



EDITED BY MIKE ASHLEY
THE BEST OF
**BRITISH
SF 2**



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British SF 2

Edited By Mike Ashley

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PROLOGUE

Volume one traced the development of science fiction in Britain from its birth to its blossoming in the early 1950s. Volume two continues with a more select representation of the post-war era. This is because so great a profusion of new science fiction writers appeared in Britain with the growth of the post-war market that it proved impossible for me to include all of them in this already large anthology. Therefore, in order to do some justice to a few of the missing names, I shall briefly look at some of the other important authors of the period.

Probably the best known name in British sf *not* included in this collection is Charles Eric Maine. Maine (born 1921) is the pen-name of Liverpoolian David McIlwain, who was another of the small clan of pre-war sf fans. He was a great friend of Jonathan Burke (of whom more in a moment) with whom he co-edited the amateur magazine *The Satellite* in 1938. He got his start in 1951 with a BBC radio play *Spaceways* which was broadcast in 1952. It was then made into a film and Maine converted it into a book. Ever since he has obtained as much mileage as possible from his work, another radio play *The Einstein Highway*, forming the basis for his second novel *Timeliner*. Since then some dozen or so novels have come from his typewriter several of which have been filmed, most recently *The Mind of Mr. Soames* (1970) starring Terence Stamp. Alas what short fiction he has written reads today rather dated, but his novels are all well worth tracking down.

His companion Jonathan Burke, or J. F. Burke (b. 1922) as his by-line usually reads, is best known today for the various *Hammer Omnibus* volumes he produced, but back in the early 1950s his name would be found in all the leading magazines as well as on a score of paperback novels. Whilst he was educated in Liverpool he was born at Rye in Sussex. He has held a number of jobs including the Public Relations Officer for Shell International. He won the Atlantic Award in Literature from the Rockefeller Foundation for his satire *Swift Summer* (1949). His first sf novel published was *Dark Gateway* (1954) although he had had a short novel *Old Man of the Stars* in the October 1953 issue of *Authentic*. Two collections of his stories have been printed, but there are still plenty that could be revived. If only there was room....

An extremely prolific writer is the Scotsman J. T. McIntosh, real name James Macgregor who was born at Paisley, Glasgow in 1925. He succeeded in selling some early stories to *Astounding* in 1951 before the British market really opened up. He has remained to this day a writer who appears most often in American magazines, though his great output means that he does not entirely neglect the British market. He supplied *New Worlds* with its first serial *The Esp Worlds* (1952) and on the last count has made over one hundred appearances in magazines on both sides of the Atlantic. Even then he found time to be a professional musician, a school teacher and a photographer at one time or another.

Bryan Berry looked like being a bright new star in the 1950s when an early death robbed the field of his talent. He sold several novels to British paperback firms, and had the distinction of having three stories published in the same issue of the popular American pulp *Planet Stories*, all under his own name. Other writers who made a name for themselves in the magazine field in the early 1950s were Lan Wright, F. G. Rayer, Peter Hawkins and Alan Barclay. Alas these names are seen all too seldom these days.

Outside of the magazine field a few other names are worth mentioning. Nigel Kneale is famous because of his *Quatermass* series on television. Kneale (b. 1922) actually had a collection of his short

stories published as far back as 1949, *Tomato Cain*, and it won the 1950

Somerset Maugham Award for short stories. The first Quatermass episode, *The Quatermass Experiment* was broadcast in 1953 and filmed in 1955, finally appearing in bookform in 1959. Two other Quatermass serials followed. Since then Kneale has scripted two other major sf television plays, *The Year of the Sex Olympics* and the ingenious *The Stone Tapes*.

The radio equivalent of Quatermass was probably Jet Morgan who starred in the memorable *Journey Into Space* series scripted by Charles Chilton (b. 1927). Three separate series were broadcast throughout the 1950s and later issued in book form as *Journey Into Space* (1954), *The Red Planet* (1956) and *The World in Peril* (1960).

A name much overlooked today is that of Paul Capon (b. 1912) from Suffolk. Originally a writer of detective fiction he turned to sf in the 1950s and wrote several memorable novels starting with *The Other Side of the Sun* (1950) - the first of a trilogy about Antigeos, a planet that corresponds with the Earth on the far side of the Sun. A later novel was *Into the Tenth Millennium* (1956).

Then there is the mystery man of sf, John Lymington. His name first appeared in the sf field with *The Night of the Big Heat* (1959) about an alien invasion. It was subsequently made into a convincing film. Since then Lymington has written about a dozen novels including *The Coming of the Strangers* (1961), *A Sword Above the Night* (1962) and *Froomb!* (1964). *Froomb!* was in fact a rewrite of Lymington's very first novel *David and Goliath* written in the 1930s. It was not published as Lymington was told

'There is just no market for fantasy'. And so Lymington turned to writing thrillers for which he has become widely known under his real name of John Newton Chance. Most of his short stories are of supernatural nature and thus not suited to this anthology.

And, finally, Edmund Cooper (b. 1926). Whilst he is best known today for his novels, he also first appeared in one of Britain's sf magazines with *The Jar of Latakia* (*Authentic*, September 1954). His first sf novel was *Deadly Image* (1958), and he has concentrated on books ever since, such as his more recent volumes *The Overman Culture* (1971) and *Prisoner of Fire* (1974).

And there I must draw the line at the risk of omitting many other names. It's time I opened up the second part of this anthology and let you read the rest of *The Best of British*.

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JAMES WHITE: Tableau

The January 1953 issue of *New Worlds* (its nineteenth) was quite a special one for several reasons. Besides carrying the first sf story in print by J. F. Burke (*Chessboard*) it also printed the debut story by Northern Irish writer James White, *Assisted Passage*. To keep White company in the issue were fellow Irishmen Walter Willis, who contributed an article about the 1952 World Science Fiction Convention held in Chicago, and artist Gerard Quinn who supplied the cover and several of the interior illustrations.

White, who had been born in Belfast in 1928 but spent much of his early life in Canada, would soon become one of the most popular writers in *New Worlds*. Many of his early stories, like *Assistance*, *Passage* and *Tableau* which follows, revolved around a military setting, but White could be versatile. His first novel, *Tourist Planet* (1956), centred on the intriguing idea of what holidays in space would be like. A more recent novel, *All Judgement Fled* (1967), dealing with the discovery and exploration of an alien ship, won him the Europa sf Award.

White is also known for his 'Sector General' series, which began with the story of that title in the November 1957 *New Worlds*. The series revolves around an intergalactic hospital, which instantly gives endless plot possibilities. In all fourteen have appeared to date, up to and including *Spacebird* in *New Writings in SF* 22 (1973).

Of all his stories it was *Tableau* White chose as his favourite. When asked to comment he said:

'... this story combines two of my favourite themes, Man Meets Alien and Nobody Wants War especially the people unfortunate enough to be fighting in one, whether they are extra-terrestrial human beings or both. *Tableau* also makes the point that wars should not be won, just ended, and soon as possible.'

* * * *

TABLEAU

James White

The War Memorial in the planetary capital of Orligia was unique, but it very definitely was not a nice object. A great many people - beings of sensitivity and intelligence - had tried vainly to describe the feelings of shock, horror and anger which the sight of it had caused them. For this was no aesthetically pleasing marble poem in which godlike figures gestured defiance, or lay dying nobly with limbs arranged to their best advantage. Instead it consisted of an Orligian and an Earthman surrounded by the shattered remnant of a control room belonging to a type of ship now long obsolete, the whole being encased in a cube of transparent plastic.

The Orligian was standing crouched slightly forward, with blood matting the fur on its chest and face. A few feet away lay the Earthman, very obviously dying. His uniform was in shreds, revealing the ghastly injuries he had sustained - certain organs in the abdominal region normally concealed by layers of skin and muscle being clearly visible. Yet this man, who had no business being alive much less being capable of movement, was struggling forward to reach the Orligian. It was the look on the Earthman's face which was the most distressing thing about the whole, horrible tableau.

Night had fallen, but the Memorial was lit erratically by the flashes which repeatedly outlined the buildings at the edges of its surrounding park. From all over the city came the sounds of sharp thudding explosions, while rockets grew rapidly on slender stems of orange sparks to flow crashingly into clouds of falling stars. The city, indeed the whole planet, was in festive mood. With the Orligian love of doing things properly or not at all, this meant the letting off of a great many fireworks as well as the usual merry-making. Sleep was impossible, the populace was going wild.

It was, after all, a great occasion. Tomorrow the Orligians were getting another war memorial...

* * * *

Like most single ship engagements it had proved to be a long-drawn out affair. Normally such a duel led to the defeat of the Orlog ship within a few hours, MacEwan thought with that small portion of his mind which was not engaged in throwing his ship about in violent evasive action. But there was nothing normal about this fight, he thought bitterly; the enemy had begun to learn things, to adopt Earth armament and tactics. They, too, had regressed to throwing rocks ...!

‘Closer! Closer!’ Reviora’s voice squeaked suddenly through his phones. ‘We’re too far away, dammit! They’ll get us in a minute ...’

MacEwan did not have to be reminded of the necessity for sticking close to the enemy ship, and another Captain would have told the Ordnance Office so in no uncertain terms. But he had discovered long ago that young Reviora, whose voice had only recently changed and was prone to change back again at times of emotional stress, could exhibit all the outward signs of panic while continuing to use his weapons with incredible accuracy. MacEwan relegated the Ordnance Officer’s jitters into the realm of general background noise and continued to focus all his attention on the controls.

His idea in taking evasive action at extreme range - extreme for his ship, that was; it was nearly ideal range for the enemy - was to lull the Orlog skipper into thinking that he intended breaking off the action. Such a thing was unheard of, simply because trying to run away from an Orlog ship meant certain destruction from their primary weapon, but there was always a first time. Maybe the enemy officer would think that his ship was crippled, or out of ammunition, or that its Captain lacked sufficient intestinal fortitude to ram. Anyway, he would be puzzled and maybe just a little bit inattentive ...

MacEwan said quietly, ‘Reviora, ready?’ He pulled the ship round in a tight turn, then with the Orlog ship centring his forward vision screen he pushed the thrust bar through the emergency gate and headed it there. The target vessel grew slowly, then expanded so rapidly that the screen was suddenly too small to hold it. A dull, intermittent vibration told of Reviora, with the ship holding a steady course and the enemy dead ahead, using his forward turret to the best advantage. MacEwan thought he saw a spurt of fog from a hole freshly torn in the Orlog ship’s hull, then the image flicked out of sight to reappear as a rapidly shrinking picture in the aft view-screen.

His hands were slippery and he had to blink sweat out of his eyes. *Check velocity!* his racing brain yelled at his slow, fumbling fingers. *Move!*

Jump around! And above all, keep close...!

* * * *

So as to give Reviora a chance to get in a killing burst, MacEwan had made a fast but unswerving approach. He had held his ship steady for fully five seconds. That had been an insane risk to take, but he had gambled on the Orlog ship not using its primary weapon on him for fear of his hurtling ship smashing into it even after MacEwan’s ship and crew were written off. Now however, he was far receding from the enemy ship and evasive action was again indicated. Still on emergency thrust he began weaving and corkscrewing, at the same time trying desperately to kill the velocity away from the enemy he had built up during the attack.

Evasive action at a distance was much less effective than close up because the Orlig primary weapon had a certain amount of spread. Maximum safety lay in sticking close and moving fast. Or had done until now ...

It had been estimated that the radiation, or force, or field of stress which was the Orligian Primary Weapon took roughly six to seven seconds to build up, but once caught in that field a ship and its occupants were a total loss. Yet strangely the ships affected appeared unharmed. Provided one was extremely careful they could even be entered. But just scratch the metal of one of those ships, or stick a needle in one of the crew-men, and the result resembled a small-scale atomic explosion - but again strangely, without any trace of immediate or residual radioactivity. Such ships were now left severely alone, their orbits not even being plotted as dangers to navigation because the first meteorite puncture their hulls caused them to destroy themselves.

It was a super-weapon, only one of those which had forced Earth back, so far as tactics were concerned, to the bow-and-arrow level.

MacEwan only half noticed the shudderings of his ship as Reviora, using absurdly adolescent profanity, tried for a deflection shot with the remote-controlled waist turret, and the harsher, more erratic vibration of Orlig shots getting home. At the moment he was wishing desperately that there was some means by which he could simply cut and run - not, he hastened to assure himself, because he was overly interested in his own safety, but because this new development represented a change in Orlig strategy. It was a change which would have to be countered, and MacEwan hoped that the Bra back home would be able to find the answer - he couldn't see one himself.

If only Nyberg had never been born, MacEwan thought; or failing that, if only he had not grown up into a stubborn, courageous and idealistic Swede whose highmindedness had started an interstellar war. Such wishing was sheerest futility, he knew, but even in the middle of the hottest engagement he had yet experienced there was this weak, traitorous segment of his mind which tried to escape into the world of what might have been ...

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Five years ago the UN survey ship *Starfinder* - crew of fifty-eight plus seven civilian specialists - Captain Sigvard Nyberg in command - had, at very nearly the limit of its prodigious range, made contact with a ship of an alien culture for the first time. A tape left by the late Captain Nyberg told of the excitement of the occasion, and a day-by-day summary gave some indications of the difficulties experienced in widening that contact.

Strangely, the vessel of what were later to become known as the Orligians did not seem to want to maintain contact at first, though neither did they show signs of hostility. *Starfinder's* psychologist, admittedly working on little or no data, had suggested that such behaviour might be due either to a high degree of conservatism in their culture or to a simple case of cold feet. He had added that cowardice was not a strong possibility, however, considering the fact that the alien ship was four times the size of their own. But Captain Nyberg had maintained contact - just how he had done so was not known in detail because he was a man who disliked talking about his own accomplishments - and widened it to the point where simple sequences of radio signals were replaced by exchanges of message capsules containing technical data which enabled the two ships to match communication channels.

It was shortly after sound-with-vision communications had been set up between the ships that something went wrong. The last words on Captain Nyberg's tape were to the effect that, far from being horrible monsters the aliens were nice, cuddly little creatures and that their atmosphere and gravity requirements seemed to be close enough to Earth-normal for the two races to co-exist on either of their home planets without artificial aids. A few words, mostly of self-identification, had already been exchanged. But the Captain intended going across to their ship next day, because he had a hunch that the Orlogians were beginning to shy away again.

When the nine men in *Starfinder's* tender, who had been investigating a nearby solar system during these proceedings, returned they found that the mother ship had been the scene of a massacre. Not one of the ship's personnel had escaped, and the condition of the bodies seemed to indicate that they had been battered to death with the nearest available blunt instrument. The slaughter had been merciless, the humans being obviously taken by surprise because in only a few places was the deck stained with blood which matched no earthly group, and there were no Orlogian dead at all.

The nine-man crew of the tender somehow managed to bring their mother ship home. The situation was, of course, highly charged emotionally

- much more so than normal because of the fact that *Starfinder's* crew had been mixed - so that Earth, which had known peace for three centuries, found itself at war with the culture of Orlogia.

* * * *

And the war, MacEwan was thinking as he frantically threw his ship all over the sky half a mile from the Orlogian light cruiser, had been going on for far too long. The sense of immediacy, where the people back home were concerned, had been lost - and with it the horror and righteous anger which had started it all. Defence spending was heavy and teddy-bears were no longer stocked in kiddy's toy stores, but otherwise there was very little to indicate outwardly that a state of war existed at all. Best maximum effort was being, and would be, maintained simply through fear. Earth, had she chosen to, could have withdrawn her spacefleet at any time, could simply have left and called the whole thing off. Neither side knew the positions of each other's home planets. But that course would have left the situation unresolved and eventually, whether in fifty years or five hundred, the Orlogs were bound to discover Earth. The people of Earth were honest enough not to gain peace by dumping the problem on the laps of their many times great grandchildren.

But it was an untidy and very unsatisfactory son of war. The 'front line'

so to speak was in the general volume of space where the original contact had been made, and bases had been set up by both sides on planetary bodies in the region, and supplied by ships taking very great pains to conceal their point of origin. The distances involved made patrolling a joke and a battle a vast, disorganised series of dogfights. Except when raids were carried out on enemy bases there was nothing unusual for three weeks to go by without a single clash, and this at a time when both sides were prosecuting the war with maximum effort. Altogether it proved what had been known from the first, that the very idea of interstellar war was impractical and downright silly. But the chief reason for the feeling of dissatisfaction was the fact that, slowly but surely, the Earth was losing.

Superiority in offensive and defensive weapons belonged to the Orlogs. They had a screen, probably originally intended for meteor protection, which englobed each of their ships at a radius of two mil-

and which melted anything approaching at a velocity likely to do harm - meteors, missiles, attacking ships, *anything*. This screen could be penetrated only by guiding the ship through it at what was practically a crawl. Once through, however, the missile's remote-control equipment immediately ceased to function and the missile drifted harmlessly past the target. On the one or two occasions when a nuclear warhead had accidentally drifted into an Orlig ship, nothing at all had happened.

Earth science had been able to duplicate this screen, but it was no good to them because the Orli scorned the use of such crude methods of attack as atomic missiles: they had The Weapon.

This the Earth scientists could not understand, much less duplicate. They only knew that it was some kind of beam or field of force which required several seconds to focus, and that its maximum range was about thirty miles. There was no answer to this weapon. A ship caught by it became a lifeless undamaged but untouchable hulk which needed only sharp contact with a meteorite or piece of drifting wreckage to blast itself out of existence. The Weapon was also thought to be the reason why atomic warheads refused to function in the vicinity of Orlig ships, but this was just a guess.

There had been panic in high places, MacEwan remembered, when the most advanced offensive weapons of Earth had been proved useless. What was needed was some form of weapon which was too simple and uncomplicated for the Orlig nullification equipment to be effective, and a tactic which would bring such a weapon to bear. An answer of sorts had been found. To find it they had to go back not quite so far as the bow-and-arrow era, but to the Final World War period and the armour-piercing cannon, and chemically powdered rockets used in the aircraft of that period. The tactics which had been developed were the only ones possible with such weapons, but they tended to be wasteful of men.

'Sir! Sir! Can I have the ship?'

It was Reviora, excited but no longer swearing. The tiny, wandering portion of MacEwan's mind came back to present time with a rush. He said,

'Why?'

'Ammunition's running out, but we've three Mark V's in the nose rocket launcher,' Reviora babbled. 'It's working now - I found the break in the firing circuit. They won't be expecting rockets at this stage. We can use that trick of Hoky's -' He bit the sentence off abruptly, then stammered, 'I... I'm sorry, I mean Captain Hokasuri -'

'Skip it,' said MacEwan. He ran his eye briefly over the control panel, then switched everything to the forward conning position. 'Right, you have the ship.'

Hoky had had lots of tricks. Hokasuri and MacEwan were the Old Firm, the unbeatable, invincible combination who invariably hunted together. But then every team was invincible until one or the other failed to come back. MacEwan squirmed restively. His mind, temporarily freed of the responsibility for guiding the ship, flicked back over the opening minutes of the engagement. It could only have been through sheer bad luck that his partner had been Stopped, the mild-mannered little Japanese with the apologetic grin and the black button eyes was not the type to make mistakes...

Hokasuri and he had been searching the nearby planet for signs of an enemy base when they had surprised an Orligian presumably engaged on the same chore. Distance had been about two hundred

miles. They had immediately separated and attacked.

The Orligs used fairly large ships; apparently the generators for The Weapon took up a lot of space. Earth craft-were very small and fast, and hunted in pairs. Though not one hundred per cent successful, this had proved to be the only effective means of coming to grips with the enemy. The Weapon had a range of thirty miles and took six or seven seconds to focus. Two ships, therefore, approaching from different directions, the while taking violent evasive action, discharging 'window' and performing various other acts designed to confuse enemy aim, could be expected to run the gauntlet of The Weapon until the screen which surrounded enemy ships at a distance of two miles was reached. But to penetrate this the attacking ships had to check velocity, and it was at this point that the two attackers usually became one, the reason being that there was time for The Weapon to be focused on one of them. The surviving attacker then closed with the enemy - its very nearness and extreme mobility provided protection against the slow-acting Weapon - and slowly battered the Orlig ship into a wreck with solid, armour-piercing shells and rockets.

Once begun such a battle had to be fought to the death, because the Earth ship would be a sitting target if it attempted to escape through the screen again.

MacEwan had not been worried about Hokasuri getting through the screen, they had done it so often before despite all the laws of probability and statistics. They were the invincible ones, the pilots with that little something extra which had enabled them to return together after eighteen successful kills. But he had seen Hokasuri Stopped, seen his ship diving unwaveringly into the planet below them and watched it explode in the fringes of its atmosphere.

For the first time then MacEwan had experienced a sense of personal anger towards this Orlig ship. Indoctrination to the contrary, previous attacks had always seemed more like a big and very dangerous game to him. But then his anger had been pushed into the background by a sudden upsurge of fear that was close to panic. The Orlig ship, which should have been helpless now that he had closed in, was hitting back. What was worse, it was using the same type of archaic weapon for short-range defence that Earth ships had developed for attack, heavy calibre machine-guns of some sort. His ship was in nearly as bad a state as was that of the enemy ...

* * * *

Now he watched the Orlig ship spreading out in his forward view-screen again. The bow-launchers were fixed mount; to line them up on the target Reviora had to aim with the whole ship, and the Ordnance Officer had to do it because MacEwan's fire control panel was dead.

Hokasuri's trick had been to open up the enemy ship with his guns, saving the rockets until he could place them right inside the target. It was a process which called for accuracy of a high order. Perhaps Reviora could match it.

For an agonising four seconds Reviora held the ship on a collision course with the enemy while the fire of two Orlig blister turrets gouged at its hull. Suddenly the rockets were away, streaking ahead and plunging unerringly into the long, dark rent already torn in the Orlig's hull plating by an earlier attack. Everything happened at once, then. Metal fountained spectacularly outwards and the ragged edged hole in the Orlig's hull lengthened, widened and gaped horribly. Simultaneously there was a sharp cry from Reviora which faded out in peculiar fashion. MacEwan wondered about it for perhaps

fraction of a second, decided that the peculiar sound was due to the sudden loss of the air which carried Reviora's voice from his mouth to the suit mike, then he was reaching frantically for the control panel again.

Reviora was dead. They were still on a collision course!

Desperately MacEwan stabbed control keys - forward and rear opposed lateral steering jets to swing the ship, and full emergency thrust on the main drive to get him out of there fast. The ship began turning but that was all. Controls to the main power pile were cut, probably by the recent Orlig gunnery, and the hyperdrive telltales were dead, too - the ship was a wreck. Now it was skidding in broadside-wards and still closing rapidly with the other ship. MacEwan hit more keys, firing all lateral jets on that side in an attempt to check velocity. Uselessly, it was too little and too late. There was a close-space series of shocks as the ship ran through the metallic debris blown from the Orlig ship, climaxed by a tearing, grinding crash as the Earth vessel embedded itself exactly in the hole its rockets had blasted in the enemy hull.

The shock tore MacEwan, straps and all, sideways out of his chair and threw him on to the deck. His head hit something...

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When he was in a condition to think straight again his first thought was for the spacesuit. Captains do not wear protective suits in action for the same reason that necessitated their safety webbing being thin, flexible and generally not worth a damn - too cumbersome, and besides, the control room was tucked away relatively safe in the centre of the ship. But now there was no longer any need for his hands to be unhampered and his body able to move freely; his control board was dead. Two view-screens were still operating for some peculiar reason but that was all. There were no indications of a drop in air pressure, his ears felt normal and respiration ditto, but it was too much to expect that the crash had not opened seams even here. He was about to open the suit locker when his mind registered what his eyes were seeing in the two view-screens.

One was focused inwards and showed where the lateral jets had practically fused the two ships together before cutting out; some of the Orlig's bulkheads still glowed red hot. The other screen gave a view outwards and showed the planetary surface only a few hundred miles off. As MacEwan watched his ears detected a whispering, high-pitched rushing sound.

There are no sounds in space. The Orlig ship, crippled, a near wreck and carrying the remains of the small ship responsible for its present condition, was trying for a landing. It was already entering atmosphere. MacEwan abruptly forgot about spacesuits and dived instead for the acceleration chair.

He was still scrambling weightlessly above the chair when the first surge dropped him face downwards into it. He had time to fasten just one safety strap, before suddenly mounting deceleration hammered him flat. Briefly, he thought that the Orlig ship must be in bad-trouble to want to land in its present state. With the damage inflicted by the Earth ship the Orligian must be an aerodynamic mess and that without taking into account the wreckage of the aforesaid ship jammed against it like some spacegoing Siamese twin. Then all thinking stopped as he strained every nerve and muscle to keep alive, to keep his creaking and popping rib cage from collapsing on to his straining heart and lungs, and strangling the life out of him.

After what seemed an impossibly long time the deceleration let up somewhat, becoming steady measured surges of one or two G's which he could take comfortably. Obviously the Orlog pilot had shed most of his velocity in the thin, upper air to minimise atmospheric heating, then was taking her down slow for the last few miles. Not too slow, though, or stratospheric winds might buffet her vertically despite everything the gyros could do. This Orlog was *good*, MacEwan thought; he deserved to make it. MacEwan also thought that he would like to buy the Orlog pilot a drink, supposing such a thing was possible and that Orlogs drank.

The control room was vibrating and heaving in a manner unnerving both to mind and body, as jerking and swaying in time to the mad cacophony of shrieking air, bellowing engines and a banging rattling percussion section as deceleration and air resistance tried to shake both ships to pieces. MacEwan was amazed that the wreckage of his ship had not torn itself free long ago.

Suddenly there was a last, violent surge of deceleration, a smashing, jarring shock, then the grinding scream of tearing metal. They were down but not still. There was a sickening, outward swaying motion and more harsh crepitation of ruptured metal. MacEwan's eyes flew to the view-screen. It showed a stony, desert-like planetary surface swooping up to meet him. One of the Orlog's landing legs must have buckled, they were toppling ...

The noise was like a pick driven into his brain, and he saw the ship coming to pieces all around him. Bits of sky showed in surrealistic geometric shapes which changed constantly with the shifting of the wreckage. There was a sudden bright explosion, and MacEwan had time only to remember the damaged midships launcher and the primed rocket still jammed in it, then flying, jagged-edged metal ripped all consciousness from him.

* * * *

When MacEwan came to again there was surprisingly little pain; his strongest impressions were those of numbness and extreme, clammy cold. This must be shock, he diagnosed briefly. But there was a warm wetness overlying the chill of his body that seemed to be localised in the area where he felt the dull, shock-numbed pains. He looked down at himself then, and realised how very lucky he was to be in a state of shock. He knew at once, of course, that he was dying.

The blast had left only a few shreds of his uniform, there was a great deal of blood, and his injuries ...

A man should not have to look at himself in a state like this, MacEwan thought dully. If he had met an animal in this condition he would have shot it, and had it been a member of his own species he would have turned away and been violently sick. As it was he gazed at the frightful wounds with a strange objectivity until his brain, not quite as numb as the rest of him, re-opened communications with his one good arm. He fumbled open the emergency medical kit that still hung from his belt and used the coagulant spray freely, ending by swallowing rather more than the prescribed dose of antipain against the time when the shock would wear off. With most of the external bleeding checked, MacEwan tried to lie as motionless as possible. If he moved at all he felt that he would burst open along the seams like some great big football filled with red molasses.

It was while he was trying to look around him – and endeavouring to decide why he had given himself this inadequate first aid – that MacEwan saw the Orlogian.

By what freak of circumstances it came to be there it was impossible to say, but not three yards from MacEwan lay one of the Enemy. It was not a very impressive object, he thought, this small being which resembled nothing so much as a teddy-bear that had been left out in the rain. But it was not rain which matted the fur on the creature's chest and head, nor was it water oozing from the raw ruin of its face. It was in much better shape than MacEwan, however, it was breathing steadily and making occasional twitching movements which suggested returning consciousness. The broad belt to which was attached MacEwan's holster and the pouch containing the medical kit was the only part of his uniform left intact. He carefully drew the little gun with its clip of thirty explosive bullets and waited for the Orlog to wake up.

While waiting he tried hating it a little.

* * * *

MacEwan had always been an unemotional man - perhaps that was the secret of his success as a Captain, and the reason for his unusually long period of active duty. In his particular job MacEwan was convinced that emotion simply killed you off in jig time. A man making an attack approach with hate or any other emotion -whether directed towards the enemy, or something or somebody else - clogging his mind was leaving that much less of it for the vital business of evading The Weapon. In battle MacEwan felt no hatred for the enemy, no anger that his Ordnance Officer cursed and swore in a highly insubordinate fashion at him - Reviora was invariably full of apologies on their return to base and none of the softer emotions that could leak over from the times when he was not in battle.

There had been a girl once, a tall, dark-eyed girl who had been attached to the base Plot Room. MacEwan had eaten with her a few times, seen how things were going, then avoided her. That had been the smart thing to do; good survival. Now he was realising what an unhappy man he had been.

Hokasuri had treated the whole thing as a game, too. MacEwan had had one of his rare moments of anger when his brother Captain's Stopped ship had exploded in this planet's atmosphere, and when Reviora had died. But now he felt only a dull regret. He reminded himself that the Orlog lying over there was responsible - in part, at least - for those deaths, but still he could not actively hate the thing.

It was his duty to kill it, whether he hated the Orlog personally or not. Why, then, was he being so squeamish about not wanting to shoot it when it was unconscious, and trying to work up hatred for it? Was his imminent demise making him go soft, had Iron Man MacEwan turned to putty at the end? Phlegmatic, unsmiling and distant, Captain MacEwan was looked upon back at base as the embodiment of the soulless, killing machine. Now he felt as if he was thinking like a woman. Now he was thinking that, just this once, he would like to do something on a basis of emotion rather than of cold, calculating, logical reasons. It would be the last chance he would have, he thought wryly.

But wasn't he fooling himself? Suppose he forgot logic for once, would he use the pistol to blow the Orlog into little pieces out of sheer hate or would he do something stupid? Yellow cowardice was a motivation as well as duty or hate, and MacEwan was coming near his end. He had never been a religious man, but nobody had been able to give him concrete data on what lay on the other side, though a great many believed firmly that they knew. Was he simply scared that doing a bad thing now would have serious consequences later, after he died - even though he did not really believe there was a later? MacEwan swore weakly, the first time he had done such a thing in years.

All right, then! MacEwan told himself savagely. This mind of mine, admittedly dopey from shock and antipain pills not to mention a generous measure of sheer blue funk, will for the first and most decidedly the last time reason on the purely thalamic level. He would not shoot the Orligian. Fear of the Hereafter was only part of the reason, there was the fact that this particular Orlig, or one of his crew mates, had made a very fine crash landing.

MacEwan said, 'Oh, go ahead and live, damn you!' and tossed the gun away from him.

Immediately the Orlig leapt crouching to its feet.

* * * *

MacEwan only faintly heard the gun sliding down the inclined deck, falling between the ruptured seams of floor plating and clattering down through the wreckage below. He was watching the Orlig and realising that it had been playing possum, pretending unconsciousness and covertly keeping him under observation while he had the gun in his hand. A smart little teddybear, this Orlig, and now that he was unarmed ...

He could not help remembering that the muscles under those soft-looking, furry arms were capable of tearing a man's head off, as the massacre on the *Starfinder* had shown.

'MacEwan,' he told himself sickly, 'you have done a very stupid thing.'

At the sound the Orlig started back, then it began edging nearer again. One of its arms hung limp to the side. MacEwan saw, and very obviously it was having to force itself to approach him. Finally it got within three feet and stood looking down. It growled and whined in an odd fashion at him and gestured with its good arm; the noises did not sound threatening. Then the arm reached out, hesitated, and its stubby, four-fingered hand touched MacEwan briefly on the head and was withdrawn quickly. The Orlig growled again and retreated. It disappeared behind a nearby tangle of wreckage and he heard it clambering awkwardly through to the remains of its own ship.

MacEwan let his head sink to the deck, no longer willing to exert the tremendous effort needed to hold it upright. The antipain was not working too well and his brain seemed to function in fits and starts, racing one minute and completely blank the next. All at once he was utterly, deathly tired, and it must have been at that point that he blacked out again. When he came to, MacEwan's first impression was of vibration striking up through his jaw from the deck plating. His second was that he had gone mad.

His eyes were closed yet he could see himself - all of himself, including the head lying on the deck with its eyes closed. And there was a constant gabbling in his mind which could only be delirium. MacEwan wanted to black out again but the delirium kept him awake. It was too loud, as if somebody were shouting in his head. But the words, though nonsense, were heard clearly:

... It is wrong to do this. My Family would be ashamed. But my Family is dead, all dead. Killed by this Family of this loathsome thing which is dying. It is wrong, yet here is a chance to obtain valuable data about them, and with my Family dead the displeasure of other Families cannot hurt me. Perhaps my efforts are useless and the creature is already dead, its wounds are frightful. ..

MacEwan shook his head weakly and opened his eyes. He blinked so as to focus on the object

mechanism which had appeared on the deck about a foot from his head. It was squat, heavy-looking and was dull grey except where clusters of fine, coppery rods stuck out at intervals. A thick power cable sprouted from its base and disappeared somewhere, and just behind the machine the Orlig sat on its haunches. The expression in its eyes, which were the only feature in that ruined face capable of registering any emotion, could only be described as intent.

In his present state it was hard for MacEwan to feel undue excitement or amazement. But he was not so far gone that he would not reason logically, so that he knew quite clearly what it was that he was experiencing.

The Orligs had telepathy.

In the instant of his reaching that conclusion the babble in his head ceased, but there was not silence. Instead there was a bubbling stew of half-thoughts, memory fragments and general confusion, the whole being overlaid by an extreme feeling of antagonism and instinctive loathing which the Orlig was trying unsuccessfully to control. But it *was* trying, MacEwan knew, and that was a good point in its favour. And the main reason for its confusion, he saw, was the fact that having opened communications with a species which was its deadly enemy, the Orlig was at a loss for words.

MacEwan thought that the right thing to do would be to mentally spit in its eye. But he had stopped doing the right things recently - he had gone all emotional. Instead he thought, *That was a very nice landing you pulled off. A very fine landing.*

With the rapport existing between them MacEwan now *knew* that this was the Orlig pilot.

Surprise and increased confusion greeted this, then: *Thank you*, the creature's mind replied. *At the time I did not know I had a passenger to observe it.*

Maybe it was due to an accident of phrasing, but MacEwan thought that there was an undercurrent of surprisingly Human humour in the thought. But it was lost abruptly in an upsurge of the ever-present antagonism and revulsion, and the flood of sight, sound and pain impressions that, although shockingly clear in themselves, were roaring through the Orligian's brain at a speed too fast for words. The screaming hail of metal from the attacking Earth ship, searching out its Family one by one, ripping them into bloody ruin and continuing to churn horribly at what was left. As the most junior member of the Family with the fastest reflexes it had been in the pilot's position, and relatively safe. But it had felt and seen its brothers being cut to pieces, and when its father had left the control room to take over a firing position, the mentacom had sent him the feelings of its parent gasping frenziedly for air in a compartment which had suddenly been blasted open to space by MacEwan's guns...

You started this war not us! MacEwan broke in, suddenly angry because he shared identical feelings about Reviora and other acquaintances that he had been careful to avoid thinking of as friends. He was remembering the *Starfinder*.

The reply he got staggered him. It was his own race, not the Orligs, who were responsible for the war and looking at it from the other's point of view he could see that it was so.

* * * *

What a perfectly ghastly mess! MacEwan thought. And Nyberg, poor, brave, ignorant Captain Nyberg. If only he had realised that a feeling of instinctive friendship towards these newly-discovered aliens because they were so soft and furry and so reminiscent of a child's first non-adult friend, a teddy-bear - did not necessarily have to be reciprocated. On the Orlig's home planet there was a species which resembled the Earthmen as closely as Orligs did teddybears. Its habits were dirty, it was vicious, cowardly and possessed just enough intelligence to be depraved. To the Orlig mentality that species was like fat, wet things under rocks, and things that itched and stank. One of their tricks was to play and cavort within sight of groups of Orlig cubs until one or more, intrigued and as yet not intelligent enough to know better, would wander off after them. The species was, of course, carnivorous ...

And Captain Nyberg, impatient to broaden Earth's mental horizon by contact with an extra-terrestrial civilisation and puzzled by the alien's tendency to shy away, had crossed to the Orlig ship. He had been admitted by beings whose conditioning from earliest childhood towards things like him were diametrically opposed to his feelings for them. But that alone might not have led to war. If only Nyberg had not tried too hard to win friends and influence Orligs by the tactic so beloved of Earth politicians.

If only he had not tried to kiss babies.

The Orligs were a very emotional race and things had happened very quickly after that incident. They were not enough beings on the ship possessing the objectivity to realise that Nyberg's action might only have *appeared* threatening...

But why, MacEwan wondered, had not one of the mentacom gadgets been handy. Instead of halting words and actions, both of which were wide open to misunderstanding, there would have been full comprehension of the potentially explosive differences in the backgrounds of both races. If the *Starfinder* incident would never have happened, there would not have been a war and he, MacEwan, would not be dying. Even at this late date he wondered what the Earth authorities might do if the true situation was explained to them. They, too, like Captain Nyberg, had been at one time anxious for contact with an intelligent extra-terrestrial species.

* * * *

But the flood of the Orlig's thinking was pouring over him again. The main torrent roared through his brain, but not so loudly that the small, revealing side streams went unnoticed. Things like the fact that a large-scale war had been unknown on Orligia - though small ones, something like feuds, tended to be rugged - because the Family system made them impossible. There were no nations on the planet, just Families, which were small, close-knit groups of up to fifteen who submitted willingly to the near Godlike authority of the male parent until they showed sufficient aptitude to form a family group of their own.

It was an intensely conservative type of culture with very complicated and inflexible codes of manners, and Nyberg's misadventure proved the severity of punishments for offences against the code. And the mentacom, it seemed, had been recently developed from existing instruments in use by Orligian psychologists. Apparently the noise of a space battle played hob with the delicate modulated whines and growls which were the Orlig spoken language so that they had been forced to develop a method of mechanical telepathy to solve the communications problem.

Just like that, MacEwan thought dryly, then he concentrated on the mainstream of thought being radiated at him. It was so much easier to do that.

He was cold all over now, his mouth and tongue burned with a raging thirst and he could not believe that a human body could feel so utterly and completely weary and still remain awake. Had the conversation been in spoken words MacEwan knew that he could never have carried it on, he was too far gone. His brain felt funny, too, as if a cold, dark something was pushing at it around the edges. Fatigue, loss of blood and oxygen starvation were probably responsible for that effect, he thought, and wondered ironically what particular code he would break if he died on the Orlig in the middle of the conversation.

A sudden new urgency had come into the Orlig's thoughts. They were on the *Starfinder* incident again and apparently there were those in that Orlig ship's crew who had felt themselves unduly constrained by their home planet's codes of behaviour and of thinking. In their opinion the planet was too hidebound and conservative and contact with an alien culture was just what it needed if stasis and decadence were to be warded off. The Families in the Earth ship were, it was true, outwardly loathsome to an infinite degree, but perhaps the visual aspect, thought some, was not of primary importance...

MacEwan felt a sudden wild hope growing in him as he guessed the trend of the other's thinking. But an equally great despair followed it. What could *he* do, he was as good as dead?

Do I understand, he thought as distinctly as he could, *that you would like peace?*

The Orlig's thoughts fairly boiled out at him. Their centuries-old civilisation was being disrupted. Though warships were generally crewed by one or more complete Families, for technical reasons some Families had to be split up. The pain and tragedy of this process could only be appreciated by a Orligian. And hundreds of other Families, the very best Families who specialised in the various technologies, were being lost every year in the war. Most decidedly the Orlig, and quite a few of his acquaintances, would like peace!

We, also, thought MacEwan fervently, *would like peace*. Then suddenly he cursed. A door had been opened, just the barest crack, and it was heavy with the inertia of past guilt and blood and misunderstanding. How could a dying man push it wide and cross the threshold?

* * * *

MacEwan felt that his mind as well as his body was packing up on him. It would be so nice and easy just to let everything stop. But he was Iron Man MacEwan, he reminded himself goadingly; MacEwan the Indestructible, the big bodied and even bigger headed Superman, the perfect killing machine. No, he had something which was really worthwhile to strive for, and all he wanted to do was give up because he felt tired. *Think, damn you!* he raged at himself. *Think, you stinking lousy quitter ... !*

And he did think. Weakly, urgently he pleaded with the Orlig to relay his suggestions to the other superiors. He thought in terms of an Armistice preparatory to peace talks, and explained how this might be brought about by using the Earth device of a flag of truce. A raid on an Earth base in which message containers only were dropped, followed by a single ship with a white flag painted prominently on the hull. The Earth forces would be suspicious, but MacEwan did not think they would blow the ship out of the sky ...

At that point MacEwan blanked out. It was as if the peaks and hollows of his brain waves had suddenly evened themselves out, leaving him with the knowledge of being alive but with no other sensations at all. He didn't know how long it lasted but when he came round again the Orlig pilot was pleading with him desperately not to die, that medical help was on the way together with a flotilla which was escorting the rescue ship - and that he must live until the other's superiors talked with him.

MacEwan was icy cold and sick and his thirst was a dry acid in his throat. The antipain was not working so well anymore, but he knew that he would never be able to keep a clear head - or even stay conscious - if he took another dose. He thought longingly of water; he knew the Orligs used it.

But the Orlig sent him a firm, sorrowful negative. He did not know much of Earthmen's physiology but he was very sure that food or drink would do further harm considering the seriousness and position of MacEwan's injuries. There was a queer, guilty undertone to the thought. MacEwan fastened on it, prised it open, and felt a sensation of hurt which had nothing to do with his wounds. As well as the reasons stated the Orlig had been trying to hide the fact that he did not want to have to touch the Earthman again at any price.

Tell me of yourself, the Orlig went on hastily, of your world, your background, your friends and family. I must know as much as possible in case ... It tried to stop the thought there, but only succeeded in accentuating it: there can be no tact in a meeting of minds ... *In case you die before my superiors arrive.*

* * * *

MacEwan fought pain and thirst and soft encroaching darkness as he tried to tell the Orlig about Earth, his friends and himself. He was pleading a case, and a successful decision meant the end of the war. But he could not be eloquent, nor could he cover up the unpleasant aspects of certain things, because it was impossible to lie with the mind. Several times he slid into a kind of delirium wherein he fought out the last engagement which had killed Hoky and Reviora, right down to the crash, the explosion and the meeting with the Orlig pilot. He could do nothing to stop it, this recurrent nightmare which just might end on a note of hope.

The Orligian was horrified at MacEwan's personal score of kills, but at the same time he seemed to feel just a little sympathy for the loss of Hokusuri and Reviora. And there was a peculiar thought which MacEwan did not catch properly because he was slipping into a delirious spell at the time: about the Weapon that was somehow tied in with the strange belief on the Orlig's part that no civilised being could attack knowing he had a fifty-fifty chance of being killed; such bravery was incredible.

But what impressed the other most was the knowledge that the long-dead Captain Nyberg's actions had been motivated by *friendship* towards the Orligians. And that there were creatures on Earth closely resembling the Orligians which the Humans liked and treated as pets, whereas positions were completely reverse on Orligia. It meant that the unfortunate Captain had been slain unjustly, and if he could convince its superiors of that, the groundwork for understanding and eventual peace might be laid.

A severe mental struggle became apparent in the Orlig pilot's mind at that point, so intense that the other seemed deaf to MacEwan's thinking even though he was in one of his rare lucid periods. The being rose to his feet and padded up and down the clear deck area of the wrecked control room. His mental distress was extreme. Finally it stopped, crouching above MacEwan, and began to bend forward. It was fighting hard, every inch of the way.

A stubby, hairy hand found MacEwan's, held it and actually squeezed it for all of two seconds before being hastily pulled away.

My name is Grulyaw-Ki, it said.

MacEwan could not think of a reply for several seconds because there was a funny tightness in his throat - which when he came to think of it was silly.

MacEwan.

Things were hazy after that. They talked a good deal through the mentacom, mostly about the war and regarding tactics and installations in a way which would have had the security officers of both sides tearing their hair. It came as a shock to see that the control room suddenly contained three more Orligs, who eyed him keenly and touched him in several places without any particularly strong sign

of repugnance. Obviously Medics are used to horrible sights since the war. They withdrew and immediately afterwards he noticed a large section of the control room wall being cut away, revealing blue sky, the slender pillar of the rescue ship and a barren stretch of desert. An intricate piece of electronic gadgetry was being assembled in the gap, with power lines running from it to the wrecked Orlig ship. MacEwan could not ask about it because the power cable to the mentacom had been taken out and plugged into this new mechanism.

The Orlig medics had cleaned Grulyaw-Ki up but had not been able to do much for his face, and the being had steadfastly refused to leave MacEwan and go to the rescue ship for proper treatment. It seemed that the Orlig felt deeply obligated to MacEwan because of the Captain's earlier decision not to kill it when he had had the gun and the Orlig was lying helpless on the deck. The Orlig had got the memory of that little item from MacEwan when he had been delirious, apparently. He wanted to stay with the Earthman until...

The mentacom had been disconnected at that point.

Officers of ever increasing seniority arrived and talked with Grulyaw-Ki. Some hurried away again and the others stayed and looked down at MacEwan from positions behind the electronic gadget - still apparently arguing with the Orlig pilot, who seemed to be refusing to move more than a few feet from MacEwan's side.

There was something going on here, MacEwan knew suddenly, something which was not consistent with the things he had expected from reading the Orlig's mind. For instance why, after pleading with him to stay alive until the arrival of Orligian higher-ups had the pilot allowed the mentacom to be disconnected immediately after the arrival of the medical officers? Why weren't they asking him questions over the mentacom instead of whining and growling urgently at the Orlig pilot from behind the now apparently complete mechanism a dozen feet away? What *was* the blasted thing, anyway ... ?

Tenuous as mist, with neither strength, directional properties or even clarity, an Orlig thought sequence seeped through his mind. The mentacom beside him was disconnected, but somewhere - at extreme range and probably on the rescue ship - there was another which was operating, and there was an Orligian near it who was thinking about him. There was an undercurrent of excitement in the thought, and hope, and the overall and everpresent problems of strategy and supply - the thought of a very important and responsible Orlig, obviously. MacEwan was a very brave entity, the thought went on, but even so it was better that the Earth-being should not be told what was to happen to him ...

Rage exploded so violently in MacEwan that he forgot his wounds, and his anger was matched only by his utter self-loathing. He had been a blind, stupid fool! He had talked too much, betrayed his friends, his race and his world. He had told *everything* to the Orlig pilot, and with knowledge of the spatial coordinates of Earth a planet-wrecker or a few bacteriological bombs would soon end the war. Of course the Orlig had given him equally vital information, but with the difference that MacEwan was hardly in a position to pass it on. Now apparently, they were too impatient even to wait for MacEwan to die because the mechanism which had been set up and which was now focused on his huddled, near-corpse was nothing less than The Weapon.

The sheer force of his emotions sent him crawling towards Grulyaw-Ki. Mounting waves of pain pounded and roared over the small, feeble core of purpose in his brain and he dared not look down at his injuries. But the Orlig pilot was looking, and his companions behind The Weapon, and a ragged

tortured whine of sympathy and horror was dragged from their throats at the sight. They had feeling he had met one of them mind to mind and he knew. It didn't fit, what they were going to do to him. Grulyaw-Ki's mind had not even considered his being killed out of hand. Maybe that was why the pilot was electing to go with him, because he disapproved of the treachery of his brothers.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw certain coils within the complex mass of The Weapon glow brightly, and he hunched himself desperately forward. *We're not all bad*, his mind screamed, in a vain attempt to reach them without benefit of a mentacom. *Maybe you've tricked me, but there can be peace ... peace ...* He tried to reach out and grasp the Orlog pilot's hand, to show them that he meant what he was thinking, but his stupid, senseless lump of an arm refused to move any more for him, and off to one side The Weapon was about ready to project its radiation, or force pattern, or field of stress ...

... After two hundred and thirty-six years the Orlogians were getting another War Memorial, were being forced to get another War Memorial. And the Orlogians were a very emotional race.

It was after dawn when the noisy festivities died down and the crowd silent now and strangely solemn - began to gather round the protective plastic of the old Memorial, the most gruesomely effective War Memorial ever known. They had remained far away from it during the night's celebrations, it would not have been proper to indulge in merrymaking in this place, but now they were gathering from all over the city. They came and stood silent and grave and still moving only to let through the ground vehicles of off-planet dignitaries or the numerous other technicians and specialists who had business at the Memorial. Some of them cried a little.

At midday the Elected Father of Orlogia rose to address them. He spoke of both the joy and solemnity of this occasion, and pointed with pride at the ages-frozen figure of the mighty Grulyaw-Ki, the Orlogian who, despite, the urgings of his friends and the orders of his superiors, had determined to discharge his obligation towards this great Earth-being MacEwan.

The time stasis field projector, once an Orlogian weapon of war but now in use in hospitals on every planet of the Union, had made this possible. With great difficulty the Stopped bodies of MacEwan and Grulyaw-Ki had been sealed up and moved to Orlogia, there to wait while the first shaky peace between Earth and Orlogia ripened into friendship and medical science progressed to the point where it was sure of saving the terribly injured Earthman. Grulyaw-Ki had insisted on being Stopped with his friend so that he could see MacEwan cured for himself. And now the two greatest heroes of the war were heroes because they had ended it - were about to be brought out of Stasis. To them no time at all would have passed between that instant more than two hundred years ago and now, and perhaps none for the first time the truly great of history would receive the reward they deserved from posterity. The technicians were ready, the medical men were standing by, the moment was *now...!*

The crowd in the immediate vicinity saw the figures come alive again, saw MacEwan twitching feebly and Grulyaw-Ki bending over him, saw the bustle as they were transferred into the waiting ambulance and - temporarily Stopped again until the hospital would be reached by a small and more refined projector - hurried away. The throng went wild then, so that the noise of the previous night would have been restful by comparison. Some of them stayed out of deference to the sculptor for the unveiling of the new memorial, a towering, beautiful thing of white stone that caught at the throat, but only a few thousand. And of these there were quite a few who, when the ceremony was over, went to look through the little peep holes set at intervals around its base.

Through them could be seen a tiny, three-dimensional picture in full detail and colour of the original war memorial, placed there to remind viewers that there was nothing great or noble or beautiful about war.

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ARTHUR SELLINGS: Starting Course

In Volume one I referred to the *Observer*'s short story contest *AD 2500*, that brought us Aldiss's *Night For An Age*. That competition led to the publication of a book of the twenty-one best entries, chosen by Angus Wilson. Besides the Aldiss offering, and a tale by Robert Wells (an author finally making his mark), it also included *The Mission* by Arthur Sellings.

Sellings was the pen-name of Robert Arthur Ley, born in Tunbridge Wells, Kent in 1921. He moved early to London where he had a vivid recollection of seeing both *Metropolis* and *The Girl in the Moon* - two classic early and influential German sf films - and soon after he discovered H. G. Wells and the US sf magazines.

He did not turn his hand to writing, however, until 1953, with the sale of *The Haunting to Authenticity*. Thereafter, he sold regularly, predominantly to the United States, in particular to *Galaxy Magazine*. His appearances in the British magazines were few and far between but they were no less entertaining as *Starting Course* from the January 1961 *New Worlds* shows only too well. Two collections of Sellings' short stories exist as well as several novels including the powerful *Telepath* (1962) and the fascinating *The Power of Y* (1965).

Science fiction was dealt a tragic blow when Sellings died on September 24th, 1968, aged only 47. Several stories appeared posthumously, the last, prophetically entitled *The Last Time Round*, being published in the November 1970 *If*. I leave you with these words from his widow, Gladys Ley:

'As a friend said to me, never to converse with Arthur, share his enthusiasms and his love of life again; we have lost so much.'

* * * *

STARTING COURSE

Arthur Sellings

'Good afternoon, sir. Mr Trendall? I'm from Android Bank.'

Trendall looked past the visitor, looking for - what? - a gyrotruck, a crate? Then he realised. *This was* it - him. He looked down at the neat bag in the young man's hand, then up past trim slacks and jerked of dark grey to the fresh, strangely *new*, face.

'Uh - well, come in.'

He was conscious that his voice sounded hollow. Hell, it wasn't his fault. Just how did you welcome

an android into your family?

He showed the young man into the lounge and called his wife in from the kitchen where she'd hidden herself. She entered nervously.

'Oh, May, this is our guest, Mr -'

Trendall felt suddenly even more awkward, and cursed both that and the fact that he'd been pressured into this. He was a solid twenty-second century citizen, integrated in his job and in his social sector and unused to feeling awkward. The schmooze about that being the very reason he'd been selected! He hadn't swallowed that - no *sir*. But how about the thinly-veiled threats of penalties, down-grading status? He had the kids to think of, hadn't he? But he was beginning now to regret desperately that he hadn't made a stand.

The young man spoke - in the same careful, rather flat, tone in which he had announced himself. 'Just call me Eddie. I do have a surname - A hyphen Smith. A for android, of course. But that's only for the records. A surname is rather superfluous in my case, don't you think?'

Trendall felt oddly grateful. That seemed to put the matter in perspective somehow. His wife said, 'Of course, dear, yes, why of course -' He shot her a meaningful look.

'Well then - uh - Eddie. Take a seat.' He noticed now the curious correctness with which the visitor moved. They all sat down. There was an awkward silence.

'Perhaps you'd like to freshen up,' May blurted.

Was that the right thing? Trendall wondered. Did they? Have need to, that was?

'No, thank you, ma'am. I've come straight from the Bank.'

* * * *

Heck, thought Trendall, he says it as if he had just stepped out of the vat!

That was how they bred them, the man from the Bank had said. Up from single artificial cells emerging as a human being - or a damn good copy. Forget that, the official had said - treat him just as an ordinary, if immature, human. They had given him a basic education. Now he had to live with his family for six months. A finishing course, the official had said with a slight smile.

May tried again. 'Would you like some tea?'

'Yes, thank you, ma'am,' said the young man, to Trendall's surprise. May heaved a visible sigh of relief and went out to the kitchen. Trendall felt less constrained now. He could talk to the other, man ... as it were ... to man.

'How many of you are there?'

'Of me? Oh androids, you mean? About fifty, I think. I was in a class of twenty-five. There was one other class. I think we're the only bank so far in the world.'

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