

A N C
TODAY'S SCIENCE FICTION—TOMORROW'S FACT •

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featuring **THE LOVERS** a novel by Philip José Farmer

and **THE HOUR OF THE MORTALS**

a novelet by Kendell Foster Crossen

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Vol. 27, No. 1 A THRILLING PUBLICATION

AUGUST, 1952

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A Science Fiction Department Featuring Letters from Readers

JUST this once we suggest you might read the lead novel first and then come back here.

These editorial remarks should mean more to you as a result, for much of what we have to say was touched off by *THE LOVERS* in a chain reaction which has led hither and you but made a point of sorts, we hope. It has also acted as a catalyst to solidify many of our own growing ideas about science fiction.

Editorially and otherwise, we have long contended that science fiction must be more than hopeful science; it must be *good* fiction as well. It must contain the basic requirements of drama, it must be well told, it must depict real people, it must be as sincere in its emotional values as in calculating the speed of a space ship operating on ultra-galactic drive. Until this is achieved, *Time* book-reviewers will continue to make disparaging comparisons with westerns.

To date not many stories have approached these requirements. Which is why we have permitted ourselves a certain amount of hoopla about *THE LOVERS*. It is a fresh note in science fiction.

People and Gadgets

What's fresh about it? Well, it is a warm, emotional story about people first and gadgets second, as opposed to a cold, objective story about gadgets first and people second. Yet it is unmistakably science fiction, not romance, because if you took the science out of it you would have no story. (There, incidentally, you have at least one definition of science fiction, though there are others as good.)

There will be squawks about this novel—we predict it with serenity. It is a story which some people will hate to pieces. For this we are sorry in advance. We are sorry, not because our own opinion will be shaken, but because we think *THE LOVERS* is an important

story. Important not necessarily because it is great literature, but because it will make a lot of fine writers sit up and be quoted as blurting: "My gosh, I didn't know we could do anything like that in science fiction!" or words to that effect.

This is exactly the point. It is our contention that anything can be done in science fiction—and should be done. It is actually the broadest of all mediums, because it is imagination unlimited. A lot of stf authors writing today are good as can be in their own type of story, but the type has turned into a rut. They are writing the same basic story they wrote fifteen years ago. Some readers still like this kind of story—but not exclusively. They recognize the need for other kinds and the fact that this need broadens as a wider and wider circle of readers becomes acquainted with science fiction.

Furthermore, with familiarity, most readers progress in sophistication beyond the simple space or gadget story to something involving a tentative nibble at the larger issues beyond. Some of the old-time writers, like Ed Hamilton, have grown with this enlargement of the theme, are boldly tackling subjects undreamed of ten years ago. For our sister mag, *TWS*, we have just bought a story by Ed Hamilton titled *WHAT'S IT LIKE OUT THERE?* which is so far removed from his *Captain Future* stories as to convince anyone that it is the work of a totally different writer.

New Frontiers

Some of the boys, like Ted Sturgeon and Ray Bradbury, have always been conscious of the larger issues, and an awareness of it showed even in their earliest stories. And now comes a whole new school of writers, men like Philip Farmer and R. J. McGregor and Ken Crossen, who are hewing out entire new frontiers in the business. These are the writers who are work-

(Continued on page 8)

ing to achieve a synthesis between the heavy, powerful old saga and the new, warm, human story. They have had support for a long time from able artists like St. Clair and Brackett and Frank Belknap Long, who have always used science as only a magic carpet to transport their characters and to whom human values were paramount.

A synthesis between the light satire and the saga, the human story and the epic, is likely to produce something very much like literature. It makes for big, important stories, big writers.

Ten years from now, *THE LOVERS* will not seem remarkable at all. We hope so. For if it did, it would mean the field had stood still all that time. It must continue to move; it must make its own best works obsolete if it is to survive.

There are fans (whose only fault is loyalty) who have taken us to task for failing to enthuse about certain old sf classics which are dear to their hearts. Our best answer to that is that we hope *THE LOVERS* will seem as creaky and ancient ten years from now; and we say this because, not in spite of the fact that we think *THE LOVERS* is one of the best stories we have ever seen anywhere—in science-fiction magazine or book.

We consider it a high-water-mark today; but it would mean the stagnation and death of science fiction if it were not superseded by new works and new writers, and by the author's newer works themselves, since he is learning and growing as he works.

The theme of *THE LOVERS* is unimportant, though some readers will like it and some will not. But it is a story which digs deep. It is a story which came from a man's urgent need to say something—not merely to write a story for money.

*Amid the deceit, the intrigue, the treachery marking
the Earthmen's scheme to conquer the world of Ozagen,
Hal Yarrow broke every taboo to love his Jeannette. . . .*

The LOVERS

A Novel by PHILIP JOSE FARMER





Foreword

DURING the day, the dreadnaught *Gabriel* squatted in a park in the center of the city of Siddo, on the planet Ozagen. From sunrise to sunset the *Gabriel's* personnel ventured out among the Ozagenians—or wogglebugs, as they were familiarly and contemptuously called—learning all they could of Ozagen's history, customs, language and other things.

The "other things," though the Earthmen did not mention this to the wogglebugs, were Ozagen's technologies. As far as could be seen, the wogs had progressed, roughly speaking, to the level of Earth's early 20th-century science. Logically, there should be nothing to fear from them. But the

men of Earth's Haijac Union trusted no one. What if the wogs were hiding terrible weapons, waiting to catch the men unawares?

At nightfall, the spaceship rose to a height of fifty feet and poised there until the sun rose again. Then it sank back into the deep depression made by its own weight. Always a radar gig hovered in the stratosphere and probed for other spacecraft. Presumably, neither Earth's Israeli Republics nor its Bantu-Malay Federation knew of Ozagen . . . but if they found out!

Meanwhile the Terrans searched, studied, prowled and planned. Before they attacked the natives, before they began their decimation project to make room for the hordes that would follow, they must learn the wogs' potentialities.

And so it was that, a month after the appearance of the *Gabriel* above Siddo, two presumably friendly (to wogs) Terrans set out with two presumably friendly (to Terrans) wogglebugs on a trip. They were going to investigate the ruins of a city left by a dead humanoid race. They rode a vehicle fantastic to the men. . . .

I

THE MOTOR hiccoughed and jerked. The Ozagenian sitting on the right side of the rear seat leaned over and shouted something. Hal Yarrow twisted his head and yelled, "Quoi?"

Fobo, sitting directly behind Hal, stuck his mouth against the Earthman's ear. He translated the gibberish into French:

"Zugu says and emphasizes that you should pump the throttle. That little rod to your right. It gives the carburetor more alcohol. *Où quelque chose.*"

Fobo's antennae tickled Hal's ears. Hal said, "*Merci,*" and worked the throttle. To do so, he had to lean across the gapt, sitting at his right. "*Pardon-*

nez-moi, monsieur Pornsen!" he bel-
lowed.

The gapt did not look at Yarrow; his hands, lying on his lap, were locked together. The knuckles showed white. Like his ward, he was having his first experience with an internal combustion motor. Unlike Hal, he was scared by the loud noise, the fumes, the bumps and bangs, and just the idea of riding in a manually controlled vehicle.

Hal grinned. He loved this quaint car, so reminiscent of Earth's early twentieth-century autos. It thrilled him to be able to twist the stiff-acting wheel and feel the heavy body obey his muscles. The four cylinders' banging and the alcohol's reek excited him. As for the bouncing, that was fun. It was romantic, like putting out to sea in a sailboat—something else he hoped to do before they left Ozagen.

Also, anything that scared his gapt pleased Yarrow.

His pleasure ended. The cylinders popped, off-key. The car jerked and then rolled to a stop. At once, the two wogglebugs hopped over the side and raised the hood. Hal followed. Pornsen sat. He pulled a package of Merciful Seraphim from his uniform pocket, took one out and lit up.

Hal noted that it was the fourth he'd seen Pornsen smoking since morning prayers. If Pornsen wasn't careful, he'd be going over his quota. That meant that the next time Hal got in trouble, he could blackmail the gapt into helping him. Judging by his troubles so far on this expedition, it wouldn't be long before he would have to.

Hal bent over the motor and watched. Zugu seemed to know what the matter was. He should, since he was the inventor and builder of the only—as far as the Terrans knew—native-made self-propelling vehicle on this planet.

Zugu used a wrench to unscrew a long narrow pipe from a round glass case. Yarrow remembered that this was a gravity feed system. The fuel ran from the tank into the glass case, which was

a sediment chamber. From there it ran into the feed pipe, which in turn passed on to the carburetor.

PORNSEN called harshly, "Well, Yar-row, are we going to be stuck here all day?"

Though he still wore the hood and goggles the Ozagenians had equipped him with as windbreaks, the gapt's expression was clear enough. He would take out his annoyance in a report that would not be favorable to Hal. Unless, that is, his ward came across something so important in the humanoid ruins that it would justify this long trip.

The gapt—G.A.P.T., or Guardian Angel Pro Tempore—had wanted to

Hal of the sacredness of the human self by telling him to slow down. Hal would nod and would ease his foot off the accelerator. But after a while he would slowly press down. Once again they would roar and leap down the dirt road.

Zugu unscrewed both ends of the pipe, stuck one in his V-shaped mouth, and blew. Nothing came out the other end. Zugu shut his big blue eyes and blew again. Nothing happened, except that his already green-tinged face turned a dark green. Then he rapped the copper tubing against the hood and blew once more. No reaction.

Fobo reached into a large leather pouch slung from a belt around his big belly. His finger and thumb came out

~~~~~ Entrance Cue ~~~~~

THE LOVERS is a story we would like to introduce with trumpets and fanfare—maybe even a parade. We feel that way about it. We are restrained with difficulty from raving only because we know our dignity would suffer.

We think this story is a delicate and beautiful, yet powerful and shocking piece of work. We are amazed that so strong and sure a drama could come from a new young writer. We believe we are here launching the career of a man who will shortly be ranked with the few at the very top. We think Philip José Farmer is the find of the year. After you've read it, the verdict will be with you.

—The Editor

wait the two days that would be needed until they could get a gig. The trip to the ruins could then have been made in fifteen minutes, a soundless and comfortable ride through the air. But Hal had argued that driving through the countryside would be as valuable—if not more so, in detecting any possible hidden large industries—as reconnoitering by air. That his superiors had agreed was another thing that had exasperated Pornsen. Where his ward went, he had to go.

So he had sulked all day while the young Terran, coached by Zugu, wheeled the jalopy down the forest roads. The only times the gapt spoke was to remind

holding a tiny blue insect. Gently, he pushed the creature into one end of the pipe. In about five seconds a small red insect dropped out of the other end. Behind it, evidently in pursuit, came the blue. Fobo picked up his pet and put it back in the pouch. Zugu squashed the red thing beneath his bare heel.

"Voilà. C'est un mangeur de l'alcool, monsieur," said Fobo. "It lives in the tank and imbibes freely and unmolested. It extracts the carbohydrates therein. A swimmer upon the golden seas of alcohol. What a life! But now and then it goes into the sediment chamber, eats and devours the filter, and passes into the feedpipe. *Voyez!* Zugu is even now

replacing the filter. In a moment we will be on our way and road."

Fobo's breath had a strange and sickening odor. Hal wondered if the wog had been drinking liquor. He had never smelled alcohol on anybody's breath before, so he had on experience to go on. But even the thought of it made Hal nervous. If his gapt knew a bottle was being passed back and forth in the rear seat, he would not for a minute let Hal out of his sight.

The wogs climbed into the back seat. "Allons!"

Pornsen pursed his thin lips. He had meant to ask Zugu to drive, but he realized the wogs might think he lacked confidence in Yarrow. He did, but he could not admit that in front of an Ozagenian.

THOUGH Hall started slowly enough, he soon found his foot heavy. The trees began whizzing by. He glanced at Pornsen. The gapt's rigid back and set teeth showed that he was thinking of the report he would make to the chief Uzzite back in the spaceship. He looked mad enough to demand the 'Meter for his ward.

Yarrow breathed deeply the wind battering his face-mask. To H with Pornsen! To H with the 'Meter! The blood lurched in his veins. This planet's air was not stuffy Earth's. His lungs sucked it in like a happy bellows. At that moment he felt as if he could have snapped his fingers under the nose of the Sandalphon himself.

"Look out!" screamed Pornsen.

Hal glimpsed out of the corners of his eyes the large antelope-like beast that leaped from the forest onto the road. A half-second later, he twisted the wheel away from it. The jalopy skidded on the dirt. Its rear end swung around. Hal was not well enough grounded in the physics of driving to know that he should have turned the wheels in the direction of the skid to straighten the car out.

His lack of knowledge was not fatal, except to the beast, for its bulk struck

the vehicle's side. Checked, the car quit trying to circle. Instead, it angled off the road and ran up a sloping ridge of earth. From there it leaped high into the air and landed with an all-at-once bang of four tires blowing.

Even that did not halt it. A big bush loomed. Hal jerked on the wheel. Too late.

His chest pushed hard against the wheel as if it were trying to telescope the steering shaft against the dashboard. Fobo slammed into Yarrow's back. Both cried, out, and the wog fell off.

Then, except for a sharp hissing, there was silence. A pillar of steam from the broken radiator shot through the branches that held Hal's face in a rough barky embrace.

Yarrow stared through steamshaped into big brown eyes. He shook his head. Was he stunned? Eyes. And arms like branches. Or branches like arms. He thought he was in the grip of a brown-eyed nymph. Or were they called dryads? He couldn't ask anybody. He wasn't supposed to know about such creatures. *Nymph* and *dryad* had even been cut out of such books as Hack's edition of the Revised and Moral Milton. Only an unexpurgated *Paradise Lost*, booklegged from Israel, had enabled Hal to learn of Greek mythology.

Thoughts flashed off and on like lights on a spaceship's pilotboard. Nymphs sometimes turned into trees to escape their pursuers. Was this one of the fabled forest women staring at him with large and beautiful eyes through the longest lashes he had ever seen?

He shut his lids and wondered if a head injury were responsible for the vision and if it were permanent. If it were, so what? Hallucinations like that were worth keeping.

He opened his eyes. The illusion was gone.

He thought, *It was that antelope looking at me. It got away after all. It ran around the bush and looked back. Antelope eyes.*

II

HE FORGOT about the eyes. He was choking. A heavy nauseating odor hung around the car. The crash must have frightened the wogs very much, else they would not have released the sphincter muscles which controlled the neck of their "madbags." This organ, a bladder located near the small of their backs, had once been used by the pre-humanoid ancestors of the Ozagenians as a powerful weapon of defense in much the same way as a bombardier beetle thwarts attackers. Now an almost vestigial structure, the madbag served as a means of relieving extreme nervous tension. Its function was effective, but is presented problems such as that of the wog psychiatrists, who either had to keep their windows open or else wear gasmasks during therapy.

Hal pushed aside the branches and struggled over the side. Why didn't wogs build doors in their vehicles?

Wong Af Pornsen, assisted by Zugu, crawled out from under the foliage. His big paunch, the color of his uniform, and the white nylon angel's wings sewed on the back of his jacket made him resemble a fat blue bug. When he stood up and took off his windmask, he showed a bloodless face. His shaking fingers fumbled over the crossed hour-glass and sword, symbol of the Haijac Union, before they found the button he was searching for. He pulled out a pack of Merciful Cherubim. Once the cigarette was in his lips, he had a hard time holding the lighter to it.

Hal took out his own and held the glowing coil to the tobacco. It didn't waver.

Only thirty years of discipline could have shoved back the grin he felt deep inside his face muscles.

Pornsen accepted the light. A second later, a tremor of skin around his lips and eyes revealed that he knew he had lost much of his advantage over Yarrow. Trained in psychology, he realized you don't let a man do you a service—

even one as slight as his ward's and then crack the whip on him.

He began formally, "Hal Shamshiel Yarrow . . ."

"Shib, *abba*, I hear."

"You're—uh—much too reckless."

Considering the offense, his voice was milder than it should have been. Now and then he stopped to draw in or puff out smoke.

"The hierarchy has had its eye (puff) upon you for a long time. Though you have not been suspected of any moral turpitude—as regards sex or liquor, that is—you have shown signs of a certain pride and independence. That is not shib, Yarrow. That is not real. It smacks of behavior that does not conform to the structure of the universe as we know it, as it has been revealed to mankind by the Forerunner, real be his name.

"I have (puff)—may the Forerunner forgive them!—sent two dozen men to H. I didn't like it, for I am a tender-hearted man, but it is the duty of the Guardian Angels Pro Tempore to watch out for the diseases of the self that may spread and infect the followers of Isaac Sigmen. Unreality must not be tolerated; the self is too weak and precious to be subjected to temptation.

"I have been your gapt since you were (puff) born. You always were a disobedient child, but you could be whipped into submissiveness, into seeing reality. Not until you were eighteen did you become hard to handle. That was when you decided to become a joat. I thought you'd make a very good specialist, and I warned you that as a joat you'd only get so high in our society. But you persisted. And since we have need of joats, and since I was over-ridden by my superior, I allowed you to become one.

"That wasn't too (puff) unshib, but when I picked out the woman most suitable to be your wife, I saw just how proud and rebellious you were. She was a woman whom the Urielites, selfdocs, and Sandalphons agreed was the ideal

mate as set forth in the Western Talmud. And yet you argued and held out for a year before you consented to marry her. In that year of unreal behavior, you cost the Sturch one self. . . ."

Hal's face had paled, and in so doing had revealed seven thin red marks that rayed out fanwise from the left corner of his lips and across his cheek to his ear. They were scars left by Pornsen's lash years before.

"I cost it nothing," blazed Hal. "Mary and I were married ten years, and she proved barren. And it was her fault, not mine, as the tests proved. When that came out, why didn't you insist on our divorce, as your duty required, instead of pigeonholing my petition?"

PORNSEN blew out smoke slowly enough, but his voice tensed. He dropped one shoulder lower than the other, a characteristic when he forgot himself, and said, "That's another thing. I was sure when you applied for this expedition that it was not out of desire to serve the Sturch in its quest for new lands for our overcrowded planets. (Puff) I was sure you signed up for one reason. To get away from your wife. Since barrenness, adultery, and space travel are the only legal grounds for divorce, and adultery means going to H, you took the only way out. You became legally dead. You—"

"You can't prove it!" Hal was shaking, and loathed himself because he could not hide his rage.

"Oh, I could have, if I had recommended you for the Elohimeter. But we needed scientists very much, and my superiors thought it best to overlook your possible motives. Besides, you had an excuse in that sterility report, which was lost through the inefficiency of my secretaries.

"However, the hierarchy has been slowly and regretfully, but surely, coming to the conclusion that you do not have a high enough regard for your self. Or that of others.

"The self, as defined by Isaac Sig-

men, is sacred, sacred to God, to the angels both high and low, to the pre-Torah prophets. . . ."

Hal listened with only a half-ear. Pornsen was repeating Moral Lecture PT19, which his ward knew by heart. Hal was looking at the beast's body crumpled on the road. Now he remembered the thump the jalopy had made when it struck it. But if it were dead, whose eyes had he seen through the bush?

Fobo, the empathist, was bending over it. He straightened up; large tears filled his blue eyes and ran down the long tubular nose. The antennae rising from his bald forehead waved. He made a circular sign with his index finger over the carcass.

Hal said to Pornsen, "Shut up!"

The gapt stiffened. The lower left shoulder drew level with the other. The cigarette fell from his slack thin lips. Red swarmed up his bull-neck and sagging jowls. His right hand shot to his belt and grabbed the crux ansata on the handle of his whip. He jerked it out and cracked it in the air.

The marks on Yarrow's cheek tingled in remembrance of that other time when the lashes, one for each of the Seven Deadly Unrealities, had cut the flesh.

The gapt said, "How dare you?"

HAL said in a low voice, swiftly, "A moment ago you said something in English. You know French is the only tongue we're allowed to speak under any circumstances."

The whip dropped.

"When—when was that?"

"When you screamed at me just before we struck that animal. Remember? And when you were yelling for help under the bush."

Pornsen stuck the whip back in his belt and lit up another Merciful Seraphim. His fifth that day. Another, and he'd be over his quota.

"You say nothing to the chief," he muttered. "And I'll keep quiet about your sibboleth recklessness."



HAL YARROW

JEANNETTE

FOBO

"Shib," agreed Hal.

He tried to keep the contempt and elation out of his voice. Once a gapt cracked. . . .

Pornsen rolled his small green eyes at the approaching Fobo. "Think he heard me?"

"I wouldn't know."

Fobo stopped and looked at them. His antennae became rigid. He said, "*Un argument, messieurs?*"

Fobo had wept as the dying beast's nervous discharges of grief and pain struck his overtrained, too receptive antennae. Now he smiled the ghastly V-in-V smile of a wogglebug. Though supersensitive, his nervous system was a hit and run one. Charge and discharge came easily.

"*Non!*" replied Hal. "No disagree-

ment. We were just wondering how far we'd have to walk to get to the humanoid ruins. Your jalopy's wrecked. Tell Zugu I'm sorry."

"*Ca ne fait rien.* The walk will be pleasant and stimulating. It is only a mile. Or thereabouts."

"*Bien. Allons.*"

The ward turned away and threw his mask and goggles in the rear seat of the car, where the Ozagenians had laid theirs.

He picked up his suitcase, but left the gapt's on the floor. Let him carry his own.

He said, "Fobo, aren't you afraid the driving-clothes will be stolen?"

"Pardon? What does that mean?"

"*Voler. Voler.* To take an article of property from someone without their

permission, and keep it for yourself. It is a crime, punishable by law."

"*Un crime?*"

Hal gave up. He shrugged and moved his long legs fast. Behind him the gapt, afraid of losing dignity if he trailed behind Hal, and angry because his ward was breaking etiquette by forcing him to carry his own case, shouted, "You'll pay for this, you—you joat!"

With which outburst he lost face.

Hal didn't turn. He plunged on ahead. The angry retort he was phrasing beneath his breath fizzed away. Out of the corner of his eye he had caught a flash of white skin in the green summer foliage.

But when he turned to look for it, it was gone. Nor did he see it or its owner the rest of the day.

III

SOO Yarrow. *Soo Yarrow. B'swa. L'fvayfvoov, soo Yarrow.*"

Hal woke up. For a moment, he didn't remember where he was. Then he recalled that he was sleeping in one of the marble rooms of the mammal-humanoid ruins. The moonlight, brighter than Earth's, poured in through the doorway. It shone on a small shape on the floor near the entrance, and on a flying insect that passed above the shape. Something long and thin flickered up and wrapped itself around the fier and pulled it into a suddenly gaping mouth.

The lizard loaned by the ruins custodian was doing a fine job of keeping out pests.

Hal turned his head to look at the open window a foot above him. The bugcatcher there was busily sweeping the area clean of mosquitoes. From beyond that moonwashed square the voice had seemed to come. He listened. Silence. Then a snuffing and rattling jerked him upright. A thing the size of a raccoon stood by the doorway. It was one of the quasi-insects, the so-called lungbugs, that prowled the for-

est at night. It represented a development of arthropod not found on Earth. Unlike its Terran cousins, it no longer depended solely on tracheae, or breathing tubes, for oxygen. A pair of distensible sacs, like a frog's, swelled out and fell in behind its mouth, and enabled it to make the heavy breathing sound.

Though it was shaped like a preying mantis, Hal wasn't worried. Fobo had told him it would not attack without provocation.

A shrilling like that of an alarm clock suddenly filled the room. Pornsen, on the cot across the room, sat up. He saw the insect and yelled. It scurried off. The shrilling, which had come from the mechanism on Pornsen's wrist, stopped.

Pornsen lay down and groaned. "That makes the sixth time those bugs have woke me up."

"Turn off the wristbox," said Hal.

Pornsen did not answer. For about ten minutes he was restless and then he began snoring. Hal's lids felt heavy. He must have dreamed the soft low voice speaking in a tongue neither Terran nor Ozagenian. He must have, because it had been human; and he and the gapt were the only specimens of homo sapiens for at least two hundred miles.

It had been a woman's voice. God! To hear one again. Almost two years now!

And he knew it would probably be five years before he would hear another. That is, if he returned. . . .

"*Soo Yarrow. L'fvayfvoov. Say mwa, zh'net w'stinvak.*"

Hal stood up. His neck was cased in ice. The whisper *was* coming from the window. He turned his head. The outline of a woman's head leaned into the solid box of moonlight that was the window. Moonwash fell off white shoulders. A pale finger crossed the black of mouth.

"*Poo lamoo d'b'tyu, soo. Seelahs. F'nay. Feet, seel-fvooplay.*"

NUMBED, but obeying as if shot full of hypno-lipno, he threw aside the sheet over his legs. Slowly, he turned on his buttocks and moved his feet until they touched the stone floor. With a look to make sure Pornsen was still asleep, he rose.

For a second his training almost overcame him and forced him to wake the gapt up. But it was evident the woman was addressing him alone. Her urgency and suppressed fear decided him to take a chance. It also made him wonder if she might not be a member of one of the unreal sects that had fled the Haijac Union two hundred or more years ago—

No. That couldn't be. She spoke in no tongue he knew. For that same reason, it was improbable that she was a party to an expedition from one of the other Earth nations.

Her words had seemed to click something familiar, however—as if he ought to know the language. But he didn't. It wasn't the English or Icelandic or Caucasian of the Haijac Union, or the Hebrew of the Israeli Republics, or the Bazaar or Swahili of the Bantu-Malay Federation. Yet it had sounded like something he'd heard before. And recently.

He picked up his suitcase and shoved it under the sheet. He rolled up a blanket and packed it next to the case. His jacket he folded and laid on the pillow. If Pornsen woke up and took a quick look at the cot, he might be fooled into thinking the bulk under the sheet was Hal's.

Softly, on bare feet, he walked to the doorway. A cylinder the size of a tin can squatted on guard. If any object larger than a mouse came within two feet of the field radiating from the cylinder, it would set up a disturbance which would cause a signal to be transmitted to the small box mounted on a silver bracelet around the gapt's wrist. The box would shrill—as it had at the appearance of the lungbug—and up would come Pornsen from the bottom

of his ever-watchful sleep.

The watchcan was not only there to insure against trespassers. Its primary purpose was to make certain that Hal would not leave the room without Pornsen's knowledge. As the ruins had no working plumbing, the only permissible excuse to step outside would be to relieve bowel or bladder. The gapt would go along to see that that was what he intended.

Two things Pornsen was watching for. One was unsupervised contact with the wogs. The other was that unreal conduct, punishable by exile to H and cataloged in the *Sefer shel ha Chetim*, or the Book of Sins, as Onanism. The long space voyage had resulted in the arrest of five men for that very unreality.

Hal picked up one of the flyswatters given them by the ruins custodian. It had a three-foot-long handle made of some flexible wood. Its mass would not be enough to touch off the field. Though his hand trembled, he grasped the swatter-end and very gently pushed the cylinder to one side with the handle. He had to be careful not to upset it, for that, too, would trigger the alarm. Fortunately, the stone floor was smooth.

When he had stepped outside, he reached back in and slid the cylinder back to its former spot. Then, with his heart pounding under the double burden of tampering with the guard and of meeting a strange woman, he walked around the corner.

She had moved from the window into the shadow of a kneeling goddess' statue about sixty yards away. When Hal began striding toward her, he saw the reason for her hiding. Fobo was strolling towards him. Hal walked faster. He wanted to intercept the wog before he noticed the girl and also before he came so close that their voices might wake up Pornsen.

"*Bon soir*," greeted Fobo. His antennae described little circles. "You seem nervous. Is it that incident of the forenoon?"

"*Non*. I am just restless."

Hal looked at the empathist. Ozagen! What was the story? That the discoverer of this planet, upon first seeing the natives, had exclaimed, "Oz again!" because the aborigines had so much resembled Frank Baum's Professor Wogglebug? Their bodies were rather round, and their limbs were skinny in proportion. Their mouths were shaped like two broad and shallow V's, one set inside the other. The lips were thick and lobular. Actually, a wogglebug had four lips, each leg of the two V's separated by a deep seam at the connection. Once, far back on the evolutionary path, those lips had been modified arms. Now they were rudimentary limbs, so disguised as true labial parts that no one who did not know their history would have guessed their origin. When the wide V-in-V mouths opened in a laugh, they startled the Terrans. The teeth were quite human, true, but a fold of skin hung from the roof of the mouth. Once the epipharynx, it was now a vestigial upper tongue, of no use at all except to tell of the wogs' arthropodal ancestry.

Their skins were as unpigmented as Hal's redhead complexion, but where the Earthman's epidermis was pink, theirs was a very faint green. Copper, not iron, carried oxygen in their blood cells.

They had antennae, their forepates were bald, but a stiff corkscrew fuzz rose from their backpates to form a corona. To complete the Oz parallel, their noses were bridgeless and shot straight out from their faces in projectile fashion.

The Terran who first saw them might have been justified by his remark. However, the story wasn't true. Ozagen was the native name for "Mother Earth."

IV

WOGGLEBUG they were called, yet they were no more insects than the

Earthmen. It was true that millions of years ago their ancestors had been a primitive unspecialized wormlike arthropod. But evolution follows parallel paths when aiming at intelligent beings. Realizing the limitations of the anatomy, she had split Fobo's Nth-great-grandfather from the arthropod phylum. When the crustacea, arachnida, and insecta had formed exoskeletons and ventral nervous systems, Grandpa the Nth had declined to go along with his cousins. He had refused to harden his delicate cuticle-skin into chitin and had begun shifting the central nerves from chest and belly to the back and had also erected a skeleton inside the flesh. Both of the latter feats were equal to lifting oneself by the bootstraps.

As the price for that action, by the time the true arthropods were very developed, highly specialized creatures creeping, hopping, and flying by the billions over the hot new globe, Fobo's ancestors were still ugly, flatwormish things hiding from their beautiful, fully rounded-out relatives.

Becoming chordate arthropods—a contradiction in terms, by the way—was a deed that took many millions of years and much humility and self-denial.

Yet it had been worth it. The wogs' fathers had finally made the ventral to dorsal shift and sheathed their bones in muscle. Their cold blood became warm; they developed airsacs and then lungs. Their nerves ramified and grew intricate. The strata-shot eye of the epoch winked, and a monkeylike creature appeared. Another wink, and it was an ape. After a very long while, as years go, it came down from the trees. Once brachiate, it began walking on two feet. It passed through australopithecoid, pithecanthropoid, and neanderthaloid stages. It became Fobo.

One of the few arthropodal heritages left was the pair of antennae. Eras ago they might have been used, as some insects are supposed to use theirs, for communication. Now their function was rudimentary, but effective. They were

so sensitive they could pick up nervous discharges from the skin of other beings. That gift, thought Hal, probably helped make the Ozagen society what it was. No wogglebug could fool another about his emotions. If he pretended friendliness, he would be betrayed. Hate, fear, rage, affection and love were easily read. A wog had to express what he felt, because he could not hide it. And once he had expressed, he had discharged his emotions, rebalanced his organism, and opened himself to rational talk and conduct.

At least, that was the theory. In actual practice, as Fobo said, it was not so easy.

Hal became aware that Fobo was talking to him:

"— this *joat* that *monsieur* Pornsen called you when he was so angry and furious. What does that mean?"

THE Terran could not tell Fobo that the word was an initial combination, formed from the first letters of jack-of-all-trades. The wog would wonder how they deduced that combination from French.

"It means," he said carefully, "that I am not a specialist in any of the sciences, but one who knows, or is supposed to know, a great deal about all of them. Actually, I am a liaison officer between various scientists and the government. It is my business to summarize and integrate what is going on in science and then report to the hierarchy."

He glanced at the statue. The woman was not in sight.

"Science has become so specialized that intelligible communication even between scientists in the same field is very difficult. Each has a deep vertical knowledge of his own little field, but not much horizontal. The more he knows about his own subject, the less aware he is of what others are doing. It is so bad that a physicist, for instance, who deals in mercury anti-ions will find it hard to talk the same language as one whose

study is radioactive isotopes. Or two doctors who specialize in nose dysfunctions. One treats the left nostril; the other, the right. Believe me, that's not exaggerated."

Fobo shrugged his shoulders and threw up his hands. He might have been French.

"But . . . science would come to a standstill!"

"Exactly."

Hal saw a head stick out from the base of the statue. It withdrew. Hal began sweating.

Fobo questioned the joat about the religion of the Forerunner. Hal was as taciturn as possible and replied to some questions not at all. The wog was nothing if not logical, and logic was the light that Hal had never turned upon what he had been taught by the Urielites.

Finally the empathist said, "I feel that this conversation is making you nervous. Perhaps we can pursue it some other time. Tell me, what do you think of these ruins?"

"Very interesting. What I cannot imagine is how these people, who you say once covered this huge continent, could entirely die out."

"Oh, there may be a few in the backwoods or jungles. But most died in the wars with us about five hundred years ago. Since then there's been peace on this planet. It's true we wiped them out, but they were very decadent, quarrelsome and greedy, and forced my ancestors to fight them."

Human, all right, thought Hal.

"I'll tell you later about their decline and fall," Fobo said. "In some ways it is a fantastic story. Right now, I think I'll go to bed."

"I'm restless. If you don't mind, I'll poke around. These ruins are fascinating in the moonlight."

"Reminds me of a poem by our great bard, Shamer. If I could remember it, I'd quote it." Fobo's V-in-V lips yawned. "*Bonne nuit.*"

Hal watched him until he'd disap-

peared, then turned and walked toward the statue of the Great Mother. When he got to the shadows in its base, he saw the girl slipping into the darkness cast by a mountainous heap of rubble. He followed, only to see her thirty yards ahead, leaning against a monolith. Beyond was the lake, silvery and black in the moonpaint.

"*B'swa, soo Yarrow.*" Her voice was low and throaty.

"*Bon soir, mademoiselle,*" he said mechanically . . . and then paused, struck.

OF COURSE! Now he knew why it had had a familiar ring. *B'swa* was *bon soir*! Even though her words were a degraded form, they could not disguise their essential Latinity. *B'swa!* And *v'fayfvoo* was *levez-vous*, which was French for "get up." How could he have missed it? It must have been because his mind wasn't expecting the familiar, and therefore had not recognized it. *Say mwa. C'est moi.* It's I. And *soo Yarrow*. Could that be *monsieur Yarrow*? The initial m dropped. Final r also. Abandonment of nasalization plus vowel and consonant shifts in other words. Different, but still subtly Gallic.

"*Bon soir, mademoiselle.*"

How inadequate those words were. Here were two human beings meeting a thousand light-years from Earth, one a man who had not seen a woman for two years, the other a woman obviously hiding; perhaps the only woman left on the planet. And all he could say was "Good evening, miss."

He stepped closer. Suddenly he was flushed with heat. Her white skin was relieved only by two black, narrow strips of cloth, one across her breasts, the other diapered around the hips. In all his life he had seen only one woman who was not clad from neck to floor in thick cloth, and that had been in a semidarkness. She had been his wife.

The heat of his embarrassment was followed by a gasp of astonishment. She was lipstickked! Her lips were scar-

let in the moonlight with the forbidden rouge.

His mind gave that problem a quick flip in the air and considered its other side. Cosmetics had gone out with the coming of the Forerunner. They were unreal, immoral. No woman dared . . . well, that wasn't true . . . it was just in the Haijac Union that they were not used. Israeli and Bantu women wore rouge; but then everybody knew what kind of women they were.

Another step, and Hal breathed hard again. He was close enough to see that the scarlet was natural. That meant that she was not Earthborn but was an Ozagen human being. The murals in the ruins showed red-lipped women, and Fobo had told him they were born with the flaming labile pigment.

But how could that be? She spoke a Terran dialect.

The next moment he forgot about his doubts and paradoxes. She was clinging to him, and he had his arms around her, clumsily trying to comfort her. She was pouring out words, one so fast after the other that even though he knew they came from the French he could only make out a word here and a phrase there.

Hal asked her to slow down and go over what she had said. She paused, her head cocked slightly to the left, while he enunciated clearly his request. When he was through, she brushed back the hair over one ear, a gesture he was to find characteristic of her when she was thinking.

Then she repeated.

She began slowly enough. But as she progressed she speeded up, her full lips working like two bright-red things independent of her, packed with their own life and purpose.

Fascinated, Hal watched them. As they worked, they seemed to send stabs of desire into him, almost as if they were heliographing erotic messages.

With an effort he lifted his gaze from them and listened, trying to grasp her whole story.

SHE told it disconnectedly and with repetition and backtracking. But he could understand that her name was Jeannette, that she came from a plateau in the tropics of Ozagen, that she was

in the ruins and the nearby forest, that she was frightened because of the things that prowled the forest at night, that she lived on wild fruit and berries or on food stolen from wog farmhouses,



The hideous insectal face was pointed at him

one of the few human beings left on the planet, that she had been captured by an exploring party of wogs and taken to Siddo, that she had only recently escaped, that she had been hiding

that she had seen Hal when he crashed the jalopy, that she had followed him and listened to his conversations with the two wogs and with the gapt, that she could tell by her instincts—here she

used a word that he did not understand but which he translated as "instincts"—that he was a man she could trust, that he had to do something for her.

That he had to save her.

Tears filled her big dark eyes, and her voice broke. She leaned against him; her shoulders were soft and smooth; her full breasts pressed against his ribs. What her words did not say, her body did.

Yarrow thought swiftly. He had to get back to the room in the ruins before Pornsen woke up. And he couldn't see her tomorrow, because a gig from the ship was picking the two Haijacs up in the morning. Whatever he was going to do would have to be told to her in the next few minutes.

Suddenly he had a plan; it unfolded in an instant from another idea, one he had long carried around buried in the fertile soil of his brain. Its seeds had been in him even before the ship had left Earth. But he hadn't had the courage to carry it out. Now, with the sudden appearance of this girl as a catalyst, he was thrown into action. She was what he needed to spark his guts and make him step onto a path that, once taken, could not be retraced.

"Jeannette," he said rapidly and fiercely, "listen to me! You'll have to wait here every night. No matter what things haunt the dark, you'll have to be here. I can't tell you just when I'll be able to get a gig and fly here. Sometime in the next three weeks, I think. If I'm not here by then, keep waiting. *Keep waiting!* I'll be here! And when I am, we'll be safe. Safe for a while, at least. Can you do that? Can you hide here? And wait?"

She nodded her head and said, "Vi."

V

TWO weeks later, Yarrow flew from the spaceship *Gabriel* to the ruins. His needle-shaped gig gleamed in the big moon as it floated over the white marble buildings and settled to a stop. The city

lay silent and bleached, great stone cubes and hexagons and cylinders and pyramids and statues like toys left scattered while the giant child went to bed and slept forever.

The Terran stepped out, glanced to left and right, and then strode to an enormous arch. His flashlight probed its darkness; his voice echoed from the faraway roof and walls.

"*Jeannette. C'est moi. Votre ami, Hal Yarrow. Jeannette. Ou êtes vous?*"

He walked down the fifty-yard-broad staircase that led to the crypts of the kings. The beam bounced up and down the steps and suddenly splashed against the black and white figure of the girl.

"Hal!" she cried, looking up at him. "Thank the Great Stone Mother! I've waited every night! But I knew you'd come!"

Tears trembled on the long lashes; her scarlet mouth was screwed up as if she were doing her best to keep from sobbing. He wanted to take her in his arms and comfort her, but a lifetime of "you-must-nots" stiffened his arms. It was a terrible thing even to look at a woman as unclothed as she was. To embrace her would be unthinkable. Nevertheless, that was exactly what he was thinking of.

The next minute, as if divining his paralysis, she moved to him and put her head on his chest. Her own shoulders hunched forward as she tried to burrow into him. He found his arms going around her. His muscles tightened, and heat stabbed from his stomach down into his loins.

He released her and looked away. "We'll talk later. We've no time to lose. Come."

She followed him, silently, until they came to the gig. Then she hesitated by the door. He gestured impatiently for her to climb in and sit down beside him.

"You will think I'm a coward," she said. "But I have never been in a flying machine. To leave this solid earth. . . ."

Surprised, he could only stare at her.

It was hard for him to understand the mental attitude of a person totally unaccustomed to airtravel. Such reactions did not fit into his culture.

"Get in!" he barked.

Obediently enough, she got in and sat down in the co-pilot's seat. She could not keep from trembling, however, or looking with huge brown eyes at the instruments before and around her.

Deciding the best thing to do was to ignore her fear, Hal glanced at his watchphone.

"Ten minutes to get to my apartment in the city. One minute to drop you off there. A half-minute to return to the ship. Fifteen minutes to report on my espionage among the wogs. Thirty seconds to return to the apartment. Not quite half an hour in all. Not bad."

He laughed. "I would have been here two days ago, but I had to wait until all the gigs that were on automatic were in use. Then I pretended that I was in a hurry, that I had forgotten some notes, and that I had to go back to my apartment to pick them up. So I borrowed one of the manually controlled gigs used for exploration outside the city. I never could have gotten permission from the O.D. for that, but he was overwhelmed by this."

Hal touched a large golden badge on his left chest. It bore a Hebrew L.

"That means I'm one of the Chosen. I've passed the 'Meter."

Jeannette had seemingly forgotten her terror and had been looking at Hal's face in the glow from the panel-light. She gave a little cry. "Hal Yarrow! What have they done to you?" Her fingers touched his face.

HE LOOKED at her. A deep purple ringed his eyes; his cheeks were sunken, and in one a muscle twitched; a rash spread over his forehead; and the seven whipmarks stood out against a pale skin.

"Anybody would say I was crazy to do it," he said. "I stuck my head in the lion's mouth. And he didn't bite my

head off. Instead, I bit his tongue."

"What do you mean?"

"Listen. Didn't you think it was strange that Pornsen wasn't with me tonight, breathing his sanctimonious breath down my neck? No? Well, you don't know our setup. There was only one way I could get permission to move out of my quarters in the ship and get an apartment in Siddo. That is, without having a gapt living with me to watch my every move. And without having to leave you out here in the forest. And I couldn't do *that*."

He shook his head. She ran her finger down the line from his nose to the corner of his lip. Ordinarily he would have shrunk from the touch, because he hated close contact with anybody. Now, he didn't shrink.

"Hal," she said softly. "*M' sheh.*"

"*Mon cher,*" he corrected

"*Mon cher,*" she repeated.

He felt a glow. *My dear.* Well, why not?

To stave off the headiness her touch gave, he said, "There was only one thing to do. Volunteer for the 'Meter."

"*Le Mètre? Keskasakah?*"

"It's the only thing that can free you from the constant shadow of a gapt. Once you've passed it, you're pure, above suspicion—theoretically, at least.

"My petition caught the hierarchy off guard. They never expected any of the scientists—let alone me—to volunteer. Urielites and Uzzites have to take it if they hope to advance in the hierarchy—"

"Urielites? Uzzites?"

"To put it in ancient terminology, priests and cops. The Forerunner adopted those terms—the names of angels—for religious-governmental use—from the Talmud. See?"

"*Non.*"

"You'll be clearer about that later. Anyway, only the most zealous ask to face the 'Meter. It's true that many people do, but the majority do it because they are compelled to. The Urielites were gloomy about my chances be-

fore it, but they were forced by law to let me try my chances. Besides, they were bored, and they wanted to be entertained—in their grim fashion.

HE SCOWLED a little at the memory. "So it was that a day later I was told to report to the psych lab at 2300 S.T.—Ship's Time, that is. I went into my cabin — Pornsen was out — opened my labcase, and took out a bottle labeled 'Prophetsfood.' It was supposed to contain a powder whose base was peyote. That's a drug that was once used by American Indian medicine-men."

"Quoi?"

"Just listen. You'll get the main points. Prophetsfood is taken by everybody during Purification Period. That's two days of locking yourself in a cell, fasting, praying, being flagellated by electric whips, and seeing visions induced by hunger and Prophetsfood. Also subjective time-traveling."

"Quoi?"

"Don't keep saying 'What?' I haven't got time to explain dunnology . . . It took me ten years of hard study to understand it and its mathematics. Even then, there were a lot of questions I had. But it's not wise to ask them. You might be thought to be doubting.

"Anyway, my bottle did not hold Prophetsfood. Instead it contained a substitute I'd secretly prepared just before the ship left Earth. That powder was the reason why I dared face the 'Meter. And why I was not as terrified as I should have been . . . though I was scared enough. Believe me."

"I do believe you. You were brave. You overcame your fear."

Hot blood crept beneath his face-skin. It was the first time in his life he had ever been complimented.

"A month before the expedition took off for Ozagen, I had noticed in one of the many scientific journals that passed under my nose an announcement that a certain drug had been synthesized. Its efficacy was in destroying the virus of the so-called Sirian 'rash.'

What interested me was a footnote. It was in small print and in Hebrew, which showed that the biochemist must have realized its importance."

"Poow kwa?"

"Why? Well, I imagine it was in Hebrew in order to keep any layman from understanding it. If a secret like that became generally known. . . .

"The note commented briefly that it had been found that a man suffering from the 'rash' was temporarily immune to the effects of hypno-lipno. And that the Urielites should take care during any sessions with the 'Meter that their subject was healthy."

"I have trouble understanding you," she said.

"I'll go slower. Hypno-lipno is the most widely used truth-drug. I saw at once the implications in the note. The beginning of the article had described how the Sirian 'rash' was narcotically induced for experimental purposes. The drug used was not named, but it did not take me long to look it and its processing up in other journals. I thought: if the true 'rash' would make a man immune to hypno-lipno, why wouldn't the artificial?"

"No sooner said than done. I prepared a batch, inserted a tape of questions about my personal life in a psychotester, injected the 'rash' drug, injected the truth drug, and swore that I would lie to the tester about my life. And I *could* lie, even though shot full of hypno-lipno!"

"You're so intelligent," she murmured.

SHE squeezed his biceps. He hardened them. It was a vain thing to do, but he wanted her to think he was strong.

"Nonsense!" he clipped. "A blind man would have seen what to do. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if the Uzzites had arrested the chemist and put out orders for some other truth drug to be used. If they did, they were too late. Our ship left before any such news reached us.

"Anyway, the first day with the 'Meter was nothing to worry about. I took a twelve-hour written and oral test in serialism. That's Dunne's theories of time and Sigmen's amplifications on it. I've been taking that same test for years. Easy but tiring.

"The next day I rose early, bathed, injected what was supposed to be Prophetsfood, and, breakfastless, went into the Purification Cell. Alone, I lay two days on a cot. From time to time I took a drink of water or a shot of the false drug. Now and then I pressed the button that sent the mechanical scourge lashing against me. The more flagellations, you know, the higher your credit.

"I didn't see any visions. I did break out with the 'rash.' That didn't worry me. If anybody got suspicious, I could explain that I had an allergy to Prophetsfood. Some people do."

He looked below. Moonfrosted forest and an occasional square or hexagonal light from a farmhouse. Ahead was

the high range of hills that shielded Siddo.

"So," he continued, unconsciously talking faster as the hills loomed closer, "at the end of my purification I rose, dressed, and ate the ceremonial dinner of locusts and honey."

"Ugh!"

"Locusts aren't so bad if you've been eating them since childhood."

"Locusts are delicious," she said. "I've eaten them many times. It's the combination with honey that sickens me."

He shrugged and said, "I'm turning out the cabin lights. Get down on the floor. And put on that cloak and night-mask. You can pass for a wog."

OBEDIENTLY she slid off the seat. Before he flicked the lights off, he glanced down. She was leaning over while picking up the cloak, and he could not help getting a full glimpse of her

[Turn page]

superb breasts. Though he jerked his head away, he kept the image in his head. He felt both deeply aroused and ashamed.

He continued uncomfortably: "Then the hierarch came in. Macneff the Sandalphon, that is, the Archurielite, the theologians, and the dunnological specialists: the psychoneural parallelists, the interventionists, the substratumists, the chronotropists, the pseudotemporalists, the cosmobservists.

"I was seated on a chair. Wires were taped to my body. Needles were stuck in my arms and back. Hypno-lipno was injected. The lights were turned out. Prayers were said; readings from the Western Talmud and the Revised Scriptures were intoned. Then a spotlight shone down from the ceiling upon the Elohimeter. . . ."

"*Keskasekasah?*"

"Elohim is Hebrew for God. Meter is Greek for—well, for those." He pointed at the instrument panel. "The Elohimeter is round and enormous, and its needle, as long as my arm, is straight up and down. The circumference of the dial's face is marked with Hebraic letters that are supposed to mean something to those giving the test.

"Most people are ignorant of what the dipping and rising needle shows. But I'm a goat. I've access to the books that describe the test."

"Then you knew the answers, *nespa?*"

"*Oui.* Though that means nothing, because hypno-lipno brings out the truth, the reality . . . unless, of course, you are suffering from Sirian 'rash,' natural or artificial."

His sudden laugh was a mirthless bark.

"Under the drug, Jeannette, all the dirty and foul things you've done and thought, all the hates you've had for your superiors, all the doubts about the realness of the Forerunner's doctrines—these rise up from your lower-level minds like soap released at the bottom of a dirty bathtub. Up it comes, slick and irresistibly buoyant and covered

with all the layers of scum.

"But I sat there, and I watched the needle—it's just like watching the face of God, Jeannette—you can't understand that, can you?—and I lied. Oh, I didn't overplay it. I didn't pretend to be incredibly pure and faithful. I confessed to minor unrealities. Then the needle would flicker and go back around the circumference a few square letters. But on the big issues, I answered as if my life depended on them. Which it did.

"And I told them my dreams—my subjective time-traveling."

"*Subjectif?*"

"*Oui.* Everybody travels in time subjectively. But the Forerunner is the only man, except his first disciples and a few of the scriptural prophets, who has traveled objectively.

"Anyway, my dreams were beauties—architecturally speaking. Just what they liked to hear. My last, and crowning, creation—or lie—was one in which the Forerunner himself appeared on Ozagen and spoke to the Sandalphon, Macneff. That event is supposed to take place a year from now."

"Oh, Hal!" she breathed. "Why did you tell them that?"

"Because now, *ma chère*, the expedition will not leave Ozagen until that year is up. They couldn't go without giving up the chance of seeing Sigmen in the flesh as he voyages up and down the stream of time. Nor without making a liar of him. And of me. So, you see, that colossal lie will make sure that we have at least a year together. . . ."

"And then?"

"We'll think of something else then."

Her throaty voice murmured in the darkness by the seat: "And you would do all that for me. . . ."

HAL did not reply. He was too busy keeping the gig close to the rooftop level. Clumps of buildings, widely separated by woods, flashed by. So fast was he going that he almost overshot

Fobo's castlelike house. Three stories high, medieval-seeming with its crenellated towers and gargoyle heads of stone beasts and insects leering out from many niches, it was not nearer than a hundred yards to any other building. Wogs built their cities with plenty of elbow-room in mind.

Jeanette put on the long-snouted nightmask; the gig's door swung open; they ran across the sidewalk and into the building. After they dashed through the lobby and up on the steps to the second floor, they had to stop while Hal fumbled for the key. He had had a wog smith make the lock and a wog carpenter install it. He hadn't trusted the carpenter's mate from the ship, because there was too much chance of duplicate keys being made.

He finally found the key, had trouble inserting it. When the door opened, he was breathing hard. He almost pushed Jeannette through. She had taken her mask off.

"Wait, Hal," she said, leaning her weight against his. "Haven't you forgotten something?"

"Oh, *Forerunner!* What could it be? Something serious?"

"No. I only thought," and she smiled and then lowered her lids, "that it was the Terran custom for men to carry their brides across the threshold."

His jaw dropped. Bride! She was certainly taking a lot for granted!

He couldn't take time to argue. Without a word, he swept her up in his arms and carried her into the apartment. There he put her down and said, "Back as soon as possible. If anybody knocks or tries to get in, hide in that special closet I told you about. Don't make a sound or come out until you're sure it's me."

She suddenly put her arms around him and kissed him.

"*M'sheh, m'gwa, foh.*"

Things were going too fast. He didn't say a word or even return her kiss. Vaguely he felt that her words, applied to him, were somewhat ridiculous. If

he translated her degenerate French right, she had called him her dear, her strong man.

Turning, he closed the door; but not so quickly that he did not see the hall-light shine on a white face haloed blackly by a hood. A red red mouth stained the whiteness.

He shook. He had a feeling that Jeannette was not going to be the frigid mate so much admired, officially, by the Sturch.

VI

HAL was an hour late returning home from the *Gabriel*, because the Sandalphon asked for more details about the prophecy he'd made concerning Sigmen. Then Hal had to dictate his report on the day's espionage to a stenoservo. Afterwards, he ordered a sailor to pilot his gig back to the apartment. While he was walking toward the launching-rack, he met Pornsen.

"*Shalom, abba,*" greeted Hal.

He smiled and rubbed his knuckles against the raised lamech on the shield.

The gapt's left shoulder, always low, sagged even more, as if it were a flag dipping in surrender. His ward was now out of his reach. More, if there were any whipcuts to be given, they would be struck by Yarrow.

The joat puffed out his chest and started to walk on, but Pornsen said, "Just a minute, son. Are you going back to the city?"

"Shib."

"Shib. I'll ride back with you. I have an apartment in the same building. On the third floor, right next door to Fobo's.

Hal opened his mouth to protest, then closed it. It was Pornsen's turn to smile. He knew he had nettled the joat. He turned and led the way. Hal followed with tight lips. Had the gapt perhaps trailed him and seen his meeting with Jeannette? No. If he had, he would have had Hal arrested at once.

The thing was that the gapt was small-minded. He knew his presence would annoy Hal.

Under his breath Hal quoted an old proverb, "A gapt's teeth never let loose."

The sailor was waiting by the gig. They all got in and dropped silently into the night.

At the apartment-building Hal strode into the doorway ahead of Pornsen. He felt a slight glow of satisfaction at thus breaking etiquette and expressing his contempt for the man.

Before opening his door, he paused. The guardian angel passed silently behind him. Hal, struck with a devilish thought, called out in French, "*Père!*"

Pornsen turned.

"What?"

"Would you care to inspect my rooms and see if I'm hiding a woman in there?"

The little man purpled. He closed his eyes and swayed, dizzy with sheer fury. When he opened them he shouted, "Yarrow! If ever I saw an unreal personality, you're it! I don't care how you stand with the hierarchy! I think you're—you're—just not simply shib!"

Hal looked blank. "I'm sure I don't know what you mean, Pornsen. I'm pure. I've proven there isn't an evil thought in my head."

His voice became strident, harsh. "Pornsen, you've just been talking in English! I'm sorry, but I have to report that in the morning. You know what that means!"

Pornsen's red face was suddenly drained of its blood. He opened his mouth, closed it, looked at Yarrow's merciless face, spun on his bootheels and walked away.

Hal leaned against the doorway. He felt both weak and triumphant. When he had recovered from the reaction of baiting his guardian, he turned the key in his lock. Around and around in his head flew the thought that it had taken this girl only a few hours to fill him with enough courage to overcome thirty

years of fear and submissiveness.

He clicked on the front room lights. Looking beyond into the dining room, he could see the closed kitchen door. The rattling of pots came through it. He sniffed deeply.

Steak!

The pleasure was replaced by a frown. He'd told her to hide until he returned. What if he had been a wog or an Uzzite?

When he swung the door open, the hinges squeaked. Jeannette's back was to him. At the first protest of un-oiled iron, she whirled. The spatula in her hand dropped; the other hand flew to her open mouth.

The angry words on his lips died. If he were to scold her now, she would probably break out in embarrassing tears.

"*M'tyuh!* You startled me!"

He grunted and went by her to lift the lids on the pots.

"You see," she said, her voice trembling as if she divined his anger and were defending herself, "I have lived such a life, being afraid of getting caught, that anything sudden scares me. I am always ready to run."

"How those wogs fooled me!" Hal said sourly. "I thought they were so kind and gentle, and now I find they've kept you prisoner for two years."

She glanced at him out of the side of her large eyes. Her color had come back; her red lips smiled.

"Oh, they weren't so bad. They really were kind. They gave me everything I wanted, except my freedom. They were afraid I'd make my way back to my aunts and sisters."

"What did they care?"

"Oh, they thought there might be some males of my race left in the jungle and that I might give them children. They are terribly frightened of my race becoming numerous and strong again and making war on them. They do not like war."

"Hm! Well, let's eat."

When they had finished, he sighed,

patted his stomach, and said, "Ah, Jeannette, the soup was the best I ever tasted. The bread was fresh and hot. The salad was superb. The steak was perfect."

"My aunts gave me very good training. Among my people the female is taught at an early age all that will please a man. All. By the time we've grown up, we do it almost instinctively."

Hal leaned back and lit a cigarette. She tried one, coughed, then drew in and blew out smoke like a veteran. She seemed to have an amazing facility for imitation. Show or tell her something once, and she never forgot it.

They smoked awhile, looking at each other. During the meal she had chattered lightly and amusingly about her life with her father and her relatives. She had the trick of raising her eyebrows as she laughed; he was fascinated by them. They were almost bracket-shaped. A thin line rose from the bridge of the nose, turned at right angles, curved slightly while going above the eyesockets, and then made a little hook downwards. He asked her if the shape was a trait of her mother's people. She laughed and said No, she got them from her father. Her laughter was low and musical. It did not get on his nerves, as his ex-wife's had. Lulled by it, he felt pleasant. She seemed to have a sixth sense that guessed his moods and thoughts and exactly what he needed to blunt any gloominess or sharpen any gaiety.

Finally he said, "We'll have to wash the dishes. It would never do for a visitor to see a table set for two. And another thing: we'll have to hide the cigarettes, and air out the rooms frequently. Now that I've been 'Metered, I'm supposed to have renounced such vices as smoking."

Jeannette would not let him help her do the dishes. He smoked and speculated about the chances of getting tobacco. She so enjoyed the cigarettes that he could not stand the idea of her missing out on them. One of the crewmen he

knew did not smoke, but instead sold his ration to his mates. Maybe a wog could act as middleman; buy the stuff from the sailor, and pass it on to Hal. He'd have to be careful . . . maybe it wasn't worth it. . . .

Hal sighed. Having Jeannette was wonderful, but she was beginning to complicate his life. Here he was, contemplating a criminal action as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

She was standing before him, hands on her hips, eyes shining.

"Now, Hal, *mon cher*, if we only had something to drink . . . it would make a perfect evening."

He got to his feet. "Sorry. I forgot you wouldn't know how to make coffee."

"*Non. Non.* It is the liquor I am thinking of. *L'alcool. Pas le café.*"

"Alcohol? Good God, girl, we don't *drink!* That'd be the most disgust—"

He stopped. She was hurt. He mastered himself. After all, she couldn't help it. She came from a different culture. She wasn't even, strictly speaking, all human.

"I'm sorry," he said. "It's a religious matter. Forbidden."

Tears filled her eyes. Her shoulders began to shake. She put her face into her hands and began to sob. "You don't understand. I have to have it. I have to."

"But why?"

She spoke from behind her fingers. "Because during my imprisonment I had little to do but entertain myself. My captors gave me liquor; it helped to pass the time and make me forget how utterly homesick I was. Before I knew it, I was an—an alcoholic."

Hal clenched his fists and growled, "Those sons of bugs!"

"So you see, I have to have a drink. It would make me feel better, just for the time being. And later, maybe later, I can try to overcome it. I know I can, if you'll help me."

He gestured emptily. "But—where can I get you any?" His stomach

revolted at the idea of trafficking in alcohol, but if she needed it, he'd try his best to get it.

Swiftly she said, "Fobo lives on the third floor. Perhaps he could give you some."

"But Fobo was one of your captors! Won't he suspect something if I come asking for alcohol?"

"He'll think it's for you."

"All right," he said, somewhat sullenly, and at the same time guiltily because he was sullen. "But I hate for anybody to think I drink. Even if he is just a wog."

She came up to him and seemed to flow against him. Her lips pressed softly and hotly. Her body tried to pass through his. He held her for a minute and then took his mouth away.

"Do I have to leave you?" he whispered. "Couldn't you pass up the liquor? Just for tonight? Tomorrow I'll get you some."

Her voice broke. "Oh, *m'namoow*, I wish I could. How I wish I could. But I can't. I just can't. Believe me. . . ."

"I believe you."

He released her and walked into the front room, where he took a hood, cloak, and nightmask out of the closet. His head was bent; his shoulders sagged. Everything would be spoiled. He would not be able to get near her, not with her breath stinking with alcohol. And she'd probably wonder why he was cold, and he wouldn't have the nerve to tell how revolting she was, because that would hurt her feelings. To make it worse, she'd be hurt anyway, if he offered no explanation.

Before he left, she kissed him again on his now frozen lips.

"Hurry! I'll be waiting."

"Yeah."

VII

YARROW knocked lightly. Fobo's apartment was next door to Pornsen's. Tonight was not a good time for the gapt to see him visiting the empathist.

When the door opened, he stepped in and shut it quickly. Noise bounced off the walls of the room, large as a basketball court. Screaming, twelve wog children raced around. Abasa, Fobo's wife, was sitting in one corner and chattering with three female visitors. The empathist himself was at a table by the door, reading.

Hal shouted, "How can you concentrate?"

Fobo looked up. "Why, can't you cut out all unwanted noises with an effort of will? That is, turn off certain nerve paths? No? Well, we wogs can, though how, we don't know. That is one of the subjects for research at the nearby College of Empathology. And now, won't you sit down? I'd offer you a drink, but I'm fresh out."

Hal was sure that his dismay didn't show on his face, but Fobo's antennae must have picked it up.

"Anything wrong?"

Hal decided not to waste time. "Yes. Where can I get a quart of liquor?"

The wog took his night garments down from a hook, put them on, and then buckled on a broad leather belt with sheath and short rapier.

"I was just thinking of going out and getting some. You see, this empathology is very trying on the nerves. I run into so many people who need help; and since I must put myself into their shoes, feel their emotions as they feel them, and then must wrench myself out of their shoes and take an objective look at their problems, I am exhausted and shaken at the end of the day. I find that a drink or two relaxes me. You understand?"

The Terran didn't, but he shook his head yes. He wondered how he was going to explain that he was breaking the law by drinking. He'd have to stress the necessity of saying nothing to Pornsen.

Outside, Hal said, "Why the sword?"

"Oh, there isn't much danger, but it's best to be careful. You see, this is a world of insects whose development and specialization go even beyond that of

your planet. You know the parasites and mimics that infest ant colonies, don't you? The beetles that look like ants and make an easy living from that resemblance? The pygmy ants and other tiny creatures that live in the walls and prey on the eggs and the young? Well, we have things analogous to them. Things that hide in sewers or basements or hollow trees and creep around the city at night. Our streets are well-lighted and patrolled, but they are often separated by wooded stretches. . . ."

By the time Fobo had finished talking, they had passed through a park, zigzagged down a dozen blocks of a shopping district, now closed, and stopped before a building in front of which a big electric sign blazed.

"Duroku's Tavern," translated Fobo.

IT WAS in the basement. Hal, after stopping to shudder at the blast of liquor that came up the steps, followed the wog. In the entrance he paused to blink.

Loud odors of alcohol mingled with loud bars of a strange music and even louder talk. Wogs crowded the hexagonal-topped tables and leaned across big pewter steins to shout in each other's face. Antennae wiggled with drunken emotion. Somebody waved his hands uncoordinatedly and sent a stein crashing. A waitress, looking much like her Terran counterpart with her white apron and peaked cap, hurried up with a towel to mop up the mess. When she

bent over, she was slapped resoundingly on the rump by a jovial, greenfaced, and very fat wogglebug. His tablemates howled with laughter, their broad V-in-V lips wide open. The waitress laughed, too, and said something to the fat one that must have been witty, for the tables roundabout guffawed.

On a platform at one end of the room a five-piece band slammed out fast and weird notes. Hal saw three instruments that looked Terranlike: a harp, a trumpet, and a drum. A fourth musician, however, was not himself producing any music, but was now and then prodding with a long stick a rabbit-sized locustoid insect in a cage. When so urged, the creature rubbed its hind wings over its back legs and gave four loud chirps followed by a long, nerve-scratching screech.

The fifth player was pumping away at a bellows connected to a bag and three short and narrow pipes. A thin squealing came out.

Fobo shouted, "You mustn't judge Ozagen by this place. It's a lowerclass hangout. Especially, don't think that noise is typical of our music. It's cheap popular stuff. I'll take you to a symphony concert one of these days, and you'll hear what great music is like."

The wog led the man to one of the curtained-off booths scattered along the walls. They sat down. A waitress came to them. Sweat ran off her forehead and down her tubular nose.

[Turn page]

"Keep your mask on until we've gotten our drinks," said Fobo. "Then we can close the curtains."

The waitress said something in Wog. Fobo repeated in French, "Beer, wine, or alcohol à la beetle. Myself, I wouldn't touch the first two. They're for women and children."

The Terran didn't want to lose face. He said with a bravado he didn't feel, "The latter, of course."

"Double shot?"

Hal didn't know what that meant, but he nodded.

Fobo held up two fingers. The waitress returned quickly with two big steins. The wog leaned his nose into the fumes and breathed deeply. He closed his eyes in ecstasy, lifted the stein, and drank a long time. When he put the container down, he belched loudly and then smacked his lips.

"Tastes as good coming up as going down!" he bellowed.

The man felt queasy. Eructation was very frowned upon in the Haijac Union.

"*Mais, monsieur!* You are not drinking."

Yarrow said weakly, "*Damifaino,*" the Ozagen equivalent of mud-in-your-eye, and drank.

Fire ran down his throat like lava down a volcano's slope. And, like a volcano, Hal erupted. He coughed and wheezed; liquor spurting out of his mouth; his eyes shut and squeezed out big tears.

"*Tres bonne, n'est-ce pas?*" said Fobo calmly.

"Yes, very good," croaked Yarrow from a throat that seemed to be permanently scarred. Though he had spat most of the stuff out, some of it must have dropped straight through his intestines and into his legs, for he felt a hot tide down there swinging back and forth as if pulled by some invisible moon circling around and around in his head, a big moon that bulged and brushed against the inside of his skull.

"Have another."

The second drink he managed better

—outwardly, at least, for he did not cough or sputter. But inwardly he was not so unconcerned. His belly writhed, and he was sure he would disgrace himself. After a few deep breaths, he thought he would keep the liquor down. Then he belched. The lava got as far as his throat before he managed to stop it.

"Pardon me," he said, blushing.

"Why?" said Fobo.

Hal thought that was one of the funniest retorts he had ever heard. He laughed loudly and sipped at the stein. If he could empty it swiftly and then buy a quart for Jeannette, he could get back before the night was completely wasted.

WHEN the liquor had receded halfway down the stein, Hal heard Fobo, dimly and faroff as if he were at the end of a long tunnel, ask him if he cared to see where the alcohol was made.

"Shib," Hal agreed.

He rose, but had to put a hand on the table to steady himself. The wog told him to put his mask back on. "Earthmen are still objects of curiosity. We don't want to waste all evening answering questions. Or drinking drinks that'll be forced on us."

They threaded through the noisy crowd to a backroom. There Fobo gestured and said, "*Voilà. L'escarbot.*"

Hal looked. If he had not had some of his inhibitions washed away in the liquorish flood, he might have been overwhelmingly repulsed. As it was, he was curious.

The thing sitting on a chair by the table might at first glance have been taken for a wogglebug. It had the antennae, the blond fuzz, the bald pate, the nose, and the V-shaped mouth. It also had the round body and enormous paunch of some of the Ozagens.

But a second look in the bright light from the unshaded bulb overhead showed a creature whose body was sheathed in a hard and lightly green-

tinted chitin. And though it wore a long cloak, the legs and arms were naked. They were not smooth-skinned but were ringed, segmented with the edges of armor-sections, like stovepipes.

Fobo spoke to it in Wog. Yarrow understood some of the words; the others he was able to fill in.

"Ducko, this is Mr. Yarrow. Say hello to Mr. Yarrow, Ducko."

The big blue eyes looked at Hal. There was nothing about them to distinguish them from a wog's, yet they seemed inhuman, thoroughly arthropodal.

"Hello, Mr. Yarrow," Ducko said in a parrot's voice.

"Tell Mr. Yarrow what a fine night it is."

"It's a fine night, Mr. Yarrow."

"Tell him Ducko is happy to see him."

"Ducko is happy to see you."

"And serve him."

"And serve you."

"Show Mr. Yarrow how you make beetlejuice."

A wog standing by the table glanced at his wristwatch. He spoke in rapid Ozagen. Fobo translated.

"He says Ducko ate a half hour ago. He should be ready to serve. These creatures eat a big meal every half hour and then they—watch!"

Duroku hurried up with a huge earthenware bowl and set it on the table. Ducko leaned over it until a half-inch long tube, probably a modified tracheal opening, was poised above the edge. From the tube he shot a clear liquid into the bowl until it was filled to the brim. Duroku grabbed the bowl and carried it off. An Ozagen came from the kitchen with a plate of highly-sugared spaghetti. He set it down, and Ducko began eating from it with a big spoon.

HAL'S brain was by then not working very fast, but he began to see what was going on. Frantically, he looked around for a place to throw up. Fobo shoved a drink under his nose. For lack of anything better to do, he swallowed some. Whole hog or none. Surprising-

ly, the fiery stuff settled his stomach. Or else burned away the rising tide.

"Exactly," replied Fobo to Hal's strangled question. "These creatures are a superb example of parasitical mimicry. Though quasi-insectal, they look much like us. They live among us and earn their board and room by furnishing us with a cheap and smooth alcoholic drink. You noticed its enormous belly, no? *Eh bien*, it is there that they so rapidly manufacture the alcohol and so easily upchuck it. Simple and natural, *oui*? Duroku has two others working for him, but it is their night off, and doubtless they are in some neighborhood tavern, getting drunk. A sailor's holiday. . . ."

Hal burst out, "Can't we buy a quart and get out? I feel sick. It must be the closeness of the air. Or something."

"Something, probably," murmured Fobo.

He sent a waitress after two quarts. While they were waiting for her, they saw a short wog in a mask and blue cloak enter. The newcomer stood in the doorway, black boots widespread and the long tubular projection of the mask pointing this way and that like a sub's periscope peering for prey.

Hal gasped and said, "Pornsens!"

"*Oui*," replied Fobo. "That drooping shoulder and the black boots and the lack of antennae give him away. Who does he think he's fooling?"

The joat looked wildly around. "I've got to get out of here!"

The waitress returned with the bottles. Fobo paid her and gave one to Hal, who automatically put it in the inside pocket of his cloak.

The gapt saw them through the doorway, but he must not have recognized them. Yarrow still wore his mask, while the empathist probably still looked to Pornsens like any other wog. Methodical as always, Pornsens evidently determined to make a thorough search. He brought up his sloping shoulder in a sudden gesture and began parting the curtains of the booths along the walls.

Whenever he saw a wog with his or her mask on, he lifted the grotesque covering and looked behind.

Fobo chuckled. "He won't keep that up long. What does he think we Ozagens are? A bunch of rabbits?"

What he had been waiting for happened. A burly wog suddenly stood up as Pornsen reached for his mask and instead lifted the gapt's. Surprised at seeing a non-Ozagenian's features, the wog dropped his jaw and stared for a second. Then he gave a screech, yelled something, and punched the Earthman in the nose.

At once there was bedlam. Pornsen staggered back into a table, knocking it and its steins over, and fell to the floor. Two wogs jumped him. Another hit a fourth. The fourth struck back. Duroku, carrying a short club, hurried up and began thumping his fighting customers on the back and legs. Somebody threw beetlejuice in his face.

And at that moment Fobo threw the switch that plunged the tavern into darkness.

VIII

HAL stood bewildered. A hand seized his. "Follow me!" The hand tugged. Hal turned and allowed himself to be led, stumbling, toward what he thought was the backdoor.

Any number of others must have had the same idea. Hal was knocked down and trampled upon. Fobo's hand was torn from his. Yarrow cried out for the wog, but any possible answer was drowned out in a chorus of *Beat it! Get off my back, you dumb son-of-a-bug! Great Larva, we're piled up in the doorway!*

Sharp reports added to the noise. A foul stench choked Hal as the wogs, under nervous stress, released the gas in their madbags. Gasping, he fought his way through the door. A few seconds later his mad scrambling over twisting bodies got him his freedom. He lurched down an alleyway. Once on the street,

he ran as fast as he could. He didn't know where he was going. His one thought was to put as much distance as possible between himself and Pornsen.

Arc-lights on top of tall slender iron poles flashed by. He ran with his shoulder almost scraping the buildings. He wanted to stay in the shadows thrown by the many balconies jutting out from the second stories. Presently, he slowed down at a narrow passageway. A glance showed him it wasn't a blind alley. He darted down it until he came to a large square can, one that by its odor must have been used for garbage. Squatting behind it, he tried to lessen his gaspings. After a minute his lungs regained their balance; he no longer had to sob for air. Then he could listen without having his heart thudding in his ears.

He heard no pursuer. After a while he decided it was safe to rise. He felt the bottle in his cloakpocket. Miraculously, it had not been broken. Jeanette would get her liquor. What a story he would have to tell her! After all he had gone through for her, he would surely get a just reward. . . .

He shivered with goose-pimples at the thought and began to walk briskly down the alley. Where he was he had no idea, but he carried a map of the city in his pocket. It had been printed in the ship and bore street names in Ozagen with French translations beneath. All he had to do was read the street-signs under one of the many lamps, orient himself with the map, and return home. As for Pornsen, the fellow had no real evidence against him, and would not be able to accuse him until he got some. Hal's possession of the golden lamech made him above suspicion. Pornsen. . . .

PORNSEN! No sooner had he muttered the name than the flesh appeared. There was a click of hard boot-heels behind him. He turned. A short, cloaked figure was coming down the alley. A lamp's glow outlined the droop of a shoulder and shone on black leather boots. His mask was off.

"Yarrow!" shrilled the gapt. "No use running! Wait!" Triumph was in the voice. "I saw you go in that tavern!"

He clickclacked up to his ward's tall rigid form. "Drinking! I know you were drinking!"

"Yeah?" Hal croaked. "What else?"

"Isn't that enough?" screamed the gapt. "Or are you hiding something in your apartment? Maybe you are! Maybe you've got the place filled with bottles. Come on. Come on. Let's get back to your apartment. We'll go over it and see what we see. I wouldn't be surprised to find all sorts of evidence of your unreal thinking."

Hal hunched his shoulders and clenched his fists, but he said nothing. When the gapt told him to precede him back to Fobo's building, he walked without a sign of resistance. Like conqueror and conquered, they marched from the alley into the street. Yarrow, however, spoiled the picture by reeling a little and having to put his hand to the wall to steady himself.

Pornsen sneered, "You drunken joat! You make me sick to my stomach!"

Hal pointed ahead. "I'm not the only one who's sick. Look at that fellow."

He was not really interested, but he had a wild hope that anything he said or did, however trivial, might put off the final and fatal moment when they would return to his apartment. What he indicated was a large and evidently intoxicated wogglebug hanging onto a lamp post to keep from falling on his tube-shaped nose. The picture might have been one of a nineteenth of twentieth century drunk, complete to top hat, cloak and lamp post. Now and then the creature groaned as if he were deeply disturbed.

"Perhaps we'd better stop and see if he's hurt?" said Hal.

He had to say anything, anything, to delay Pornsen. Before his captor could protest, he went up to the wog. He put his hand on the free arm—the other was wrapped around the post—and spoke in Ozagen.

"Can we help you?"

The big wog looked as if he, too, had been in a brawl. His cloak, besides being ripped down the back, was spotted with dried green blood. He kept his face away from Hal, so that the Earthman had a hard time understanding his muttering.

Pornsen jerked at his arm. "Come on, Yarrow. He'll get by all right. What's one sick bug more or less?"

"Shib," agreed Hal, tonelessly. He let his hand drop and started to walk on. Pornsen, behind, took one step . . . and then bumped into Hal as Hal stopped.

"What are you stopping for, Yarrow?" The gapt's voice was suddenly apprehensive.

And then the voice was screaming in agony.

HAL whirled . . . to see in grim actuality what had flashed across his mind and caused him to stop in his tracks. When he had put his hand on the wog's arm, he had felt, not warm skin, but hard and cool chitin. For a few seconds the meaning of that had not cleared the brain's switchboard. Then it had come through, and he had remembered the talk he and Fobo had had on the way to the tavern, and why Fobo wore a sword. Too late, he had wheeled to warn Pornsen.

Now the gapt was holding both hands to his eyes and shrieking. The big thing that had been leaning against the lamp post was advancing towards Hal. Its body seemed to grow huger with every step. A sac across its chest was swelled until it looked like a palpitating grey balloon; the hideous insectal face, with two vestigial arms waving on each side of its mouth and the funnel-shaped proboscis below the mouth, was pointed at him. It was that proboscis which Hal had mistakenly thought was a wog's nose. In reality, the thing must breathe through tracheae and two slits below the enormous eyes.

Hal yelled with fury and as a means

of discharging his fear. At the same time he grabbed his cloak and threw it up before his face. His mask might have saved him, but he did not care to take the chance.

Something burned the back of his hand. He yelped with pain, but leaped forward. Before the thing could breath in air to bloat the sac again and expell the acid through the funnel, Hal rammed his head against its paunch.

The thing said, "*Oof!*" and fell backward where it lay on its back and thrashed its legs and arms like a giant poisonous bug—which it was. Then, as it recovered from the shock and rolled over and tried to get back on its feet, Hal kicked hard. His leather toe drove with a crunching sound through the thin chitin.

The toe withdrew; a greenish blood oozed out; Hal kicked again in the open place. The thing screamed and tried to crawl away on all fours. The Terran leaped upon it with both feet and bore it sprawling to the cement. He pressed his heel against its thin neck and shoved with all the strength of his leg. The neck cracked. The thing lay still. Its lower jaw dropped open and exposed two rows of tiny needle-teeth. The mouth's rudimentary arms wigwagged feebly for a while and then drooped.

Hal's chest heaved in agony. He couldn't get enough air. His guts quivered and threatened to force their way through his throat. Then they did, and Hal bent over, retching.

All at once, he was sober. By that time Pornsen had quit screaming. He was lying huddled on his side in the gutter. Hal turned him over and shuddered at what he saw. The eyes were partly burned out, and the lips were grey with large blisters. The tongue, too, sticking from the mouth, was swollen and lumpy. Evidently Pornsen had swallowed some of the venom. According to Fobo, even a small part was fatal.

Hal straightened up and walked away. A wog patrol would find the gapt's body and turn it over to the Earthmen. Let

the hierarchy figure out what had happened. Pornsen was dead, and now that he was, Yarrow admitted to himself what he had never allowed himself to admit before this time. He had hated Pornsen. And he was glad that he was dead. If Pornsen had suffered horribly, so what? His pains were brief, but the pain and grief he had caused Hal had lasted for almost thirty years.

In all that time Hal had kept unconscious his desire to kill the man. Now his feelings, anti-climactically, exploded. Tears ran down his cheeks; his shoulders shook with sobs; he staggered like a drunk. Something was reaching down into his intestines and tearing them apart. It wasn't grief. It was hate, working out like a poison, a swift poison leaving his body but boiling him alive. Still, it was coming out, and though he felt that he was dying while it lasted, by the time he arrived at home he felt much better. Fatigue held his arms and legs down, and he could hardly make it up the steps. But inside, where the heart was, he was stronger than he had ever been in his life.

IX

A TALL ghost in a light blue shroud was waiting for the Terran in the false dawn. It was the empathist, standing in the hexagonal-shaped arch that led into his building. When Hal came close, Fobo threw back the hood and exposed a face that was scratched on one cheek and blacked around the right eye.

He chuckled and said, "Some son of a bug pulled my mask off and plowed me good. But it was fun. It helps if you blow off steam that way now and then. How did you come out? I was afraid you might have been picked up by the police. Normally that wouldn't worry me, but I know your colleagues at the ship would frown upon such activities."

Hal smiled wanly. "Frown misses it by a mile."

He wondered how Fobo knew what the hierarch's reactions would be. How

much did these wogs know about the Terrestrials? Were they onto the Haijac game, and waiting to pounce? If so, with what? Their technology, as far as could be determined, was way behind Earth's. True, they seemed to know more of psychic functions than the Terrans did, but that was understandable. The Sturch had long ago decreed that the proper psychology had been perfected and that further research was unnecessary. The result had been a standstill in the psychical sciences.

He shrugged mentally. He was too tired to think of such things. All he wanted was to go to bed.

"I'll tell you later what happened," he said.

Fobo replied, "I can guess. Your hand. You'd better let me fix that burn. Nightlifer venom is nasty."

Like a little child, Hal followed to the wog's apartment and let him put a cooling salve on it.

"*Voilà*," said Fobo. "Go to bed. Tomorrow you can tell me all about it."

Hal thanked him and walked down to his floor. His hand fumbled with the key. Finally, after using Sigmen's name in vain, he inserted the key. When he had shut and locked the door, he called Jeannette. She must have been hiding in the closet-within-a-closet in the bedroom, for he heard two doors bang. In a moment she was running to him. She threw her arms around him.

"Oh, *mon homme, mon homme!* Hal, *mon amour*, what has happened? I was so worried. I thought I would scream when the night went by, and you didn't return."

Though he was sorry he had caused her pain, he could not help a prickling of pleasure because someone cared enough about him to worry. Nobody ever had before.

"There was a brawl," he said. He had decided not to say anything about the gapt or the nightlifer. Later, when the strain had passed, he'd talk.

She untied his cloak and hood and took off his mask. While she hung them

up in the frontroom closet, he sank into a chair and closed his eyes. A moment later they were pulled open by the sound of liquid pouring into a glass. She was standing in front of him and filling a large glass from the quart. The odor of beetlejuice began to turn his stomach, and the picture of a beautiful girl about to drink the nauseating stuff spun it all the way around.

She looked at him. The delicate brackets of her brows rose. "*Qu'y a-t-il?*"

"Nothing's the matter!" he groaned. "I'm all right."

SHE put down the glass, picked up his hand, and led him into the bedroom. There she gently sat him down, pressed on his shoulder until he laid down, and then took off his shoes. He didn't resist. After she unbuttoned his shirt, she stroked his hair.

"You're sure you're all right?"

"Shib. I could lick the world with one hand tied behind my back."

"Good."

The bed creaked as she got up and walked out of the room. Before he could fall asleep, she returned. Again, he opened his eyes. Again, she was standing with a glass in her hand.

She said, "Would you like a sip now, Hal?"

"Great Mind, girl, don't you understand?" he barked. Fury poured adrenalin into his tired blood. He sat up. "Why do you think I got sick? I can't stand the stuff! I can't stand to see you drink it. It makes me sick. You make me sick. What's the matter with you? Are you stupid?"

Jeannette's eyes widened. Blood drained from her face and left the pigment of her lips a crimson moon in a white lake. Her hand shook so that the liquor spilled.

"Why — why —" she gasped — "I thought you said you felt fine. I thought you were all right. I thought you wanted to go to bed with me."

Yarrow groaned. He shut his eyes and laid back down. Sarcasm was lost

on her. She insisted on taking everything literally. She would have to be re-educated, not only in irony, but in other things. If he weren't so exhausted, he would have been shocked by her open proposal—so much like that of the Scarlet Woman in the Western Talmud when she had tried to seduce the Forerunner.

But he was past being shocked. Moreover, a voice on the edge of his conscience said that she had merely put into hard and unrecalable words what he had planned in his heart all this time. But when you spoke them!

A crash of glass shattered his thoughts. He jerked upright. She was standing there, face twisted, lovely red mouth quivering and tears flowing. Her hand was empty. A large wet patch against the wall, still dripping, showed what had become of the glass.

"I thought you loved me!" she yelled.

Unable to think of anything to say, he stared. She spun and walked away. He heard her go into the front room. Loud sobs forced him to jump out of bed and walk swiftly after her. These rooms were supposed to be soundproof, but one never knew. What if she were overheard?

Anyway, she was twisting something inside him, and he had to straighten it out.

WHEN he entered the front room, she didn't look up. For a while he stood silent, wanting to say something but utterly unable to because he had never been forced to solve such a problem before. Haijac women didn't cry often, or if they did, they wept alone in privacy.

He sat down by her and put his hand on her soft shoulder.

"Jeannette."

She turned quickly and laid her dark hair against his chest and said, between sobs, "I thought maybe you didn't love me. And I couldn't stand it. Not after all I've been through!"

"Well, Jeannette, I didn't . . . I mean . . . I wasn't. . . ."

He paused. He had had no intention of saying he loved her. He'd never told any girl he loved her. Nor had any girl ever told him. And here was this girl on a faraway planet, only half-human at that, taking it for granted that he was hers, body and self.

He began speaking in a soft voice. Words came easily, because he was quoting Moral Lecture AT-16:

". . . all beings with their hearts in the right place are brothers . . . Man and woman are brother and sister . . . Love is everywhere . . . but love . . . should be on a higher plane . . . Man and woman should rightly loath the beastly act as something the Great Mind, the Cosmic Observer, has not yet eliminated in man's evolutionary development . . . The time will come when children will be produced otherwise. Meanwhile we must recognize sex as outmoded, and necessary for only one reason: children . . ."

Slap! His head rang, and points of fire whirled off into the blackness before his eyes.

It was a moment before he could realize that Jeannette had leaped to her feet and slammed him hard with the palm of her hand. He saw her standing above him with her eyes slitted and her red mouth open and drawn back in a snarl.

Then she whirled and ran into the bedroom. He got up and followed her. She was lying on the bed, sobbing.

"Jeannette, you don't understand."

"Va t'feh fut!"

When he understood that, he blushed. Then he got mad. He grabbed her by the shoulder and turned her over so that she faced him.

Suddenly he was saying, "But I do love you, Jeannette. I do."

He sounded strange, even to himself. The concept of love, as she meant it, was alien to him—rusty, perhaps, if it could be put that way. It would need a lot of polishing. But it would, he knew, be polished. Here in his arms was one whose very nature and instinct

and education were pointed toward love.

He had thought he had drained himself of grief earlier that night, but now, as he forgot his resolve not to tell her what had happened, and as he recounted, step by step, the long and terrible night, tears ran down his face. Thirty years makes a deep well; it takes a long time to pump out all the weeping.

Jeannette, too, cried, and said that she was sorry that she had gotten angry at him. She promised never again to do so. He said it was all right. They kissed again and again until, like two babies who have wept themselves and loved themselves out of frustration and fury, they passed gently into sleep.

X

AT DAWN the Haijac ship, which had been suspended fifty feet high, settled to earth. All day long it would rest there in the middle of a big glade. At nightfall it would rise again. Even though the Terrans had so far seen no evidence of wog aerial flight, except for a few balloons, they took no chances of sudden attack. The sinking sun always saw the *Gabriel* poised above the tree-tops, radar probing, ready on the instant to accelerate into Ozagen's stratosphere, or, if necessary, into the safety of space.

At 0900 Ship's Time, Yarrow walked into the *Gabriel*, the smell of morning dew on grass in his nostrils. As he had a little time before the conference, he looked up Turnboy, the historian joat. Casually, he asked if Turnboy knew anything of a spaceflight emigration from France during the Forerunner's early days. Turnboy was delighted to show off his knowledge. Yes, the remnants of the Gallic nation had gathered in the Loire country after the Apocalyptic War and had formed the nucleus of what might have become a new France.

But the fastgrowing colonies sent from Iceland to the northern part of France, and from Israel to the southern part, had surrounded the Loire. New

France found itself squeezed economically and religiously. Sigmen's disciples invaded the Catholic territory in waves of missionaries. High tariffs had strangled the little state's trade. Finally a group of Frenchmen, seeing the inevitable absorption or conquest of their state, religion, and tongue, had left in six spaceships, three thousand strong, to find another Gaul rotating about some faroff star. Where they had landed, nobody knew.

Hal thanked Turnboy and walked to the conference room. He spoke to many; two years of flight had enabled him to recognize most of the personnel. Half of them, like him, had a Mongolian tinge to their features. They were the English-speaking descendants of Hawaiian and Australian survivor of the same war which had decimated France. Their manytimes great-grandfathers had repopulated Australia, the Americas, and Japan.

Almost half of the crew spoke Icelandic. Their ancestors had sailed from the grim island to spread across northern Europe and Siberia and Manchuria.

About a sixteenth of the crew spoke Georgian when among their fellows from home. Their fathers had moved down from the Caucasus Mountains and resettled the depopulated plains of southern Russia. A minority in the Haijac Union, they were gradually abandoning their native tongue in favor of that of their closest neighbors—the Icelanders.

At 1200 Hal left the conference room. He felt wonderful. First, he had been moved from twentieth place to the Archurielite's left to sixth from his right. The lamech on his chest made the difference. Second, there was little difficulty about Pornsen's death. The gapt was considered as a casualty of war. Everyone was warned about the night-lifers and other things that sometimes prowled Siddo after dusk. It was not, however, suggested that the Haijacs quit their moonlit espionage.

Macneff, the Achurielite, ordered Hal,

as the dead gapt's spiritual son, to arrange for the funeral the following day. Then he pulled down a huge map from a long roller on the wall. This was the representation of Earth that would be given to the wogs.

It was a good example of the Haijacs' subtlety and Chinese box-within-a-box thinking. The sheet bore two hemispheres of Earth with colored political boundaries. It was correct as far as the Bantu and Malay states were concerned. But the positions of the Israeli and Haijac nations had been reversed. The legend beneath the map said that green was the color of the Forerunner states and yellow was the Hebrews'. The green portion, however, was a ring around the Mediterranean, covering Palestine, Turkey, the Balkans, Italy, Austria, south Germany, lower France, Spain and northern Africa; it included the Sahara Sea, Arabia, Mesopotamia, and eastern Persia.

In other words, said Macneff, if by any inconceivable chance the Ozagenians were concealing spaceships, or captured the *Gabriel* and built ships with it as a model, and if they managed to find Sol, they would still attack the wrong country. They would think the Israeli Republic was the Union. Unless, that is, they took time to capture and question Ter-rans and thus found out the truth. But that was unlikely, for the essence of modern war was the surprise attack. The wogs would not want to give their enemies a chance to prepare.

As everyone knew, Macneff added, the deception might have been furthered by having the *Gabriel's* members speak Hebrew. But since that was the holy tongue, not to be used by the lower classes except in religious rituals nor to be used at all in profane matters such as carrying on a war, it was forbidden.

However—due to the excellent suggestion of Yarrow, the linguistic goat—French was being spoken. If the wogs pierced the deception, they would think it was a ruse of the Israeli.

After the conference, still glowing

from the Achurielite's compliment, Hal gave orders for the funeral arrangements. Other duties kept him till dark, when he returned home.

XI

WHEN YARROW locked the door behind him, he heard the shower running. He hung his coat up in the closet; the water quit splashing. As he went toward his bedroom door, Jeannette stepped out from the bathroom. She was drying her hair with a big towel, and she was naked.

She said, "*Bon jour, Hal,*" and walked on unselfconsciously into the bedroom.

Hal replied feebly. He turned and went back into the front room. He felt foolish, because of his timorousness, and at the same time vaguely wicked, unreal, because of the pounding of his heart, his heavy breathing, the hot and fluid fingers that wrapped themselves, half-pain, half-delight, around his loins.

She came out dressed in a pale green robe which he had purchased for her and which she had re-cut and re-sewed to fit her figure. Her heavy black hair was piled on her head in a Psyche knot. She kissed him and asked if he wanted to come into the kitchen while she cooked. He said that would be fine.

She began making a sort of spaghetti. He asked her to tell him about her life. Once started, she was not hard to keep going.

"... and so my father's people found a planet like Earth and settled there. It was a beautiful planet; that is why they called it *Luhbawpfey*."

"Huh?"

"*Le Beau Pays,*" she enunciated more carefully. "The beautiful land. According to my father, there are about thirty million living there on one continent. My father was not content to live the life his grandfathers had—tilling the soil or running a shop and raising many children. He and some other young men like him took the only spaceship left of the original six that had come there,

and they sailed off to the stars. They came to Ozagen. And crashed. No wonder. It was two hundred and fifty years old."

"The obsolete ion-beam drive. Is the wreck still around?"

"*Vi*. I mean *oui*. Close to where my sisters and aunts and cousins live."

"Your mother is dead?"

SHE hesitated, then nodded. "Yes. She died giving birth to me. And my sisters. Father died later. Or rather, we think he did. He went on a hunting-party and never came back."

Hal frowned. "Wait a minute. You told me that your mother and aunts were the last of the native human beings on Ozagen. And you said once before that Rastignac was the only Earthman to get out alive from the wreck. He was your mother's husband, naturally . . . and incredible as it sounds, their union—one of a terrestrial and an extraterrestrial—was fertile! That alone would rock my colleagues on their heels. Amazing! Completely contrary to accepted science, that their body chemistry and chromosomes should match! But—what I'm getting at is that your mother's *sister* had children, too. If the last Ozagenian human male died years before Rastignac crashed, who was their father?"

"Jean Rastignac. He was the husband of my mother and my four aunts. They all say that he was a superb and very virile lover."

Hal said, "Oh."

Until she had the spaghetti and salad ready, he watched her in silence. By then he had regained some of his perspective. After all, the Frenchman was not too much worse than he himself was. Maybe not as bad. He chuckled. How easy it was to condemn somebody else for giving way to temptation until you yourself faced the same situation. He wondered what Pornsen would have done if Jeannette had contacted him.

" . . . and so it was easy to escape from the wogs," she was saying. "They did

not watch me closely, and they were through examining me. *Mon Dieu*, the tests. Questions, questions! That Fobo asked me all sorts of things. Wanted to find out my intelligence, my personality, my etcetera. Put me under all kinds of machines. He and his fellows turned me inside out. Literally, my dear. They took pictures of my insides. Showed me my skeleton and organs and just simply everything. They said it was most interesting. Imagine that! I am exposed as no woman has ever been exposed, and to them I am just most interesting. Indeed!"

"Well," laughed Hal. "You can't expect arthropods to take the viewpoint of a mammal towards a female . . . that is. . . ."

She looked archly at him. "And am I a mammal?"

"Obviously, unmistakably, indisputably, and enthusiastically."

"For that you get a kiss."

"Hmmm. I'll bet that was almost as good as the spaghetti is going to be."

"You eat your food, and then I will show you something that is much better than almost as good."

He was learning fast. He didn't even flush.

AFTER the meal she cut a pitcher of beetlejuice with water, poured in a purplish liquid which made the drink smell like grapes, and dropped sprigs of an orange plant on the surface. Poured into a glass of ice cubes, it was cool and even tasted like grapes. It did not gag him at all.

"Why did you pick me, instead of Pornsen?" he asked.

She sat on his lap, one arm around his neck, the other on the table, drink in hand. "Oh, you were so goodlooking, and he was so ugly. Besides, I eavesdropped, and he sounded mean. You were nice. And I knew I had to be careful. My father had told me about Earthmen. He said they couldn't be trusted."

"How true. But you must have an instinct for doing the right thing, Jean-

nette. If you had antennae, I'd say you could detect nervous emanations. Here, let's see!" He went to run his fingers through her hair, but she ducked her head and laughed.

He laughed with her and dropped the hand to her shoulder, rubbing the smooth skin. "I was probably the only person on the ship who wouldn't have betrayed you. But I'm in a quandary now. You see, your presence here raises the devil. Here we Haijacs are, speaking French as a sort of camouflage for our real nationality, and all the time the wogs knew our language from the beginning. When we first came here, we were careless of what we said before them, because we figured it would take some time for them to learn French.

"Now our expedition may be in danger. And I can't tell Macneff that, because he would want to know how I knew. That'd give you away. And there's something else. You told me they have x-ray machines. So far we've seen none. Are the wogs hiding them? And if they are, what else are they concealing? And why? It's important that we know; but I can't tell Macneff they're got a hidden technology. So I'm on the horns of a dilemma."

"A dilemma? A beast I never heard of."

He hugged her. "I hope you never do. Listen, Jeannette, this is serious. Sooner or later, and probably sooner, we'll have to make up our minds to leave. Our specialists are working night and day on samples of wogglebug blood. They hope to make an artificial semivirus that will attach itself to the copper in the green blood-cells and change their electrophoretic properties."

"Comment?"

"Don't look so blank. Or giggle. It's deadly serious. It's what killed seven-eighths of Earth's people. Guided missiles by the tens of thousands circling high over the surface. Dropping little knots of protein molecules that locked onto the hemoglobin in the red blood cells and gave them a positive charge

so that one end of a globin molecule would bind with the end of another. Which would make the molecules go into a sort of crystallization. Which would twist the doughnut shaped red cells into a scimitar, and cause an artificial sickle cell anemia.

"The lab-created anemia was much swifter and more certain than the natural kind, because every red cell would be affected, not just a small percentage. Every cell would soon break down. The blood would have no carriers of oxygen to various parts of the body. The body would die.

"The body did die, Jeannette—the body of humanity. Almost a planetful of human beings perished from lack of oxygen. Only by accident did any organized governments survive. Most of those were islands that weren't attacked because they were felt to be too small to bother with. Hawaii, and Iceland, and a city in Australia and Bali.

"Palestine got scotfree by sheer coincidence. An experiment with short radiowaves interfered with the missiles' guiding beams. None got to the Holy Land. By the time the enemy found out why, they were dead. All over the world—not only in the civilized parts, but in the arctic, the jungles, the mountains—they died. Everywhere the missiles circled; everywhere was the invisible rain of death, the skulls, the bones—"

"Hush!" Jeannette put her finger on his quivering lips. "I don't know what you mean by proteins and molecules and those—those electrofrenetic charges! They're way above my head. But I do know that the longer you've been talking, the more scared you've been getting. Your voice was getting higher, and your eyes were growing wider.

"Somebody has frightened you in the past. No! Don't interrupt! They've scared you, and you've been man enough to hide most of your fear, but they've done such a horribly efficient job that you haven't been able to get over it.

"Well—" and she put her soft lips to his ears and whispered—"I'm going to

wipe that fear out. I'm going to lead you out of that valley of fright. No! Don't protest! I know it hurts your ego to think that a woman could know you're afraid. But I don't think any the less of you. I admire you all the more because you've conquered so much of it. I know what courage it took to face the 'Meter. I know you did it because of me. I'm proud that you did. I love you for it. And I know what courage it takes to keep me here, when any time a slip would send you to certain disgrace and death. I know what it all means. It's my nature and instinct and business and love to know.

"Now! Drink with me. We're not outside these walls where we have to worry ourselves about such things and be scared. We're in here. Away from everything except ourselves. Drink. And love me. I'll love you, Hal, and we'll not see the world outside nor need to. For the time being. Forget in my arms."

They drank the purplish liquor. After a while he picked her up and carried her into the bedroom. There he forgot. The only disconcerting item was that she insisted upon keeping her eyes open, even during the climax, as if she were trying to photograph his features upon her mind.

XII

ON EARTH, the alcoholics were not cured but were sent to H. Therefore no psychological or narcotic therapies had been worked out for addicts. Hal, dead-ended by this fact in his desire to wipe out Jeannette's alcoholism, went for medicine to the very people who had given her the disease. Only he pretended that the cure was for himself.

Fobo said, "There is widespread drinking on Ozagen, but it is light. Our few alcoholics are quickly empathized into normality. Why don't you let me empathize you?"

"Sorry. My government forbids that."

He had given Fobo the same excuse for not inviting the wog home.

"You have the most forbidding government," said Fobo, and went into one of his long, howling laughs. When he recovered, he said, "You're forbidden to touch liquor, too, but that doesn't hold you back. Well, there's no accounting for inconsistency. Seriously, though, I have just the thing for you. It's called Easyglow. It's a stimulant which has an effect similar to alcohol's, but which is, in reality, however, depressing. We put it into the daily ration of liquor, increasing slowly the Easyglow and diminishing the alcohol. In two or three weeks the patient is drinking from a fluid 96 per cent Easyglow. The taste is much the same; the drinker seldom suspects. Continued treatment eases the patient from his dependence on the alcohol. There is only one drawback."

He paused and said. "The drinker is now addicted to Easyglow!"

He whooped and slapped his thigh and wiggled his antennae and laughed until the tears came.

"Really, though, the peculiar effect of Easyglow is that it opens the patient for discharge of the strains that have driven him to drink. He may then be empathized and at the same time weaned from the stimulant. Since I have no opportunity to slip the stuff to you secretly, I'm taking the chance that you are seriously interested in curing yourself. When you're ready for therapy, tell me."

Hal took the bottle to his apartment. Every day its contents went quietly and carefully into the beetlejuice he got for Jeannette. He hoped that he was psychologist enough to cure her once the Easyglow took effect.

Although he didn't know it, he was himself being "cured" by Fobo. His almost daily talks with the empathist instilled doubts about the religion and science of the Haijacs—or, as their enemies termed them, the Highjackers. Fobo read the biographies of Isaac Sigmen and the Works: the Pre-Torah, the Western Talmud, the Revised Scriptures, the Foundations of Serialism,

Time and Theology, The Self and the World-Line. Calmly sitting at his table with a glass of juice in his hand, the wog challenged the mathematics of the dunnologists. Hal proved; Fobo disproved. He pointed out that the math was mainly based on false-to-fact assumptions; that Dunne's and Sigmen's reasoning was buttressed by too many analogs, metaphors and strained interpretations. Remove the buttresses, and the structure fell.

AND worse, far worse, he said that the Forerunner's biographies and theological writings revealed him, even through the censor's veil, as a sexually frigid and woman-hating man with a messiah complex and paranoid and schizophrenic tendencies which burst through his icy shell from time to time in religious-scientific frenzies and fantasies.

"Other men," Fobo said, "have stamped their personality and ideas upon their times. But Sigmen had an advantage over those great leaders who came before him. Because of Earth's rejuvenation serums he lived long enough, not only to set up his kind of society, but to consolidate it and weed out its weaknesses. He didn't die until the cement of his social form had hardened."

"But the Forerunner didn't die," protested Yarrow. "He left in time. He is still with us, traveling down the fields of presentation, skipping here and there, now to the past, now to the future. Always, wherever he is needed to turn pseudo-time into real time, he is there."

"Ah, yes," smiled Fobo. "That was the reason you went to the ruins, was it not? To check up on a mural which hinted that the Ozagen humans had once been visited by a man from outer space. You thought it might have been the Forerunner, didn't you?"

"Macneff did," said Hal, annoyed. "But my report showed that, though the man resembled Sigmen somewhat, the evidence was too inconclusive. The

Forerunner may or may not have visited this planet a thousand years ago."

"Be that as it may, I maintain your theses are meaningless. You claim that his prophecies came true. I say, first, that they were couched ambiguously. Second, if they have been realized, it is because your powerful state-church—you may call it the Sturch—has made strenuous efforts to fulfill them.

"Furthermore, this pyramidal society of yours—this guardian-angel administration—where every ten families have a gapt to supervise their most intimate and minute details, and every ten family-gapts have a block-gapt at their head, and every fifty block-gapts are directed by a supervisor-gapt, and so on—this society is based on fear and ignorance and suppression."

Hal, shaken, angered, shocked, would get up to leave. Fobo would call him back and ask him to disprove what he'd said. Hal would let loose a flood of wrath. Sometimes, when he had finished, he would be asked to sit down and continue the discussion. Sometimes, Fobo would lose his temper; they would shout and scream insults; twice, they fought with fists; Hal got a bloody nose once and Fobo a black eye. Then the wog, weeping, would embrace Hal and ask for his forgiveness, and they would sit down and drink some more until their nerves were calmed.

YARROW told Jeannette of these incidents. She encouraged him to tell them over and over again until he had talked away the stress and strain of grief and hate and doubt. Afterwards, there was always love such as he had never thought possible. For the first time he knew that man and woman could become one flesh. His wife and he had remained outside the circle of each other, but Jeannette knew the geometry that would take him in and the chemistry that would mix his substance with hers.

Always, too, there was the light and the drink. But they did not bother him.

Unknown to her, she was now drinking a liquor almost entirely Easyglow. And he had gotten used to the light above their bed. It was one of her quirks. Fear of the dark wasn't behind it, because it was only while making love that she required a bulb be left on. He didn't understand it. Perhaps she wanted to impress his image on her memory, always to have it if she ever lost him. If so, let her keep the light.

By its glow he explored her body with an interest that was part sexual and part anthropological. He was delighted and astonished at the many small differences between her and Terran women. There was a small appendage of skin on the roof of her mouth that might have been the rudiment of some organ whose function was long ago cast aside by evolution. There were two bumps of cartilage on the top of her head, hidden by her thick black hair. She had thirty teeth; the wisdom teeth were missing. That might or might not have been a characteristic of her mother's people.

He suspected that she either had an extra set of pectoral muscles or else an extraordinarily well-developed normal set. Her large and cone-shaped breasts did not sag. They were high and firm and pointed slightly upwards: the ideal of feminine beauty so often portrayed through the ages by male sculptors and painters and so seldom existing in nature.

She was not only a pleasure to look at; she was pleasing to be with. At least once a week she would greet him with a new garment. She loved to sew; out of the materials he gave her she fashioned slips, blouses, skirts and even gowns. Along with the change in dress went new hairdos. She was ever-new and ever-beautiful, and she made Hal realize for the first time that a thing of beauty was a joy, if not for forever, then for at least as long as it lasted.

Her imitativeness was another thing that delighted him. She had switched from her brand of French to his almost

overnight. Within a week she was speaking it faster and more expressively than he. As she also knew Ozagen thoroughly, he decided the best way for him to learn it was to have her read wog books to him. He'd lie on the divan while she sat on a chair. Her accent and pronunciation were correct, and trained his ear. Where she saved him time was in his not having to look up each new word in a dictionary—she translated for him.

JEANNETTE loved to read to him, but she wearied of the dry and technical books he gave her. When he saw that she was tired, he softened and let her stop. He never did, for example, finish Weenai's monumental *Rise and Fall of Man on Ozagen*. That evening Jeannette began, as usual, bravely enough. Her low, throaty voice tried to simulate interest in what her eyes saw. She went through the first chapter, which described the formation of the planet and the beginnings of life. In the second she yawned quite openly and looked at Hal, but he closed his eyes and pretended not to notice. So she read of the rise of the wogs from an arthropod that had changed its mind and decided to become a chordate. Weenai made some heavy jests about the contrariness of the wogglebugs since that fateful day, and then took up, in the third chapter, the story of mammalian evolution on the other large continent of Ozagen. It climaxed in man.

She quoted: "But homo sapiens, like us, had its mimical parasites. One was a different species of the so-called tavern beetle. It, instead of resembling a wog, looked like a man. Like its counterpart, it could fool no intelligent person, but its gift of alcohol made it very acceptable to man. It, too, accompanied its host from primitive times, became an integral part of his civilization, and, finally, a large cause of man's downfall.

"Humanity's disappearance from the face of Ozagen is due not only to the tavern beetle. That creature can be con-

trolled, and has been by us. Like most things, it has benefits to confer. Like most things, it can be abused or its purpose distorted so that it becomes a menace.

"That is what man did with it.

"He had, it must be noted, an ally to help him in the misuse of the insect. This was another parasite, one of a somewhat different kind; one that was, indeed, our cousin. That is, it is a so-called chordate arthropod.

"One thing, however, distinguishes it from us, and from man, and from any other animal on this planet with the exception of some very low species. That is, that from the very first fossil evidence we have of it, it was wholly—"

Jeannette put the book down. "I don't know the next word. Hal, do I have to read this? It's so boring."

"No. Forget it. Read me one of those comics that you and the crew like so much."

She smiled, a beautiful sight, and began Vol. 1037, Book 56, of the *Adventures of Leif Magnus, Beloved Disciple of the Forerunner, When He Met the Horror From Arcturus*.

He listened to her translation of the French into vernacular Wog until he grew tired of the banalities and pulled her down to him.

Always, there was the light left on above them.

XIV

IT WAS the following day that Yarrow, returning from the market with a large box, said, "You've sure been putting away the groceries lately. You're not eating for two? Or maybe three?"

She paled. "*Mon Dieu!* Do you know what you're saying?"

He put the box on a table and grabbed her shoulders.

"Shib. I do. Jeannette, I've been thinking about that very thing for a long time, but I haven't said anything. I didn't want to worry you. Tell me, are you?"

She looked him straight in the eye, but her body was shaking. "Oh, no. It is impossible!"

"Why should it be? We've used no preventives."

"*Oui*. But I know—don't ask me how—call it instinct, if you wish—that it cannot be. But you must never say things like that. Not even joking. I can't stand it."

He pulled her close and said over her shoulder, "Is it because you can't? Because you know you'll never bear my children?"

Her thick, faintly perfumed hair nodded. "I know. Don't ask me how I know."

He held her at arm's length again. "Listen, Jeannette. I'll tell you what's been troubling you. You and I are really of different species. Your mother and father were, too. Yet they had issue. But you're thinking that the ass and the mare have young, too, but the mule is sterile. The lion and the tigress may breed, but the liger or tigon can't. Isn't that right? You're afraid you're a mule!"

She put her head on his chest and sobbed.

He said, "Let's be real about this, honey. Maybe you are. So what? My God, our situation is bad enough without a baby to complicate it. We'll be lucky if you are . . . uh . . . well, we have each other, haven't we? That's all I want. You."

He couldn't keep from being reflective as he dried her tears and kissed her and helped her put the food in the refrigerator.

The quantities of groceries and milk she had been consuming were more than a normal amount, especially the milk. There had been no telltale change in her superb figure, true. But the stuff was going somewhere.

A month passed. He watched her closely. She ate enormously. Nothing happened.

Yarrow put it down to his ignorance of her alien metabolism.

XV

ANOTHER month. Hal was just leaving the ship's library when Turnboy stopped him.

"The rumor is that the techs have finally made the globinlocking molecule," the historian said. "I think that this time the grapevine's right. A conference is called for 1500."

"Shib." Hal kept his despair out of his voice.

When the meeting broke up at 1650, it left him with sagging shoulders. The virus was already in production. In a week a large enough supply would be made to fill the disseminators of six prowler-torpedoes. The plan was to release them to wipe out the city of Siddo. A beachhead would be established there. While the *Gabriel* flew back to Earth, the beachhead would keep making the virus and would send prowlers out in spirals whose range would expand until a large territory would be covered. By the time a huge fleet returned, millions of wogs would be slain. The fleet would then deal with the rest of the planet.

When he got home, he found Jeanette lying in bed. She smiled weakly. Her hair was loose in a black corona on the pillow.

He forgot his mood in a thrill of concern.

"What's the matter, baby?"

He laid his hand on her forehead. The skin was dry and hot and rough.

"I don't know. I haven't been feeling really well for two weeks, but I didn't complain. I thought I'd get over it. Today I felt so bad I just had to go back to bed after breakfast."

"We'll get you well."

He sounded confident. Inside himself, he was lost. If she had contracted a serious disease, she could get no doctor, no medicine—

For the next few days she continued to lie in bed. Her temperature fluctuated from 99.5 in the morning to 100.2 at night. Hal attended her as well as he could. He put wet towels and ice-bags

on her head and gave her aspirin. She had quit eating so much food; all she wanted was liquid. She seemed to be always asking for milk. Even the beetle-juice and the cigarettes were turned down.

Her illness was bad enough, but her silences stung Yarrow into a frenzy. As long as he had known her, she had chattered lightly, merrily, amusingly. She could be quiet, but it was with an interested wordlessness. Now she let him talk, and when he quit, she did not fill his silence with questions or comments.

In an effort to arouse her, he told her of his plan to steal a gig and take her back to her jungle home. A light came into her dulled eyes; the brown looked shiny for the first time. She even sat up while he put a map of the continent on her lap. She indicated the general area where she had lived, and then described the mountain range that rose from the green tropics, and the tableland on its top where her aunts and sisters lived in the ruins of a metropolis.

Hal sat down at the little octagonal-shaped table by the bed and worked out the coordinates from the maps. Now and then he glanced up. She was lying on her side, her white and delicate shoulder rising from her nightgown, her eyes large in the shadows that were beginning to stain rings around them.

"All I have to do is steal a little key," he said. "You see, the milometer on a gig is set at 0 before every flight from the field. The boat will run fifty miles on manual. That gives us leeway to go any place in Siddo and return. But once the tape passes fifty, the gig automatically stops and sends out a location signal. That's to keep anybody from running away. However, the autos can be unlocked and the signal turned off. A little key will do it. I can get it. Don't worry."

"You must love me very much."

"You bet I do!"

He rose and kissed her. Her mouth, once so soft and dewy, felt dry and hard.

It was almost as if the skin were turning to horn.

HE RETURNED to his calculations. An hour later, a sigh from her made him look up. Her eyes were closed, and her lips were slightly open. Sweat ran down her face.

He hoped her fever had broken. No. The mercury stopped at 100.3.

She said something.

He bent down. "What?"

She was muttering in an unknown language. Delirious. Hal swore. He had to act. No matter what the consequences. He ran into the bathroom, shook from a bottle a ten grain rockabye tablet, went back and propped Jeannette up and got her to wash the pill down with a glass of water.

After he locked her bedroom door, he put on a hood and cloak and walked fast to the nearest pharmacy. There he purchased three 20-gauge needles, three syringes, and some anti-coagulant. Back in his apartment, he tried to insert the needle in an arm vein. The point refused to go in until the fourth attempt when, in a fit of exasperation, he pressed hard.

During none of the jabblings did she open her eyes or jerk her arm.

When the first fluid crept into the glass tube, he gasped with relief. Though he hadn't known it, he had been biting his lower lip and holding his breath. Suddenly he knew that he had for the last month been pushing a horrible suspicion back to the outlands of his mind. Now, he realized the thought had been ridiculous.

The blood was red.

He tried to arouse her in order to get a specimen of urine. She twisted her mouth over strange syllables, then lapsed back into sleep or a coma—he didn't know which. In an anguish of despair he slapped her face, again and again, hoping he could bring her to. He swore once more, for he realized all at once that he should have gotten the specimen before giving her the rockabye Pill. How stupid could he get! He

wasn't thinking straight; he was too excited over her condition and what he had to do at the ship.

He perked some very strong coffee and managed to get part of it down her. The rest dribbled down her chin and soaked her gown.

Either the caffeine or his desperate tone awoke her, for she opened her eyes long enough to look at him while he explained what he wanted her to do and where he was going afterwards. Once he'd gotten the urine into a previously boiled jar, he wrapped the syringes and jar in a handkerchief and dropped them into the cloak-pocket.

He had already wristphoned the *Gabriel* for a gig. A horn beeped outside. He took another look at Jeannette, locked the bedroom door, locked the apartment door, and ran down the stairs. The gig hovered above the curb. He entered, sat down, and punched the *Go* button. The boat rose to a thousand feet and then flashed at an 11-degree angle toward the park where the ship squatted.

XVI

THE medical section was empty, except for one orderly. The fellow dropped his comic and jumped to his feet.

"Take it easy," said Hal. "I just want to use the Labtech. And I don't want to be bothered with making out triplicate forms. This is a little personal matter, see?"

Hal had taken off his cloak. The orderly looked at the bright golden lamech.

"Shib," he grunted.

Hal gave him two cigarettes.

"Geez, thanks." The orderly lit up, sat down, and picked up his *The Fore-runner and Delilah in the Wicked City of Gaza*.

Yarrow went around the corner of the Labtech, where the orderly couldn't see him, and set the proper dials. After he inserted his specimens, he sat down. Almost at once he jumped up and began pacing back and forth. Meanwhile, the

huge cube of the Labtech purred like a contented cat as it digested its strange food. A half-hour later, it rumbled once and then flashed a green light: ANALYSIS COMPLETE.

Hal pressed a button. Like a tongue out of a metal mouth, a long tape slid out. He read the code. Urine was normal. No infection there. Also normal was the pH and the blood count.

He hadn't been sure the "eye" would recognize the cells in her blood. However, the chances had been strong that her red cells would be Terranlike. Why not? Evolution follows parallel paths; the biconcave disk is the most efficient form for carrying the maximum of oxygen.

The machine chattered. More tape. Unknown hormone! Similar in molecular structure to the parathyroid hormone primarily concerned in the control of calcium metabolism.

What did that mean? Could the mysterious substance loosed in her bloodstream be the cause of her trouble?

More clicks. The calcium content of the blood was 40 mg. per cent.

Strange. Such an abnormally high percentage should mean that the renal threshold was passed and that an excess of calcium should be "spilling" into the urine. Where was it going?

The Labtech flashed a red light: FINISHED.

He took a Hematology book down from the shelf and opened it to the Ca section. When he quit reading, he straightened his shoulders. New hope? Perhaps. Her case sounded as if she had a form of hypercalcemia, which was manifested by any number of diseases ranging from rickets and steomalacia to chronic hypertrophic arthritis. Whatever she had, she was suffering from a malfunction of the parathyroid glands.

The next move was to the Pharm machine. He punched three buttons, dialed a number, stood for two minutes, and then lifted a little door at waist-level. A tray slid out. On it was a cellophane sheath containing a hypodermic needle

and a tube holding 30 c.c. of a pale blue fluid. It was Jesper's serum, a "one-shot" readjustor of the parathyroid.

Hal put on his cloak, stuck the package in the inside pocket, and strode out. The orderly didn't even look up.

THE next step was the weapons room. There he gave the storekeeper an order—made out in triplicate—for one .1 mm. automatic and a clip of one hundred cartridges. The keeper only glanced over the forged signatures—he, too, was awed by the lamech—and unlocked the door. Hal took the gun, which he could easily hide in the palm of his hand, and stuck it in his pants pocket.

At the key room, two corridors away, he repeated the crime. Or rather, he tried to.

Moto, the officer on duty, looked at the papers, hesitated, and said, "I'm sorry. My orders are to check on any requests with the Chief Uzzite. That won't be possible for about an hour, though. He's in conference with the Archurilite."

Hal picked up his papers. "Never mind. My business'll hold. Be back in the morning."

On the way home, he planned what he'd do. After injecting Jesper's serum in Jeannette, he'd move her into the gig. The floor beneath the gig's control-panel would have to be ripped up, two wires would be unhooked, and one connected to another lead. That would remove the fifty-mile limit. Unfortunately, it would also set off an alarm back in the *Gabriel*. His hope was that he could take off straight up, level off, and dive behind the range of hills to the west of Siddo. The hills would deflect the radar. The autopilot could be set long enough for him to demolish the box that would be sending out the signal by which the *Gabriel* might track him down.

After that, with the gig hedgehopping, he could hope to be free until daybreak. Then he'd submerge in the nearest deep-enough lake or river until

nightfall. During the darkness he could rise and speed towards the tropics; and if his radar showed any signs of pursuit, he could plunge again into a body of water.

HE LEFT the long needle-shaped parked by the curb. His feet pounded the stairs. The key missed the hole the first two tries. He slammed the door without bothering to lock it again.

"Jeannette!" he shouted. Suddenly he was afraid that she might have gotten up while delirious and somehow opened the doors and wandered out.

A low moan answered him. He unlocked the bedroom door and shoved it open. She was lying with her eyes wide.

"Jeannette. Do you feel better?"

"No. Worse. Much worse."

"Don't worry, baby. I've got just the medicine that'll put new life in you. In a couple of hours you'll be sitting up and yelling for steaks. And you won't even want to touch that milk. You'll be drinking Easyglow by the gallon. And then—"

He faltered as he saw her face. It was a stony mask of distress, like the grotesque and twisted wooden faces of the Greek tragedians.

"Oh, no . . . *no!* My God," she moaned. "What did you say? Easyglow?" Her voice rose. "Is *that* what you've been giving me?"

"Shib, Jeannette. Take it easy. You liked it. What's the difference? The point is that we're going—"

"Oh, Hal, Hal! What have you done?"

Her pitiful face tore at him. Tears were falling; if ever stone could weep, it was weeping now.

He turned and ran into the kitchen where he took out the sheath, removed the contents, and inserted the needle in the tube. He went back into the bedroom. She said nothing as he thrust the point into her vein. For a moment he was afraid the needle would break. The skin was almost brittle.

"This stuff cures Earth people in a jiffy," he said, with what he hoped was

a cheery bedside manner.

"Oh, Hal, come here. It's—it's too late now."

He withdrew the needle, rubbed alcohol on the break and put a pad on it. Then he dropped to his knees by the bed and kissed her. Her lips were hard.

"Hal, do you love me?"

"Won't you ever believe me? How many times must I tell you?"

"No matter what you'll find out about me?"

"I know all about you."

"No, you don't. You can't. Oh, Great Mother, if only I'd told you, Hal! Maybe you'd have loved me just as much, anyway. Maybe . . ."

"Jeannette! What's the matter?"

Her lids had closed. Her body shook in a spasm. When the violent trembling passed, she whispered with stiff lips. He bent his head to hear her.

"What did you say? Jeannette! Speak!"

He shook her. The fever must have died, for her shoulder was cold. And hard.

The words came low and slurring.

"Take me to my aunts and sisters. They'll know what to do. Not for me . . . but for the . . ."

"What do you mean?"

"Hal, will you always love . . ."

"Yes, yes. You know that! We've got more important things to do now than talk about that."

If she heard him she gave no sign. Her head was tilted far back with her exquisite nose pointed at the ceiling. Her lids and mouth were closed, and her hands were by her side, palms up. The breasts were motionless. Whatever breath she might have was too feeble to stir them.

XVII

HAL ran upstairs to the third floor and pounded on Fobo's door until it opened.

The empathist's wife said, "Bugs, alive, Hal, you startled me!"

"Where's Fobo?"

"He's at a college board meeting."

"I've got to see him at once."

Abasa yelled after him, "If it's important, go ahead. Those meetings bore him, anyway."

By the time Yarrow had taken the steps three at a time and bee-lined across the nearby campus, his lungs were on fire. He didn't slacken his pace; he hurtled up the steps of the administration building and burst into the board room.

When he tried to speak, he had to stop and suck in deep breaths.

Fobo jumped out of his chair.

"What's up?"

"You—gasp—you've—got to come. Matter—life—death!"

"Excuse me, gentlemen," said Fobo.

The ten wogs nodded their antennae and resumed the conference. The empathist put on his cloak and high-crowned, plumed hat and led Hal out.

"Now, what is it?"

"Listen. I've got to trust you. I know you can't promise me anything. But I think you won't turn me in to my people. You're a real person, Fobo. Not like the Haijac men."

"Get to the point, my friend."

"Listen. You wogs are as advanced as we are in endocrinology. And you've got an advantage. You know Jeannette inside out. You've examined her."

"Jeannette? Oh, Rastignac! The *lalitha*."

"Yes. I've been hiding her in my apartment."

"I know."

"You . . . know! How?"

"Never mind." The wog put his hand on Hal's shoulder. "Something bad has happened, or you'd not have come to me about her."

By the time Hal had told him, they were at their apartments. Fobo stopped him at the door.

"I may as well tell you. Your countrymen know you're up to something. For the last eight days a man has been living in that building down the street and

spying on you. His name is Art Hunah Fedtof."

"An Uzzite!"

"*Oui*. He lives in the front room on the ground floor. His windows are darkened, but he is probably watching you right now."

"Forget about him!" Yarrow snarled.

He bounded up the stairs. Fobo followed him into his rooms. The wog felt Jeannette's forehead and tried to lift her lid to look at her eye. It would not bend.

"Hmm! Calcification of the outer skin layer is far advanced."

With one hand he threw the sheet from her figure and with the other he grabbed her gown by the neckline and ripped the thin cloth down the middle. The two parts fell to either side. She lay nude, as silent and pale and beautiful as a sculptor's masterpiece.

Her lover gave a little cry at what seemed like a violation. But he shut up at once, because he knew that Fobo's move was medical. In any case, the wog would not have been sexually interested.

Puzzled, he watched. Fobo had tapped his fingertips against her flat belly and then put his ear against it. When he stood up, he shook his head.

"I won't deceive you, Hal. Though we'll do the best we can, we may not be good enough. She'll have to go to a surgeon. If we can cut her eggs out before they hatch, that, plus the serum you gave her, may reverse the effect and pull her out."

"Eggs?"

"I'll tell you later. Wrap her up. I'll run upstairs and phone Dr. Kuto."

Yarrow folded a blanket around her. When he rolled her over, she was as stiff as a show-window dummy. He covered her face. The stony look was too much for him.

His wristphone shrilled. Automatically he reached to flick the stud and just in time drew his hand back. It shrilled loudly, insistently. Finally he decided that if he didn't answer, he would stir up their suspicion far faster.

"Yarrow!"

"Shib!"

"Report to the ArchurIELite. You will be given fifteen minutes."

"Shib."

Fobo came back in and said, "What're you going to do?"

Hal squared his mouth and said, "You take her by the shoulders, and I'll carry her feet. Rigid as she is, we won't need a stretcher."

As they carried her down the steps, he said, "Can you hide us after the operation, Fobo? We won't be able to use the gig now."

"Don't worry," the wog said enigmatically over his shoulder. "The Earthmen are going to be too busy to run after you."

It took sixty seconds to get her in the gig, hop to the hospital, and get her out.

Hal said, "Let's put her on the ground for a minute. I've got to set the gig on auto and send her back to the *Gabriel*. That way, at least, they won't know where I'm at."

"No. Leave it here. You may be able to use it afterward."

"After what?"

"Later. Ah, there's Kuto."

IN THE waiting room the joat paced back and forth and puffed Merciful Seraphim out in smoke. The empathist sat on a chair and rubbed his bald pate and the thick golden corkscrew fuzz on the back of his head.

"All this could have been avoided," he said unhappily. "But I didn't know until a week ago that the *lalitha* was living with you. I didn't think there was any hurry to tell you that I knew. Anyway, I was busy working on Project Earthman."

"What was that?" barked Yarrow.

"Oh, for some time we've had our electroencephalographs on you. You Terrans are far ahead of us in most of the physical sciences, but in the psychological sciences we've got you beaten. For instance, you haven't yet found out

that below the level of the general brain-waves, which might be likened to 'static,' lie very weak but definite impulses.

"These we call the 'semantic' waves. Our instruments, built with our antennae and nervous system as a model, are so sensitive that they can pick them up at quite a distance and amplify them. The various heights of the semantic waves are then correlated with the spoken syllables of the language. In other words, we have a more or less efficient mind-reader.

"We trained them on you Terrans from the beginning. We thought we would have quite an advantage, because we had learned a type of French from the *lalitha*. To our consternation, however, we found that you talked to us in one language but tended to do your thinking in, not one, but four different tongues."

"Those were Hebrew for the theological thinking of the Urielites and technical thinking of some of the scientists," snapped Hal. "English, Icelandic and Georgian for the everyday thoughts. Any other time I'd be interested in this thinkpicker. But for Fore-runner's sake, I want to hear about Jeannette!"

"Believe me, Hal, I can feel for and with you." He wiggled his antennae to indicate he was receiving grief and anxiety emanations. "It's necessary and justifiable that I take my explanation in order. Otherwise, I'll be confused and backtracking all the time, which I detest. As I was saying, we were stumped for a while because the semantic waves' fluctuations did not match those of the spoken word. However, we kept picking up stray thoughts here and there in French. As well grounded as you all seem to have been in that language, it was inevitable that you would do a certain amount of private thinking in it, regardless of your native tongue. About two weeks ago we managed to work out the complete synchronization in the artificial tongue

and also bind up a great many impulses with the other languages' words by comparing them with the French."

"Then you know we have perfected the globinlocker?"

Fobo smiled. "Yes, but we were suspicious of that from the beginning. When you asked us for samples of blood, your request was accompanied by too heavy a charge of what we call 'furtive' emanations. We gave you the blood, all right, but it was that of a barnyard creature which uses copper in its blood cells. We wogs use magnesium as the oxygen-carrying element in our cells."

"Our virus is useless!"

"Naturally. Now to get to the personal. My colleagues had their e.c.g.'s turned on you whenever you came into my room. They didn't think it was any use tapping your waves when you were in your room. You'd be likely to be thinking in the vernacular. About a week ago they did, however, just for experiment, and they were amazed to find the *lalitha* there. They told me. I was too engrossed with this business with the ship to put two and two together. Otherwise, I'd have known why you were pretending to be an alcoholic. I—"

A nurse entered and said, "Phone, Doctor."

Yarrow paced, and smoked another cigarette. Fobo came back.

He said, "We're going to have company. One of my colleagues, who is watching the ship, tells me Macneff and two Uzzites left in a gig a minute ago. They should be arriving at the hospital any second now."

Yarrow stopped in midstride. His jaw dropped. "Here?"

"Don't be afraid."

Hal just stood there. The cigarette, unnoticed, burned until it seared his fingers. He dropped it and crushed it beneath his sole.

Bootheels clicked in the corridor.

THREE men entered. One was a tall and gaunt ghost—Macneff, the Arch-

urielite. The others were short and broad-shouldered and clad in black. Their meaty hands, though empty, were hooked, ready to dart into their pockets. Their heavy-lidded eyes stabbed at Fobo and then at Hal.

Macneff strode up to the joat. His pale blue eyes glared; his lipless mouth was drawn back in a skull's smile.

"You unspeakable degenerate!" he shouted.

His arm flashed, and the whip, jerked out of his belt, cracked. Thin red marks crawled out of Yarrow's white face and began oozing blood.

"You will be taken back to Earth in chains and there exhibited as an example of the worst pervert, traitor, and—and—!"

He drooled, unable to find words.

"You—who have passed the Elohimeter, who are supposed to be so pure—you have lusted after and lain with an insect!"

"What! What!"

"Yes. With a thing that is even lower than a beast of the field! What even Moses did not think of when he forbade union between man and beast, what even the Forerunner could not have guessed when he reaffirmed the law and set the death penalty for it, you have done. You, Hal Yarrow, the pure, the lamech wearer!"

Fobo rose and said in a deep voice, "Might I suggest and stress that you are not quite right in your zoological classification? It is not the class of insecta but the class of the chordata pseudarthropoda, or words to that effect."

The joat said, "What?" again. He could not think.

The wog growled, "Shut up, Hal. Let me talk."

He swung to face Macneff. "You know about her?"

"You are shib that I know her! Yarrow thought he was getting away with something. But no matter how clever these unrealists are, they're always tripped up. In this case, it was his asking Turnboy about those Frenchmen

that fled Earth two and a half centuries ago. Turnboy, who is very zealous in his attitude towards the Sturch, reported the conversation. It lay among my papers for quite a while. When I came across it, I turned it over to the psychologists. They told me that the joat's question was a deviation from the pattern expected of him; a thing totally irrelevant unless it was connected to something we didn't know about him.

"A man was put on his trail. He saw Yarrow buying twice the groceries he should have. And much cloth and sewing equipment and silk stockings and perfume and earrings. Moreover, when you wogs learned the tobacco habit from us and began making cigarettes too, he bought them from you. The conclusion was obvious. He had a female in his apartment.

"We didn't think it'd be a wog female, for she wouldn't have to stay hidden. Therefore she must be human. But we couldn't imagine how she got here on Ozagen. It was impossible for him to have stowed her away on the *Gabriel*. She must either have come here in a different ship, or be descended from people who had.

"It was Yarrow's talk with Turnboy that furnished the clue. Obviously, the French had landed here. She was a great-great-granddaughter. How the joat had found her, we didn't know. It wasn't important. We'll find out, anyhow."

"You're due to find out some other things, too," Fobo said calmly. "How did you discover she wasn't human?"

Yarrow muttered, "I've got to sit down."

XVIII

HE SWAYED to the wall and sank into a chair. One of the Uzzites started to move toward him. Macneff waved the man back and said, "Turnboy had been reading the history of man on Ozagen. He came across so many references to the *lalitha* that the suspicion

was bound to rise that the girl might be one.

"Last week one of the wog physicians, while talking to Turnboy, mentioned that he had once examined a *lalitha*. Later, he said, she had run away. It wasn't hard for us to guess where she had ended up!"

"My boy," said Fobo, turning to Hal, "didn't you read Weenai's book?"

Hal shook his head. "We started it, but Jeannette mislaid it."

"And doubtless saw to it that you had other things to think of . . . they are good at diverting a man's mind. Why not? That is their purpose in life.

"Well, Hal, I'll explain. The *lalitha* are the highest example of mimetic parasitism known. Also, they are unique among sentient beings. Unique in that all are female.

"You see, if you'd read on in Weenai, you'd have found that fossil evidence shows that about the time that Ozagenian man was still an insectivorous marmoset-like creature, he had in his family group not only his own females but the females of another class, perhaps another phylum. These animals looked and probably stank enough like the females of pre-homo marmoset to be able to live and mate with them. They seemed mammalian, but dissection would have indicated very strongly their pseudoarthropodal ancestry.

"It's reasonable to suppose that these precursors of the *lalitha* were man's parasites long before the marmosetoid stage. They may have met him when he first crawled out of the sea, and promptly adapted their shape, through an evolutionary process, to that of the lungfish. And later to the amphibian's. And the reptile's and primitive mammal's. And so on.

"What we do know is that the *lalitha* were Nature's most amazing experiment in parasitism and parallel evolution. As man metamorphosed into higher forms, so she kept pace with him. All female, mind you, depending upon the male of another phylum for the con-

tinuance of the species.

"It is astonishing the way they became integrated into the prehuman cultures, the pithecanthropoid and neanderthaloid steps. Only when homo sapiens developed did their troubles begin. Some families and tribes accepted them; others killed them. So they resorted to artifice, and disguised themselves as human women. A thing not hard to do—unless they became pregnant.

"In which case they died."

HAL groaned and put his hands over his face.

"Painful but real, as our acquaintance Macneff would say," said Fobo. "Of course—such a condition required a secret sorority. In those societies where the *lalitha* was forced to camouflage, she would, once pregnant, have to leave. And perish in some hidden place among her kind, who would then take care of the nymphs—" here Hal shuddered—"until they were able to go into human cultures. Or else be introduced as foundlings or changelings.

"You'll find quite a tribal lore about them—fables and myths make them central or peripheral characters quite frequently. They were regarded as witches, demons, or worse.

"With the introduction of the alcohol beetle in primitive times, a change for the better came to the *lalitha*. Alcohol made them sterile. At the same time, barring accident, disease, or murder, it made them *immortal*."

Hal took his hands off his face. "You—you mean Jeannette would have lived—forever? That I cost her—that?"

"She could have lived a thousand years, at least. We know that some did. What's more, they remained young. Let me explain. In due order. Some of what I'm going to say will distress you, Hal, but it must be said.

"The long life of the pseudo-woman, sometimes so long that they survived tribes and nations they had joined when first founded, led to their being wor-

shipped as goddesses. They became the repositories of wisdom and wealth. Religions were established with *lalitha* as the focus and priests and beetles on the circumference as permanent marks of human civilizations. The priests and the kings were their lovers.

"Some cultures barred the *lalitha*. They could not, however, keep them out. The false women infiltrated. Being always very beautiful, they mated with the most powerful men—the leaders, the rich, the poets, the thinkers. They competed with women and beat them at their own game, hands down, because in the *lalitha* Nature wrought the complete female.

"You see, they had no male hormone, no male element. They were all woman, and they centered their lives on men. They were instinctively and consciously sensitive to their lovers' desires, whims and moods. Yet they were crafty enough not to be clinging vines. When the time demanded a quarrel, they produced it. They knew what few human females did: the time to speak and the time not to speak.

"You noticed that in Jeannette, didn't you, Hal? No wonder. As part of their arthropodal heritage they owned two rudimentary antennae—mere bumps on their heads, but still sensitive in detecting the grosser nervous emanations.

"And so they gained mastery over their lovers. Influenced unduly the governments. Caused widespread slavery and wholesale breeding of beetles and the resulting alcoholism which led to humankind's downfall.

"When we wogs came to this continent, half their cities were ruined. War, liquor, depraved religious rites, falling birth rate, graft, corruption—a hundred factors leveled once mighty man. Yet, though weakened, they fought us. The *lalitha* urged them to battle, for they saw in us their doom. We could not be influenced by them as their men were. War and disease slew half of them; the rest just seemed to lose interest in living. . . ."

A wog nurse with a white mask over her long nose came out of the operating room. Hal sprang up and watched her as she said something to the empathist in a low voice.

MACNEFF had been pacing back and forth with his hands clutched behind him. Hal wondered, in the back of his mind, why he, Hal, had not been dragged away at once; why the priest had waited to hear Fobo. Then a flash of insight told him that Macneff had wanted the joat to hear all about Jeanette and realize the full enormity of his deeds.

The nurse went back into the operating room. The Archurielite said loudly, "Is the beast of the fields dead yet?"

Fobo, ignoring him, spoke to Hal, who had shaken as if at a blow when he heard the word "dead."

"Your larv—that is, your children, have been removed. They are in an incubator. They are—" he hesitated—"eating well. They will live."

Yarrow could tell from his tone that it was no use asking about the mother.

The wog twitched his antennae. Big tears rolled from his round blue eyes. He did not, however, offer any sympathy. He kept on talking:

"You won't understand, Hal, what has happened unless you comprehend the *lalitha's* unique method of reproduction. To begin, their ovaries furnish the matrix for the bodies of the embryo, all beautiful bodies, the apex of art as practised by Nature. The male spermatozoa is in no way connected with the genes that lay out the pattern for the body.

"Two things the *lalitha* needs to reproduce. Those two things must occur simultaneously. They are, excitation from orgasm and the stimulation of the photokinetic nerve."

Fobo paused and seemed to cock an ear, as if he were listening for something outside. Hal, who had absorbed some of the empathy of the wog during his acquaintanceship, felt that he was

waiting for something big. Really big. And whatever it was, it involved the fate of the Earthmen.

Suddenly he thrilled to hot and cold tinglings . . . and the knowledge that he was on the wog's side!

"What is this nerve?" Fobo went on. "It is a property of the *lalitha*, and runs from the retina of the eye, along with the optic nerve, to the back of the brain. From there it descends the spinal column and leaves the base to enter the uterus. Or, as we term it, the *camera obscura uteri*. The dark room of the womb. Where the photographs of the father's features are developed. And attached to the daughters' faces.

"Yes, that is one of their unique anatomical marks. The photogenes. A *lalitha's* chromosomes are connected to the photokinetic nerve. During intercourse, at the moment of the climax, an electrochemical change takes place in that nerve. By the light that the *lalitha* always requires—an arc-reflex makes it impossible for her to close her eyes at that time—the face of the male is photographed.

"Photographed is an inadequate word, but it is the only one we have for the process. Anyway, if his hair is light brown, that information passes down a string of genes, each of which controls a specific hair color from jet-black down through the hair-spectrum to orange-red. The genes work on a cybernetic parallel. A yes-no binary system. If the gene's color does not correspond to the photokinetic nerve's request, it does not respond. It says no. If it approximates most closely the request, it says yes.

"The same thing happens with the shape and thickness of the hair, the size and shape of the nose and lips, the cheekbones, and jaw, and chin, and the color of the eyes. The shape of the nose, for instance, might have to be turned down a hundred and fifty times before the right combination of genes were struck—"

"You hear that?" exulted Macneff.

"You have begat larvae! Monsters of an unholy union. Insect children! And they will have your face as witness of this revolting carnality—"

"Of course, I am no connoisseur of human features," interrupted Fobo, "but the young man's strike me as vigorous and handsome. In a human way, you understand."

HE TURNED to Yarrow. "Now you see why Jeannette desired light. And why she pretended alcoholism. As long as she drank a sufficient amount of liquor before copulation, she was sure that the workings of the delicate photokinetic nerve would be interfered with. No pregnancy that way. No death. But when . . . you cut the beetlejuice with Easyglow . . . unknowing, of course. . ."

Macneff burst into a high-pitched laughter. "What irony! Truly it has been said that the wages of unrealism are death!"

Fobo spoke loudly. "Go ahead, son. Cry, if you like. You'll feel better. You can't, eh? I wish you would.

"*Eh, bien. Je continue.* The *lalitha*, no matter how human she looks, cannot escape her arthropod heritage. The nymphs that develop from the larvae can easily pass for babies, but it would pain you to see the larvae themselves. Though they are not any uglier than a five months' human embryo. Not to me, anyway.

"It is a sad thing that the *lalitha* mother must die. Hundreds of millions of years ago, when the primitive pseudo-arthropod was ready to hatch the eggs in her womb, a hormone was released in her body. It calcified the skin and turned her into a womb-tomb. She became a shell. Her larvae ate the organs and the bones, which were softened by the draining away of their calcium. When the young had fulfilled the function of the larva, which is to eat and grow, they rested and became nymphs. Then they broke the shell in its weak place in the belly.

"That weak point is the navel. It

alone does not calcify with the epidermis, but remains soft. By the time the nymphs are ready to come out, the soft flesh of the navel has decayed. Its dissolution lets loose a chemical which decalcifies an area that takes in most of the abdomen. The nymphs, though weak as human babies and much smaller, are activated by instinct to kick out the thin and brittle covering.

"You must understand, Hal, that the navel itself is both functional and mimetic. Since the larvae are not connected to the mother by an umbilical cord, they would have no navel. But they grow an excrescence which resembles one.

"The breasts of the adult also have two functions. Like the human female's, they are both sexual and reproductive. They never produce milk, of course, but they are glands. At the time the larvae are ready to hatch from the eggs, the breasts act as two powerful pumps of the hormone which carries out the hardening of the skin.

"Nothing wasted, you see—Nature's economy. The things that enable her to survive in human society also carry out the death process.

"It is a sad thing, but it has not changed in all these epochs. The mothers must give their lives for their young. Yet Nature, as a sort of recompense, has given them a gift. On the analogy of reptiles, which do not stop growing larger as long as they aren't killed, the *lalitha* will not die if they remain un-pregnant. And so—"

Hal leaped to his feet and shouted, "Stop it!"

"I'm sorry," Fobo said softly. "I'm just trying to make you see why Jeannette felt that she couldn't tell you what she truly was. She loved you, Hal; she possessed the three factors that make love: a genuine passion, a deep affection, and the feeling of being one flesh with you, male and female so inseparable it would be hard to tell where one began and the other ended. I know she did, believe me, for we empathists can

put ourselves into somebody else's nervous system and think and feel as they do.

"And feel, despite all this, she must have had a bitter leaven in her love. The belief that if you knew she was of an utterly alien branch of the animal kingdom, separated by millions of years of evolution, barred by her ancestry and anatomy from the true completion of marriage—children—you would turn from her with horror. That belief must have shot with darkness even her brightest moments. . . ."

"No! I would have loved her, anyway! It might have been a shock. But I'd have gotten over it. Why, she was human; she was more human than most of the women I've known!"

Macneff sounded as if he were going to retch. When he had recovered himself, he howled, "You abysmal thing! How can you stand yourself, now you know what utterly filthy monster you have lain with! Why don't you try to tear out your eyes, which have seen that vile filth! Why don't you bite off your lips, which have kissed that insect mouth! Why don't you cut off your hands, which have pawed with loathsome lust that mockery of a body! Why don't you tear out by the roots those organs of carnal—"

Fobo spoke through the storm of wrath. "Macneff! Macneff!"

THE gaunt head swiveled towards the empathist. His eyes stared, and his lips had drawn back into what seemed to be an impossibly large smile; a smile of absolute fury.

"What? What?" he muttered, like a man waking from sleep.

"Macneff. Why don't you tell Yarrow what you were thinking about the other night? When you were alone in your cabin, and supposedly at your prayers. Why don't you tell him what you were planning to do if your agents brought in the *lalitha* alive? What were you thinking?"

The Sandalphon's jaw fell. Red

flooded his face and became purple. The violent color faded, and a corpselike white replaced it.

He screeched like an owl.

"Enough! Uzzites, take this—this thing that calls itself a man to the gig!"

The two men in black circled to come at the joat from front and back. Their approach was based on training, not real caution. Years of taking prisoners had taught them to expect no resistance. The arrested always stood cowed and numb before the representatives of the Sturch. Now, despite the unusual circumstances, and the knowledge that Hal carried a gun, they saw nothing different in him.

Normally, they would have been right. They could not guess that they had met a man whose basically rebellious character was on the point of bursting the lifelong cocoon of repression. He stood with bowed head and hunched shoulders and dangling arms, the typical arrestee.

That was one second; the next, he was a tiger striking.

The agent in front of him reeled back, blood flowing from his mouth and spilling on his black jacket. When he bumped into the wall, he paused to spit out three teeth.

By then Yarrow had whirled and rammed a fist into the big soft belly of the man behind him.

"Whoof!" went the Uzzite.

He folded. As he did so, Hal brought his knee up against the unguarded chin. There was a crack of bone breaking, and the agent fell to the floor.

"Watch him!" yelled Macneff. "He's got a gun!"

The Uzzite by the wall shoved his hand under his jacket, feeling for the weapon in his armpit holster. Simultaneously a heavy bronze bookend, thrown by Fobo, struck his temple. He crumpled.

Macneff screamed, "You are resisting, Yarrow! You are resisting!"

Hal bellowed, "You're damn shib I am!"

Head down like a mad bull's, he plunged at the Archurielite.

Macneff slashed with his whip at his attacker's skull. Hal rammed into the gray-clad form and knocked it to the floor. When Macneff got to his knees, Yarrow seized him by the throat and squeezed. Macneff turned purple and clutched at the terrible hands.

At that moment a tremendous *boom!* rattled the hospital windows. On its heels came another shock wave. Somewhere outside, the night became day for a second.

HAL unclenched his hands and let Macneff fall.

"What was that?" he demanded.

"I imagine it was the *Gabriel* falling from a height of fifty feet," Fobo said. "Not very far, of course, but the ship is tremendous. Something must have exploded. I hope the damage wasn't too serious, for we want to use the ship as a model to build some for ourselves."

Macneff groaned. Hal, standing over him and breathing hard, stared at the wog.

"We don't have mechanical flying missiles, Hal. But we do have hordes of winged and poisonous insects whose flight may be directed, within limits, by painful or pleasing super or sub-sonic waves. And who also may be conditioned by the sweat-impregnated clothing of Terrans to bite any Earthmen that come within their sense of smell.

"What happened a moment ago was that our fierce little fighters were sent through the open ports and ventilators of the *Gabriel*. Once inside, it is probable that they stung everybody on the ship, and that those stung collapsed with half-paralyzed nervous systems. Naturally, I don't know why the ship fell and then exploded. However, that makes it unnecessary for us to board the ship

from a balloon which Zugu had powered with a motor."

"You wogs think of everything, don't you?"

Fobo shrugged. "We are peaceful . . . but, unlike you Terrans, we are really 'realists.' If we have to take action against vermin, we exterminate them. On this insect-ridden planet we have had a long history of battling vermin."

He looked at Macneff, who was on all fours, eyes glazed, shaking his head like a wounded bear.

Fobo said, "I do not include you in that vermin, Hal. You are free to go where you want."

Hal sat down again and croaked, "What is there left for me?"

"Plenty, man." Tears ran down Fobo's nose and collected at the end. "You have your daughters to care for, to love. In a few days they will be through with their feeding in the incubator—they survived the Caesarean quite well—and will be beautiful babies. They will be yours as much as any human infants could be. After all, they look like you—in a modified feminine way, of course. Your genes are theirs. What's the difference whether genes act by cellular or photonic means? Genes are genes.

"And there will be women for you. You forget that she has aunts and sisters. All young and beautiful."

"Thanks, Fobo, but that's not for me." He buried his face in his hands.

A nurse stuck her head out of the door of the operating room.

"Doctor Fobo, we are bringing the body out. Does the man care to look?"

Without removing his hands, Hal shook his head.

Two nurses wheeled the carrier out. A white sheet was draped over the form. It clung to the superb curves of the shell beneath.

Hal did not look up.

He moaned, "Jeannette! Jeannette!"

Next Issue: THE OBLIGATION, a novelet by Roger Dee which proves that humans have no monopoly on conscience!

Also, as far as I know, only animals of very low nervous organization change sex. No present day reptiles do; there is no reason to think Cretaceous or Jurassic did. Tzzu Tsssin's species would be given no notable advantage by changing their sex. And they'd have to backtrack along evolution's path to have that sort of structure. Moreover, why the third eye? How many reptiles had it? What advantage was it? Evolution wields a sort of Occam's razor on such basic organs as eyes, noses, ears, etc. Evolution lets herself go with many superfluous structures such as crests, very long tailfeathers, colors, etc. But not with third eyes and four ears or two brains.

Also, the hero of the story thought that the Szabor Szor might have auxiliary brains in their hips. And longer tails. Again, why? The primitively developed dinosaurs had a sort of brain that controlled their rear extremities in their hips: a knot of nerves necessary because the feeble head-brain seemingly wasn't powerful enough to manipulate the legs and tail. But Tzzu was highly developed and nowhere that I remember was it stated that he was any larger than a man, which is about the size you would expect of a symbol-using creature. Another brain in the hips would result in a sort of schizophrenia.

That, by the way, is a story idea. Would you be interested in one based on that?

Furthermore, the hypothesis that egg-eating mammals might have wiped out the dinosaurs is passé and regarded with no respect by authorities. Not that the authorities haven't been wrong many times, but reason is on their side. Why haven't egg-eating mammals wiped out the crocodile, etc.?

THE GNOME'S GNEISS was very nice. As long as you keep the mag predominantly stf, I don't mind a fantasy like this or JOURNEY TO BAR-KUT. I enjoyed the "unstoned" Alviss and the dead pan and conscientious Kevan. More funny ones like this will be appreciated. One niggling point. Loki is, I believe, not a blond, but a red-head. That's the way I remember my Norse mythology. That seems, by the way, to have been the hair color of a lot of heroes and villains: Genghis Khan, Alexander the Great, Byron, Judas, King David, and even Christ.

I was talking to Alviss' cousin the other day, and he told me he could clear up your perplexity as to how the Irish fairies got mixed up with the Norse gods. His explanation didn't sound very reasonable or coherent to me (we'd been draughting Old Overcoat and using Cemetery Club for a mix) so I suggested he drop by your office and tell you. It also seems he's always wanted to write, and he has a few manuscripts he'd like you to look at. No fantasy, though. All autobiographical. SECRET CONFESSIONS OF AN UNDERGROUND CHARACTER and stuff like that.

TAKE A SEAT reminded me of vVogt's PEN PAL, I think it was titled. Why the Greek-dialect comedian way of writing? His story is told in English, and no matter what the structure of his language, should be told in good English. Or if it isn't, let's have the reason why.

As to Zacks' FROM OUTER SPACE, why should the porcine people be so horrified because we eat pigs? Would we be horrified if we came to their planet and saw them eating monkeys or apes? If those oinkoids had a terrific cultural

AUTHOR TO FAN

by Philip Farmer

Dear Sam: G. Smith's THE HELLFLOWER was, as you claim, *good* space opera. Fast-paced, well written, and with characterizations better than some of his previous works.

THE MURALIST was interesting but illogical. A race capable of the immense scientific technology depicted therein would not have as much trouble as St. Clair claims in getting rid of pests. If we laid eggs, would we allow mice and rats to wipe us out? I think not.

taboo against meateating or if pigs were sacred, I could understand it. Were they?

All in all, the May issue was a good one, very enjoyable, though I thought the April issue surpassed it.—621 *Barker, Peoria, Ill.*

Thanks for warning me about Alviss' Cousin. Am locking the office and leaving immediately for Mexico to hunt catamounts and tortillas. A story involving a schizophrenic brain in the hips? Don't some human females—well, anyway, I ain't committing myself until I see it.