its riches. Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon, Hitler, Gospodinov, Tirazhul—never in its past or future haves world knowed nor will it know conquerors like us."

"You can go to hell," said Brent lightly but firmly. "All two of you."

"Do not be too clever, my friend. Remember that I be Stapper and can—"

"You be two Stappers, which may turn out to be a little awkward. But you could be a regiment of Stappers, and I still wouldn't play ball. Your plan stinks, Bokor, and you know what you can do with it."

Bokor-Sub-One took the idiom literally. "Indeed I do know, Brent. It willed have bees easier with your aid, but even without you it will succeed." He drew out his rod and contemplated it reflectively. "No," he murmured, "there bees no point to taking you in and changing your mind. You be harmless to me, and your liberation of travelers will be useful."

The original Bokor opened his eyes. "We will

meet again, Brent. And you will see what one man with daring mind can accomplish in this world." Bokor and Bokor-Sub-One walked to the door and turned. "And for bond," they spoke in unison, in parody of the conventional Stapper's phrase, "State thanks you."

Brent stood alone in the room, but the black-eyed domination of the two Bokors lingered about him. The plan was so damned plausible, so likely to succeed if put into operation. Man has always dreamed of power. But damn it, man has always dreamed of love, too, and of the rights of his fellow man. The only power worthy of man is the power of all mankind struggling together toward a goal of unobtainable perfection.

And what could Bokor do against Kruj and Mimi and Nikobat and the dozens of others that Kruj reported sympathetic?

Nevertheless there had been a certainty in those vast glowing eyes that the duple Bokor knew just what he could do.

The release of the travelers was a fabulous episode. Stephen had frowned and Brent had laughed when Martha said simply, "Only person who has power to release them bees Head of State by will of Cosmos. Very well. We will persuade him to do so." But she insisted, and she had been so uncannily right ever since the explosion of the second Barrier that at last, when Kruj had made his final report, Brent accompanied her on what he was certain was the damndest fool errand he'd got himself into yet.

Kruj's report was encouraging. There were two, perhaps three among the travelers who had Bokorian ideas of taking over the State for their own purposes. But these were far outweighed by the dozens who saw the tremendous possibilities of a reawakening of mankind. The liberation was proved a desirable thing; but why should the Head of State so readily loose these disrupters upon his Stasia?

Getting to see the Head of State took the best part of a day. There were countless minor officials to be interviewed, all of them guarded by Stappers who looked upon the supposed Slanduch envoy with highly suspicious eyes. But one by one, with miraculous consistency, these officials beamed upon Brent's errand and sent him on with the blessing of Cosmos.

"You wouldn't like to pinch me?" he murmured to Martha after the fifth such success. "This works too easy. It can't be true."

Martha looked at him blankly and said, "I don't understand it. But what be we doing here? What be we going to say?"

Brent jumped. "Hey! Look, madam. This was all your idea to start with. You were going to talk the Head of State into— And now you say, 'What be we going to say?' If you don't—"

But a Stapper was already approaching to conduct them to the next office, and Brent fell silent.

It was in the anteroom of the Head of State that they met Bokor. Just one of him this time. He smiled confidentially at Brent and said, "Shocking accident today. Stapper beed killed in fight with prisoner who beed to have his mind changed. Odd thing—Stapper beed second in succession to Chief of Stappers."

"You're doing all right," said Brent.

"I be curious to see what you plan here. How do you hope to achieve this liberation? I talked with Head of State yesterday and he bees strongly opposed."

"Brother," said Brent sincerely, "I wish to Cosmos I knew."

In a moment Bokor ushered them into the sanctum sanctorum of the Head of State. This great dignitary was at first glance a fine figure of a man, tall and well built and noble. It was only on second glance that you noticed the weak lips and the horribly empty eyes. The stern and hawk-nosed Chief of Stappers stood beside him.

"Well!" the latter snapped. "Speak your piece!"

Brent faltered and glanced at Martha. She looked as vacant and helpless as ever she had before the Barrier. He could only fumble on and pray that her unrevealed scheme would materialize.

"As you know, sir," he began, "I, as interpreter, have beed in very close contact with travelers. Having in my mind good of Cosmos and wishing to see it as rich and fully developed as possible, it seems to me that much may be accomplished by releasing travelers so that they may communicate with people." He gulped and swore at himself for venturing such an idiotic request.

The empty eyes of the Head of State lit up for a moment. "Excellent idea," he boomed in a dulcet voice. "You have permission of State and Cosmos. Chief, I give orders that all travelers be released."

Brent heard Bokor's incredulous gasp behind him. The Chief of Stappers muttered "Cosmos!" fervently. The Head of State looked around him for approval and then reverted to formal vacancy.

"I thank State," Brent managed to say, "for this courageous move."

"What bees courageous?" the Head demanded. His eyes shifted about nervously. "What have I doed? What have I sayed?"

The Chief of Stappers bowed. "You have proclaimed freedom of travelers. May I, too, congratulate you on wisdom of action?" He turned to Bokor. "Go and give necessary orders."

Brent saw the dazed faces of Bokor and Martha and wondered if his own looked quite so ridiculously incredulous. That the Head of State and the Chief of Stappers should sanction a policy

that any dolt could see must inevitably be fatal to the Stasis of Cosmos— It was mad. It was a dream. But it was certainly a damned agreeable one.

Martha did not say a word till they were outside on the moving sidewalk again. Then she asked, "What happened? Why in Cosmos' name does he consent?"

"Madam, you have me there. But you should know. It was all your idea."

Understanding came back to her face. "Of course. It bees time now that you know all about me. But wait till we be back in apartment. Stephen saves right to know this, too. And Martha," she added.

That oral postscript was too much for Brent. When you begin talking of yourself as a third party—

"Come on home, madam," he said. "You'll feel better."

They had left Bokor behind them in the sanctuary, and they met Bokor outside the building. That did not worry Brent, but he was admittedly perturbed when he passed a small group of people just off the sidewalk and noticed that its core was a third Bokor. He pulled Martha off the moving path and drew near the group.

Bokor was not being a Stapper this time. He was in ordinary iridescent robes. "I tell you I know," he was insisting vigorously. "I am . . . I be Slanduch from State of South America, and I can tell you deviltry they be practicing there. Armament factories twice size of laboratories of Cosmos. Bees this for nothing? They plan to destroy us; I know."

A Stapper shoved his way past Brent. "Here now!" he growled. "What bees going on here?"

Bokor hesitated. "Nothing, sir. I was only—"

"Was, huh?"

"Pardon, sir. *Beed*. I be Slanduch, you see, and—"

One of the men in the crowd interrupted. "He beed telling us what all State needs to know—plans of State of South America to invade and destroy us."

"Hm-m-m!" the Stapper ejaculated. "You be right, man. That sounds like something we all need to know. Go on, you."

Bokor resumed his rumor mongering, and the Stapper lent it official endorsement by his listening silence. Brent moved to get a glimpse of the Stapper's face. His guess was right. It was another Bokor.

This significant byplay had delayed them enough so that Brent's three travelers had reached the apartment before them. When they arrived, Stephen was deep in a philosophical discussion with the Venusian of the tragic nobility

of human nature, while Kruij and Mimi were experimenting with bond. Their respective civilizations could not have been markedly alcoholic; Kruij had reached the stage of sweeping and impassioned gestures, while Mimi beamed at him and interposed an occasional irrelevant giggle.

All three had discarded the standardized robes of the Stasis and resumed, in this friendly privacy, the clothes in which they had arrived—Kruij a curiously simplified and perverted version of the ruffled court costume of the Elizabethan era he had hoped to reach, Mimi, the startling armor of an unfamiliar metal which was her uniform as Amazon warrior, and Nikobat a simple bronze-colored loincloth against which his green skin assumed a certain strange beauty.

Brent introduced Martha's guests to their hosts and went on, "Now for a staff meeting of G. H. Q. We've got to lay our plans carefully, because I warn you we're up against some stiff opposition. There's one other traveler who—"

"One moment," said Martha's voice. "Shouldn't you introduce me, too?"

"I beg your pardon, madam. I just finished that task of courtesy. And now—"

"I be sorry," her voice went on. "You still do not understand. You introduced Martha, yes; but not me."

Stephen turned to the travelers. "I must apologize for my sister. She has gone through queer experiences of late. She traveled with our friend John and metted herself in her earlier life. I fear that shock has temporarily—and temporarily—unbalanced her."

"Can none of you understand so simple thing?" the woman's voice pleaded. "I be simply using Martha's voice as instrument of communication. I can just as easily—"

"Steeth!" Kruij exclaimed. "'Tis eke as easy and mayhap more pleasant to borrow this traveler's voice from mine explications."

"Or," Mimi added, "I cou taw li thih, but I do' like ih vey muh."

Stephen's eyes popped. "You mean that you be traveler without body?"

"Got it in one," Brent heard his own voice saying. "I can wander about any way I damned please. I picked the woman first because her nearly empty mind was easy to occupy, and I think I'll go on using her. Brent here's a little hard to keep under control."

Stephen nodded. "Then all good advice Martha has beed giving us—"

"Bees mine, of course." The bodiless traveler was back in Martha now.

Brent gasped. "And now I see how you wangled the release of the travelers. You got us in by usurping the mind and speech of each of the minor officials we tackled, and then ousted the Head

of State and Chief of Stappers to make them give their consent."

Martha nodded. "Exactly."

"This is going to be damned useful. And where do you come from, sir? Or is it madam?"

"I come from future so far distant that even our Venusian friend here cannot conceive of it. And distinction between *sir* and *madam* bees then meaningless."

The dapper Krug glanced at the hulking Amazon beside him. "Twere pity," he murmured.

"And your intentions here, to go on with the State linguist's questionnaire?"

"My intentions? Listen, all of you. We cannot shape ends. Great patterns be shaped outside of us and beyond us. I beed historian in my time. I know patterns of mankind even down to minute details. And I know that Stephen here bees to lead people of this Age of Smugness out of their stupidity and back to humanity.

Stephen coughed embarrassedly. "I have no wish to lead. But for such cause man must do what he may."

"That bees ultimate end of this section of pattern. That bees fixed. All that we travelers can do bees to aid him as wisely as we can and to make the details of the pattern as pleasingly beautiful as may be. And that we will do."

Stephen must have been so absorbed in this speech that his hearing was dulled. The door opened without warning, and Bokor entered.

"Swounds!" Krug cried out. "A Stapper!"

Stephen smiled. "Why fear Stappers? You be legally liberated."

"Stapper, hell!" Brent snorted. "Well, Bokor? You still want to declare yourself in with your racket?"

Bokor's deep eyes swept the room. He smiled faintly. "I merely wished to show you something, Brent. So that you know what you be up against. I have finded two young scientists dissatisfied with scholastic routine of research for Cosmos. Now they work under my instructions, and they have maked for me—this." He held a bare rod in his hand.

"So it's a rod. So what next?"

"But it bees different rod, Brent. It does not paralyze. It destroys." The point of the rod wavered and covered in turn each individual in the room. "I want you to see what I can accomplish."

"You suvvabih!" Mimi yelled and started to rise. Krug restrained her.

"State thanks you, madam, for making up my mind. I will demonstrate on you. Watch this, Brent, and realize what chance you have against me." He pointed the rod firmly at Mimi.

"Do something!" Martha screamed.

It all happened at once, but Brent seemed to see it in slow motion even as he moved. Mimi

lunged forward furiously and recklessly. Krug dived for her feet and brought her to the floor out of the line of fire. At the same time Brent threw himself forward just as Bokor moved, so that the rod now pointed directly at Brent. He couldn't arrest his momentum. He was headed straight at Bokor's new instrument of death. And then the rod moved to Bokor's own head.

There was no noise, no flash. But Bokor's body was lying on the floor, and the head was nowhere.

"That beed hard," said Martha's voice. "I have to stay in his mind long enough to actuate rod, but get out before death. Matter of fractions of seconds."

"Nice work, sir-madam," Brent grunted. He looked down at the headless corpse. "But that was only one of him."

Brent quoted in his journal: *Love, but a day, and the world has changed! A week, to be more exact, but the change is nonetheless sudden and impressive.*

*Our nameless visitant from the future—they seem to need titles as little as sexes in that time—whom I have for convenience labeled Sirdam, has organized our plans about the central idea of interfering as little as possible—forcing the inhabitants of the Stasis to work out their own salvation. The travelers do not appear openly in this great change. We work through Stephen's associates.*

*The best single example to show the results we obtain is the episode of Professor Harrington, whose special department of so-called learning is the preservation of the Nakamura Law of Spatial Acceleration, which had so conclusively proved to the founders of the Stasis the impossibility of interplanetary travel.*

*This fell obviously within Nikobat's field. A young scientist affiliated with the Underground—a nephew, I have since learned, of Alex's—expounded the Nakamura doctrine as he had learned and re-proved it. It took the Venusian less than five minutes to put his finger on the basic flaw in the statement—the absolute omission, in all calculations, of any consideration of galactic drift. Once this correction was applied to the Nakamura formulas, they stood revealed as the pure nonsense which, indeed, Nikobat's very presence proved them.*

*It was not Nikobat but the young man who placed this evidence before Professor Harrington. The scene must have been classic. "I saw," the young man later told us—they are all trying desperately to unlearn Farthing-ized English—"his mouth fall open and gap spread across his face as wide as gap he suddenly finded in universe—the universe."*



For the professor was not stupid. He was simply so conditioned from childhood to the acceptance of the Stasis of Cosmos that he had never questioned it. Besides, he had doubtless had friends whose minds were changed when they speculated too far.

Harrington's eyes lit up after the first shock. He grabbed pencil and paper and furiously checked through the revised equations again and again. He then called in a half dozen of his best students and set them to what was apparently a routine exercise—interpolating variations for galactic drift in the Nakamura formulas.

They ended as astonished as their instructor. The first one done stared incredulously at his results and gasped, "Nakamura beed wrong!"

One of them, horrified, destroyed his calculations, saying, "This bees against Stasis."

The professor smiled. "Not against, my boy. It bees beyond Cosmos."

That was typical. The sheep are ready to be roused, each in his individual way. Kruij has been training men to associate with the writers of the Stasis. The man's knowledge of literature of all periods, and especially of his beloved Elizabethan Age, is phenomenal and his memory something superhuman. And four writers out of five who hear his disciples discourse on the joys of creative language and quote from the Elizabethan dramatists and the King James Bible will never be content again to write Stasis propaganda for the sollies or the identically bound books of the State libraries.

I have myself been contributing a fair amount to the seduction of the world by teaching cooks. I was never in my own time acknowledged as better than a fair-to-middling nonprofessional, but here I might be Escoffier or Brillat-Savarin. We steal plants and animals from the scientific laboratories, and in our hands they become vegetables and meat; and many a man in the street, who doesn't give a damn if his science is false and his arts synthetic, has suddenly realized that he owes the State a grudge for feeding him on concentrates.

The focus of everything is Stephen. It's hard to analyze why. Each of us travelers has found among the Undergrounders someone far more able in his own special field, yet all of us, travelers and Undergrounders alike, unquestioningly acknowledge Stephen as our leader. It may be the sheer quiet kindness and goodness of his nature. It may be that he and Alex, in their organization of this undercover group of instinctive rebels, were the first openly to admit that the Stasis was inhuman and to do something about it. But from whatever cause, we all come to depend more and more on the calm reliability of Stephen.

Nikobat says—

Brent broke off as Kruij Kruijl Kruijlar staggered into the room. The little man was no longer dapper. His robes were tattered, and their iridescence was overlaid with the solid red of blood.

He panted his first words in his own tongue, then recovered himself. "We must act apace, John. Where is Stephen?"

"At Underground quarters, I think. But what's happened?"

"I was nearing the building where they do house us travelers when I beheld hundreds of people coming along the street. Some wore our robes, some wore Stappers'. And they all—" He shuddered. "They all had the same face—a brown hairless face with black eyes."

Brent was on his feet. "Bokori!" The man had multiplied himself into a regiment. One man who was hundreds—why not thousands? millions?—could indeed be such a conqueror as the world had never known. "What happened?"

"They entered the building. I knew that I could do nothing there, and came to find you and Stephen and the bodiless one. But as I came along the street, lo! on every corner there was yet another of that face, and always urging the people to maintain the Stasis and destroy the travelers. I was recognized. By good hap those who set upon me had no rods, but 'sbody! 'Twas a close thing that I escaped with my life."

Brent thought quickly. "Martha is with Stephen, so Sirdam is probably there, too. Go to him at once and warn him. I'm going to the travelers' building and see what's happened. Meet you at the headquarters as soon as I can."

Kruij hesitated. "Mimi—"

"I'll bring her with me if I can. Get going."

The streets were mad. Wild throngs jammed the moving roadways. Somewhere in the distance mountaintainous flames leaped up and their furious glitter gleamed back from the eyes of the mob.

And those were not the deeply glowing black eyes of multitudinous Bokors. These were the ordinary citizens of the Stasis, no longer cattle, or rather cattle stampeded and raging.

A voice blared seemingly out of the heavens. Brent recognized the public address system used for vital State messages. "Revolt of travelers haves spreaded to amphitheater of Cosmos. Flames lighted by travelers now attack sacred spot. People of Cosmos: Destroy travelers!"

"The Reichstag fire!" Brent muttered. "Technique doesn't change much—" If only he could avoid running into a Bokor. There was nothing to mark him superficially as a traveler. He pushed along with the mob, shouting as rabidly as any other. He could make no headway. He was borne along on these foaming human waves.

Then in front of him he saw three Bokors pushing against the mob. If they spied him—His hands groped along the wall. Just as a Bokor looked his way, he found what he was seeking—one of the spying niches of the Stappers. He slipped into the false wall in safety.

He peered out cautiously for a moment to escape. From the next door he saw a man emerge whom he knew by sight—a leading dramatist of the sollies, who had promised to be an eventual convert of Kruj's disciples. Three citizens of the mob halted him as he stepped forth.

"What bees your name?"

"Where be you going?"

"When do you come from?"

"Answer every man directly."

The solly writer hesitated. "I be going to amphitheater. Speaker have sayed—"

"When do you come from?"

"Why, from now."

"What bees your name?"

"John—"

"Ha!" the first citizen yelled. "Stappers have telled us to find this John. Tear him to pieces; he bees traveler."

"No, truly. I be no traveler; I be writer of sollies. I be of now."

One of the citizens chortled cruelly. "Tear him for his bad sollies!"

There was one long scream—

The smugness of the Stasis had been inhuman. Stephen and the travelers had sought to make the citizens human again in the noblest traditions of man's striving. But there was another manner of being human, and Bokor had found and roused it.

Fire breeds fire, literally as well as metaphorically. The dwelling of the travelers was ablaze when Brent reached it. A joyous mob cheered and gloated before it.

Brent started to push his way through, but a hand touched his arm and a familiar voice whispered, "Achtung! Ou vkhodit."

He interpreted the warning and let the Venusian draw him aside. Nikobat rapidly explained in Brent's own speech.

"The Stappers came and subdued the whole crowd with paralyzing rods. They took them away—God knows what they'll do with them. There's no one in there now; the fire's just a gesture." The red flames glittered on the green skin.

"But you— How did you—"

"My nerve centers don't react the same. I lay doggo and got away. Mimi escaped, too; her armor has deflecting power. I think she's gone to warn the Underground."

"Then come on."

"Don't stay too close to me," Nikobat warned. "They'll recognize me as a traveler; stay out of range of rods aimed at me. And here. I took these from a Stapper I strangled. This one is a paralyzing rod; the other's an annihilator."

The next half-hour was a nightmare—a montage of flames and blood and sweating bodies of hate. The Stasis of Stupidity was becoming a Stasis of Cruelty. For a moment Brent wondered if he could find where the Stappers had taken his machine. That Derringer model was the only machine unshattered—the only one that, though still helpless against the Barrier, could at least take him forward to what might be a better world—Kruj's esthetic paradise or even Mimi's matriarchy. But he thought of Stephen and Martha, and he pushed on toward the Underground headquarters.

Twice groups of citizens stopped him. They were unarmed; Bokor wisely kept weapons to himself, knowing that the fangs and claws of an enraged mob are enough. The first group Brent left paralyzed. The second time he confused his weapons. He had not meant to kill, but he could not regret it.

He did not confuse his weapons when he bagged a brace of Bokors. But what did the destruction of two matter? He fought his way on, finally catching up with Nikobat at their goal. As they met, the voice boomed once more from the air. "Important! New Chief of Stappers announces that offices of Chief of Stappers and Head of State be henceforth maked one. Under new control, travelers will be wiped out and Stasis preserved. Then on to South America for glory of Cosmos!"

Brent shuddered. "And we started out so beautifully on our renaissance!"

Nikobat shook his head. "But the bodiless traveler said that Stephen was to destroy the Stasis. This multiple villain cannot change what has happened."

"Can't he? We're taking no chances."

The headquarters of the Underground was inappositely in a loft. The situation helped. The trap entrance was unnoticeable from below and had gone unheeded by the mobs. Brent delivered the proper raps, and the trap slid open and dropped a ladder. Quickly he and the Venusian mounted.

The loft was a sick bay. A half-dozen wounded members of Stephen's group lay groaning on the floor. With them was Krui. Somewhere the little man had evaded the direct line of an annihilator, but lost his hand. Blood was seeping out of his bandages, and Mimi, surprisingly feminine and un-Amazonic, held his unconscious head in her lap.

"You don't seem to need warning," Brent observed tersely.

Stephen shook his head sadly. "We be trapped here. Here we be safe for at littlest small while. If we go out—"

Brent handed him his rods. "You're the man we've got to save, Stephen. You know what Sirdam's said—it all depends on you. Use these to protect yourself, and we'll make a dash for it. If we can lose ourselves in the mob as ordinary citizens, there's a chance of getting away with it. "Or"—he turned to Martha-Sirdam—"have you any ideas?"

"Yes. But only as latest resort."

Nikobat was peering out the window. "It's the last resort now," he said. "There's a good fifty of those identical Stappers outside, and they're headed here. They act as though they know what this is."

Brent was looking at Stephen, and he saw a strange thing. Stephen's face was expressionless, but somewhere behind his eyes Brent seemed to sense a struggle. Stephen's body trembled with an effort of will, and then his eyes were clear again. "No," he said distinctly. "You do not need to control me. I understand. You be right. I will do as you say." And he lifted the annihilator rod.

Brent started forward, but his muscles did not respond to his commands. Force his will though he might, he stood still. It was the bodiless traveler who held him, he realized, held him motionless to watch Stephen place the rod to his temple.

"This bees goodest thing that I can do for mans," said Stephen simply. Then his headless corpse thumped on the floor.

Brent was released. He dashed forward, but vainly. There was nothing men could do for Stephen now. Brent let out a choking gasp of pain and sorrow.

Then the astonished cries of the Undergrounders recalled him from his friend's body. He looked about him. Where was Nikobat? Where were Krug and Mimi?

A small inkling of the truth began to reach him. He hurried to the window and looked out.

There were no Bokors before the house. Only a few citizens staring dazedly at a wide space of emptiness.

At that moment the loud-speaker sounded. "Announcement," a shocked voice trembled. "Chief of Stappers has just disappeared." And in a moment it added, "Guards report all travelers have vanished."

The citizens before the house were rubbing their eyes like men coming out of a nightmare.

"But don't you see, madam— No? Well, let me try again." Brent was not finding it easy to explain her brother's heroic death to an untenanted Martha. "Remember what your inhabitant told us? The Stasis was overthrown by Stephen."

"But Stephen bees dead."

"Exactly. So listen: All these travelers came from a future wherein Stephen had overthrown the Stasis. So that when Stephen destroyed himself, as Sirdam realized, he likewise destroyed that future. A world in which Stephen died unsuccessful is a world that cannot be entered by anyone from the other future. Their worlds vanished and they with them. It was the only way of abolishing the menace of the incredibly multiplied Bokor."

"Stephen bees dead. He cans not overthrow Stasis now."

"My dear madam— Hell, skip it. But the Stasis is damned nonetheless in this new world created by Stephen's death. I've been doing a little galping on my own. The people are convinced now that the many exemplars of Bokor were some kind of evil invader. They rebound easy, the hordes; they dread the memory of those men and they dread also the ideas of cruelty and conquest to which the Bokors had so nearly converted them.

"But one thing they can't rebound from is the doubts and the new awarenesses that we planted in their minds. And there's what's left of your movement to go on with. No, the Stasis is damned, even if they are going to erect yet another Barrier."

"Oh," Martha shuddered. "You willn't let them do that, will you?"

Brent grinned. "Madam, there's damned little letting I can do. They're going to, and that's that. Because, you see, all the travelers vanished."

"But why—"

Brent shrugged and gave up. "Join me in some bond?" It was clear enough. The point of time which the second Barrier blocked existed both in the past of the worlds of Nikobat and Sirdam, and in the past of this future they were now entering. But no travelers had come from this future. Therefore there must be a Barrier yet ahead of them.

Would the Stasis by then be dissolved into a normal human society? Would man have cast aside his purse-proud garment of smugness and become his struggling, striving, failing, ridiculous, noble self? And the travelers from this coming future—would they be Sirdams to counsel and guide man, or Bokors to corrupt and debase him?

Brent lifted his glass of bond. "To the moment after the next Barrier!" he said.