

AD INFINITUM

CIENCIA-FICCION FANTASIA Y COMIC

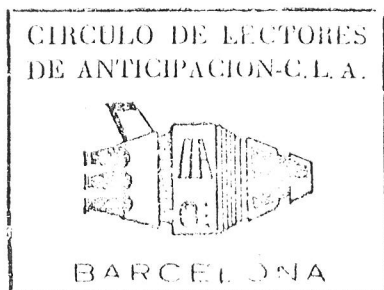
FANZINE DEL
CIRCULO DE LECTORES DE ANTICIPACION
BARCELONA

MAYO 1969 EPOCA PRIMERA NUMERO 5





CIRCULO DE LECTORES DE ANTICIPACION
C. L. A.
BARCELONA



AD INFINITUM

english edition

MAY 1969 FIRST AGE NUMBER 5

MY UNFORGETTABLE TEACHER

by Avelino Flores

Whenever I think about my teacher I am saddened by an odd yearning. To him I owe, if not what I am, most certainly all that I know, and this fact is registered in my brain so effectively that I am constrained to admire him.

But to come clean about it, I never succeeded in liking him. I admired him, but I never liked him. How odd. The reason may lie in my guessing from the first that his teachings were not intended for me alone but for the benefit of society.

I often fear I commit an injustice suspecting him of that, since as a matter of fact he went in many an occasion without food and sleep, so earnestly he endeavoured to impart to me the knowledge I now possess. He always treated me with tact, and I could not possibly complain about him. However...it is likely that after all I was all the time yearning for some warmth, a fondness he never accorded me.

But, as it happens, on many an occasion, while watching the stars, for instance, I can feel an odd sensation inside me on being confronted with the incredible figures separating us from them, and recognising the complexes which go into their composition I am again invaded by that same feeling of admiration. But I repeat, I am always well aware of the fact that this admiration is based on the knowledge that wise man imparted to me, and on nothing else.

When I reach this point I feel liberated from any feeling of fondness or gratitude and I am reminded of the foolishness of a tame lion feeling fondness for his master, or the absurdity of a skyscraper being thankful to the architect who designed it.

And this is why my metallic brain has never registered any regret for the coldness of my feelings.

.....

MINISTORY

by

Jaime Rosal del Castillo

In Bha-Ga-Mtron, a bathing-place where all the magnates of the Fifth Dimension spend their weekends, there is from time immemorial an entrance door to the Third Dimension. Over the threshold, the following warning can be read:

ENTRANCE FORBIDDEN
TRESPASSERS WILL BE CONDEMNED
TO ROAM FOREVER IN SPACE

...and there are so many curious people...

.....

IN THE CONFEDERACY OF FREE EXCHANGE OF THAU

by Jaime Rosal del Castillo

In the Confederacy of Free Exchange of Thau, and on reaching the age of reason, daddy's children generally obtain as a gift from their parents space vehicles in which to displace themselves.

The authorities of the Confederacy have taken rigorous measures against some ill-bred children who make a point of scaring their space neighbours by flying very low over the planets that have not yet been admitted into the Interplanetary League.

.....

Mr. Galdakian, of Armenian origin, nationalized Portuguese, officially residing in Switzerland, is a man of fabulous wealth. In an article recently published in the American financial magazine FORTUNE, his fortune was estimated at roughly two billion dollars, (yes, it's no mistake, we said TWO BILLIONS), invested in real estate, plantations, oil-wells, mines of all kinds, a magnificent collection of paintings and art treasures, as well as in most of the shares of innumerable corporations, financial, industrial and transport societies in the five continents. However, in spite of his wealth, Mr. Galdakian is practically unknown outside the small world of high finance. Endowed with a sharp business sense, allied to an absolute lack of moral and ethical principles, he has reached the autumn of his life, his fortune daily increasing, in complete solitude, avoiding his fellow human beings whom he despises and fears, the perfect embodiment of Gog, Papini's unhappy hero.

Three years ago, while working with one of his many secretaries, Mr. Galdakian was informed that, thanks to a successful move in the Stock Exchange, he had become the proprietor of an important computer factory in the United States. Oddly enough, his curiosity was awakened, if not his interest, and he expressed his desire to get acquainted with the process of manufacturing "those gross copies of the human brain."

On arrival at the factory he was shown around the various plants by the chief engineer, whose explanations about the different manufacturing stages he did not understand at all. When the chief engineer ended his speech in the shipment hall, all Mr. Galdakian asked was:

"Could you build a brain, just like the human one, able to think and decide for itself?"

"Perhaps," the chief engineer replied, "but in order to achieve a considerable likeness it should be of great size and the power consumed would raise working expenses exorbitantly."

"That's immaterial. I am wealthy enough to permit myself a whim like this. I want you to build the most perfect brain ever," and he added after a pause: "and also a robot of human shape acting on its orders."

"But, Mr. Galdakian, it..."

"Your opinion does not interest me," he interrupted drily. "You said you could build it, do it then! From now on this factory will not produce any more computers for sale. All the personnel, from you down to the last man, will contribute to the building of the

robot. My secretary will provide you with all the money you need. I give you two years in which to do it." and, turning on his heels, he walked towards his car.

When the term ended Mr. Galdakian appeared at the factory. The chief engineer ran to meet him with an amazed expression.

"Mr. Galdakian...Oh...I..." he stammered, "I thought you'd wait for my news...The fact is..."

"It is two years to the day, isn't it? Where is the robot? Show it to me."

"Look, Mr. Galdakian...the fact is..." drops of sweat were on his forehead, "...a small incident..."

"Stop talking and bring it here! I want to see it."

"Mr. Galdakian!..."he seemed ready to kneel down,"it is impossible because...three days ago the robot disappeared from the factory."

"What...!!!" the millionaire howled, "Disappeared, you say?" he was red in the face. "Then, go and find it! I will not lose my time because of your incompetence!"

"We are searching for it. All the men take part in the search. You will see it soon, it can't be very far."

"I hope so, or you will regret it for the rest of your life."

"Yes, Mr. Galdakian," said the chief engineer humbly, and seeing that his rage had receded, he ventured to add: "I am sure you will be satisfied when you see it. During many years it will be the greatest achievement in the field of the computers. The complexity and perfection of the brain are incredible. We had to build a ten-storied building to house it. We had to canalize a small river flowing three kilometres from here in order to refrigerate duly its seven million circuits. A powerful micro-wave transmitting-set takes care of the connection between the brain and the robot's body." His voice quivered. Enthusiasm reddened his cheeks. "The robot is an exact reproduction of the human body. Movements, colour, temperature...even his chest heaves while imitating breathing. It is already three months since we finished him. Then he was like a new-born baby: a white page. We have spent the rest of the term teaching him everything possible. He learns quickly and you seldom have to explain things twice. He speaks and writes English, French and Armenian", he smiled servilely at Mr. Galdakian, "drives a car, plays chess well, can solve mathematical problems and maintain a lively conversation on history or art; he even dances and plays the piano fairly well. And this is only the beginning! He can learn much more; his memory has a great capacity. But he is not only a machine acting on orders. He is able to decide for himself."

"This is all very well, but I want to see it and speak with it."

Mr. Galdakian had to wait three long days before there were any news from the robot. On the morning of the fourth day the chief en-

gineer entered the suite in the factory where the millionaire had installed himself, and announced triumphantly:

"Mr. Galdakian! We found him! He is in the city, thirty kilometres from here."

"And why didn't you bring it here, you stupid!" yelled the magnate.

"You see, sir..." his enthusiasm had ebbed. "They could not. He is very strong and he seemed ready to fight. I told you he was able to make his own decisions."

"You said it's in the city? Well then, let's go there." He went quickly to the door. "Don't stand there like an idiot. Follow me!"

Half an hour later Mr. Galdakian's Rolls Royce came to a suave halt in front of the Ascot Club, the only night club in the city.

Mr. Galdakian had great pains getting used to the deafening noise of the place, as well as the pervading darkness. Then he asked:

"All right, and where is it?", pointing to the hundred of persons dancing and pushing one another on the small steel platform under the glare of the intermittent spot-lights.

"There, he's there", the chief engineer was pointing towards the youth in a flowered shirt and tight pants who, standing on the small stage and accompanying himself with an electric guitar, was singing protest songs to the top of his voice while he watched the dancers with a look of profound indifference.

Mr. Galdakian did not feel equal to saying more than:

"Eight hundred million dollars idly spent on "that"!...he has turned out just as stupid as all the others..."

And he left.

.....

"And you, fire, what are you? Whence does your proud flame come? Why are you proud? Tell me, fire, you who do not deign to speak unless you are questioned."

"I am fire, I am above everything; flame and destructive blaze, lord and master of the universe, heir of Nature's breath, hidden power of warmth, life and movement. My origin lies beyond time, I was, I am, and will be forever, I am the essence that creates, I am that God you are looking for and never find. Why am I proud? It is not a question of pride, I, the master of matter and spirit, need not be proud, pride and arrogance are my own self, because nothing can equal me."

"Yes, fire, it is pride and arrogance to call yourself God, since you know it is not true; you call yourself beginning and say you are immortal, but, tell me, fire, where is your origin? do you expect my simple human soul to be satisfied with your immortality? Show yourself as you were in the beginning."

"My beginning? what do you know of my beginning? When man was born and learned to know me, he admitted me as his God; later, when he learned to tame me he believed himself powerful, and now you dare ask me about my origin. You who write poetry demand reality from me. You have the reality of fire. How could I explain to your simple mind the secret of the Universe. You say I am not God and expect me to reply. Your arrogance is useless, and you blame me for mine. How am I born? Haven't you seen it a thousand times? I begin by being a restless spark, light until I become a soft bluish flame, creeping and licking, soon growing and expanding into several long, irate, red flames; like envious tongues announcing the beginning of my power. I grow in your world into a fateful combustion dyed red, yellow and crimson, turn destructive and do not stop, I am not satisfied with just burning, I want that all becomes fire.

Then I go on in the stars, in yellow, crackling flames I give birth to many heavenly bodies like yours, while I continue growing.

I become pure light, flame, fire; white in anger I twist in a gigantic furnace. There I transform and create the beginning of your beginning. The fire that means destruction to you, up there in the stars it is creation. Later I fade, turn yellow again and old, a lighter red and then spent blue flame, tepid embers at last, generating wild sparks."

"You speak about your existence. But, judging by your words, you, fire, are nothing but...a circle. Way or cycle, like water, like man. You are powerful, it is true, you are even free from a chain to which I am bound. But then, why God? is there not a cycle

in Nature, a water cycle, a life cycle? Why must you be the god of all that? You are ubiquitous, but this means nothing, does not my imagination go beyond that? You imparted nothing new to my mind or to my fantasy. And by the way, the air could be God with more reason than you. It obeys to no cycle, it is not constrained to make and destroy itself. Therefore, what else have you to offer? What can you grant to the imagination, since you give nothing to the intellect?"

"You are making some mistake in what you say. I do give something to the intellect. I inspire fear. Fear of the infinite, fear of death. But this is not important.

You demand something for the imagination and I ask you: what do you think there is now in your mind? why are you writing? what strange force is pushing you, exciting your mind? And I answer: fire.

Since you find it difficult to understand, I'll say it otherwise. You have me inside you, day and night I torture your mind until it is feverish and conceited. Your soul starts under my touch and fire is in your look when you stare and fire is in your arm when it strikes. I command over you and over those who, like you, provoke and incite me. Those who are not interested in me do not put any questions. Those who do not feel me, are not burned by my flames. I grant nothing to fantasy, I ignite fantasy just as I ignite in the air. Why else do you think there is love in looks or ferocity in battles, or heat in caresses and games. I am fire, lord of the world, believe in me and do not strive to destroy me for you would destroy yourself."

"How funny is your attitude. You call yourself God and Lord, and then you become human and speak about love and hate. Where is your deceit, fire? You are not clean and gay like water, nor sincere and transparent like air. To me you are wicked and vengeful. Conceited, you boast of your virtues, while, incredulous, I only see your faults. You darken the eyes, dull the brain and obstruct the intellect. You say I am made of fire, and it is true...but also of water, earth and air, and above all, myself, not a fiery God!"

"You believe me wicked and vengeful? That's all right, time will teach you to understand me, I get often excited and this is why you doubt me but just think: air gets polluted and water putrefies. I purify, fire purifies matter as well as spirit. For you who are now hard and deaf I have nothing else but this: purity. If you do not believe in my virtues, eliminate the fire in your soul, put out the breath in your mind and keep your look limpid. Then live, and deprived of my energy, fight, love, die, and let your pride endeavour to quench my flame. You humiliate me, hurt me. You will need me some day, perhaps your days will be minutes and in minutes you

will demand my help.

I, fire, lord of heavens and earth, am not offended by your doubts; as I already told you it is not arrogance, it is force, it is all-pervading fire.

Just like the earth, which is cold but fire smoulders in her entrails, your body is matter, - earth or water - and deeper inside, in the core, it is breath, air...or flame."

.....

On the fifth day all organized resistance had ceased. The terrible black vessels of the alien invaders had destroyed the last resisting nucleus of the regular military forces.

Then several terrestrials with hate in their hearts went up to the mountains in order to continue from there the classical guerrilla warfare of the defeated.

The others, either resigned or cowardly, returned to the cities, cities which the enemy had left untouched perhaps intending to plunder them afterwards, before the end.

It was on the sixth day when the miracle happened: in the heavens above the Earth appeared other vessels, white ones this time, which dived straight towards the black vessels of the Invader.

It was a terrible fight; more fierce than anything the planet had known before. Hundreds of vessels destroyed one another, pursuing, attacking, criss-crossing themselves, colliding in a ferocious relentless fight.

After fighting for several hours the white vessels controlled the situation, while the few surviving black vessels betook themselves to shameful flight. A spotless white vessel, somewhat bigger than the others, descended before the seat of the UNO.

A being of human appearance, good-looking features and wearing white garments alighted from the spacecraft, and with raised arms and a smile on his lips he greeted the huge mob acclaiming him.

Once inside the building the being made a speech in pure English, faultlessly pronounced, before the delegates of the General Assembly, in order to explain to them the reason of his interference against the enemies of the Earth.

The white vessels proceeded from the planet AnGell and the black ones belonged to the terrible Dems. Owing to the maraudings of the latter everywhere in the universe, the inhabitants of AnGell, in spite of their peaceful disposition, took upon themselves the great responsibility of helping preserve the peace, joining forces with the planets being attacked by the wicked Dems.

They, the AnGells, did not believe in violence, they were firmly convinced that the best policy was based on friendship and gratitude.

It was an apotheosis; after being applauded for a longer time than anyone ever was in the history of the United Nations, ambassador AnGell was triumphantly paraded everywhere in the five Continents, and Governments vied with one another to entertain him and conclude with him various treaties of cooperation and commerce.

These treaties were perhaps a bit (or a lot, really) too profitable for the AnGells, but...had they not been the rescuers of the planet? were they not also maintaining a costly police action on a galactic scale against the Dems? The Earth had to show gratitude!

Meanwhile, in the Asteroid Belt, at a point where no earthly detection system could reach it, a macrovessel was on the alert.

"All right," said the commander of the vessel, "the next planet we must open for colonization is situated at 15,4 light years from here, in co-ordinates X453Y765Z960; prepare the vessel for the cast-off, Captain."

And, turning to the televideophone: "Hangars? How many black and white robot-vessels have we left?"

.....

TOMAHAWK

The warriors were tall and strong and their skin was the colour of sunset. They were grouped around the brightly-laced tents of the camp with blood-shot eyes; they were comanches, a healthy race, vigorous and proud. Through their ardent veins flowed the sap of many passed generations, of their greatness and infinite experiences. But they had also known slavery, that is to say, they still remembered it. And for nothing on earth would they go back to it.

Wanaha, warrior chief of the tribe, the beautiful feathers of his headdress undulating in the wind, got up suddenly.

"My valiant warriors: you all know the history of our race. From olden times our ancestors hunted in the plains and in the woods, there was peace and food for the comanche, for the wife of the comanche and for the son of the comanche. Now the prophecy has come true and the monster has awakened from his sleep. Manitu wants to try us once more, he 's sending to us the same plague which once afflicted our forefathers. But I say to you: Do not bow your head again! Dig out the war axe which during centuries has been waiting under the earth to be held by a revengeful and manly hand! Death to the monster!"

The Indians got up all at once and shrieked with the savage voice of the beast. Death to the monster. Death to the enemy.

The war dances had not been forgotten. They had remained buried side by side with the paintings and the tomahawk, and the monster. But everything was restored to the light, to the light of a raging, blinding sun that scorched the earth and the air, the latter hardly moved by the hard and constant beating of the drums.

The paintings. Blood red, forgotten-night blue, hate and fury white...Shouts, leaps, grain spirits and little fires of blinding smoke and suffocating heat. A tragic mixture of sensations and a magnificent communion among savages. Hate and fury white...Blood red.

Horses shout, men howl, children cry and women stare and are silent. The horde gallops away and the earth trembles, the whole earth shakes and a dirty cloud wants to shelter the eyes of the sun against the battle.

The Red Skins have left the desert behind them, a long way behind. They spring forward into the Fifth Avenue, breaking the reheated asphalt with the young nails of their horses. Hundreds of misshapen creatures, bulbous and disgustingly white are trying to run away; but the Indian is quick and sure. He kills ruthlessly the phantom of the white man. The new white man who was trying to be born again. Who was beginning to revive, like a tardy Phoenix bird, from his own ashes.

The old and broken show-windows display the burned remnants of another time, another civilization, another world. On one side, the sea. On the other, the desert, and life.

Angel Rodríguez Metón

I

The children hunt

It was still dark when they appeared in the outskirts of the village. They slipped from street to street, from corner to corner. This time they had not changed their shape; they were like the last time, like large toads, three metres tall, their colour a dark green, their eyes black and cruel and with sharp claws and fangs.

Some of them, panting, stood still under the damp light of the nearby torches. The sky was completely dark, no star was shining.

Somebody by me was moaning. "It will be necessary...", said a voice. On the other side of the street a door creaked on being opened. Two children appeared, they stood still like tiny wax statues. A little further up another door was opened. This time a little girl came out, alone, she took two or three steps and stood waiting.

Inside me a voice was whispering: "Be quick... be quick..." While I stood looking through the window, trying to focus my sight through the dirty glass, I heard the entrance door being opened. The three children were going out. The door closed and a faint sound, like a lament, began to be heard.

In the village all the doors were opening, one after the other, upon the cold darkness of the night. The torches were shining a smoky light.

I closed the window when in the streets began the running, the screaming and the clamour of the chase. I only opened it again when it was time to help the others to pick up the bleeding bodies.

II

I took off my helmet. The technician put it on and began to revise the vision carefully. He kept silent until he had finished.

"The first tape is always less clear", he remarked. "It seems the relatives do not defend themselves... then there is a mighty force hindering it... all the same, it is a comfort to know they are alive."

I looked in silence at the grotesque mass of the octopus, the greatest brain in the universe. It was motionless on the isolated tray, dribbling from time to time some spinal fluids. It was so large that by itself it almost occupied the whole of the room, which was six metres broad and as many high. Yes, there was some place left for my armchair, the recorder, and the technician's table.

The octopus' appearance was always moist. Refreshing liquids poured on it from above, and underneath, the long myeline canalizations lost themselves in the side tunnels, ending in God knows what electrical or biological contacts.

"It is already two days since the disappearance of the spacecraft", whispered the technician. "At least, this is the first notice. Let's see: they are alive; there is a powerful and awesome force besieging them; perhaps they have been obliged to sacrifice some vital parts of the equipment..."

"And it is dark", I said, "with no star shining."

"Oh, that," murmured the technician, "it's just for scenery's sake. I don't think it is important."

One of the octopus' volutions moved slightly, undulating itself. A thin fissure opened between two protuberances and a flake of pearl-grey liquid fell on the insulating tray. Little by little the slight movement ceased.

The octopus too had its own subconsciousness; the most powerful one in the universe. Its usefulness as a calculating or computing device was not great; but it became so when used as a means of communication with human beings lost in unknown places, as now with those in the spacecraft.

The worst about it was the nightmarish form in which it gave the messages. I received them. The technician interpreted them, at least in part.

"If there were any stars", I insisted, "we could know the situation."

"Without the stars..." the technician thought aloud, "The Coal Sack is discarded...such an opposite course..."

He stopped for a moment, squinting.

"There are signs of landing...the torches, the village. A primitive civilization...the houses, the streets, the lighting."

He sighed.

"The toads are forces...isolation, danger, something powerful pushing towards an unavoidable action...that's all."

He switched off the recorder and hung the helmet on its peg.

"That's enough for today," he said, "We'll go on tomorrow."

He went out, carefully closing the insulating door. Throwing a last look at the octopus, motionless by now, I followed him.

III

The technician was sitting with her in a neighbouring café. I occupied a private cubicle next to them. With my head pressed to the synthetic screen I could hear their conversation.

"I have only seen canalization number 7", she was saying, "but if all the rest is like that, it must be really revolting."

"No, it's not that as long as it doesn't move."

"Does it?"

"Yes...when it receives or rejects fluids."

There was silence. I did not see any of the two; but I could remember her. She was red-haired, her skin was translucent, her legs very long. She had been pleasant to me. Yes; I remembered her perfectly.

Again I heard her voice.

"And...him?"

"He's doing his work", the technician said, "he's enduring it well. He's indispensable."

"Doesn't he suffer? The nightmares..."

"No...he doesn't suffer."

Again silence.

"Will you come?" the technician asked.

I heard her laugh.

"I promise I'll come...but not tonight."

"Tomorrow?"

"And if there are no news from the spacecraft? Will it mean more work?"

"No. He cannot withstand more than one daily vision. It must be administered, spared, this vision. It can only be used for the most serious cases..."

"...like this one."

"That's it, like this one. Tomorrow?"

"Yes, yes. Tomorrow."

I heard them get up. Stooping a little I could see the golden dress, the slender legs, the red hair. On her back, on her spine gleamed a green jewel. Yes, I remembered her well...always.

IV

The island

I went ashore at daybreak. The island was almost round, not very big. Slowly at first, and then more quickly, I climbed the steps to the quay.

The manager was waiting for me.

"We hope to persuade you", he said. "You can see everything right away."

We walked towards the interior. Low above the horizon a strong yellow sun was shining. I could see uprooted trees, remnants of burned down cottages. Seeing where I was looking, the manager smiled, as if apologetically.

Before long we found the path. It was clearly marked on the ground, with the upturned earth all around.

"It's the isochromes, of course," whispered the manager. "I don't recommend them to you. They are a good transformation... but not the final one."

Some far-away figures were approaching. We remained silent while they got nearer. They started passing in front of us, one after the other, all covered with dust. The glassy eyes looked fixedly ahead. They all executed the same movement at the same moment; at any given moment their legs, feet and heads moved and turned all at once.

"We guarantee," said the manager, "the total forgetfulness of any problem. The physical activity they practise is sufficient..."

The line of men kept moving ahead. They were wearing coarse garments, gray, shapeless. Their sex was hardly noticeable. Their heads were shaved, their skins suntanned, their faces almost black.

They disappeared in the distance, not interrupting their automatic movements.

"Another step in perfection," remarked the manager. "Let's go. You shall meet the covenanters..we hope to persuade you. I would prefer to make a covenanter of you. It is...more...exalted."

In a valley appeared a line of silhouettes. They all looked ahead of them, toward the centre of the island. They also were, all of them -- men and women -- suntanned and full of dust. But they stood motionless.

We got a little nearer. The first one -- an aged man -- had a big electronic mechanism with a large, green, pulsing eye sunk into his chest, held by bands of skin and flesh. Farther up, the legs of one woman had been substituted by a complex golden chair. Out of a man's head protruded a big metallic cylinder.

"It is pure imagination," said the manager, "their minds have been conditioned towards the desired things...sometimes changing their shape a little...We guarantee a continuous introspection... physical activity is not necessary."

He kept silent. Beyond the valley I saw a group of dark-skinned men, with skirts and spears. Their eyes were wide with terror.

"I recommend you to covenant..."

I signalled towards the armed group. The manager laughed.

"Those? They're just innocent aborigines! Terrified by our conquests...above all by the isochromes..."

I stood still, looking at the group of scared natives, which was slowly increasing in number.

"It's strange," remarked the technician, "not one clue of the position. Generally, the second time it gets much clearer...it happens to be the prime issue..."

The octopus was pulsating slowly. The volutions opened and closed like the leaves of a gigantic polyp, displaying blood-red crevices. A slight rain of fluids fell from the ceiling. The myeline canalizations curved a little, changed to a brownish hue which later became paler, and again remained motionless. A protuberance formed itself on the top part of the octopus. It sank down when the fluid rain ceased.

"Nothing at all?" I asked.

The technician put on his helmet once more. He switched on part of the recorded tape. On a switchboard some lights blinked lazily. I could not take my eyes off the octopus.

He was a good technician; the best there was.

"Nothing, nothing," he answered. "There are the same elements... of the foregoing vision. They are alive. There is isolation, danger, something powerful pushing. There is the fear of an unavoidable transformation...something loved and hated at the same time."

"The natives?"

"No, no. They're just ego representatives. Nothing important. But of course there are several transformations...something which changes nature completely...of what? the spacecraft? the crew?"

"The island?"

"I said it: isolation. The feeling of something strange; the sun, a strong yellow sun. There is a great fear of oblivion, of the loss of personality. There is no communication; communication is totally lacking."

He mused for an instant. Then his face lit up.

"Wait! There is a sign!"

I looked at him, speechless.

"The sun. I'll pass on to the computers...in this course there must be yellow suns...let's say twice as big as ours."

He fingered the keys hurriedly.

"Yes, yes, this is something. They are in a planet with a yellow sun visually double...in size, of course. There is an impending danger of transformation...into something they dislike. But there is no danger of death. Gravity in that planet is probably one. There are seas, and islands. They are possibly on an island, otherwise surrounded by something hostile. They cannot succeed in launching the spacecraft. The feeling of immobility was quite clear!"

"And the manager?"

"Nothing, just a simple figure of individual merging. But... wait, there is a trap somewhere! It contradicts itself, yes, it contradicts itself...what were the natives doing in the centre of the island? It's absurd!"

He switched off the general contact; hung the helmet on the peg.

"Let's leave it now, that's enough. Perhaps we'll be luckier with the computers. If not...we'll know more about it tomorrow."

VI

I followed her when she had finished her work in canalization number 7. She went straight to the technician's dwelling. She was not wearing the golden dress or the green jewel on her back. This time she had put on what looked like a party dress, with wide colourful sleeves bordered by gleaming stones.

I saw her take the ascending stairs. When I reckoned that she had already reached the technician's home, I slid towards the skylight near the roof which was already known to me. It was ajar. I could see them perfectly well, and their words came up to me.

"You are marvellous," the technician was saying.

"I should not have come," she answered, "there was a lot of work at the canalization. This thing, the octopus...was uneasy... it kept shuddering and changing colour..."

"It is submitted to a mighty stress..."

"No news yet from the spacecraft?"

"No, the computers found nothing."

"And him?"

"He did what he could. Poor devil! If you had seen him today! He was shattered after the vision."

"The nightmare?"

"The vision. He can't abide that we call them that."

He served some blue liqueur in tall glasses. They both drank. They looked at each other in silence for a while. Then he kissed her delicately. She responded willingly.

"Is it all right?" asked the technician.

"Yes."

I went on watching while they resumed their love-making. It was evident that they loved each other a lot. They were young, free and could love each other unconcernedly. And that's why they did.

No; I would not forget her easily.

VII

The distant saucers

I was in the uppermost story of a tall building. The streets were deserted, and a leaden dawn was beginning to soar above the buildings. It was cold.

In the canals, the thick myeline tentacles did something I had never seen previously: they started folding themselves, getting out of the vaults and rolling themselves clumsily beside the octopus. Surely a mild panic must be spreading along the canalization service tables.

The technician was furious; bending over his table, his back on the octopus, he kept touching the keys and reckoning.

"Let's see...A pageant someone is watching. That someone is in danger...a doubtful danger, not very likely or very sure... this pageant is something magnificent, unforgettable..."

He was silent for a moment.

"...able to bring about a transformation..."

The side concavities of the octopus were moving, undulating, forming excrescences. Pale blue sparks were spurting along the edges of the volutions. One of the sparks, the biggest, jumped into the insulating tray. A tiny smoke column appeared on the spot it had touched; the smell of burning stuff was lightly noticeable.

The technician had not noticed anything.

"...which sounds as a horrible lie."

Something like a gray arm, slimy, dripping fluid, was beginning to grow from the octopus. At its tip a long, pale, electric spark was blinking. The air was heavy. The yellowish myeline tubes were twisting like snakes. One of them jumped out of its canal, displaying a shattered red tip.

A telephone started ringing. The technician lifted the receiver. He listened for a moment. Then he turned to me, aghast.

"The spacecraft has landed at a Routine Station. They are all safe...their transmitting set just broke down..."

He noticed for the first time the transformation of the octopus. The thick gray arm, like a medieval war club, was advancing upon him, trembling, leaving a path of electric sparks.

"Then," the technician said, "there was no communication from the spacecraft...the powerful uncontrollable force is the octopus itself! And also the danger, the pageant, the deaths...A revolt!"

I saw him pressing a green button, L-shaped. The octopus swelled like a monstrous gray wave, and a terrifying electric spark spurted from it towards the technician. But he was quicker. Something flashed from the ceiling; the spark was stopped on its way by a power-field.

The octopus shrieked and was covered by a green luminosity. From the upper fountain spouted a gigantic flood. In no time the curtains of thick gray liquid completely covered the octopus, that fragment of my brain which I had stupidly relinquished five years earlier to have that thing developed, which took away from me all my desires, feelings, hates and love for others. It had grown very large, but it was not yet so clever as the technician.

The latter was breathing with difficulty. I looked at him in

My little daughter was at my side, huddled against me like a baby cat. We were both eagerly watching the dawn half hidden behind a greyish mist.

A slight drumming began to be heard. Its volume increased; it came nearer. From one of the side streets a clown appeared, raising high some musical instruments. A chill ran through my back. Was it possible? Could it be they?

Some moments later I doubted no more. There they were.

A procession of clowns, Pierrots, ballerinas and riders appeared, hoisting placards that read: "The distant saucers". Some windows were being opened. The drumming increased as the dawn broke.

The pageant proceeded along the street. More circus people appeared, bringing with them the large containers of polished metal which we all had heard about...the saucers. Others were carrying twisted spears, hooks, various instruments of malignant aspect, all of them made of the same gleaming polished metal.

The whole population went that night to watch the grand pageant. We had been hearing about it for years and years, yearning to see it, envying those who had seen it. We knew that it was dangerous, that not all the lookers-on came out of it alive or uninjured; but in spite of the danger we longed to watch it. It was something well known in the whole universe; something no one who had seen it or taken part of it could ever forget it afterwards.

And they were right; the show was worth the danger. My little daughter thought it was confusing and a bit too elaborate, but she never forgot it.

They were gone the following day. Some neighbours were missing, we should never see them again. But it was worth it...it was worth it.

VIII

"I can't understand it!" cried the technician. "Never was a problem so hard to solve. There's nothing but indistinct sensations... not one clear token of what is happening. Danger, continual danger all around, powerful forces, and the rest. The clown, oneirically, means death. What is it all about? And those saucers? And the pageant partly invisible for us?"

He dropped the helmet violently on the control board. Something was nagging at him that I did not quite comprehend. And he was a good technician, the best there was.

"And the metal instruments?"

"Nothing, it's nothing. Pure technique. What we must know is the whereabouts of the spacecraft."

The octopus was moving, swelling. From the ceiling a fluid stream was pouring incessantly, activated by the automatic fountains. The volutions were opening violently, with a sucking sound.

silence. They had deceived me. I did not even know about the existence of that power field. But it was logical; the forces of the octopus, once unchained, could destroy the earth. And not in vain the technician was the best there was.

The octopus had quieted down. But I knew it was not dead.

IX

On the following day, when we were both working, I met her in a corridor. I looked admiringly at her lovely hair, the charming shape of her lips.

"You know what?" she said with an expression of compassionate friendliness, "We're going to get married...me and the technician..you know him..."

"Oh, yes," I replied. "Congratulations..."

.....

He was again sitting before his typewriter and again no idea materialized in his brain. The eternal problem of originality. Would he try with a shock story? No, he could not think of a plot with real impact in it. Let us imagine that the men from Mars came to the Earth...No, no, that had been done hundreds of times already, and by much more experienced writers than himself. Wait! The end of the world...a man was left alone and...It would not do either, that plot had been used once and again. Well, what's the use, he thought, bored, lighting another cigarette. He got up slowly from his chair. I need a drink, he said to himself.

There was a bottle of Scotch whisky on the kitchen table. He opened the refrigerator, then he put the ice-cube tray under the tab so as to take the ice out more easily. One cube, two, three... that's enough. Then some water, he needed the ice and the water to dilute the drink since it would not be the last, as usual. It would be a long night and he ought to be careful. He took a pretty long gulp without pausing to enjoy it. Then he went from the kitchen to his study. He ought to write something, he really ought to. Oh, the eternal problem of originality, the writers facing that same wall were legion.

He opened the window and a gust of cold wind hit his face. The temperature was considerably lower, maybe a storm was coming. The street was deserted. All of a sudden he remembered a story by.... he didn't know exactly, Vanasco? Goligorsky? Poh! he didn't care!

His lips touched the glass, it was empty. He had drunk the whole without even noticing it. Well then, I'll have a second, he thought. He was on edge and a second drink would calm him down. Where the deuce had he heard that whisky was a sedative? It would not do to justify himself though, he drank because he felt like it, and that was that. All the ice-cubes he had left under the tab were gone. He went to the refrigerator and made an awful discovery: there was no more ice. I'll have it straight, he thought.

A slow gulp, it seemed to burn his inside. He glanced at the label. An unknown brand. Cheap whisky, cheap cigarettes...the idea made him want to smoke. He took a cigarette from the crumpled pack, lighted it and sucked deeply. He gave a side glance at the clock on the writing-table. Midnight. How many gray-suited men would be now sleeping and waiting for the unpleasant song of a rickety alarm-clock to break their dreams once more. He himself had also been a man at \$50 a week, but that was over, it was a forgotten memory.

He