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"Down Will Come the Sky"

Nelson Slade Bond

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S C I E N C E F I C T I O N

FIRST ISSUE!



STOWAWAY

Mack Reynolds

THEODORE STURGEON's Most Daring Story

"The World Well Lost"

MURRAY LEINSTER—NELSON BOND—ROBERT BLOCH



WE SAY HELLO

THERE have been enough new science fiction magazines lately to keep the nation's hundreds of thousands of fans busy sampling. They have been good, bad, and indifferent, depending on the varied qualifications of their editors and their writers. They have been announced with fanfare, drums, firecrackers and rockets and they are generally claimed (by their editors) to be world-shaking, soul-shaking, or cosmos-shaking.

We must confess that our purpose is more modest. We have been a fan and student of science fiction for more than 20 years. We have our ideas of what a good science fiction magazine ought to contain and they are very simple. This first issue of **UNIVERSE** will show you how well we have met this simple objective. It is only this: To give you the best science fiction stories published in America today!

GEORGE BELL

Editor

LOOK for the next issue of
UNIVERSE Science Fiction
On Sale At All Newsstands June 5th.

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Universe

SCIENCE FICTION

Issue #1

EDITOR
GEORGE BELL

ART DIRECTOR
MALCOLM H. SMITH

Cover Painting by Malcolm H. Smith, illustrating THE STOWAWAY

Illustrations by Michael Becker, W. E. Terry, Bert Durr, H. W. McCauley, Malcolm H. Smith, John Cadell, Herb Ruud and Gredno Mahasm

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Constant Reader

By Robert Bloch



ONCE upon a time they were called straitjackets. When you put one on, you were “in restraint” according to the polite psychiatric jargon of the day. I know, because I’ve read all about it in books. Yes, real books, the old-fashioned kind that were printed on paper and bound together between leather or board covers. They’re still available in some libraries, Earthside, and I’ve read a lot of them. As a matter of fact, I own quite a collection myself. It’s a peculiar hobby, but I enjoy it much more than telereading or going to the sensorials.

Consequently I admit I’m a little bit maladjusted, according to those same psychiatric texts I

mentioned. That’s the only possible explanation of why I enjoy reading, and why I pick up so many odd items of useless information.

This business about straitjackets and restraint, for example. All I ever got out of it was a peculiar feeling whenever we hit grav. on a Rec. Flight.

I got it again, now, as Penner yelled, “Act alert, Dale — put down that toy and strap up!”

I dropped my book and went over to the Sighter Post. Already I could feel the preliminary pull despite the neutralizer’s efforts. I strapped up and hung there in my cocoon, hung there in my straitjacket.

about the interesting savages he'd found where he'd been cast away. Which would be the beginning of the end, for humanity.

Ben's been worrying a lot since the appearance of that curious disease at Los Alamos and Hanford, Washington. It's thought to be caused by radiation. Every so often a key technician, or one of the authorities on atomic theory, is found sleeping heavily. His pulse is normal. His breathing is

deep. There is absolutely nothing wrong with him that can be detected. He wakes up after about twenty-four hours and only remembers a creepy sensation as preceding the attack, and a sensation of cold at the temples.

There've been less than a dozen cases of the disease so far. Curiously, every one has been a man with top-secret information.

Ben doesn't sleep well, these nights. He's worrying.

DID MU EXIST AFTER ALL?

FOR decades scientists have been sneering at evidence for the lost continent of Mu, presumably sunk beneath the Pacific waves. "Just a pipe dream of James Churchward," they have exclaimed. "There is no evidence that Mu ever existed."

Official scientific dogma is that the fair Pacific islands were uninhabited until the Polynesians came along in relatively recent times — and they were quite obviously modern men related to the Indo-European peoples with Malayan mixtures in the north and Melanesian mixtures in the south.

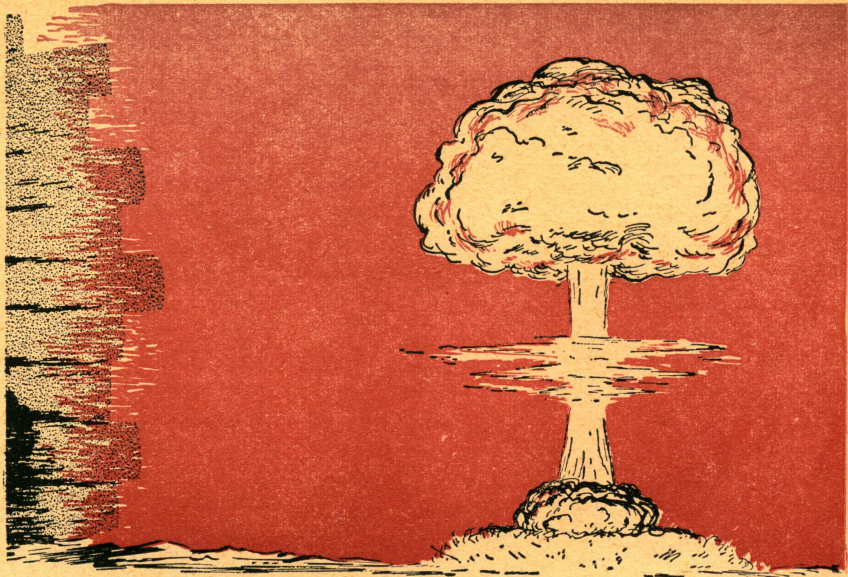
Last winter Dr. I. Hamilton Beattie, archeologist of Suva, Fiji Islands, upset this scientific applecart with a revolutionary discovery of paleolithic implements on Pitcairn Island, home of the Bounty mutineers. Five ancient stone implements — two adzes, two borers, and a mallet, were dug up on Pitcairn.

Here's what the discovery means — that old stone age people must have been living on Pitcairn Island as long as 15,000 years ago. Yet this little island was completely uninhabited when the Bounty mutineers arrived in 1790. Where did the original inhabitants go? It seems likely that Pitcairn was a fragment of a larger island which sank beneath the waves of the Pacific, carrying with it a vanished race, unknown to the later Polynesians. The stone implements are similar to those found in Tasmania and China.



**DOWN
WILL COME
THE SKY**

by **NELSON BOND**



All of us have had that “I have been here before” sensation, and Randall was no exception, only — he’s going to be ready next time.

TAKE paramnesia, for instance,” said Frank Andrews of the *Call*.

“Not I,” said Bob Jamieson. “I’m allergic to words of four syllables. *You* take it, Art.”

“No, thank you,” said Hartman placidly. “I’ll take another Scotch and soda. Roscoe —”

He lifted fingers at the bartender. Roscoe grinned and clinked bottles. We all grinned; even Frank. That’s the nice thing about the Press Club. The conversation gets progressively zanier

and more insulting as the hour grows later and the drinks more authoritative, but nobody ever gets sore at anyone else. Really, that is.

During the evening we had drifted from a discussion of flying saucers to a survey of occult phenomena in general, finally reaching the question of prescience, on which Andrews proceeded to discourse with astonishing clarity, considering the number of bourbon and waters he had consumed.

“Paramnesia,” Frank persisted.

"The '*I have been here before*' feeling. We've all had it one time or another. Psychologists call it illusion. What actually happens, they say, is this: A man enters a situation, in the course of which he suffers a brief syncope — perhaps caused by fatigue. This mental blackout lasts only a fraction of a second, so when the brain cuts in again the man doesn't *know* that for a moment he was unconscious. He thinks he is encountering for the first time a set of circumstances which somehow, somewhere, he met before.

"He is right. He *was* there before — a split second ago. The shutoff interval was so short that as 'once again' he sees exactly what he was seeing at the moment it began — the waving hand, the pouring tea, the falling star. He hears, as if in memory, the unfinished sentence, the unbroken bar of music.

"And that," shrugged Frank, "is the simple explanation of the phenomenon we call paramnesia, or *déjà vu*."

Newspaper men are realists. They like things clear, simple, logical. Around the circle heads nodded in approval. Until the stranger spoke up.

"An interesting theory," he said. "There's only one thing wrong with it."

"Namely?" demanded Frank.

"Namely this," said the stranger.

"It's not true."

He was a quiet sort of person, gray in apparel, appearance and manner. Even his flat contradiction of Frank's explanation was gentle, without challenge. He was neither flippant nor argumentative. His statement was as grayly commonplace as himself.

Nevertheless, Frank was a friend, this fellow an outsider. So automatically we rallied to Andrews' support. Ed Townsend of the *Times* drewled, "Very interesting, Mr. —"

"Randall," said the gray man. "Herbert Randall. I take it none of you remember me?"

There was an immediate stirring of interest. I did not *remember* Bert Randall, having never seen him before in my life, but I sure as hell knew who he was. As did every man in the room. Randall was one of those fabulous characters: a newsman's newsman; a synthesis of all the finer qualities of Richard Harding Davis and Ernie Pyle and William Allen White with none of that trio's flaws; a foreign correspondent with a roving assignment from the press association he represented; twice winner of the Pulitzer award. That sort of guy.

You could almost hear the clanking of mental gears as the majority of us abruptly shifted allegiance. Nor were we greatly embarrassed by our defection, for Andrews himself was making tiny, strangled noises of retraction some-

where in the background.

Then Randall said an amazing thing.

"I take it none of you remember me," he said sadly, "but I know most of *you*. Hawley, Townsend, Andrews —" His eyes roved over the fireside circle — "Cohen, Mitchell, Hartman —"

Jamieson gasped, "Good God, man — what are you? A mind reader?"

Randall smiled faintly. "Not at all."

"But you — a stranger here — reeling off our names like that —"

"You *have* been away, haven't you?" asked Sam Cohen. "We read your stories from Korea."

"Yes," said Randall, "and no."
"Eh?"

"Apparently I've been away," conceded Randall, with a strangely speculative glance at his pale fingers dangling a cigarette. "Obviously this — this *being* named Herbert Randall was in Korea this time last week. And before that, in Japan.

"But the essential *I* — or at least some part of me — did not yesterday step down from a transcontinental airliner. I know your names because —" He drew a deep breath — "because we have been friends for many years. Last Tuesday night we sat together in this same room. Does that make sense?"

No voice disturbed an abruptly uncomfortable silence. Randall's

hands trembled slightly, and the smoke of his cigarette spun blue-brown spirals to the ceiling. Then the gray man spoke again.

"No," he said. "No, I suppose it doesn't. Because it wasn't really *you*, any more than the Randall you see before you is really *I*. Those other people are no longer in existence. They ceased to be last Sunday afternoon when, shortly after 3:15 o'clock — I destroyed their world."

|| DON'T expect you to believe this (said Randall), because it didn't happen to you. But it is the truth. Of all people alive today, I alone am of a world that was destroyed. *You* are all living in your proper time. *I* lived on a time-track that once was, and now is not.

You glance at each other. I don't blame you. You think I am insane — and you may be right. But listen to my story, then judge for yourselves.

Consider Time. Do you know what Time is? If not, I'd like to give you my idea.

Think of a tree. Its trunk grows straight to a certain point, then from this node splits into two boles. Later, these two trunks diverge again. And again. So they continue endlessly to separate and divide, first into branches, then into limbs and twigs, finally into stems and buds and leaves.

Time, I conceive, is such a

treelike structure. It started from a common root and source; it has now branched and subdivided so often that in the infinite universe there exist as many possible worlds as there are leaflets on a tree.

I think a tree's dividing points are matched, in mankind's history, by decision points: important moments in Time when a critical decision was made. Perhaps one such point was that at which the first curious lungfish flopped to the shore of a primeval sea and dared the great experiment of venturing onto land. Another may have been when some hairy primate first rose from all fours to walk erect, freeing his hands for more important tasks.

Moses on Sinai, Achilles before Troy, Caesar at the Rubicon — these are historic records of such nodes. There are countless others. Each was a point in Time at which someone made a vital decision. And from each dividing point sprang a separate history of mankind — a new, unique, completely independent world.

These possible worlds — the worlds of *If* — co-exist. They are separate branches on the tree of Time, having equal reality. But we can no more know of them than the leaves on the sun side of a tree can have awareness of the leaves in the shade. Each sprout thinks it alone has reality. This is the great delusion of mankind. For other sprouts exist. In fact,

other *worlds* exist.

I know this. I know it with a dreadful certainty. Because I am the child of one such world.

RANDALL paused. Townsend said thoughtfully, "Parallel worlds? I've heard the theory before. But it *is* only a theory, of course."

"A theory once proved," said Randall, "becomes a fact. And I can prove that what I say is true. Let me ask a question. When you encounter this experience of *déjà vu*, how do you feel?"

"Dazed," said Townsend. "Bewildered and confused."

"Quite so. And how do you *act*?"

"Well — helplessly. As if I were moving on a treadmill, caught in the grip of some force over which I have no control. I know exactly what I'm going to say and do, but I can't stop myself. Of course I can't speak for others —"

"It is the same for all. At such moments, we feel as if our acts are foreordained. But this, too, is illusion. For in each man's life, such moments are the great decision points."

SUCH moments (repeated Randall), are the great decision points. I believe we foresee their coming. Far in advance of actuality we become aware — how, I cannot guess — that before us lies an important decision. Thus we

are given ample time to study the problem and decide on a solution. This is prescience.

Then, after days or months or years, we come to that critical point. Confusion dulls our faculties, and so we act in accordance with our subconsciously precalculated decisions. Yet even as we do so, our numbed minds labor with the thought, '*This is not new to me. I have been here before.*'

That, I believe, is why during such moments we feel as if we were being borne by a swift, irresistible tide. But that current is *not* irresistible. It is possible to change our actions at these points. I know this, because I have accomplished it.

I have told you I am not of your time. That is so. But I was born in your year 1904, and for many years thereafter was your contemporary. Reverting to my tree analogy, I am a leaf on one stem, you are leaves from another. But we sprang from a common branch. Thus my early memories are identical with yours. We shared the same world to a decision point — then we diverged. The histories of your world and mine were the same to a certain year.

That year was 1945.

At five o'clock in the morning on the sixteenth day of July in that year I reached a decision point. That dawn I stood with a tense group of scientists and mili-

tary men in a concrete shelter on the desert near Los Alamos. I was the only newsman in that group, selected to represent the press pool. But only for the purpose of future record. For the present I was pledged to strictest secrecy — for in a moment was to be discharged the first atomic blast ever released by man.

Now, how it happened that I was chosen as the one actually to press the button detonating the distant bomb was just one of those things. Every man present had a better right than I to the distinction. By tradition, one of the military leaders should have tested the new superweapon. Each of the scientists had contributed greatly in time and effort to this moment. Perhaps it was *because* selection amongst them was so difficult that I was granted the honor. At any rate, when preparations had been made and checked, a multi-starred general turned to me.

"Randall," he said, "you are a newsman, and this is the greatest news story of all time. So *you* touch it off."

As simply as that was I appointed to press the button symbolizing man's mastery over the elements. I moved to the control panel and placed my finger on the red stud.

It was then that I reached my decision point. As I stood there, poised and tense, suddenly into

my mind swirled the thought, "*I have been here before.*" I felt that sense of lost futility which Townsend described as a treadmill helplessness. I heard, as in a half-remembered dream, the muted whispers and throat-clearings of my companions, saw the thin red finger of the sweep-second hand gliding toward its fateful destination, felt a swift, damp perspiration on my brow, the cold smoothness of the button beneath my finger, the clammy tingling of my viscera.

I knew I was about to do something I dreaded. Briefly the thought occurred to me, "*I don't have to do this. I can refuse —*"

Then the second hand was a vertical line, a voice cried, "*Now!*" Convulsively my finger rammed the stud. And a blinding man-made sun glazed the distant sands in the instant before trembling earth sprouted a greasy fungus to the skies.

JAMIESON said, "*You touched off the first atom bomb, Randall? I never knew that. All the records —*"

"The wrong records," said Randall. "*Records of your world, your Time. I am telling you the story of another world. I touched off the first A-bomb in a world you've never known.*"

THE pressing of that button (said Randall), was the di-

viding point between your world and mine. Now I will tell you of that other world of If. A world which I inhabited for six long dreadful years. From the moment I touched off the bomb, its history differs from the one you know. It would require volumes to tell all. I will give you only a few salient points.

There was no Hiroshima in that other history. Somehow word leaked out that we had perfected an atom bomb. A man I will not name, for in *your* time he is honored and respected, was approached by certain parties. He sold our cherished secret. The Japanese, forewarned and armed, built up an A-bomb stockpile of their own. Twenty-four hours after our first raid had ravaged Tokyo, their retaliation made flaming pyres of New York, Washington, Los Angeles. A stalemated America and Japan settled down to three years of horror in the first atomic war mankind had known.

Neither side won. No victory was possible. When both sides were too exhausted to fight any longer, a peace was sought on terms acceptable to each combatant, and on the 19th of August, 1948, an armistice was signed.

By that time, world economy had collapsed. America was a land harassed by shortages, inflation, rationing — the general breakdown of a culture whose re-



The phone rang—three, four, five times. Then it stopped.

sources have been poured wastrelly into an all-out war. We had lost more than seven million lives, most of them civilian. Many of our once proud cities lay in ruin, the others were shabby shadows of their pre-war glory. Everywhere was hunger, weariness, despair.

All this was bad. The worst was yet to come.

In the spring of 1949 began trickling into clinics the first DRD victims. This was the name we gave the Deferred Radiation Disease. I won't describe its symptoms. I will say only this: no case ever recovered. Perhaps, in view of the effects, it was better so. . . .

The disease spread swiftly. The trickle became a stream, the stream a torrent, the torrent a swelling tide that neither surgery nor drugs could halt. All the medical experts could do was make the sufferers as comfortable as possible — for a while — then see that they had opiates at the end.

The plague struck America first, then spread, borne everywhere by the dust in the air, the waters of the seas that had been contaminated by our atom bombs. In *your* Time you have seen a tepid sample of what happened to us. After atom bomb tests in the American west, radioactive snow fell in Chicago and Pittsburgh. So it was with us — on a

greater scale. The winds that circled our world carried death and destruction. By the spring of '51, two hundred millions had died. A tenth of the world's population. And the end was not in sight.

But enough of such memories. Let me come to the end of that era. The ending which *I* brought about. . . .

On that Tuesday night which is parallel in Time to last Tuesday night in *your* world, I sat in this room and talked to your counterparts. Many, that is; not all. Does that surprise you? It should not. Of course you were newsmen in that world as well as this. You have been members of this club since before 1945, haven't you? Oh, in that other Time some of you worked for different papers. I, myself, had an entirely different history. For instance, since 1947 I had worked here in New York — which is why I know your names.

Understand, I did not know then of your world. Like you, I thought the world in which I lived the only existence. But last Sunday — day before yesterday — occurred that which changed everything. I refused to answer the telephone.

YOU *what?*” frowned Sam Cohen.

“I didn't answer the phone,” repeated Randall. “And by failing to do so simple an act — I destroyed a world.”

IF THE Fates were logical creatures (Randall mused), great changes would hinge on great events. But they are gray old ladies, whimsical and capricious.

Last Sunday afternoon I was lounging in my apartment, reading the paper, listening to the radio. I had just lighted a cigarette when the phone rang. And in that instant, once again I felt that eerie recognition, “*I have been here before.*”

As in a dream I saw my hand reach for the instrument. I knew with a dreadful certainty what was going to happen. I knew that in a moment I would answer, “*Hello?*” and hear a voice reply in words as yet unknown — but words I would “remember” the moment I heard them.

And with equal suddenness — how can we analyze the speed of thought? — I knew I did not *want* this to happen!

All in the flash of an instant it came to me that mankind's failures spring from his inability to change the pattern of life at moments of decision. I recalled that moment six years earlier on the sandy wastes of New Mexico. Since then I had often wondered what might have happened if I had refused to push that button. Something quite different, I knew. For life is an endless chain of cause and effect, stimulus and reaction. One second's hesitation by myself, six years before, might

have averted the atomic war, DRD, millions of deaths.

And now, I felt, another chance was offered me to remold mankind's future. What might be the result of *not* answering the phone, I did not know. But I dared dream it would not, *could* not, be worse than the fate presently endured by man.

All this in the split second while I was reaching for the phone. The flash of insight, the rebellion, the reaction. From somewhere deep within myself I dredged an unsuspected strength. And it required strength, mental and physical, to break those cobweb bonds. My hands trembled over the telephone, my lips already framed the prepared response. But I fought my lips and hands, drew back my groping fingers.

The phone rang — three, four, five times. Then it stopped. I felt a sudden sense of release like the breaking of a wire. I could almost hear the snapping *spang!* of its separation.

Then a dark vertigo struck me. A blinding giddiness lifted and whirled me out of myself, out of that quiet room, out to the farthest stars and back again. Again illusion, no doubt, but for a moment my heart, my breathing, seemed to stop. I closed my eyes in a swift access of pain and fear. Then I opened them again . . .

I was not in that room. I was

not even the same man I had been. I was a different Herbert Randall, on my way home to New York from Korea, bearing dispatches dealing with a conflict in a world I'd never known!

MITCHELL broke in, "But you can't be a *different* Randall! You have a complete memory of that other world."

"Yes. And also a complete memory of the life and activities of the Herbert Randall I have become. I think I am a sort of synthesis. A duality. When I destroyed my own world by erasing its possibility, somehow I merged with the Randall I *might* have been."

"Erasing its possibility?" repeated Townsend.

"That must be what happened," nodded Randall. "That is the only explanation I can offer. I think that when I refused to answer that phone I broke the chain which gave my old world its validity. I cancelled the equation, ended that time-track's possibility. And so — the time-track died."

"But how about you? *You* survived."

"I don't know how or why. Perhaps because I was the indispensable factor. Perhaps each individual is the indispensable factor during his personal moments of paramnesia.

"At any rate, when I found

myself a new Randall, I discovered I had inherited the memories of that Randall for the past six years. And I know, now, why your world and mine differed. It is because a half dozen years before, this Herbert Randall rebelled in the shelter at Los Alamos. Where it had but briefly occurred to my other self to refuse pressing the button, I *did* refuse. At the moment of decision, I turned away. There was an instant of confusion. Then the commanding officer thrust me aside and pressed the stud himself — a split second later. That interval was the difference between two possible worlds.

“That is why your histories do not credit me with touching off the first atomic blast. I refused. Only the courtesy of those present has, till now, concealed the story of my failure.”

Jamieson asked slowly, “And the conclusion? Now that you have seen what *we* have done during these past six years, do you consider your alternate decision a success?”

Randall stared at him soberly.

“What do you think?”

“I’m asking you.”

“Very well. I’ll say this much: yours is a *better* world than that other. But still you’ve made a frightful mess of things. You won a victory, then let it slip from your grasp. You have permitted a new antagonist, more dangerous

than the old, to overrun half your world. Even now you face the same kind of war that wrecked our civilization. You have but years, or months, or days to go before *your* cities flame with atomic fires, your people waste away in the radiation disease.

“Yours is a *better* world, but not a good one. Like mine, perhaps it were well ended. Somewhere on the tree of Time must be a world where men have learned to live in amity and peace. Where human hearts are warm with friendliness.”

Randall’s gray eyes were curiously opaque, as if he were not seeing us at all, but looking deep within himself.

“Finding such a world,” he whispered softly, “would warrant the destruction of a dozen such as this. Or a thousand. And when one knows how the trick is done —”

Ed Townsend quoted in a curious, strained voice:

*“Good creatures, do you love your lives
And have you ears for sense?
Here is a knife like other knives,
That cost me eighteen pence.*

*I need but stick it in my heart
And down will come the sky,
And earth’s foundations will depart
And all you folk will die.”*

“Something like that,” nodded Randall. “Yes, something very much like that. Because —” He

spoke almost apologetically — “because it wouldn’t hurt you, you know. You would simply cease to exist.”

Winky Peters rose. He had been restless for some moments; now he rose and offered his hand to Herbert Randall.

“Pal,” he said, “congratulations!”

“I beg your pardon?”

“I’ve heard some experts in my time. But you’re the tops! I never heard such a convincing god-damned lie in all my life.”

Randall stiffened. Faint color tinged his cheekbones. He said, “That’s what you think of my story?”

“What did you expect? After all, we’re intelligent adults. That is, we’re supposed to be.”

“Yes,” said Randall. “Supposed to be.” He glanced around the circle awkwardly, hopelessly, then rose and moved toward the door. “Well, gentlemen, I — I’ll say goodnight.”

When he had gone, Jamieson turned on Winky.

“That was a hell of a thing to say!” he fumed. “The biggest name in American newspaper circles — and you call him a liar! Have you got rocks in your head?”

“Pebbles,” said Winky cheerfully, “compared to the ones in *his*. Bert Randall may be kingpin in the profession, but if he believes that stuff he was peddling tonight,

he’s eligible for a private suite in the Napoleon factory.”

He waited for the laughs. When he got none:

“What’s the matter with you guys?” he demanded in an aggrieved tone. “Don’t you know a rib when you hear one? Hey! Don’t tell me any of you were sucker enough to *believe* him?”

I wanted to say yes. I wanted to cry yes, I *do* believe every terrible last word of it. I believe other worlds can exist, *do* exist, and that for some years of his life Bert Randall dwelt in such a world. I wanted to say he’s right, dreadfully right. We *are* hurtling down a pathway to destruction. We *are* a leaf that will wither and die and fall, and there is no salvation for us.

But you don’t say things like that. Not to men you work with every day. So I joined in the general laughter and denial. I suggested a fresh round of drinks.

“Roscoe!” I said.

The bartender got busy. The tinkle of ice in glass was comforting, reassuring. Only Townsend continued to brood.

“There’s just one thing,” he said. “There’s this one thing you’ve overlooked. Suppose he gets *another* chance? Suppose he tries again — for a better world? What will happen to us?”

“Roscoe!” I called fretfully. “Hurry up with those drinks!”



Space Transport Command was being so helpful that Intersol couldn't move a ship until they found a counter to the "Kill 'em with kindness" move.

IT WAS midmorning on Mars when Jay Murray climbed down the ladder steps from the space ship to the floor of Space Transport Command's passenger docks. At the foot of the ladder he turned, still lithe and muscular for all his forty years, toward the ramp leading to the admission depot. The place was familiar to him from other visits, and he hurried along with the others to get to the checking desks.

There weren't many passengers

because Military Control still held a tight lid upon interplanetary travel. Along with himself, most of the passengers seemed to know where they were going; and from the expressions on their faces, they seemed to know what to expect.

Jay hoped there would be none of the usual mixups on his own papers, but he also knew it was a pretty far fetched desire. Anything the military handles —

He chuckled to himself in realization that the military prob-

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