

FANTASTIC

STORIES OF IMAGINATION

JULY 1961
Volume 10 Number 7

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

Publisher
MICHAEL MICHAELSON

Editorial Director
NORMAN M. LOBSENZ

Editor
CELE GOLDSMITH



NOVELET

THE CREATOR
By Clifford D. Simak 6

SHORT STORIES

THE FOREST OF UNREASON
By Robert F. Young 32

NO HARM DONE
By Jack Sharkey 47

THE GOGGLES OF DR. DRAGONET
By Fritz Leiber 96

SOLOMON'S DEMON
By Arthur Porges 115

SERIAL

SECOND ENDING
By James White 52
(Conclusion)

FEATURES

EDITORIAL 8
ACCORDING TO YOU 126
COMING NEXT MONTH 46

Cover: Vernon Kramer



ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY, One Park Avenue, New York 16, New York. William Ziff, President; W. Bradford Briggs, Executive Vice President; Michael Michaelson, Vice President and Circulation Director; Hershel B. Sarbin, Vice President and General Manager; M. T. Birmingham, Jr., Vice President and Business Manager; Charles Housman, Financial Vice President; Richard Kislik, Treasurer.



Copyright © 1961 by Ziff-Davis Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

The CREATOR

By CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

Illustrator ADKINS





FOREWORD

THIS is written in the elder days as the Earth rides close to the rim of eternity, edging nearer to the dying Sun, into which her two inner companions of the solar system have already plunged to a fiery death. The

Twilight of the Gods is history; and our planet drifts on and on into that oblivion from which nothing escapes, to which time itself may be dedicated in the final cosmic reckoning.

Old Earth, pacing her death march down the corridors of the heavens, turns more slowly upon her axis. Her days have lengthened as she crawls sadly to her tomb, shrouded only in the shreds of her former atmosphere. Because her air has thinned, her sky has lost its cheerful blue depths and she is arched with a dreary grey, which hovers close to the surface, as if the horrors of outer space were pressing close, like ravening wolves, upon the flanks of this ancient monarch of the heavens. When night creeps upon her, stranger stars blaze out like a ring of savage eyes closing in upon a dying campfire.

Earth must mourn her passing, for she has stripped herself of all her gaudy finery and proud trappings. Upon her illimitable deserts and twisted ranges she has set up strange land sculptures. And these must be temples and altars before which she, not forgetting the powers of good and evil throughout the cosmos, prays in her last hours, like a dying man returning to his old faith. Mournful breezes play a hymn of futility across her barren reaches of

sand and rocky ledges. The waters of the empty oceans beat out upon the treeless, bleak and age-worn coast a march that is the last brave gesture of an ancient planet which has served its purpose and treads the path to Nirvana.

Little half-men and women, final survivors of a great race, which they remember only through legends handed down from father to son, burrow gnome-like in the bowels of the planet which has mothered their seed from dim days when the thing which was destined to rule over all his fellow creatures crawled in the slime of primal seas. A tired race, they wait for the day legend tells them will come, when the sun blazes anew in the sky and grass grows green upon the barren deserts once again. But I know this day will never come, although I would not disillusion them. I know their legends lie, but why should I destroy the only solid thing they have left to round out their colorless life with the everlasting phenomena of hope?

For this little folks have been kind to me and there is a blood-bond between us that even the passing of a million years cannot erase. They think me a god, a messenger that the day they have awaited so long is near. I regret in time to come they must know me as a false prophet.

There is no point in writing these words. My little friends ask me what I do and why I do it and do not seem to understand when I explain. They do not comprehend my purpose in making quaint marks and signs upon the well-tanned pelts of the little rodents which over-run their burrows. All they understand is that when I have finished my labor they must take the skins and treasure them as a sacred trust I have left in their hands.

I have no hope the things I record will ever be read. I write my experiences in the same spirit and with the same bewildered purpose which must have characterized the first ancestor who chipped a runic message upon a stone.

I realize that I write the last manuscript. Earth's proud cities have fallen into mounds of dust. The roads that once crossed her surface have disappeared without a trace. No wheels turn, no engines drone. The last tribe of the human race crouches in its caves, watching for the day that will never come.

FIRST EXPERIMENTS

THERE may be some who would claim that Scott Marston and I have blasphemed, that we probed too deeply into mysteries where we had no right.

But be that as it may, I do not regret what we did and I am

certain that Scott Marston, wherever he may be, feels as I do, without regrets.

We began our friendship at a little college in California. We were naturally drawn together by the similitude of our life, the affinity of our natures. Although our lines of study were widely separated, he majored in science and I in psychology, we both pursued our education for the pure love of learning rather than with a thought of what education might do toward earning a living.

We eschewed the society of the campus, engaging in none of the frivolities of the student body. We spent happy hours in the library and study hall. Our discussions were ponderous and untouched by thought of the college life which flowed about us in all its colorful pageantry.

In our last two years we roomed together. As we were poor, our quarters were shabby, but this never occurred to us. Our entire life was embraced in our studies. We were fired with the true spirit of research.

Inevitably, we finally narrowed our research down to definite lines. Scott, intrigued by the enigma of time, devoted more and more of his leisure moments to the study of that inscrutable element. He found that very little was known of it, beyond the perplexing equations set up by equally perplexed savants.

I wandered into as remote paths, the study of psychophysics and hypnology. I followed my research in hypnology until I came to the point where the mass of facts I had accumulated trapped me in a jungle of various diametrically opposed conclusions, many of which verged upon the occult.

It was at the insistence of my friend that I finally sought a solution in the material rather than the psychic world. He argued that if I were to make any real progress I must follow the dictate of pure, cold science rather than the elusive will-o-wisp of an unproven shadow existence.

At length, having completed our required education, we were offered positions as instructors, he in physics and I in psychology. We eagerly accepted, as neither of us had any wish to change the routine of our lives.

Our new status in life changed our mode of living not at all. We continued to dwell in our shabby quarters, we ate at the same restaurant, we had our nightly discussions. The fact that we were no longer students in the generally accepted term of the word made no iota of difference to our research and study.

It was in the second year after we had been appointed instructors that I finally stumbled upon

my "consciousness unit" theory. Gradually I worked it out with the enthusiastic moral support of my friend who rendered me what assistance he could.

The theory was beautiful in simplicity. It was based upon the hypothesis that a dream is an expression of one's consciousness, that it is one's second self going forth to adventure and travel. When the physical being is at rest the consciousness is released and can travel and adventure at will within certain limits.

I went one step further, however. I assumed that the consciousness actually does travel, that certain infinitesimal parts of one's brain do actually escape to visit the strange places and encounter the odd events of which one dreams.

This was taking dreams out of the psychic world to which they had formerly been regulated and placing them on a solid scientific basis.

I speak of my theory as a "consciousness unit" theory. Scott and I spoke of the units as "consciousness cells," although we were aware they could not possibly be cells. I thought of them as highly specialized electrons, despite the fact that it appeared ridiculous to suspect electrons of specialization. Scott contended that a wave force, an intelligence wave, might be

nearer the truth. Which of us was correct was never determined, nor did it make any difference.

As may be suspected, I never definitely arrived at undeniable proof to sustain my theory, although later developments would seem to bear it out.

STRANGELY, it was Scott Marston who did the most to add whatever measure of weight I could ever attach to my hypothesis.

While I was devoting my time to the abstract study of dreams, Scott was continuing with his equally baffling study of time. He confided to me that he was well satisfied with the progress he was making. At times he explained to me what he was doing, but my natural inaptitude at figures made impossible an understanding of the formidable array of formulas which he spread out before me.

I accepted as a matter of course his statement that he had finally discovered a time force, which he claimed was identical with a fourth dimensional force. At first the force existed only in a jumble of equations, formulas and graphs on a litter of paper, but finally we pooled our total resources and under Scott's hand a machine took shape.

Finished, it crouched like a malign entity on the work table,

but it pulsed and hummed with a strange power that was of no earthly source.

"It is operating on time, pure time," declared Scott. "It is warping and distorting the time pattern, snatching power from the fourth dimension. Given a machine large enough, we could create a time-stress great enough to throw this world into a new plane created by the distortion of the time-field."

We shuddered as we gazed upon the humming mass of metal and realized the possibilities of our discovery. Perhaps for a moment we feared that we had probed too deeply into the mystery of an element that should have remained forever outside the providence of human knowledge.

The realization that he had only scratched the surface, however, drove Scott on to renewed efforts. He even begrudged the time taken by his work as instructor and there were weeks when we ate meager lunches in our rooms after spending all our available funds but a few pennies to buy some piece needed for the time-power machine.

Came the day when we placed a potted plant within a compartment in the machine. We turned on the mechanism and when we opened the door after a few minutes the plant was gone. The pot and earth within it was intact,

but the plant had vanished. Search of the pot revealed that not even a bit of root remained.

Where had the plant gone? Why did the pot and earth remain?

Scott declared the plant had been shunted into an outre dimension, lying between the lines of stress created in the time pattern by the action of the machine. He concluded that the newly discovered force acted more swiftly upon a live organism than upon an inanimate object.

We replaced the pot within the compartment, but after twenty-four hours it was still there. We were forced to conclude the force had no effect upon inanimate objects.

We found later that here we touched close to the truth, but had failed to grasp it in its entirety.

THE DREAM

A YEAR following the construction of the time-power machine, Scott came into an inheritance when a relative, whom he had almost forgotten but who apparently had not forgotten him, died. The inheritance was modest, but to Scott and I, who had lived from hand to mouth for years, it appeared large.

Scott resigned his position as instructor and insisted upon my doing the same in order that we

might devote our uninterrupted time to reasearch.

Scott immediately set about the construction of a larger machine, while I plunged with enthusiasm into certain experiments I had held in mind for some time.

It was not until then that we thought to link our endeavors. Our research had always seemed separated by too great a chasm to allow collaboration beyond the limited mutual aid of which we were both capable and which steadily diminished as our work progressed further and further, assuming greater and greater complications, demanding more and more specialization.

The idea occurred to me following repetition of a particularly vivid dream. In the dream I stood in a colossal laboratory, an unearthly laboratory, which seemed to stretch away on every hand for inconceivable distances. It was equipped with strange and unfamiliar apparatus and uncanny machines. On the first night the laboratory seemed unreal and filled with an unnatural mist, but on each subsequent occasion it became more and more real, until upon awakening I could reconstruct many of its details with surprising clarity. I even made a sketch of some of the apparatus for Scott and he agreed that I must have drawn it from the memory of my dream.

No man could have imagined unaided the sketches I spread upon paper for my friend.

Scott expressed an opinion that my research into hypnology had served to train my "consciousness units" to a point where they had become more specialized and were capable of retaining a more accurate memory of their wandering. I formulated a theory that my "consciousness units" had actually increased in number, which would account in a measure for the vividness of the dream.

"I wonder," I mused, "if your time-power would have any influence upon the units."

Scott hummed under his breath. "I wonder," he said.

The dream occurred at regular intervals. Had it not been for my absorption in my work, the dream might have become irksome, but I was elated, for I had found in myself a subject for investigation.

One night Scott brought forth a mechanism resembling the head phones of early radio sets, on which he had been working for weeks. He had not yet explained its purpose.

"Pete," he said, "I want you to move your cot near the table and put on this helmet. When you go to sleep I'll plug it in the time-power. If it has any effect upon consciousness units, this will demonstrate it."

He noticed my hesitation. "Don't be afraid," he urged. "I will watch beside you. If anything goes wrong, I'll jerk the plug and waken you."

So I put on the helmet and with Scott Marston sitting in a chair beside my cot, went to sleep.

THAT night I seemed to actually walk in the laboratory. I saw no one, but I examined the place from end to end. I distinctly remember handling strange tools, the use of which I could only vaguely speculate upon. Flanking the main laboratory were many archways, opening into smaller rooms, which I did not investigate. The architecture of the laboratory and the archways was unbelievably alien, a fact I had noticed before but had never examined in such minute detail.

I opened my eyes and saw the anxious face of Scott Marston above me.

"What happened, Pete?" he asked.

I grasped his arm.

"Scott, I was there. I actually walked in the laboratory. I picked up tools. I can see the place now, plainer than ever before."

I saw a wild light come into his eyes. He rose from the chair and stood towering above me as I propped myself up on my arms.

"Do you know what we've found, Pete! Do you realize that we can travel in time, that we can explore the future, investigate the past? We are not even bound to this sphere, this plane of existence. We can travel into the multi-dimensions. We can go back to the first flush of eternity and see the cosmos born out of the womb of nothingness! We can travel forward to the day when all that exists comes to an end in the ultimate dispersion of wasted energy, when even space may be wiped out of existence and nothing but frozen time remains!"

"Are you mad, Scott?"

His eyes gleamed.

"Not mad, Pete. Victorious! We can build a machine large enough, powerful enough, to turn every cell of our bodies into consciousness units. We can travel in body as well as in thought. We can live thousands of lifetimes, review billions of years. We can visit undreamed of planets, unknown ages. We hold time in our hands!"

He beat his clenched fists together.

"That plant we placed in the machine. My God, Pete, do you know what happened to it? What primordial memories did that plant hold? Where is it now? Is it in some swamp of the Carboniferous age? Has it returned to its ancestral era?"

YEARS passed, but we scarcely noticed their passing.

Our hair greyed slightly at the temples and the mantle of youth dropped slowly from us. No fame came to us, for our research had progressed to a point where it would have strained even the most credulous mind to believe what we could have unfolded.

Scott built his larger time-power machine, experimented with it, devised new improvements, discovered new details . . . and rebuilt it, not once, but many times. The ultimate machine, squatting like an alien god in our work shop, bore little resemblance to the original model.

On my part, I delved more deeply into my study of dreams, relentlessly pursuing my theory of consciousness units. My progress necessarily was slower than that of my friend as I was dealing almost entirely with the abstruse although I tried to make it as practical as possible, while Scott had a more practical and material basis for his investigations.

Of course, we soon decided to make the attempt to actually transfer our bodies into the laboratory of my dreams. That is, we proposed to transform all the electrons, all the elements of our bodies, into consciousness units through the use of the time-

power. A more daring scheme possibly had never been conceived by man.

In an attempt to impress upon my friend's mind a picture of the laboratory, I drew diagrams and pictures, visiting the laboratory many times, with the aid of the time-power, to gather more detailed data on the place.

It was not until I used hypnotism that I could finally transfer to Scott's mind a true picture of that massive room with its outre scientific equipment.

It was a day of high triumph when Scott, placed under the influence of the time-power, awoke to tell me of the place I had visited so often. It was not until then that we could be absolutely sure we had accomplished the first, and perhaps most difficult, step in our great experiment.

I plunged into a mad study of the psychology of the Oriental ascetic, who of all people was the furthest advanced in the matter of concentration, the science of will power, and the ability to subjugate the body to the mind.

Although my studies left much to be desired, they nevertheless pointed the way for us to consciously aid the time-power element in reducing our corporeal beings to the state of consciousness units necessary for our actual transportation to the huge laboratory with which we had both grown so familiar.

There were other places than the dream-laboratory, of course. Both of us, in our half-life imparted by the time-power, visited other strange places, the location of which in time and space we could not determine. We looked upon sights which would have blasted our mortal sanity had we gazed upon them in full consciousness. There were times when we awoke with blanched faces and told each other in ghastly, fear-ridden whispers of the horrors that dwelled in some unprobed dimension of the unplumbed depth of the cosmos. We stared at shambling, slithering things which we recognized as the descendants of entities, or perhaps the very entities, which were related in manuscripts written by ancient men versed in the blackest of sorcery—and still remembered in the hag-ridden tales of people in the hinterlands.

But it was upon the mysterious laboratory that we centered all our efforts. It had been our first real glimpse into the vast vista to which we had raised the veil and to it we remained true, regarding those other places as mere side excursions into the recondite world we had discovered.

IN THE CREATOR'S LABORATORY

AT LAST the day arrived when we were satisfied we had advanced sufficiently far in

our investigations and had perfected our technique to a point where we might safely attempt an actual excursion into the familiar, yet unknown, realm of the dream-laboratory.

The completed and improved time-power machine squatted before us like a hideous relic out of the forgotten days of an earlier age, its weird voice filling the entire house, rising and falling, half the time a scream, half the time a deep murmur. Its polished sides glistened evilly and the mirrors set about it at inconceivable angles in their relation to each other, caught the glare from the row of stepup tubes across the top, reflecting the light to bathe the entire creation in an unholy glow.

We stood before it, our hair tinged with grey, our faces marked by lines of premature age. We were young men grown old in the service of our ambition and vast curiosity.

After ten years we had created a thing that I now realize might have killed us both. But at that time we were superbly confident. Ten years of moulding metal and glass, harnessing and taming strange powers! Ten years of moulding brains, of concentrating and stepping up the sensitivity and strength of our consciousness until day and night, there lurked in the back

of our brains an image of that mysterious laboratory. As our consciousness direction had been gradually narrowed, the laboratory had become almost a second life to us.

Scott pressed a stud on the side of the machine and a door swung outward, revealing an interior compartment which yawned like a black maw. In that maw was no hint of the raw power and surging strength revealed by the exterior. Yet, to the uninitiate, it would have held a horrible threat of its own.

Scott stepped through the door into the pitch black interior; gently he lowered himself into the reclining seat, reaching out to place his hands on the power controls.

I slid in beside him and closed the door. As the last ray of light was shut out, absolute blackness enveloped us. We fitted power helmets on our heads. Terrific energy poured through us, beating through our bodies, seeming to tear us to pieces.

My friend stretched forth a groping hand. Fumbling in the darkness, I found it. Our hands closed in a fierce grip, the handshake of men about to venture into the unknown.

I fought for control of my thoughts, centered them, savagely upon the laboratory, recalling, with a super-effort every detail of its interior. Then

Scott must have shoved the power control full over. My body was pain-wracked, then seemed to sway with giddiness. I forgot my body. The laboratory seemed nearer, it seemed to flash up at me. I was falling toward it, falling rapidly. I was a detached thought speeding along a directional line, falling straight into the laboratory . . . and I was very ill.

My fall was suddenly broken, without jar or impact.

I was standing in the laboratory. I could feel the cold of the floor beneath my feet.

I glanced sidewise and there stood Scott Marston and my friend was stark naked. Of course, we would be naked. Our clothing would not be transported through the time-power machine.

"It didn't kill us," remarked Scott.

"Not even a scratch," I asserted.

We faced each other and shook hands, solemnly, for again we had triumphed and that handshake was a self-imposed congratulation.

WE TURNED back to the room before us. It was a colorful place. Vari-colored liquids reposed in gleaming containers. The furniture, queerly carved and constructed along lines alien to any earthly standard,

seemed to be of highly polished, iridescent wood. Through the windows poured a brilliant blue daylight. Great globes suspended from the ceiling further illuminated the building with a soft white glow.

A cone of light, a creamy white faintly tinged with pink, floated through an arched doorway and entered the room. We stared at it. It seemed to be light, yet was it light? It was not transparent and although it gave one the impression of intense brilliance, its color was so soft that it did not hurt one's eyes to look at it.

The cone, about ten feet in height, rested on its smaller end and advanced rapidly toward us. Its approach was silent. There was not even the remotest suggestion of sound in the entire room. It came to a rest a short distance in front of us and I had an uncanny sense that the thing was busily observing us.

"Who are you?"

The voice seemed to fill the room, yet there was no one there but Scott and I, and neither of us had spoken. We looked at one another in astonishment and then shifted our gaze to the cone of light, motionless, resting quietly before us.

"I am speaking," said the Voice and instantly each of us knew that the strange cone before us had voiced the words.

"I am not speaking," went on the Voice. "That was a misstatement. I am thinking. You hear my thoughts. I can as easily hear yours."

"Telepathy," I suggested.

"Your term is a strange one," replied the Voice, "but the mental image the term calls up tells me that you faintly understand the principle.

"I perceive from your thoughts that you are from a place which you call the Earth. I know where the Earth is located. I understand you are puzzled and discomforted by my appearance, my powers, and my general disresemblance to anything you have ever encountered. Do not be alarmed. I welcome you here. I understand you worked hard and well to arrive here and no harm will befall you."

"I am Scott Marston," said my friend, "and this man is Peter Sands."

The thoughts of the light-cone reached out to envelope us and there was a faint tinge of rebuke, a timbre of pity at what must have appeared to the thing as unwarranted egotism on our part.

"In this place there are no names. We are known by our personalities. However, as your mentality demands an identifying name, you may think of me as the Creator.

"And now, there are others I would have you see."

He sounded a call, a weird call which seemed to incorporate as equally a weird name.

There was a patter of feet on the floor and from an adjoining room ran three animal-like figures. Two were similar. They were pudgy of body, with thick, short legs which terminated in rounded pads that made sucking sounds as they ran. They had no arms, but from the center of their bulging chests sprang a tentacle, fashioned somewhat after the manner of an elephant's trunk, but with a number of small tentacles at its end. Their heads, rising to a peak from which grew a plume of gayly-colored feathers, sat upon their tapering shoulders without benefit of necks.

The third was an antithesis of the first two. He was tall and spindly, built on the lines of a walking stick insect. His gangling legs were three-jointed. His grotesquely long arms dangled almost to the floor. Looking at his body, I believed I could have encircled it with my two hands. His head was simply an oval ball set on top of the stick-like body. The creature more nearly resembled a man than the other two, but he was a caricature of a man, a comic offering from the pen of a sardonic cartoonist.

The Creator seemed to be addressing the three.

"Here," he said, "are some new arrivals. They came here, I gather, in much the same manner you did. They are great scientists, great as yourselves. You will be friends."

The Creator turned his attention to us.

"These beings which you see came here as you did and are my guests as you are my guests. They may appear outlandish to you. Rest assured that you appear just as queer to them. They are brothers of yours, neighbors of yours. They are from your _____."

I received the impression of gazing down on vast space, filled with swirling motes of light.

"He means our solar system," suggested Scott.

Carefully I built up in my mind a diagram of the solar system.

"No!" the denial crashed like an angry thunderbolt upon us. Again the image of unimaginable space and of thousands of points of light—of swirling nebulae, of solar systems, mighty double suns and island universes.

"He means the universe," said Scott.

"Certainly they came from our universe," I replied. "The universe is everything, isn't it—all existing things?"

Again the negative of the Creator burned its way into our brains.

"You are mistaken, Earthman. Your knowledge here counts as nothing. You are mere infants. But come; I will show you what your universe consists of."

— OUR UNIVERSE ?

STREAMERS of light writhed down from the cone toward us. As we shrank back they coiled about our waists and gently lifted us. Soothing thoughts flowed over us, instructions to commit ourselves unreservedly to the care of the Creator, to fear no harm. Under this reassurance, my fears quieted. I felt that I was under the protection of a benevolent being, that his great power and compassion would shield me in this strange world. A Creator, in very truth!

The Creator glided across the floor to set us on our feet on the top of a huge table, which stood about seven feet above the floor level.

On the table top, directly before me, I saw a thin oval receptacle, made of a substance resembling glass. It was about a foot across its greatest length and perhaps little more than half as wide and about four inches deep. The receptacle was filled with a sort of grayish substance, a mass of putty-like material. To

me it suggested nothing more than a mass of brain substance.

"There," said the Creator, pointing a light-streamer finger at the disgusting mass, "is your universe."

"What!" cried Scott.

"It is so," ponderously declared the Creator.

"Such a thing is impossible," firmly asserted Scott. "The universe is boundless. At one time it was believed that it was finite, that it was enclosed by the curvature of space. I am convinced, however, through my study of time, that the universe, composed of millions of overlapping and interlocking dimensions, can be nothing but eternal and infinite. I do not mean that there will not be a time when all matter will be destroyed, but I do maintain——"

"You are disrespectful and conceited," boomed the thought vibrations of the Creator. "That is your universe. I made it. I created it. And more. I created the life that teems within it. I was curious to learn what form that life would take, so I sent powerful thought vibrations into it, calling that life out. I had little hope that it had developed the necessary intelligence to find the road to my laboratory, but I find that at least five of the beings evolving from my created life possessed brains tuned finely enough to catch my vi-

brations and possessed sufficient intelligence to break out of their medium. You are two of these five. The other three you have just seen."

"You mean," said Scott, speaking softly, "that you created matter and then went further and created life?"

"I did."

I stared at the putty-like mass. The universe! Millions of galaxies composed of millions of suns and planets—all in that lump of matter!

"This is the greatest hoax I've ever seen," declared Scott, a deliberate note of scorn in his voice. "If that is the universe down there, how are we so big? I could step on that dish and break the universe all to smithereens. It doesn't fit."

THE light-finger of the Creator flicked out and seized my friend, wafting him high above the table. The Creator glowed with dull flashes of red and purple.

His thought vibrations filled the room to bursting with their power.

"Presumptuous one! You defy the Creator. You call his great work a lie! You, with your little knowledge! You, a specimen of the artificial life I created, would tell me, your very Creator, that I am wrong!"

I stood frozen, staring at my

friend, suspended above me at the end of the rigid light-streamer. I could see Scott's face. It was set and white, but there was no sign of fear upon it.

His voice came down to me, cold and mocking.

"A jealous god," he taunted.

The Creator set him down gently beside me. His thoughts came to us evenly, with no trace of his terrible anger of only a moment before.

"I am not jealous. I am above all your imperfect emotions. I have evolved to the highest type of life but one—pure thought. In time I will achieve that. I may grow impatient at times with your tiny brains, with your imperfect knowledge, with your egotism, but beyond that I am unemotional. The emotions have become unnecessary to my existence."

I hurried to intervene.

"My friend spoke without thinking," I explained. "You realize this is all unusual to us. Something beyond any previous experience. It is hard for us to believe."

"I know it must be hard for you to understand," agreed the Creator, "You are in an ultra-universe. The electrons and protons making up your body have grown to billions and billions of times their former size, with correspondingly greater distances between them. It is all

a matter of relativity. I did not consciously create your universe, I merely created electrons and protons. I created matter. I created life and injected it into the matter.

"I learned from the three who preceded you here that all things upon my electrons and protons, even my very created electrons and protons, are themselves composed of electrons and protons. This I had not suspected. I am at a loss to explain it. I am beginning to believe that one will never find an end to the mysteries of matter and life. It may be that the electrons and protons you know are composed of billions of infinitely smaller electrons and protons."

"And I suppose," mocked Scott, "that you, the Creator, may be merely a bit of synthetic life living in a universe that is in turn merely a mass of matter in some greater laboratory."

"It may be so," said the Creator. "My knowledge has made me very humble."

Scott laughed.

"And now," said the Creator, "if you will tell me what food and other necessities you require to sustain life, I will see you are provided for. You also will wish to build the machine which will take you back to Earth once more. You shall be assigned living quarters and may do as you wish. When your machine is

completed, you may return to Earth. If you do not wish to do so, you are welcome to remain indefinitely as my guests. All I wished you to come here for was to satisfy my curiosity concerning what forms my artificial life may have taken."

The tentacles of light lifted us carefully to the floor and we followed the Creator to our room, which adjoined the laboratory proper and was connected to it by a high, wide archway. What the place lacked in privacy, it made up in beauty. Finished in pastel shades, it was easy on the eyes and soothing to one's nerves.

We formed mind pictures of beds, tables and chairs. We described our foods and their chemical composition. Water we did not need to describe. The Creator knew instantly what it was. It, of all the necessities of our life, however, seemed the only thing in common with our earth contained in this ultra-universe into which we had projected ourselves.

IN WHAT seemed to us a miraculously short time our needs were provided. We were supplied with furniture, food and clothing, all of which apparently was produced synthetically by the Creator in his laboratory.

Later we were to learn that

the combining of elements and the shaping of the finished product was a routine matter. A huge, yet simple machine was used in the combination and fixing of the elements.

Steel, glass, and tools, shaped according to specifications given the Creator by Scott, were delivered to us in a large workroom directly off the laboratory where our three compatriots of the universe were at work upon their machines.

The machine being constructed by the lone gangling creature which Scott and I had immediately dubbed the "walking-stick-man", resembled in structure the creature building it. It was shaped like a pyramid and into its assembly had gone hundreds of long rods.

The machine of the elephant-men was a prosaic affair, shaped like a crude box of some rubber-material, but its inner machinery, which we found to be entirely alien to any earthly conceptions, was intricate.

From the first the walking-stick-man disregarded us except when we forced our attentions upon him.

The elephant-men were friendly, however.

We had hardly been introduced into the workshop before the two of them attempted to strike up an acquaintance with us.

We spoke to them as they stood before us, but they merely blinked their dull expressionless eyes. They touched us with their trunks, and we felt faint electric shocks which varied in intensity, like the impulses travelling along a wire, like some secret code tapped out by a telegrapher.

"They have no auditory sense," said Scott. "They talk by the transmission of electrical impulses through their trunks. There's no use talking to them."

"And in a thousand years we might figure out their electrical language," I replied.

After a few more futile attempts to establish communication Scott turned to the task of constructing the time-power machine, while the elephant-men padded back to their own work.

I walked over to the walking-stick-man and attempted to establish communication with him, but with no better results. The creature seeming to resent my interruption of his work, waved his hands in fantastic gestures, working his mouth rapidly. In despair, I realized that he was talking to me, but that his jabbering was pitched too high for my ear to catch.

Here were representatives of three different races, all three of a high degree of intelligence else they never would have reached this super-plane, and

not a single thought, not one idea could they interchange. Even had a communication of ideas been possible, I wondered if we could have found any common ground of understanding.

I STARED at the machines. They were utterly different from each other and neither bore any resemblance to ours. Undoubtedly they all operated on dissimilar principles.

In that one room adjoining the main laboratory were being constructed three essentially different types of mechanisms by three entirely different types of beings. Yet each machine was designed to accomplish the same result and each of the beings were striving for the same goal!

Unable to assist Scott in his building of the time-power machine, I spent the greater part of my waking hours in roaming about the laboratory, in watching the Creator at work. Occasionally I talked to him. At times he explained to me what he was doing, but I am afraid I understood little of what he told me.

One day he allowed me to look through a microscope at a part of the matter he had told us contained our universe.

I was unprepared for what I saw. As I peered into the complicated machine, I saw protons, electrons! Judged by earthly

standards, they were grouped peculiarly, but their formation corresponded almost exactly to our planetary system. I sensed that certain properties in that master-microscope created an optical illusion by grouping them more closely than were their actual corresponding distances. The distance between them had been foreshortened to allow an entire group to be within a field of vision.

But this was impossible! The very lenses through which I was looking were themselves formed of electrons and protons! How could they have any magnifying power?

The Creator read my thoughts and tried to explain, but his explanation was merely a blur of distances, a mass of outlandish mathematical equations and a pyramiding of stupendous formulas dealing with the properties of light. I realized that, with the Creator, the Einstein equations were elementary, that the most intricate mathematics conceived by man were rudimentary to him as simple addition.

He must have realized it, too, for after that he did not attempt to explain anything to me. He made it plain, however, that I was welcome to visit him at his work and as time passed, he came to take my presence as a matter of course. At times he seemed to forget I was about.

The work on the time-power machine was progressing steadily under Scott's skillful hands. I could see that the other two machines were nearing completion, but that my friend was working with greater speed. I calculated that all three of the machines would be completed at practically the same time.

"I don't like this place," Scott confided to me. "I want to get the machine built and get out of here as soon as I can. The Creator is a being entirely different from us. His thought processes and emotional reflexes can bear little resemblance to ours. He is further advanced along the scale of life than we. I am not fool enough to believe he accepts us as his equals. He claims he created us. Whether he did or not, and I can't bring myself to believe that he did, he nevertheless believes he did. That makes us his property,—in his own belief, at least—to do with as he wishes. I'm getting out of here before something happens."

One of the elephant-men, who had been working with his partner, approached us as we talked. He tapped me gently with his trunk and then stood stupidly staring at us.

"Funny," said Scott, "That fellow has been bothering me all day. He's got something he wants to tell us, but he doesn't seem to be able to get it across."

Patiently I attempted an elementary language, but the elephant-man merely stared, unmoved, apparently not understanding.

The following day I secured from the Creator a supply of synthetic paper and a sort of black crayon. With these I approached the elephant-men and drew simple pictures, but again I failed. The strange creatures merely stared. Pictures and diagrams meant nothing to them.

The walking-stick-man, however, watched us from across the room and after the elephant-men had turned away to their work, he walked over to where I stood and held out his hands for the tablet and crayon. I gave them to him. He studied my sketches for a moment, ripped off the sheet and rapidly wielded the crayon. He handed back the tablet. On the sheet were a number of hieroglyphics. I could make no head or tail of them. For a long time the two of us labored over the tablet. We covered the floor with sheets covered with our scribbling, pictures and diagrams. We quit in despair after advancing no further than recognizing the symbols for the cardinal numbers.

It was apparent that not only the elephant-men but the walking-stick-man as well wished to communicate something to us.

Scott and I discussed it often, racking our brains for some means to establish communication with our brothers in exile.

CREATION — AND DESTRUCTION

IT WAS shortly after this I made the discovery that I was able to read the unprojected thoughts of the Creator. I imagine that this was made possible by the fact that our host paid little attention to me as he went about his work. Busy with his tasks, his thoughts must have seeped out as he mulled over the problems confronting him. It must have been through this thought seepage that I caught the first of his unprojected brain-images.

At first I received just faint impressions, sort of half thoughts. Realizing what was occurring, I concentrated upon his thoughts, endeavoring to bore into his brain, to probe out those other thoughts which lay beneath the surface. If it had not been for the intensive mind training which I had imposed upon myself prior to the attempt to project my body through the time-power machine, I am certain I would have failed. Without this training, I doubt if I would have been able to read his thoughts unbidden in the first place—certainly I could not have prevented him from learning that I had.

Recalling Scott's suspicions, I realized that my suddenly discovered ability might be used to our advantage. I also realized that this ability would be worthless should the Creator learn of it. In such case, he would be alert and would close his thought processes to me. My hope lay in keeping any suspicion disarmed. Therefore I must not only read his mind but must also keep a portion of mine closed to him.

Patch by patch I pieced his thoughts together like a jigsaw puzzle.

He was studying the destruction of matter, seeking a method of completely annihilating it. Having discovered a means of creating matter, he was now experimenting with its destruction.

I did not share my secret with Scott, for I feared that he would unconsciously betray it to the Creator.

As days passed, I learned that the Creator was considering the destruction of matter without the use of heat. I knew that, even on Earth, it was generally conceded a temperature of 4,000,000,000,000 degrees Fahrenheit would absolutely annihilate matter. I had believed the Creator had found some manner in which he could control such an excessive temperature. But to attempt to destroy matter without using heat at all——! I believe

that it was not until then that I fully realized the great chasm of intelligence that lay between myself and this creature of light.

I have no idea how long we remained in the world of the Creator before Scott announced that the machine in which we expected to return to our universe was ready for a few tests. Time had the illusive quality in this queer place of slithering along without noticeably passing. Although I did not think of it at the time, I cannot recollect now that the Creator employed any means of measuring time. Perhaps time, so far as he was concerned, had become an unnecessary equation. Perhaps he was eternal and time held no significance for him in his eternity.

The elephant-men and the walking-stick-man had already completed their machines, but they seemed to be waiting for us. Was it a gesture of respect? We did not know at the time.

While Scott made the final tests of our machine I walked into the laboratory. The Creator was at work at his accustomed place. Since our arrival he had paid little attention to us. Now that we were about to leave he made no expression of regret, no sign of farewell.

I approached him, wondering if I should bid him farewell. I had grown to respect him. I wanted to say good-bye, and yet. . . .

Then I caught the faintest of his thoughts and I stiffened. Instantly and unconsciously my mind thrust out probing fingers and grasped the predominant idea in the Creator's mind.

"... Destroy the mass of created matter—the universe which I created... create matter... destroy it. It is a laboratory product. Test my destructive..."

"Why you damn murderer," I screamed and threw myself at him.

LIGHT fingers flicked out at me, whipped around my body, snapped me into the air and heaved me across the laboratory. I struck on the smooth floor and skidded across it to bring up with a crash against the wall.

I shook my head to clear it and struggled to my



feet. We must fight the Creator! Must save our world from destruction by the very creature who had created it!

I came to my feet with my muscles bunched, crouched in a fighting posture.

But the Creator had not moved. He stood in the same position and a rod of purple light extended between him and the queer machine of the walking-stick man. The rod of light seemed to be holding him there, frozen, immovable. Beside the machine stood the walking-stick-man, his hand on the lever, a mad glare in his eyes.

Scott was slapping the gangling fellow on his slender back.

"You've got the goods, old man," he was shouting. "That's one trick old frozen face didn't learn from you."

A thunderous tumult beat through my head. The machine of the walking-stick-man was not a transmission machine at all. It was a weapon—a weapon that could freeze the Creator into rigid lines.

Weird colors flowed through the Creator. Dead silence lay over the room. The machine of the walking-stick-man was silent, with no noise to hint of the great power it must have been developing. The purple rod did not waver. It was just a rigid rod of purple which had struck and stiffened the Creator.

I screamed at Scott: "Quick! The universe! He is going to destroy it!"

Scott leaped forward. Together we raced toward the table where the mass of created matter lay in its receptacle. Behind us padded the elephant-men.

As we reached the table, I felt a sinuous trunk wrap about me. With a flip I was hurled to the table top. It was but a step to the dish containing the universe. I snatched it up, dish and all, and handed it down to Scott. I let myself over the table edge, hung by my hands for an instant, and dropped. I raced after the others toward the work shop.

As we gained the room, the walking-stick-man made an adjustment on his machine. The purple rod faded away. The Creator, a towering cone of light, tottered for a moment and then glided swiftly for the doorway.

Instantly a sheet of purple radiance filled the opening. The Creator struck against it and was hurled back.

The radiance was swiftly arching overhead and curving beneath us, cutting through the floor, walls, and ceiling.

"He's enclosing us in a globe of that stuff," cried Scott. "It must be an energy screen of some sort, but I can't imagine what. Can you?"

"I don't care what it is, just

so it works," I panted, anxiously.

Through the steady purple light I could see the Creator. Repeatedly he hurled himself against the screen and each time he was hurled back.

"We're moving," announced Scott.

The great purple globe was ascending, carrying in its interior we five universe-men, our machines, and fragments of the room in which we but recently had stood. It was cutting through the building like the flame of a torch through soft steel. We burst free of the building into the brilliant blue sunlight of that weird world.

Beneath us lay the building, a marvel of outre architecture, but with a huge circular shaft cut through it—the path of the purple globe. All about the building lay a forest of red and yellow vegetation, shaped as no vegetation of Earth is shaped, bent into hundreds of strange and alien forms.

Swiftly the globe sprang upward to hang in the air some distance above the building. As far as the eye could see stretched the painted forest. The laboratory we had just quitted was the only sign of habitation. No roads, no lakes, no rivers, no distant mountain—nothing relieved the level plain of red and yellow stretching away to faint horizons.

Was the Creator, I wondered, the sole denizen of this land? Was he the last survivor of a mystic race? Had there ever been a race at all? Might not the Creator be a laboratory product, even as the things he created were laboratory products? But if so, who or what had set to work the agents which resulted in that uncanny cone of energy?

MY REFLECTIONS were cut short as the walking-stick-man reached out his skinny hand for the mass of matter which Scott still held. As I watched him breathlessly, he laid it gently on a part of the floor which still remained in the globe and pulled a sliding rod from the side of the machine. A faint purple radiance sprang from the point of the rod, bathing the universe. The radiant purple surrounded the mass, grew thicker and thicker, seeming to congeal into layer after layer until the mass of matter lay sealed in a thick shell of the queer stuff. When I touched it, it did not appear to be hard or brittle. It was smooth and slimy to the touch, but I could not dent it with my fingers.

"He's building up the shell of the globe in just the same way," Scott said. "The machine seems to be projecting that purple stuff to the outside of the shell, where it is congealed into layers."

I noted that what he said was

true. The shell of the globe had taken on a thickness that could be perceived, although the increased thickness did not seem to interfere with our vision.

Looking down at the laboratory, I could see some strange mechanism mounted on the roof of the building. Beside the massive mechanism stood the Creator.

"Maybe it's a weapon of some sort," suggested Scott.

Hardly had he spoken when a huge column of crimson light leaped forth from the machine. I threw up my hands to protect my eyes from the glare of the fiery column. For an instant the globe was bathed in the red glow, then a huge globule of red collected on its surface and leaped away, straight for the laboratory, leaving behind a trail of crimson.

The globe trembled to the force of the explosion as the ball of light struck. Where the laboratory had stood was merely a great hole, blasted to the primal rock beneath. The vegetation for great distances on either side was sifting ash. The Creator had disappeared. The colorful world beneath stretched empty to the horizon. The men of the universe had proven to be stronger than their Creator!

"If there's any more Creators around these parts," said Scott, smiling feebly, "they won't dare

train another gun on this thing in the next million years. It gives them exactly what was meant for the other fellow; it crams their poison right down their own throats. Pete, that mass of matter, whether or not it is the universe, is saved. All hell couldn't get at it here."

The walking-stick-man, his mummy-like face impassive as ever, locked the controls of the machine. It was, I saw still operating, was still building up the shell of the globe. Second by second the globe was adding to its fortress—light strength. My mind reeled as I thought of it continuing thus throughout eternity.

The elephant-men were climbing into their machines.

Scott smiled wanly.

"The play is over," he said. "The curtain is down. It's time for us to go."

He stepped to the side of the walking-stick-man.

"I wish you would use our machine," he said, evidently forgetting our friend could understand no word he spoke. "You threw away your chance back there when you built this contraption instead of a transmitter. Our machine will take you wherever you wish to go."

He pointed to the machine and to the universe, then tapped his head. With the strange being at his side, he walked to our ma-

chine, pointed out the controls, explained its use in pantomime.

"I don't know if he understands," said Scott, "but I did the best I could."

As I walked past the walking-stick-man to step into the time-power machine, I believe I detected a faint flicker of a smile on his face. Of that, however, I can never be sure.

MAROONED IN TIME

I KNOW how the mistake was made. I was excited when I stepped into the machine. My mind was filled with the many strange happenings I had witnessed. I thought along space directional lines, *but I forgot to reckon the factor of time.*

I thought of the Earth, but I did not consider time. I willed myself to be back on Earth, but I forgot to will myself in any particular time era. Consequently when Scott shoved over the lever, I was shot to Earth, but the time element was confused.

I realize that life in the super-universe of the Creator, being billions of times larger than life upon the Earth, was correspondingly slower. Every second in the super-universe was equal to years of Earth-time. My life in the Creator's universe had equaled millions of years of terrestrial existence.

I believe that my body was projected along a straight line

and not along the curve which was necessary to place me back in the twentieth century.

This is theory, of course. There might have been some fault in the machine. The purple globe might have exerted some influence to distort our calculations.

Be that as it may, I reached a dying planet. It has been given to me, a man of the twentieth century, to live out the last years of my life on my home planet some millions of years later than the date of my birth. I, a resident of a comparatively young dynasty in the history of the Earth, now am tribal chieftain and demi-god of the last race, a race that is dying even as the planet is dying.

As I sit before my cave or huddle with the rest of my clan around a feeble fire, I often wonder if Scott Marston was returned to Earth in his proper time. Or is he, too, a castaway in some strange time? Does he still live? Did he ever reach the Earth? I often feel that he may even now be searching through the vast corridors of time and the deserts of space for me, his one-time partner in the wildest venture ever attempted by man.

And often, too, I wonder if the walking-stick-man used our time-power machine to return to his native planet. Or is he a prisoner in his own trap, caught

(continued on page 114)

THE CREATOR

(continued from page 31)

within the scope of the great purple globe? And I wonder how large the globe has grown.

I realize now that our effort to save the universe was unnecessary so far as the earth was concerned, for the earth, moving at its greater time-speed, would already have plunged into extinction in the flaming furnace of the sun before the Creator could carry out his destructive plans.

But what of those other worlds? What of those other planets which must surely swim around strange suns in the gulf of space? What of the planets and races yet unborn? What of the populations that may exist on the solar systems of island universes far removed from our own?

They are saved, saved for all time; for the purple globe will guard the handiwork of the Creator through eternity.

THE END

*"Then I caught the faintest
of His thoughts and I stiff-
ened. My mind grasped the
idea in the Creator's mind."
(See The Creator)*

