Who Goes There?

Chapter 1

The place stank. A queer, mingled stench that only the ice buried cabins of an Antarctic camp

know, compounded of reeking human sweat, and the heavy, fish oil stench of melted seal blubber. An

overtone of liniment combated the musty smell of sweat-and-snow-drenched furs. The acrid odor of

burnt cooking fat, and the animal, not-unpleasant smell of dogs, diluted by time, hung in the air.

Lingering odors of machine oil contrasted sharply with the taint of harness dressing and leather.

Yet, somehow, through all that reek of human beings and their associates - dogs, machines and

cooking - came another taint. It was a queer, neck-ruffling thing, a faintest suggestion of an odor

alien among the smells of industry and life. And it was a lifesmell. But it came from the thing that

lay bound with cord and tarpaulin on the table, dripping slowly, methodically onto the heavy planks,

dank and gaunt under the unshielded glare of the electric light.

Blair, the little bald-pated biologist of the expedition, twitched nervously at the wrappings, exposed

clear, dark ice beneath and then pulling the tarpaulin back into place restlessly. His little bird-like

motions of suppressed eagerness danced his shadow across the fringe of stiff, graying hair around

his naked skull a comical halo about the shadow's head.

Commander Garry brushed aside the lax legs of a suit of underwear, and stepped toward the table.

Slowly his eyes traced around the rings of men sardined into the Administration Building. His tall,

stiff body straightened finally, and he nodded. "Thirty-seven, all here." His voice was low, yet

carried the clear authority of the commander by nature, as well as by title.

"You know the outline of the story back of that find of the Secondary Pole Expedition. I have been

conferring with Second-in-Command McReady, and Norris, as well as Blair and Dr. Copper. There

is a difference of opinion, and because it involves the entire group, it is only just that the entire

Expedition personnel act on it.

"I am going to ask McReady to give you the details of the story, because each of you has been too

busy with his own work to follow closely the endeavors of the others. McReady?"

Moving from the smoke-blued background, McReady was a figure from some forgotten myth, a

looming, bronze statue that held life, and walked. Six-feet-four inches he stood as he halted beside

the table, and, with a characteristic glance upward to assure himself of room under the low ceiling

beams, straightened. His rough, clashingly orange windproof jacket he still had on, yet with his

huge frame it did not seem misplaced. Even here, four feet beneath the drift-wind that droned across

the Antartic waste above the ceiling, the cold of the frozen continent leaked in, and gave meaning to

the harshness of the man. And he was bronze- his great red-bronze beard, the heavy hair that

matched it. The gnarled, corded hands gripping, relaxing, gripping and relaxing on the table planks

were bronze. Even the deep-sunken eyes beneath heavy brows were bronzed.

Age-resisting endurance of the metal spoke in the cragged heavy outlines of his face, and the

mellow tones of the heavy voice. "Norris and Blair agree on one thing; that animal we found was not

- terrestrial - in origin. Norris fears there may be danger in that; Blair says there is none.

"But I'll go back to how, and why, we found it. To all that was known before we came here, it

appeared that this point was exactly over the South Magnetic Pole of the Earth. The compass does

point straight down here, as you all know. The more delicate instruments of the physicists,

instruments especially designed for this expedition and its study of the magnetic pole, detected a

secondary effect, a secondary, less powerful magnetic influence about 80 miles southwest of here.

"The Secondary Magnetic Expedition went out to investigate it. There is no need for details. We

found it, but it was not the huge meteorite or magnetic mountain Norris had expected to find. Iron

ore is magnetic, of course; iron more so - and certain special steels even more magnetic. From the

surface indications, the secondary pole we found was small, so small that the magnetic effect it had

was preposterous. No magnetic material conceivable could have that effect. Soundings throught the

ice indicated it was within one hundred feet of the glacier surface.

"I think you should know the structure of the place. There is a broad plateau, a level sweep that

runs more than 150 miles due south from the Secondary station, Van Wall says. He didn't have

time or fuel to fly farther, but it was running smoothly due south then. Right there, where that

buried thing was, there is an ice-drowned mountian ridge, a granite wall of unshakeable strength

that has damned back the ice creeping from the south.

"And four hundred miles due south is the South Polar Plateau. You have asked me at various times

why it gets warmer here when the wind rises, and most of you know. As a meteorologist I'd have

staked my word that no wind could blow at -70 degrees - that no more than a 5 mile wind could blow

at -50, without causing warming due to friction with the ground, snow and ice, and the air itself.

"We camped there on the lip of that ice-drowned mountain range for twelve days. We dug our camp

into the blue ice that formed the surface, and escaped most of it. But for twelve consecutive days the

wind blew at 45 miles an hour. It went as high as 48, and fell to 41 at times. The temperature was

-63 degrees. It rose to -60 and fell to -68. It was meteorologically impossible, and it went on

uninterruptedly for twelve days and twelve nights.

"Somewhere to the south, the frozen air of the South Polar Plateau slides down from that

18,000-foot bowl, down a mountain pass, over a glacier, and starts north. There must be a funneling

mountain chain that directs it, and sweeps it away for four hundred miles to hit that bald plateau

where we found the secondary pole, and 350 miles farther north reaches the Antartic Ocean.

"It's been frozen there ever since Antartica froze twenty million years ago. There has never been a

thaw there.

"Twenty million years ago Antartica was beginning to freeze. We've investigated, thought and built

speculations. What we believe happened was about like this.

"Something came down out of space, a ship. We saw it there in the blue ice, a thing like a

submarine without a conning tower or directive vanes, 280 feet long and 45 feet in diameter at its

thickest.

"Eh, Van Wall? Space? Yes, but I'll explain that better later." McReady's steady voice went on.

"It came down fromspace, driven and lifted by forces men haven't discovered yet, and somehow -

perhaps something went wrong then - it tangled with Earth's magnetic field. It came south here, out

of control probably, circling the magnetic pole. That's a savage country there, but when Antartica

was still freezing it, it must have been a thousand times more savage. There must have been

blizzard snow, as well as drift, new snow falling as the continent glaciated. The swirl there must

have been particularly bad, the wind hurling a solid blanket of white over the lip of that now-buried

mountain.

"The ship struck solid granite head-on, and cracked up. Not every one of the passengers in it was

killed, but the ship must have been ruined, her driving mechanism locked. It tangled with the

Earth's field, Norris believes. No thing made by intelligent beings can tangle with the dead

immensity of a planet's natural forces and survive.

"One of its passengers stepped out. The wind we saw there never fell below 41, and the temperature

never rose above -60. Then, the wind must have been stronger. And there was drift falling in a solid

sheet. The 'thing' was lost completely in ten paces." He paused for a moment, the deep, steady voice

giving way to the the drone of wind overhead, and the uneasy, malicious gurgling in the pipe of the

galley stove.

Drift - a drift-wind was sweeping by overhead. Right now the snow picked up by the mumbling wind

fled in level, blinding lines across the face of the buried camp. If a man stepped out of the tunnels

that connected each of the camp buildings beneath the surface, he'd be lost in ten paces. Out there,

the slim, black finger of the radio mast lifted 300 feet into the air, and at its peak was the clear

night sky. A sky of thin, whining wind rushing steadily from beyond to another beyond under the

licking, curling mantle of the aurora. And off north, the horizon flamed with queer, angry colors of

the midnight twilight. That was spring 300 feet above Antartica.

At the surface - it was white death. Death of a needle-fingered cold driven before the wind, sucking

heat from any warm thing. Cold - and white mist of endless, everlasting drift, the fine, fine particles

of licking snow that obscured all things.

Kinner, the little, scar-faced cook, winced. Five days ago he had stepped out to the surface to reach a

cache of frozen beef. He had reached it, started back - and the drift-wind leapt out of the south. Cold,

white death that streamed across the ground blinded him in twenty seconds. He stumbled on wildly

in circles. It was half an hour before rope-guided men from below found him in the impenetrable

murk.

It was easy for man -or 'thing'- to get lost in ten paces.

"And the drift-wind then was probably more impenetrable than we know." McReady's voice snapped

Kinner's mind back. Back to welcome, dank warmth of the Ad Building. "The passenger of the ship

wasn't prepared either, it appears. It froze within ten feet of the ship.

"We dug down to find the ship, and our tunnel happened to find the frozen - animal. Barclay's axe

ice-axe struck its skull.

"When we saw what it was, Barclay went back to the tractor, started the fire up and when the steam

pressure built, sent a call for Blair and Dr. Copper. Barclay himself was sick then. Stayed sick for

three days, as a matter of fact.

"When Blair and Copper came, we cut out the animal in a block of ice, as you see, wrapped it and

loaded it on the tractor for return here. We wanted to get into that ship.

"We reached the side and found the metal was something we didn't know. Our beryllium-bronze,

non-magnetic tools wouldn't touch it. Barclay had some tool-steel on the tractor, and that wouldn't

scratch it either. We made reasonable tests - even tried some acid from the batteries with no

results.

"They must have had a passivating process to make magnesium metal resist acid that way, and the

alloy must have been at least 95 per cent magnesium. But we had no way of guessing that, so when

we spotted the barely opened lock door, we cut around it. There was clear, hard ice inside the lock,

where we couldn't reach it. Through the little crack we could look in and see that only metal and

tools were in there, so we decided to loosen the ice with a bomb.

"We had decanite bombs and thermite. Thermite is the ice-softener; decanite might have shattered

valuable things, where the thermite's heat would just loosen the ice. Dr. Copper, Norris and I placed

a 25-pound thermite bomb, wired it, and took the connector up the tunnel to the surface, where Blair

had the steam tractor waiting. A hundred yards the other side of that granite wall we set off the

thermite bomb.

"The magnesium metal of the ship caught, of course. The glow of the bomb flared and died, then it

began to flare again. We ran back to the tractor, and gradually the glare built up. From where we

were we could see the whole ice-field illuminated from beneath with an unbearable light; the ship's

shadow was a great, dark cone reaching off towards the north, where the twilight was just about

gone. For a moment it lasted, and we counted three other shadow things that might have been other

-passengers - frozen there. Then the ice was crashing down and against the ship.

"That's why I told you about that place. The wind sweeping down from the Pole was at our backs.

Steam and hydrogen flame were torn away in white ice-fog; the flaming heat under the ice there was

yanked away toward the Antartic Ocean before it touched us. Otherwise we wouldn't have come

back, even with the shelter of that granite ridge that stopped the light.

"Somehow in the blinding inferno we could see great hunched things, black bulks glowing, even so.

They shed even the furious incandescence of the magnesium for a time. Those must have been the

engines, we knew. Secrets going in a blazing glory - secrets that might have given Man the planets.

Mysterious things that could lift and hurl that ship - and had soaked in the force of the Earth's

magnetic field. I saw Norris' mouth move, and ducked. I couldn't hear him.

"Insulation - something - gave way. All Earth's field they'd soaked up twenty million years before

broke loose. The aurora in the sky licked down, and the whole plateau there was bathed in cold fire

that blanketed vision. The ice-axe in my hand got red hot, and hissed on the ice. Metal buttons on my

clothes burned into me. And a flash of electric blue seared upward from beyond the granite wall.

"Then the walls of ice crashed down on it. For an instant it squealed the way dry-ice does when it's

pressed between metal.

"We were blind and groping in the dark for hours while our eyes recovered. We found every coil

within a mile was fused rubbish, the dynamo and every radio set, the earphones and speakers. If we

hadn't had the steam tractor, we wouldn't have gotten over to the Secondary Camp.

"Van Wall flew in from Big Magnet at sun-up, as you know. We came home as soon as possible.

That is the history of - that." McReady's great bronze beard gestured toward the thing on the table.

Chapter 2

Blair stirred uneasily, his little, bony fingers wriggling under the harsh light. Little brown

freckles on his knuckles slid back and forth as the tendons under the skin twitched. He pulled

aside a bit of tarpaulin and looked impatiently at the dark ice-bound thing inside.

McReady's big body straightened somewhat. He'd ridden the rocking, jarring steam tractory forty

miles that day, pushing on to Big Magnet here. Even his calm will had been pressed by the anxiety to

mix again with humans. It was alone and quiet out there in Secondary Camp, where a wolf-wind

howled down from the Pole. Wolf-wind howling in his sleep -winds droning and the clear, blue ice,

with a bronze ice-ax buried in its skull.

The giant meteorologist spoke again. "The problem is this. Blair wants to examine the thing. Thaw

it out and make micro slides of its tissues and so forth. Norris doesn't believe that is safe, and Blair

does. Dr. Copper agrees pretty much with Blair. Norris is a physicist, of course, not a biologist. But

he makes a point I think we should all hear. Blair has described the microscopic life-forms

biologist find living, even in this cold and inhospitable place. They freeze every winter, and thaw

every summer - for three months - and live.

"The point Norris makes is - they thaw, and live again. There must have been microscopic life

associated with this creature. There is with every living thing we know. And Norris is afraid that we

may release a plague - some germ disease unknown to Earth - if we thaw those microscopic things

that have been frozen there for twenty million years.

"Blair admits that such micro-life might retain the power of living. Such unorganized things as

individual cells can retain life for unknown periods, when solidly frozen. The beast itself is as those

frozen mammoths they find in Siberia. Organized, highly developed life-forms can't stand that

treatemnt.

"But micro-life could. Norris suggests that we may release some disease form that man, never

having met it before, will be utterly defenseless against.

"Blair's answer is that there may be such still-living germs, but that Norris has the case reversed.

They are utterly non-immune to man. Our life-chemistry probably -"

"Probably!" The little biologist's head lifted in a quick, birdlike motion. The halo of gray hair about

his bald head ruffled as though angry. "Heh. One look -"

"I know," McReady acknowledged. "The thing is not Earthly. It does not seem likely that it can have

a life-chemistry sufficiently like ours to make cross-infection remotely possible. I would say that

there is no danger."

McReady looked toward Dr. Copper. The physician shook his head slowly. "None whatever," he

asserted confidently. "Man cannot infect or be infected by germs that live in such comparatively

close relatives as the snakes. And they are, I assure you," his clean-shaven face grimaced uneasily,

"much nearer to us than that."

Vance Norris moved angrily. He was comparatively short in this gathering of big men, some

five-feet-eight, and his stocky, powerful build tended to make him seem shorter. His black hair was

crisp and hard, like short, steel wires, and his eyes were the gray of fractured steel. If McReady was

a man of bronze, Norris was all steel. His movements, his thoughts, his whole bearing had the

quick, hard impulse of steel spring. His nerves were steel - hard, quick-acting, swift-corroding.

He was decided on his point now, and he lashed out in its defense with a characterstic quick, clipped

flow of words. "Different chemistry be damned. That thing may be dead - or, by God, it may not - but I

don't like it. Damn it, Blair, let them see the monstrosity you are petting over there. Let them see

the foul thing and decide for themselves whether they want that thing thawed out in this camp.

"Thawed out, by the way. That's got to be thawed out in one of the shacks tonight, if it is thawed out.

Somebody - whos's watchman tonight? Magnetic - oh, connant. Cosmic rays tonight. Well, you get

to sit up with that twenty-million-year-old mummy of his.

"Unwrap it, Blair. How the hell can they tell what they are buying if they can't see it? It may have a

different chemistry. I don't know what else it has, but I know it has something I don't want. If you

can judge by the look on its face - it isn't human so maybe you can't - it was annoyed when it froze.

Annoyed, in fact, is just about as close an approximation of the way it felt as crazy, mad, insane

hatred. Neither one touches the subject.

"How the hell can these birds tell what they are voting on? They haven't seen those three red eyes,

and that blue hair like crawling worms. Crawling - damn, it's crawling there in the ice right now!

"Nothing Earth ever spawned had the unutterable sublimation of devastating wrath that this thing

let loose in its face when it looked around this frozen desolation twenty million years ago. Mad? It

was mad clear through - searing, blistering mad!

"Hell, I've had bad dreams ever since I looked at those three red eyes. Nightmares. Dreaming the

thing thawed out and came to life - that it wasn't dead, or even wholly unconscious all those twenty

million years, but just slowed, waiting - waiting. You'll dream, too, while that damned thing that

Earth wouldn't want is dripping, dripping in the Cosmos House tonight.

"And, Connant," Norris whipped toward the cosmic ray specialist, "won't you have fun sitting up all

night in the quiet. Wind whining above - and that thing dripping -." He stopped for a moment, and

looked around.

"I know. That's not science. But this is, it's psychology. You'll have nightmares for a year to come.

Every night since I looked at that thing I've had 'em. That's why I hate it - sure I do - and don't want

it around. Put it back where it came from and let it freeze for another twenty million years. I had

some swell nightmares - that it wasn't made like we are - which is obvious - but of a different kind of

flesh that it can really control. That it can change its shape, and look like a man - and wait to kill

and eat -

"That's not a logical argument. I know it isn't. The thing isn't Earth-logic anyway.

"Maybe it has an alien body-chemistry, and maybe its bugs do have a different body-chemistry. A

germ might not stand that, but, Blair and Copper, how about a virus? That's just an enzyme

molecule, you've said. That wouldn't need anything but a protein molecule of any body to work on.

"And how are you so sure that, of the million varieties of microscopic life it may have, none of them

are dangerous? How about diseases like hydrophobia - rabies - that attack any warm-blooded

creature, whatever its body-chemistry may be? And parrot fever? Have you a body like a parrot,

Blair? And plain rot - gangrene - necrosis, do you want? That isn't choosy about body-chemistry!"

Blair looked up from his puttering long enough to meet Norris' angry, gray eyes for an instant.

"So far the only thing you have said this thing gave off that was catching was dreams. I'll go so far

as to admit that." An impish, slightly malignant grin crossed the little man's seamed face. "I had

some, too. So. It's dream-infectious. No doubt an exceedingly dangerous malady.

"So far as your other things go, you have a badly mistake idea about viruses. In the first place,

nobody has shown that the enyzyme-molecule theory, and that alone, explains them. And in the

second place, when you catch tobacco mosaic or wheat rust, let me know. A wheat plant is a lot

nearer your body-chemistry than this other-world creature is.

"And your rabies is limited, strictly limited. You can't get it from, nor give it to, a wheat plant or a

fish - which is a collateral descendant of a common ancestor of yours. Which this, Norris, is not."

Blair nodded pleasantly toward the tarpaulined bulk on the table.

"Well, thaw the damned thing in a tub of formalin if you must thaw it. I've suggested that -"

"And I've said there would be no sense in it. You can't compromise. Why did you and Commander

Garry come down here to study magnetism? Why weren't you content to stay at home? There's

magnetic force enough in New York. I could no more study the life this thing once had from a

formalin-pickled sample than you could get the information you wanted back in New York. And - if

this one is so treated, never in all time to come can there be a duplicate! The race it came from must

have passed away in the twenty million years it lay frozen, so that even if it came from Mars, then

we'd never find its like. And - the ship is gone.

"There's only one way to do this - and that is the best possible way. It must be thawed slowly,

carefully, and not in formalin."

Commander Garry stood forward again, and Norris stepped back muttering angrily. "I think Blair

is right, gentlemen. What do you say?"

Connant grunted. "It sounds right to us, I think - only perhaps he ought to stand watch over it whie

it's thawing." He grinned ruefully, brushing a stray lock of ripe-cherry hair back from his

forehead. "Swell idea, in fact - if he sits up with his jolly little corpse."

Garry smiled slightly. A general chuckle of agreement rippled over the group. "I should think any

ghost it may have had would have starved to death if it hung around here that long, Connant," Garry

suggested. "And you look capable of taking care of it. 'Ironman' Connant ought to be able to take

out that thing. I- "

Eagerly Blair was stripping back the ropes. A single throw of the tarpaulin revealed the thing. The

ice had melted somewhat in the of the room, and it was clear and blue as thick, good glass. It shone

wet and sleek under the harsh light of the unshielded globe above.

The room stiffened abruptly. It was face up there on the plain, greasy planks of the table. The

broken half of the bronze ice-ax was still buried in the queer skull. Three mad, hate-filled eyes

blazed up with a living fire, bright as fresh-spilled blood, from a face ringed with writhing,

loathsome nest of worms, blue, mobile worms that crawled where hair should grow -

Van Wall, six feet and 200 pounds of ice-nerved pilot, gave a queer, strangled gasp and butted,

stumbled his way out to the corridor. Half the company broke for the doors. The others stumbled

away from the table.

McReady stood at one end of the table watching them, his great body planted solid on his powerful

legs. Norris from the opposite end glowered at the thing with smouldering hate. Outside the door,

Garry was talking with half a dozen of the men at once.

Blair had a tack hammer. The ice that cased the thing schluffed crisply under its steel claw as it

peeled from the thing it had cased for twenty million years -

Chapter 3

"I know you don't like the thing, Connant, but it just has to be thawed out right. You say leave it as it

is till we get back to civilization. All right, I'll admit your argument that we could do a better and

more complete job there is sound. But - how are we going to get across the Line? We have to take

this through one temperate zone, the equatorial zone, and half way through the other temperate

zone before we get it to New York. You don't want to sit with it one night, but you suggest, then that I

hang its corpse in the freezer with the beef?" Blair looked up from his cautious chipping, his bald,

freckled skull nodding triumphantly.

Kinner, the stocky, scar-faced cook, saved Connant the trouble of answering. "Hey, you listen,

mister. You put that thing in the box with the meat, and by all gods there ever were, I'll put you in to

keep it company. You birds have brought everything movable in this camp onto my mess here

already, and I had to stand for that. But you go putting things like that in my meat box or even my

meat cache here, and you cook your own damn grub."

"But, Kinner, this is the only table in Big Magnet that's big enough to work on," Blair objected.

"Everybody's explained that."

"Yeah, and everybody's brought everything in here. Clark brings his dogs every time there's a

fight and sews them up on that table. Ralsen brings in his sledges. Hell, the only thing you haven't

had on that table is the Boeing. And you'd 'a had that in if you coulda figured a way to get it through

the tunnels."

Commander Garry chuckled and grinned at Van Wall, the huge Chief Pilot. Van Wall's great

blonde beard twitched suspiciously as he nodded gravely to Kinner. "You're right, Kinner. The

aviation department is the only that treats you right."

"It does get crowded, Kinner," Garry acknowledged. "But I'm afraid we all find it that way at times.

Not much privacy in an Antarctic camp."

"Privacy? What the hell's that? You know, the thing that really made me weep, was when I saw

Barclay marchin' through here chantin' 'The last lumber in the camp! The last lumber in the

camp!' and carryin' it out to build that house on his tractor. Damn it, I missed that moon cut in the

door he carried out more'n I missed the sun when it set. That wasn't just the last lumber Barclay

was walkin' off with. He was carryin' off the last bit of privacy in this blasted place."

A grin rode on Connant's heavy face as Kinner's perennial good-natured grouch came up again.

But it died away quickly as his dark, deep-set eyes turned again to the red-eyed thing Blair was

chipping from its cocoon of ice. A big hand ruffed his shoulder-length hair, and tugged at a twisted

lock. "Going to be too crowded if I have to sit up with that thing," he growled. "Why can't you go on

chipping the ice away from around it - you can do that without anybody butting in, I assure you -and

then hang the thing up over the power-plant boiler? That's warm enough. It'll thaw out a chicken,

even a whole side of beef in a few hours."

"I know," Blair protested, dropping the tack hammer to gesture more effectively with his bony,

freckled fingers, his small body tense with eagerness, "but this is too important to take any

chances. There never was a find like this; there never can be again. It's the only chance men will

ever have, and it has to be done exactly right."

"Look, you know how the fish we caught down near the Ross Sea would freeze almost as soon as we

got them on deck, and come to life again if we thawed them gently? Low forms of life aren't killed by

quick freezing and slow thawing. We have -"

"Hey, for the love of Heaven - you mean that dammned thing will come to life!" Connant yelled. "You

get the damned thing - Let me at it! That's going to be in so many pieces -"

"NO! No, you fool..." Blair jumped in front of Connant to protect his precious find. "No. Just low

forms of life. For Pete's sake let me finish. You can't thaw higher forms of life and have them come

to. Wait a moment now - hold it! A fish can come to after freezing because it's so low a form of life

that the individual cells of its body can revive, and that alone is enough to re-establish life. Any

higher forms thawed out that way are dead. Though the individual cells revive, they die because

there must be organization and cooperative effort to live. That cooperation cannot be re-established.

There is a sort of potential life in any uninjured, quick-frozen animal. But it can't - can't under any

circumstances - become active life in higher animals. The higher animals are too complex, too

delicate. This is an intelligent creature as high in its evolution as we are in ours. Perhaps higher. It

is as dead as a frozen man would be."

"How do you know?" demanded Connant, hefting the ice-axe he had seized a moment before.

Commander Garry laid a restraining hand on his heavy shoulder. "Wait a minute, Connant. I want

to get this straight. I agree that there is going to be no thawing of this thing if there is the remotest

chance of its revival. I quite agree it is much too unpleasant to have alive, but I had no idea there was

the remotest possiblity."

Dr.Copper pulled his pipe from between his teeth and heaved his stocky, dark body from the bunk he

had been sitting in. "Blair's being technical. That's dead. As dead as the mammoths they find

frozen in Siberia. Potential life is like atomic energy - there, but nobody can get it out, and it

certainly won't release itself except in rare cases, as rare as radium in the chemical analogy. We

have all sorts of proof that things don't live after being frozen - not even fish, generally speaking -

and no proof that higher animal life can under any circumstances. What's the point, Blair?

The little biologist shook himself. The little ruff of hair standing out around his bald pate waved in

righteous anger. "The point is," he said in an injured tone, "that the individual cells might show

the characteristics they had in life, if it is properly thawed. A man's muscle cells live many hours

after he has died. Just because they live, and a few things like hair and a fingernail cells still live,

you wouldn't accuse a corpse of being a Zombie, or something.

"Now if I thaw this right, I may have a chance to determine what sort of world it's native to. We

don't, and can't know by any other means, whether it came from Earth or Mars or Venus or from

beyond the stars.

"And just because it looks unlike men, you don't have to accuse it of being evil, or vicious or

something. Maybe that expression on its face is its equivalent to a resignation to fate. White is the

color of mourning to the Chinese. If men can have different customs, why can't a so-different race

have different understandings of facial expressions?"

Connant laughed softly, mirthlessly. "Peaceful resignation! If that is the best it could do in the way

of resignation, I should exceedingly dislike seeing it when it was looking mad. That face was never

designed to express peace. It just didn't have any philosophical thoughts like peace in its make-up.

"I know it's your pet - but be sane about it. That thing grew up on evil, adolesced slowly roasting

alive the local equivalent of kittens, and amused itself through maturity on new and ingenious

torture."

"You haven't the slightest right to say that," snapped Blair. "How do you know the first thing about

the meaning of a facial expression inherently inhuman? It may well have no human equivalent

whatever. That is just a different development of Nature, another example of Nature's wonderful

adaptability. Growing on another planet, perhaps harsher world, it has different form and features.

But it is just as much a legitimate child of Nature as you are. You are displaying the childish

human weakness of hating the different. On its own world it would probably class you as a

fish-belly, white monstrosity with an insufficient number of eyes and a fungoid body pale and bloated

with gas. Just because its nature is different, you haven't any right to say it's necessarily evil."

Norris burst out a single, explosive, "Haw!" He looked down at the thing. "It may be that things

from other worlds don't have to be evil just because they're different. But that thing was! Child of

Nature, eh? Well, it was a hell of an evil Nature."

"Aw, will you mugs cut crabbing at each other and get the damned thing off my table?" Kinner

growled. "And put a canvas over it. It looks indecent."

"Kinner's gone modest," jeered Connant.

Kinner slanted his eyes up to the big physicist. The scarred cheek twisted to join the line of his

tight lips in a twisted grin. "All right, big boy, and what were you grousing about a minute ago? We

can set the thing in a chair next to you tonight, if you want."

"I'm not afraid of its face," Connant snapped. "I don't like keeping a wake over its corpse

particularly, but I'm going to do it."

Kinner's gring spread. "Uh-huh." He went off to the galley stove and shook down ashes vigorously,

drowning the brittle chipping of the ice as Blair fell to work again.

Chapter 4

"Cluck" reported the cosmic ray counter, "cluck-brrrp-cluck." Connant started and dropped his

pencil.

"Damnation." The physicist looked toward the far corner, back at the Geiger counter on the table

near that corner, and crawled under the desk at which he had been working to retrieve the pencil.

He sat down at his work again, trying to make his writing more even. It tended to have jerks and

quavers in it, in time with the abrupt proud-hen noises of the Geiger counter. The muted whoosh of

the pressure lamp he was using for illumination, the mingled gargles and bugle calls of a dozen

men sleeping down the corridor in Paradise House formed the background sounds for the

irregular, clucking noises of the counter, the occasional rustle of falling coal in the copper-bellied

stove. And a soft, steady drip-drip-drip from the thing in the corner.

Connant jerked a pack of cigarettes from his pocket, snapped it so that a cigarette protruded and

jabbed the cylinder into his mouth. The lighter failed to function, and he pawed angrily through the

pile of papers in search of a match. He scratched the wheel of the lighter several times, dropped it

with a curse and got up to pluck a hot coal from the stove with the coal tongs.

The lighter functioned instantly when he tried it on returning to the desk. The counter ripped out a

series of clucking guffaws as a burst of cosmic rays struck through to it. Connant turned to glower

at it, and tried to concentrate on the interpretation of data collected during the past week. The

weekly summary -

He gave up and yielded to curiosity, or nervousness. He lifted the pressure lamp from the desk and

carried it over to the table in the corner. Then he returned to the stove and picked up the coal tongs.

The beast had been thawing for nearly eighteen hours now. He poked at it with unconscious caution;

the flesh no was no longer hard as armor plate, but had assumed a rubbery texture. It looked like

wet, blue rubber glistening under droplets of water, like little round jewels in the glare of the

gasoline pressure lantern. Connant felt an unreasoning desire to pour the contents of the lamp's

reservoir over the thing in its box and drop the cigarette into it. The ghree red eyes glared up at him

sightlessly, the ruby eyeballs reflecting murky, smoky rays of light.

He realized vaguely that he had been looking at them for a very long time, even vaguely understood

that they were no longer sightless. But it did not seem of importance, of no more importance than

the labored, slow motion of the tentacular things that sprouted from the base of the scrawny, slowly

pulsing neck.

Connant picked up the pressure lamp and returned to his chair. He sat down, staring at the pages of

mathematics before him. The clucking of the counter was strangely less disturbing, the rustle of

the coals in the stove no longer distracting.

The creak of the floorboards behind him didn't interrupt his thoughts as he went about his weekly

report in an automatic manner, filling in columns of data and making brief, summarizing notes.

The creak of the floorboards sounded nearer.

Chapter 5

Blair came up from the nightmare-haunted depths of sleep abruptly. Connant's face floated vaguely

above him; for a moment it seemed a continuance of the wild horror of the dream. But Connant's

face was angry, and a little frightened. "Blair - Blair you damned log, wake up."

"Uh-eh?" The little biologiest rubbed his eyes, his bony, freckled fingers crooked to a mutilated

child-fist. From surrounding bunks other faces lifted to stare down at them.

Connant straightened up. "Get up - and get a lift on. Your damned animal's escaped."

"Escaped - what!" Chief Pilot Van Wall's bull voice roared out with a volume that shook the walls.

Down the communication tunnels other voices yelled suddenly. The dozen inhabitants of Paradise

House tumbled in abruptly, Barclay, stocky and bulbous in long woolen underwear, carrying a fire

extinguisher.

"What the hell's the matter?" Barclay demanded.

"Your damned beast got loose. I fell asleep about twenty minutes ago, and when I woke up, the thing

was gone. Hey, Doc, the hell you say those things can't come to life. Blair's blasted potential life

developed a hell of a lot of potential and walked out on us."

Copper stared blankly. "It wasn't - Earthly," he sighed suddenly. "I - I guess Earthly laws don't

apply."

"Well, it applied for leave of abscence and took it. We've got to find it and capture it somehow."

Connant swore bitterly, his deep-set black eyes sullen and angry. "It's a wonder the hellish

creature didn't eat me in my sleep."

Blair stared back, his pale eyes suddenly fear-struck. "Maybe it di - er - uh - we'll have to find it."

"You find it. It's your pet. I've had all I want to do with it, sitting there for seven hours with the

counter clucking every few seconds, and you birds in here singing night-music. It's a wonder I got

to sleep. I'm going through to the Ad Building."

Commander Garry ducked through the doorway, pulling his belt tight. "You won't have to. Van's

roar sounded like the Boeing taking off down wind. So it wasn't dead?"

"I didn't carry it off in my arms, I assure you," Connant snapped. "The last I saw, that split skull

was oozing green goo, like a squashed caterpillar. Doc just said our laws don't work - it's

unearthly. Well, it's an unearthly monster, with an unearthly disposition, judging by the face,

wandering around with a split skull and brains oozing out."

Norris and McReady appeared in the doorway, a doorway filling with other shivering men. "Has

anybody seen it coming over here?" Norris asked innocently. "About four feet tall - three red eyes -

brains oozing. Hey, has anybody checked to make sure this isn't a cracked idea of humor? If it is, I

think we'll united in tying Blair's pet around Connant's neck like the Ancient Mariner's

albatross."

"It's no humor," Connant shivered. "Lord, I wish it were. I'd rather it were -" He stopped. A wild,

weird howl shrieked thorugh the corridors. The men stiffened abruptly, and half turned.

"I think it's been located," Connant finished. His dark eyes shifted with a queer unease. He darted

back to his bunk in Paradise House, to return almost immediately with a heavy .45 revolver and an

ice-axe. He hefted both gently as he started for the corridor toward Dogtown. "It blundered down the

wrong corridor - and landed among the huskies. Listen - the dogs have broken their chains -"

The half-terrorized howl of the dog pack changed to a wild hunting melee. The voices of the dogs

thundered in the narrow corridors, and through them came a low rippling snarl of distilled hate. A

shrill of pain, a dozen snarling yelps.

Connant broke for the door. Close behind him, McReady, then Barclay and Commander Garry

came. Other men broke for the Ad Building. Pomroy, in charge of Big Magnet's five cows, started

down the corridor in the opposite direction - he had a six-foot-handled, long-tined pitchfork in mind.

Barclay slid to a halt, as McReady's giant bulk turned abruptly away from the tunnel leading to

Dogtown, and vanished off at an angle. Uncertainly, the mechanic wavered a moment, the fire

extinguisher in his hands, hesitating from one side to the other. Then he was racing after

Connant's broad back. Whatever McReady had in mind, he could be trusted to make it work.

Connant stopped at the bend in the corridor. His breath hissed suddenly through his throat. "Great

God -" The revolver exploded thunderously; three numbing, palpable waves of sound crashed

through the confined corridors. Two more. The revolver dropped to the hard-packed snow of the

trail, and Barclay saw the ice-axe shift into defensive position. Connant's powerful body blocked his

vision, but beyond he heard something mewing, and, insanely, chuckling. The dogs were quieter;

there was a deadly seriousness in their low snarls. Taloned feet scratched at the hard-packed snow,

broken chains were clinking and tangling.

Connant shifted abruptly, and Barclay could see what lay beyond. For a second he stood frozen, then

his breath went out in a gusty curse. The Thing launched itself at Connant, the powerful arms of the

man swung the ice-axe flatside first at what might have been a hand. It scrunched horribly, and the

tattered flesh, ripped by a half-dozen savage huskies, leapt to its feet again. The red eyes blazed with

an unearthly hatred, an unearthly, unkillable vitality.

Barclay turned the fire extinguisher on it; the blinding, blistering stream of chemical spray

confused it, baffled it, together with the savage attacks of the huskies, not for long afraid of

anything that did, or could live, held it at bay.

McReady wedged men out of his way and drove down the narrow corridor packed with men unable to

reach the scene. There was a sure fore-planned drive to McReady's attack. One of the giant

blow-torches used in warming the plane's engines was in his bronzed hands. It roared gustily as he

turned the corner and opened the valve. The mad mewing hissed louder. The dogs scrambled back

from the three-foot lance of blue-hot flame.

"Bar, get a power cable, run it in somehow. And a handle. We can electrocute this - monster, if I

don't incinerate it." McReady spoke with the authority of planned action. Barclay turned down the

long corridor to the power plant, but already before him Norris and Van Wall were racing down.

Barclay found the cable in the electrical cache in the tunnel wall. In a half minute he was hacking at

it, walking back. Van Wall's voice rang out in a warning shout of "Power!" as the emergency

gasoline-powered dynamo thuddered into action. Half a dozen other men were down there now; the

coal kindling was going into the firebox of the steam power plant. Norris, cursing in a low, deadly

monotone, was working with quick, sure fingers on the other end of Barclay's cable, splicing in a

contactor in one of the power leads.

The dogs had fallen back when Barclay reached the corridor bend, fallen back before a furious

monstosity that glared from baleful red eyes, mewing in trapped hatred. The dogs were a

semi-circle of red-dipped muzzles with a fringe of glistening white teeth, whining with a vicious

eagerness that near matched the fury of the red eyes. McReady stood confidently alert at the

corridor bend, the gustily muttering torch held loose and ready for action in his hands. He stepped

aside without moving his eyes from the beast as Barclay came up. There was a slight, tight smile on

his lean, bronzed face.

Norris' voice called down the corridor, and Barclay stepped forward. The cable was taped to the long

handle of a snow-shovel, the two conductors split, and held 18 inches apart by a scrap of lumber

lashed at right angles across the far end of the handle. Bare copper conductors, charged with 220

volts, glinted in the light of pressure lamps. The Thing mewed and halted and dodged. McReady

advanced to Barclay's side. The dogs beyond sensed the plan with the almost-telepathic intelligence

of trained huskies. Their whimpering grew shriller, softer, their mincing steps carried them

nearer. Abruptly a huge, night-black Alaskan leapt onto the trapped thing. It turned squalling,

saber-clawed feet slashing.

Barclay leapt forward and jabbed. A weird, shrill scream rose and choked out. The smell of burnt

flesh in the corridor intensified; greasy smoke curled up. The echoing pound of the gas-electric

dynamo down the corridor became a slogging thud.

The red eyes clouded over in a stiffening, jerking travesty of a face. Armlike, leglike members

quivered and jerked. The dogs leapt forward, and Barclay yanked back his weapon. The thing on the

snow did not move as gleaming teeth ripped it open.

Chapter 6

Garry looked about the crowded room. Thirty-two men, some tensed nervously standing against the

wall, some uneasily relaxed, some sitting, most preferred standing, as intimate as sardines.

Thirty-two, plus the five engaged in sewing up wounded dogs, made thirty-seven, the total personnel.

Garry started speaking. "All right, I guess we're here. Some of you -three or four at most - saw

what happened. All of you have seen that thing on the table, and can get a general idea. If anyone

hasn't, I'll lift -". His hand strayed to the tarpauling bulking over the thing on the table. There was

an acrid odor of singed flesh seeping out of it. The men stirred restlessly, hasty denials.

"It looks rather as though Charnauk isn't going to lead any more teams," Garry went on. "Blair

wants to get at this thing, and make some more detailed examinations. We want to know what

happened, and make sure right now that this is permanently, totally dead. Right?"

Connant grinned. "Anybody that doesn't agree can sit up with it tonight."

"All right then, Blair, what can you say about it? What was it?" Garry turned to the little biologist.

"I wonder if we ever saw its natural form." Blair looked at the covered mass. "It may have been

imitating the beings that built that ship - but I don't think it was. I think that was its true form.

Those of us who were up near the bend saw the thing in action; the thing on the table is the result.

When it got loose, apparently, it started looking around. Antarctica still frozen as it was ages ago

when the creature first saw it - and froze. From my observations while it was thawing out, and the

bits of tissue I cut and hardened then, I think it was native to a hotter planet than Earth. It couldn't,

in its natural form, stand the temperature. There is no life-form on earth that can live in Antactica

during the winter, but the best compromise is the dog. It found the dogs, and somehow got near

enough to Charnauk to get him. The others smelled it - heard it - I don't know - anyway they went

wild, and broke chains, and attacked it before it was finished. The thing we found was part

Charnauk, queerly only half-dead, part Charnauk half-digested by the jellylike protoplasm of that

creature, and part the remains of the thing we originally found, sort of melted down to the basic

protoplasm.

"When the dogs attacked it, it turned into the best fighting thing it could think of. Some

other-world beast apparently."

"Turned," snapped Garry. "How?"

"Ever living thing is made up of jelly - protoplasm and minute, submicroscopic things called nuclei,

which control the bulk, the protoplasm. This thing was just a modification of that same worldwide

plan of Nature; cells made up of protoplasm, controlled by infinitely tiner nuclei. You physicists

might compare it - an individual cell of any living thing - with an atom; the bulk of the atom, the

space-filling part, is made up of electron orbits, but the character of the thing is determined by the

atomic nucleus.

"This isn't wildly beyond what we already know. It's just a modification we haven't seen before. It's

as natural, as logical, as any other manifestation of life. It obeys exactly the same laws. The cells

are made of protoplasm, their character determined by the nucleus.

"Only in this creature, the cell-nuclei can control those cells at will. It digested Charnauk, and as

it digested, studied every cell of his tissue, and shaped its own cells to imitate them exactly. Parts of

it - parts that had time to finish changing - are dog-cells. But they don't have dog-cell nuclei." Blair

lifted a fraction of the tarpaulin. A torn dog's leg with stiff gray fur protruded. "That, for instance,

isn't dog at all; it's imitation. Some parts I'm uncertain about; the nucleus was hiding itself,

covering up with dog-cell imitation nucleus. In time, not even a microscope would have shown the

difference."

"Suppose," asked Norris bitterly, "it had had lots of time?"

"Then it would have been a dog. The other dogs would have accepted it. We would have accepted it. I

don't think anything would have distinguished it, not microscope, nor X-ray, nor any other means.

This is a member or a supremely intelligent race, a race that has learned the deepest secrets of

biology, and turned them to its use."

"What was it planning to do?" Barclay looked a the humped tarpaulin.

Blair grinned unpleasantly. The wavering halo of thin hair round his bald pate wavered in the stir of

air. "Take over the world, I imagine."

"Take over the world! Just it, all by itself?" Connant gasped. "Set itself up as a lone dictator?"

"No," Blair shook his head. The scalpel he had been fumbling in his bony fingers dropped; he bent

to pick it up, so that his face was hidden as he spoke. "It would become the population of the world."

"Become - populate the world? Does it reproduce asexually?"

Blair shook his head and gulped. "It's - it doesn't have to. It weighed 85 pounds. Charnauk weighed

about 90. It would have become Charnauk, and had 85 pounds left, to become - oh, Jack for instance,

or Chinook. It can imitate anything - that is, become anything. If it had reached the Antarctic Sea, it

would have become a seal, maybe two seals. They might have attacked a killer whale, and become

either killers, or a herd of seals. Or maybe it would have caught an albatross, or a skua gull, and

flown to South America."

Norris cursed softly. "And every time it digested something, and imitated it-"

"It would have had its original bulk left, to start again," Blair finished. "Nothing would kill it. It

has no natural enemies, because it becomes whatever it wants to. If a killer whale attacked it, it

would become a killer whale. If it was an albatross, and an eagle attacked it, it would become an

eagle. Lord, it might become a female eagle. Go back, build a nest and lay eggs!"

"Are you sure that thing from hell is dead?" Dr. Copper asked softly.

"Yes, thank Heaven," the little biologist gasped. After they drove the dogs off, I stood there poking

Bar's electrocution thing into it for five minutes. It's dead and cooked."

"Then we can only give thanks that this is Antarctic, where there is not one, single, solitary, living

thing for it to imitate, except these animals in camp."

"Us," Blair giggled. "It can imitate us. Dogs can't make four hundred miles to the sea; there's no

food. There aren't any skua gulls to imitate at this season. There aren't any penguins this far

inland. There's nothing that can reach the sea from this point - except us. We've got brains. We can

do it. Don't you see - it's got to imitate us -it's got to be one of us - that's the only way it can fly an

airplane -fly a plane for two hours, and rule - be - all Earth's inhabitants. A world for the taking - if

it imitates us!

"It didn't know yet. It hadn't had a chance to learn. It was rushed -hurried - took the thing nearest

its own size. Look - I'm Pandora! I opened the box! And the only hope that can come out is - that

nothing can come out. You didn't see me. I did it. I fixed it. I smashed every magneto. Not a plane can

fly. Nothing can fly." Blair giggled and lay down on the floor crying.

Chief Pilot Van Wall made a dive for the door. His feet were fading echoes in the corridors as Dr.

Copper bent unhurriedly over the little man on the floor. From his office at the end of the room he

brought something, and injected a solution into Blair's arm. "He might come out of it when he

wakes up," he sighed, rising. McReady helped him lift the biologist onto a nearby bunk. "It all

depends on whether we can convince him that thing is dead."

Van Wall ducked into the shack brushing his heavy blond beard absently. "I didn't think a biologist

would do a thing like that thoroughly. He missed the spares in the second cache. It's all right. I

smashed them."

Commander Garry nodded. "I was wondering about the radio."

Dr. Copper snorted. "You don't think it can leak out on a radio wave, do you? You'd have five rescue

attempts in the next three months if you stop the broadcasts. The thing to do is talk loud and not

make a sound. Now I wonder -"

McReady looked speculatively at the doctor. "It might be like an infectious disease. Everything that

drank any of its blood -"

Copper shook his head. "Blair missed something. mitate it may, but it has to a certain extent, its

own body-chemistry, its own metabolism. If it didn't, it would become a dog - and be a dog and

nothing more. It has to be an imitation dog. There you can detect it by serum test. And its chemistry,

since it comes from another world, must be so wholly, radically different that a few cells, such as

gained by drops of blood, would be treated as disease germs by the dog, or human body."

"Blood - would one of those imitations bleed?" Norris demanded.

"Surely. Nothing mystic about blood. Muscle is about 90 percent water, blood differs only in having

a couple percent more water, and less connective tissue. They'd bleed all right," Copper assured

him.

Blair sat up in his bunk suddenly. "Connant - where's Connant?"

The physicist moved over toward the little biologist. "Here I am. What do you want?"

"Are you?" giggled Blair. He lapsed back into his bunk contorted with silent laughter.

Connant looked at him blankly. "Huh? Am I what?"

"Are you there?" Blair burst into gales of laughter. "Are you Connant? The beast wanted to be a

man - not a dog."

Chapter 7

Dr. Copper rose wearily from the bunk, and washed the hypodermic carefully. The little tinkles it

made seemed loud in the packed room, now that Blair's gurgling laughter had finally quieted.

Copper looked toward Garry and shook his head slowly. "Hopeless, I'm afraid. I don't think we can

ever convince him the thing is dead now."

Norris laughed uncertainly. "I'm not sure you can convince me. Oh, damn you, McReady."

"McReady?" Commander Garry turned to look from Norris to McReady curiously.

"The nightmares," Norris explained. "He had a theory about the nightmares we had at the

Secondary Station after finding that thing."

"And that was?" Garry looked at McReady levelly.

Norris answered for him, jerkily, uneasily. "That the creature wasn't dead, had a sort of

enormously slowed existence, an existence that permitted it, none the less, to be vaguely aware of

the passing of time, of our coming, after endless eyars. I had a dream it could imitate things."

"Well," Copper grunted, "it can."

"Don't be an ass," Norris snapped. "That's not what's bothering me. In the dream it could read

minds, read thoughts and ideas and mannerisms."

"What's so bad about that? It seems to be worrying you more than the thought of the joy we're

going to have with a mad man in an Antarctic camp." Copper nodded toward Blair's sleeping form.

McReady shook his great head slowly. "You know that Connant is Connant, because he not merely

looks like Connant - which we're beginning to believe that beast might be able to do - but he thinks

like Connant, talks like Connant, moves himself around as Connant does. That takes more than

merely a body that looks like him; that takes Connant's own mind, and thoughts and mannerisms.

Therefore, though you know that the thing might make itself look like Connant, you aren't much

bothered, because you know it has a mind from another world, a totally unhuman mind, that couldn't

possibly react and think and talk like a man we know, and do it so well as to fool us for a moment.

The idea of the creature imitating one of us is fascinating but unreal because it is too completely

unhuman to decieve us. It doesn't have a human mind."

"As I said before," Norris repeated, looking steadily at McReady, "you can say the damnedest

things at the damnedest times. Will you be so good as to finish that thought - one way or the other?"

Kinner, the scar-face expedition cook, had been standing near Connant. Suddenly he moved down

the length of the crowded room toward his familiar galley. He shook the ashes from the galley stove

noisily.

"It would do it no good," said Dr. Copper, softly as though thinking out loud, "to merely look like

something it was trying to imitate; it would have to understand its feelings, its reaction. It is

unhuman; it has powers of imitation beyond any conception of man. A good actor, by training

himself, can imitate another man, another man's mannerisms, well enough to fool most people. Of

course no actor could imitate so perfectly as to deceive men who had been living with the imitated

one in the complete lack of privacy of an Antarctic camp. That would take a super-human skill."

"Oh, you've got the bug too?" Norris cursed softly.

Connant, standing alone at one end of the room, looked about him wildly, his face white. A gentle

eddying of the men had crowded them slowly down toward the other end of the room, so that he stood

quite alone. "My God, will you two Jeremiahs shut up?" Connant's voice shook. "What am I? Some

kind of a microscopic specimen you're dissecting? Some unpleasant worm you're discussing in the

third person?"

McReady looked up at him; his slowly twisting hands stopped for a moment. "Having a lovely time.

Wish you were here. Signed: Everybody. Connant, if you think you're having a hell of a time, just

move over on the other end for a while. You've got one thing we haven't; you know what the answer

is. I'll tell you this, right now you're the most feared and respected man in Big Magnet."

"Lord, I wish you could see your eyes," Connant gasped "Stop staring, will you? What the hell are

you going to do?"

"Have any suggestions, Dr. copper?" Commander Garry asked steadily. "The present situation is

impossible."

"Oh, is it?" Connant snapped. "Come over here and look at that crowd. By Heaven, they look

exactly like that gang of huskies around the corridor bend. Bennings, will you stop hefting that

damned ice-ax?"

The coppery blade rang on the floor as the aviation mechanic nervously dropped it. He bent over and

picked it up instantly, hefting it slowly, turning it in his hands, his brown eyes moving jerkily about

the room.

Copper sat down on the bunk beside Blair. The wood creaked noisily in the room. Far down a

corridor, a dog yelped in pain, and the dog-drivers' tense voices floated softly back. "Microscopic

examination," said the doctor thoughtfully, "would be useless, as Blair pointed out. Considerable

time has passed. However, serum tests would be definitive."

"Serum tests? What do you mean exactly?" Commander Garry asked.

"If I had a rabbit that had been injected with human blood - a poison to the rabbits, of course, as is

the blood of any animal save that of another rabbit - and the injections continued in increasing doses

for some time, the rabbit would be human-immune. If a small quantity of its blood were drawn off,

allowed to separate in a test-tube, and to the clear serum, a bit of human blood were added, there

would be a visible reaction, proving the blood was human. If cow, or dog blood were added - or any

protein material other than that one thing, human blood - no reaction would take place. That would

prove definitely."

"Can you suggest where I might catch a rabbit for you, Doc?" Norris asked. "That is, nearer than

Australia; we don't want to waste time going that far."

"I know there aren't any rabbits in Antarctica," Copper nodded, "but that is simply the usual

animal. Any animal except man will do. A dog for instance. But it will take several days, and due to

the greater size of the animal, considerable blood. Two of us will have to contribute."

"Would I do?" Garry asked.

"That will make two," Copper nodded. "I'll get to work on it right away."

"What about Connant in the meantime?" Kinner demanded. "I'm going out that door and head off

for the Ross Sea before I cook for him."

Connant burst out in a flood of curses. "Human! May be human, you damned saw-bones! What in

hell do you think I am?"

"A monster," Copper snapped sharply. "Now shut up and listen." Connant's face drained of color

and he sat down heavily as the indictment was put in words. "Until we know - you know as well as we

do that we have reason to question the fact, and only you know how that question is to be answered -

we may reasonably be expected to lock you up. If you are - unhuman - you're a lot more dangerous

than poor Blair there, and I'm going to see that he's locked up thoroughly. I expect that his next

stage will be a violent desire to kill you, all the dogs, and probably all of us. When he wakes, he will

be convinced we're all unhuman, and nothing on the planet will ever change his conviction. It would

be kinder to let him die, but we can't do that, of course. He's going in one shack, you can stay in

Cosmos House with your cosmic ray apparatus. Which is about what you'd do anyway. I've got to fix

up a couple of dogs."

Connant nodded bitterly. "I'm human. Hurry that test. Your eyes - Lord, I wish you could see your

eyes staring -"

Commander Garry watched anxiously as Clark, the dog-handler, held the big brown Alaskan

husky, while Copper began the injection treatment. The dog was not anxious to cooperate; the

needle was painful, an already he'd experienced considerable needle work that morning. Five

stitches held closed a slash that ran from his shoulder across the ribs half way down his body. One

long fang was broken off short; the missing part was to be found half-buried in the shoulder bone of

the monstrous thing on the table in the Ad Building.

"How long will that take?" Garry asked, pressing his arm gently. It was sore from the prick of the

needle Dr. Copper had used to withdraw blood.

Copper shrugged. "I don't know, to be frank. I know the general method, I've used it on rabbits. But

I haven't experimented with dogs. They're big, clumsy animals to work with; naturally rabbits are

preferable, and serve ordinarily. In civilized places you can buy a stock of human-immune rabbits

from suppliers, and not many investigators take the trouble to prepare their own."

"Why do they want them back there?" Clark asked.

"Criminology is one large field. A says he didn't murder B, but that the blood on his shirt came

from killing a chicken. They make a test, then it's up to A to explain how it is the blood reacts on

human-immune rabbits, but not on chicken-immunes."

"What are we going to do with Blair in the meantime?" Garry asked wearily. "It's all right to let

him sleep where he is for a while, but when he wakes up -"

"Barclay and Benning are fitting some bolts on the door of Cosmos House," Copper replied grimly.

"Connant's acting like a gentleman. I think perhaps the way the other men look at him makes him

rather want privacy. Lord knows, heretofore we've all of us individually prayed for a little privacy."

Clark laughed bitterly. "Not anymore, thank you. The more the merrier."

"Blair," Copper went on, "will also have to have privacy - and locks. He's going to have a pretty

definite plan in mind when he wakes up. Ever hear the old story of how to stop hoof-and-mouth

disease in cattle?

"If there isn't any hoof-and-mouth disease, there won't be any hoof-and-mouth disease," Copper

explained. "You get rid of it by killing every animal that exhibits it, and every animal that's been

near the diseased animal. Blair's a biologist, and knows that story. He's afraid of this thing we

loosed. The answer is probably pretty clear in his mind now. Kill everybody and everything in this

camp before a skua gull or a wandering albatross coming in with the spring chances out this way

and -catches the disease."

Clark's lips curled in a twisted grin. "Sounds logical to me. If things get too bad - maybe we'd better

let Blair get loose. It would save us commiting suicide. We might also make something of a vow that

if things get bad, we see that that does happen."

Copper laughed softly. "The last man alive in Big Magnet - wouldn't be a man," he pointed out.

"Somebody's got to kill those - creatures that don't desire to kill themselves, you know. We don't

have enough thermite to do it all at once, and the decanite explosive wouldn't help much. I have an

idea that even small pieces of one of those beings would be self-sufficient."

"If," said Garry thoughtfully, "they can modify their protoplasm at will, won't they simply modify

themselves to birds and fly away? They can read all about birds, and imitate their structure without

even meeting them. Or imitate, perhaps, birds of their home planet."

Copper shook his head, and helped Clark to free the dog. "Man studied birds for centures, trying to

learn how to make a machine to fly like them. He never did do the trick; his final success came

when he broke away entirely and tried new methods. Knowing the general idea, and knowing the

detailed structure of wing and bone and nerve-tissue is something far, far different. And as for

other-world birds, perhaps, in fact very probably, the atmospheric conditions here are so vastly

different that their birds couldn't fly. Perhaps, even, the being came from a planet like Mars with

such a thin atmosphere that there were no birds."

Barclay came into the building, trailing a length of airplane control cable. "It's finished, Doc.

Cosmos House can't be opened from the inside. Now where do we put Blair?"

Copper looked toward Garry. "There wasn't any biology building. I don't know where we can isolate

him."

"How about East Cache?" Garry said after a moment's thought. "Will Blair be able to look after

himself - or need attention?"

"He'll be capable enough. We'll be the ones to watch out," Copper assured him grimly. "Take a

stove, a couple bags of coal, necessary supplied and a few tools to fix it up. Nobody's been there since

last fall, have they?"

Garry shook his head. "If he gets noisy - I thought that might be a good idea."

Barclay hefted the tools he was carrying and looked up at Garry. "If the muttering he's doing now

is any sign, he's going to sing away the night hours. And he won't like his song."

"What's he saying?" Copper asked.

Barclay shook his head. "I didn't care to listen much. You can if you want to. But I gathered that the

blasted idiot had all the dreams McReady had, and a few more. He slept beside the thing when we

stopped on the trail coming in from Secondary Magnetic, remember. He dreamt the thing was alive,

and dreamt more details. And - damn his soul - knew it wasn't all dream, or had reason to. He knew

it had telepathic powers that were stirring vaguely, and that it could not only read minds, but project

thoughts. They weren't dreams, you see. They were stray thoughts that thing was broadcasting, the

way Blair's broadcasting his thoguhts now - a sort of telepathic muttering in its sleep. That's why

he knew so much about its powers. I guess you and I, Doc, weren't so sensitive - if you want to

believe in telepathy."

"I have to," Copper sighted. "Dr. Rhine of Duke University has shown that it exist, shown that some

are much more sensitive than others."

"Well, if you want to learn a lot of details, go listen in on Blair's broadcast. He's drive most of the

boys out of the Ad Building; Kinner's rattling pans like coal going down a chute. When he can't

rattle a pan, he shakes ashes.

"By the way, Commander, what are we going to do this spring, now the planes are out of it?"

Garry sighted. "I'm afraid out expedition is going to be a loss. We cannot divide our strength now."

"It won't be a loss - if we continue to live, and come out of this," Copper promised him. "The find

we've made, if we can get it under control, is important enough. The cosmic ray data, magnetic

work, and atmospheric work won't be greatly hindered."

Garry laughed mirthlessly. "I was just thinking of the radio broadcasts. Telling half the world

about the wonderful results of our exploration flights, trying to fooll men like Byrd and Ellsworth

back home there that we're doing something."

Copper nodded gravely. "They'll know something's wrong. But men like that have judgment enough

to know we wouldn't do tricks without some sort of reason, and will wait for our return to judge us. I

think it comes to this: men who know enough to recognize our deception will wait for our return.

Men who haven't discretion and faith enough to wait will not have the experience to detect any fraud.

We know enough of the conditions here to put through a good bluff."

"Just so they don't send 'rescue' expeditions," Garry prayed. "When - if - we're ever ready to come

out, we'll have to send word to Captain Forsythe to bring a stock of magnetos with him when he

comes down. But - never mind that."

"You mean if we don't come out?" asked Barclay. "I was wondering if a nice running account of an

eruption or an earthquake via radio - with a sell windup by using a stick of decanite under the

microphone - would help. Nothing, of course, will entirely keep people out. One of those swell,

melodramatic 'last-man-alive-scenes' might make 'em go easy though."

Garry smiled with genuine humor. "Is everybody in camp trying to figure that out too?"

Copper laughed. "What do you think, Garry? We're confident we can win out. But not too easy

about it, I guess."

Clark grinned up from the dog he was petting into calmness. "Confident did you say, Doc?"

Chapter 8

Blair moved restlessly around the small shack. His eyes jerked and quivered in vague, fleeting

glances at the four men with him; Barclay, six feet tall and weighing over 190 pounds; McReady, a

bronze giant of a man; Dr. Copper, short, squatly powerful; and Bennings, five-feet-ten of wiry

strength.

Blair was huddled up against the far wall of the East Cache cabin, his gear piled in the middle of the

floor beside the heating stove, forming an island between him and the four men. His bony hands

clenched and fluttered, terrified. His pale eyes wavered uneasily as his bald, freckled head darted

about in birdlike motion.

"I don't want anybody coming here. I'll cook my own food," he snapped nervously. "Kinner may be

human now, but I don't believe it. I'm going to get out of here, but I'm not going to eat any food you

send me. I want cans. Sealed cans."

"O.K., Blair, we'll bring 'em tonight," Barclay promised. "You've got coal, and the fire's started.

I'll make a last - " Barclay started forward.

Blair instantly scurried to the farthest corner. "Get out! Keep away from me, you monster!" the

little biologist shrieked, and tried to claw his way through the wall of the shack. "Keep away from

me - keep away - I won't be absorbed - I won't be -"

Barclay relaxed and moved back. Dr. Copper shook his head. "Leave him alone, Bar. It's easier for

him to fix the thing himself. We'll have to fix the door, I think -"

The four men let themselves out. Efficiently, Bennings and Barclay fell to work. There were no

locks in Antarctica; there wasn't enough privacy to make them needed. But powerful screws had

been driven in each side of the doorframe, and the spare aviation control cable, immensely strong,

woven steel wire, was rapidly caught between them and drawn taut. Barclay went to work with a drill

and a keyhole saw. Presently he had a trap cut in the door through which goods could be passed

without unlashing the entrance. Three powerful hinges from a stock-crate, two hasps and a pair of

three-inch cotter-pins made it proof against opening from the other side.

Blair moved about restlessly inside. He was dragging something over to the door with panting gasps

and muttering, frantic curses. Barclay opened the hatch and glanced in, Dr. Copper peering over

his shoulder. Blair had moved the heavy bunk against the door. It could not be opened without his

cooperation now.

McReady sighed. "If he gets loose, it is his avowed intention to kill each and all of us as quickly as

possible, which is something we don't agree with. But we've something on our side of that door that

is worse than a homicidal maniac. If one or the other has to get loose, I think I'll come up and undo

those lashings here."

Barclay grinned. "You let me know, and I'll show you how to get these off fast. Let's go back."

The sun was painting the northern horizon in multi-colored rainbows still, though it was two hours

below the horizon. The field of drift swept off to the north, sparkling under its flaming colors in a

million reflected glories. Low mounds of rounded white on the northern horizon showed the Magnet

Range was barely awash above the sweeping drift. Little eddies of wind-lifted snow swirled away

from their skis as they set out toward the main encampment two miles away. The spidery finger of

the broadcast radiator lifted a gaunt black needle against the white of the Antarctic continent. The

snow under their skis was like fine sand, hard and gritty.

"Spring," said Benning bitterly, "is come. Ain't we got fun! I've been looking forward to getting

away from this blasted hole in the ice."

"I wouldn't try it now, if I were you." Barclay grunted. "Guys that set out from here in the next few

days are going to be marvelously unpopular."

"How is your dog getting along, Dr. Copper?" McReady asked. "Any results yet?"

"In thirty hours? I wish there were. I gave him an injection of my blood today. But I imagine another

five days will be needed. I don't know certainly enough to stop sooner."

"I've been wondering - if Connant were - changed, would he have warned us so soon after the animal

escaped? Wouldn't he have waited long enough for it to have a real chance to fix itself? Until we

woke up naturally?" McReady asked slowly.

"The thing is selfish. You didn't think it looked as though it were possessed of a store of the higher

justices, did you?" Dr. Copper pointed out. "Every part of it is all of it, every part of it is all for

itself, I imagine. If Connant were changed, to save his skin, he'd have to - but Connant's feelings

aren't changed; they're imitated perfectly, or they're his own. Naturally, the imitation, imitating

perfectly Connant's feelings, would do exactly what Connant would do."

"Say, couldn't Norris or Van give Connant some kind of a test? If the thing is brighter than men, it

might know more physics than Connant should, and they'd catch it out," Barclay suggested.

Copper shook his head wearily. "Not if it reads minds. You can't plan a trap for it. Van suggested

that last night. He hoped it would answer some of the questions of physics he'd like to know answers

to."

"This expedition-of-four idea is going to make life happy." Bennings looked at his companions.

"Each of us with an eye on the others to make sure he doesn't do something - peculiar. Man, aren't

we going to be a trusting bunch! Each man eyeing his neighbors with the greatest exhibition of faith

and trust - I'm beginning to know what Connant meant by 'I wish you could see your eyes.' Every

now and then we all have it, I guess. One of you looks around with a sort of

'I-wonder-if-the-other-three-are-human' look. Incidentally, I'm not excepting myself."

"So far as we know, the animal is dead, with a slight question as to Connant. No other is suspected,"

McReady stated slowly. "The 'always-four' order is merely a precautionary measure."

"I'm waiting for Garry to make it four-in-a-bunk," Barclay sighed. "I thought I didn't have any

privacy before, but since that order -"

None watched more tensely than Connant. A little sterile glass test-tube, half-filled with

straw-colored fluid. One-two-three-four-five drops off the clear solution Dr. Copper had prepared

from the drops of blood from Connant's arm. The tube was shaken carefully, then set in a beaker of

clear, warm water. The thermometer read blood heat, a little thermostat clicked noisily, and the

electric hotplate began to glow as the lights flickered slightly.

Then - little white flecks of precipitation were forming, snowing down the clear straw-colored fluid.

"Lord," said Connant. He dropped heavily into a bunk, crying like a baby. "Six days -" Connant

sobbed, "six days in there - wondering if that damned test would lie -"

Garry moved over silently, and slipped his arms across the physicist's back.

"It couldn't lie," Dr. Copper said. "The dog was human-immuned.. and the serum reacted."

"He's - all right?" Norris gasped. "Then - the animal is dead - dead forever?"

"He is human," Copper spoke definitely, "and the animal is dead."

Kinner burst out laughing, laughing hysterically. McReady turned toward him and slapped his face

with a methodical one-two, one-two action. The cook laughed, gulped, cried a moment and sat up

rubbing his cheeks, mumbling his thanks vaguely. "I was scared. Lord, I was scared -"

Norris laughed brittley. "You think we weren't, you ape? You think maybe Connant wasn't?"

The Ad Building stirred with a sudden rejuvenation. Voices laughed, the men clustering around

Connant spoke with unnecessarily loud voices, jittery, nervous voices relievedly friendly again.

Somebody called out a suggestion, and a dozen started for their skis. Blair. Blair might recover.

Dr. Copper fussed with his test-tubes in nervous relief, trying solutions. The party of relief for

Blair's shack started out the door, skis clapping noisily. Down the corridor, the dogs set up a quick

yelping howl as the air of excited relief reached them.

Dr. Copper fussed with his tubes. McReady noticed him first, sitting on the edge of the bunk, with

two precipitin-whitened test-tubes of straw-colored fluid, his face whiter than he stuff in the tubes,

silent tears slipping down from horror-widen eyes.

McReady felt a cold knife of fear pierce through his heart and freeze in his breast. Dr. Copper

looked up.

"Garry," he called hoarsely. "Garry, for God's sake, come here."

Commander Garry walked toward him sharply. Silence clapped down on the Ad Building. Connant

looked up, rose stiffly from his seat.

"Garry - tissue from the monster - precipitates too. It proves nothing. Nothing but - but the dog was

monster-immune too. That one of the two contributing blood - one of us two, you and I, Garry - one of

us is a monster."

Chapter 9

"Bar, call back those men before they tell Blair," McReady said quietly. Barclay went to the door;

faintly his shouts came back to the tensely silent men in the room. Then he was back.

"They're coming," he said. "I didn't tell them why. Just that Dr. Copper said not to go."

"McReady," Garry sighed, "you're in command now. May God help you. I cannot."

The bronzed giant nodded slowly, his deep eyes on Commander Garry.

"I may be the one," Garry added. "I know I'm not, but I cannot prove it to you in any way. Dr.

Copper's test has broken down. The fact that he showed it was useless, when it was to the advantage

of the monster to have that uselessness not known, would seem to prove he was human."

Copper rocked back and forth slowly on the bunk. "I know I'm human. I can't prove it either. One of

us two is a liar, for that test cannot lie, and it says one of us is. I gave proof that the test was wrong,

which seems to prove I'm human, and now Garry has given that argument which proves me human -

which he, as the monster, should not do. Round and round and round and round and -"

Dr. Copper's head, then his neck and shoulders began circling slowly in time to the words.

Suddenly he was lying back on the bunk, roaring with laughter. "It doesn't have to prove one of us

is a monster! It doesn't have to prove that at all! Ho-ho. If we're all monsters it works the same!

We're all monsters - all of us - Connant and Garry and I - and all of you."

"McReady," Van Wall, the blond-bearded Chief Pilot, called softly, "you were on the way to an M.D.

when you took up meteorology, weren't you? Can you make some kind of test?"

McReady went over to Copper slowly, took the hypodermic from his hand, and washed it carefully in

95 per cent alcohol. Garry sat on the bunk-edge with wooden face, watching Copper and McReady

expressionlessly. "What Copper said is possible," McReady sighted. "Van, will you help here?

Thanks." The filled needle jabbed into Copper's thigh. The man's laughter did not stop, but slowly

faded into sobs, then sound sleep as the morphia took hold.

McReady turned again. The men who had started for Blair stood at the far end of the room, skis

dripping snow, their faces as white as their skis. Connant had a lighted cigarette in each hand; one

he was puffing absently, and staring at the floor. The heat of the one in his left hand attracted him

and he stared at it, and the one in the other hand, stupidly for a moment. He dropped one and crushed

it under his heel slowly.

"Dr. Copper," McReady repeated, "could be right. I know I'm human - but of course can't prove it.

I'll repeat the test for my own information. Any of you other who wish to may do the same."

Two minutes later, McReady held a test-tube with white precipitin settling slowly from the

straw-colored serum. "It reacts to human blood too, so they aren't both monsters."

"I didn't think they were," Van Wall sighed. "That wouldn't suit the monster either; we could have

destroyed them if we knew. Why hasn't the monster destroyed us, do you suppose? It seems to be

loose."

McReady snorted. Then laughed softly. "Elementary, my dear Watson. The monster wants to have

life-forms available. It cannot animate a dead body, apparently. It is just waiting - waiting until the

best opportunities come. We who remain human, it is holding in reserve."

Kinner shuddered violently. "Hey. Hey, Mac, would I know if I was a monster? Would I know if the

monster had already got me? Oh Lord, I may be a monster already."

"You'd know," McReady answered.

"But we wouldn't," Norris laughed shortly, half-hysterically.

McReady looked at the vial of serum remaining. "There's one thing this damned stuff is good for, at

that," he said thoughtfully. "Clark, will you and Van help me? The rest of the gang better stick

together here. Keep an eye on each other," he said bitterly. "See that you don't get into mischief,

shall we say?"

McReady started down the tunnel toward Dogtown, with Clark and Van Wall behind him. "You need

more serum?" Clark asked.

McReady shook his head. "Tests. There's four cows and a bull, and nearly seventy dogs down there.

This stuff reacts only to human blood and -monsters."

McReady came back to the Ad Building and went silently to the wash stand. Clark and Van Wall

joined him a moment later. Clark's lips had developed a tic, jerking into sudden, unexpected sneers.

"What did you do?" Connant exploded suddenly. "More immunizing?"

Clark snickered, and stopped with a hiccough. "Immunizing. Haw! Immune all right."

"That monster," said Van Wall steadily, "is quite logical. Our immune dog was quite all right, and

we drew a little more serum for the tests. But we won't make any more."

"Can't - can't you use one man's blood on another dog -" Norris began.

"There aren't," said McReady softly, "any more dogs. Nor cattle, I might add."

"No more dogs?" Benning sat down slowly.

"They're very nasty when they start changing," Van Wall said precisely, "but slow. That

electrocution iron you made up, Barclay, is very fast. There is only one dog left - our immune. The

monster left that for us, so we could play with our little test. The rest -" He shrugged and dried his

hands.

"The cattle -" gulped Kinner.

"Also. Reacted very nicely. They look funny as hell when they start melting. The beast hasn't any

quick escape, when it's tied in dog chains, or halters, and it had to be to imitate."

Kinner stood up slowly. His eyes darted around the room, and came to rest horribly quivering on a

tin bucket in the galley. Slowly, step by step, he retreated toward the door, his mouth opening and

closing silently, like a fish out of water.

"The milk -" he gasped. "I milked 'em an hour ago -" His voice broke into a scream as he dived

through the door. He was out on the ice cap without windproof or heavy clothing.

Van Wall looked after him for a moment thoughtfully. "He's probably hopelessly mad," he said at

length, "but he might be a monster escaping. He hasn't skis. Take a blow-torch in case."

The physical motion of the chase helped them; something that needed doing. Three of the other men

were quietly being sick. Norris was lying flat on his back, his face greenish, looking steadily at the

bottom of the bunk above him.

"Mac, how long have the - cows been not - cows -"

McReady shrugged his shoulders hopelessly. He went over to the milk bucket, and with his little

tube of serum went to work on it. The milk clouded it, making certainty difficult. Finally he dropped

the test-tube in the stand and shook his head. "It tests negatively. Which means either they were

cows then, or that, being perfect imitations, they gave perfectly good milk."

Copper stirred restlessly in his sleep and gave a gurgling cross between a snore and laugh. Silent

eyes fastened on him. "Would morphine affect a monster -" somebody started to ask.

"Lord knows," McReady shrugged. "It affects every Earthly animal I know of."

Connant suddenly raised his head. "Mac! The dogs must have swallowed pieces of the monster, and

the pieces destroyed them! The dogs were where the monster resided. I was locked up. Doesn't that

prove -"

Van Wall shook his head. "Sorry. Proves nothing about what you are, only proves what you didn't

do."

"It doesn't do that," McReady sighed. "We are helpless. Because we don't know enough, and so

jittery we don't think straight. Locked up! Ever watch a white corpuscle of the blood go through the

wall of a blood vessel? No? It sticks out a pseudopod. And there it is - on the far side of the wall."

"Oh," said Van Wall unhappily. "The cattle tried to melt down, didn't they? They could have melted

down - become just a thread of stuff and leaked under a door to re-collect on the other side. Ropes -

no - no, that wouldn't do it. They couldn't live in a sealed tank or -"

"If," said McReady, "you shoot it through the heart, and it doesn't die, it's a monster. That's the

best test I can think of, offhand."

"No dogs," said Garry quietly, "and no cattle. It has to imitate men now. And locking up doesn't do

any good. Your test might work, Mac, but I'm afraid it would be hard on the men."

Chapter 10

Clark looked up from the galley stove as Van Wall, Barclay, McReady and Benning came in,

brushing the drift from their clothes. The other men jammed into the Ad Building continued

studiously to do as they were doing, playing chess, poker, reading. Ralsen was fixing a sledge on the

table; Van and Norris had their heads together over magnetic data, while Harvey read tables in a low

voice.

Dr. Copper snored softly on the bunk. Garry was working with Dutton over a sheaf of radio

messages on the corner of Dutton's bunk and a small fraction of the radio table. Connant was using

most of the table for cosmic ray sheets.

Quite plainly through the corridor, despite two closed doors, they could hear Kinner's voice. Clark

banged a kettle onto the galley stove and beckoned McReady silently. The meteorologist went over

to him.

"I don't mind the cooking so damn much," Clark said nervously, "but isn't there some way to stop

that bird? We all agreed that it would be safe to move into Cosmos House."

"Kinner?" McReady nodded toward the door. "I'm afraid not. I can dope him, I suppose, but we don't

have an unlimited supply of morphia, and he's not in danger of losing his mind. Just hysterical."

"Well, we're in danger of losing ours. You've been out for an hour and a half. That's been going on

steadily ever since, and it was going for two hours before. There's a limit, you know."

Garry wandered over slowly, apologetically. For an instant, McReady caught the feral spark of fear -

horror - in Clark's eyes, and knew at the same instant it was in his own. Garry - Garry or Copper -

was certainly a monster.

"If you could stop that, I think it would be a sound policy, Mac," Garry spoke quietly. "There are -

tensions enough in this room. We agreed that it would be safe for Kinner in there, because

everyone else in camp is under constant eyeing." Garry shivered slightly. "And try, try in God's

name, to find some test that will work."

McReady sighed. "Watched or unwatched, everyone's tense. Blair's jammed the trap so it won't

open now. Says he's got food enough, and keeps screaming 'Go away, go away - you're monster. I

won't be absorbed. I won't. I'll tell men when they come. Go away.' So - we went away."

"There's no other test?" Garry pleaded.

McReady shrugged his shoulders. "Copper was perfectly right. The serum test could be absolutely

definitive if it hadn't been - contaminated. But that's the only dog left, and he's fixed now."

"Chemicals? Chemical tests?"

McReady shook his head. "Our chemistry isn't that good. I tried the microscope, you know."

Garry nodded. "Monster-dog and real dog were identical. But - you've got to go on. What are we

going to do after dinner?"

Van Wall had joined them quietly. "Rotation sleeping. Half the crowd asleep; half awake. I wonder

how many of us are monsters? All the dogs were. We thought we were safe, but somehow it got

Copper - or you." Van Wall's eyes flashed uneasily. "It may have gotten every one of you - all of you

but myself may be wondering, looking. No, that's not possible. You'd just spring then. I'd be

helpless. We humans must somehow have the greater numbers now. But -" he stopped.

McReady laughed shortly. "You're doing what Norris complained of in me. Leaving it hanging. 'But

if one more is changed - that may shift the balance of power.' It doesn't fight. I don't think it ever

fights. It must be a peaceable thing, in its own inimitable way. It never had to, because it always

gained its end."

Van Wall's mouth twisted in a sickly grin. "You're suggesting then, that perhaps it already has the

greater numbers, but is just waiting -waiting, all of them - all of you, for all I know - waiting till I,

the last human, drop my wariness in sleep. Mac, did you notice their eyes, all looking at us?"

Garry sighed. "You haven't been sitting here for four straight hours, while all their eyes silently

weighed the information that one of us two, Copper or I, is a monster certainly - perhaps both of us."

Clark repeated his request. "Will you stop that bird's noise? He's driving me nuts. Make him tone

down, anyway."

"Still praying?" McReady asked.

"Still praying," Clark groaned. "He hasn't stopped for a second. I don't mind his praying if it

relieves him, but he yells, he sings psalms and hymns and shouts prayers. He thinks God can't hear

well way down here."

"Maybe He can't," Barclay grunted. "Or he'd have done something about this thing loosed from

hell."

"Somebody's going to try that test you mentioned, if you don't stop him," Clark stated grimly. "I

think a cleaver in the head would be as positive a test as a bullet in the heart."

"Go ahead with the food. I'll see what I can do. There may be something in the cabinets." McReady

moved wearily toward the corner Copper had used as his dispensary. Three tall cabinets of rought

boards, two locked, were the repositories of the camp's medical supplies. Twelve years ago McReady

had graduated, had started for an internship, and been diverted to meteorology. Copper was a picked

man, a man who knew his professions thoroughly and modernly. More than half the drugs available

were totally unfamiliar to McReady; many of the others he had forgotten. There was no huge

medical library here, no series of journals available to learn the things that did not merit inclusion

in the small library he had been forced to content himself with. Books are heavy, and every ounce of

supplies had been freighted in by air.

McReady picked a barbituate hopefully. Barclay and Van Wall went with him. One man never went

anywhere alone in Big Magnet.

Ralsen had his sledge put away, and the physicists had moved off the table, the poker game broken

up when they got back. Clark was putting out the food. The click of spoons and the muffled sounds

of eating were the only sign of life in the room. There were no words spoken as the three returned;

simply all eyes focused on them questioningly, while the jaws moved methodically.

McReady stiffened suddenly. Kinner was screeching out a hymn in a hoarse, cracked voice. He

looked wearily at Van Wall with a twisted grin and shook his head. "Hu-uh."

Van Wall cursed bitterly, and sat down at the table. "We'll just plumb have to take that till his voice

wears out. He can't yell like that forever."

"He's got a brass throat and a cast-iron larynx," Norris declared savagely. "Then we could be

hopeful, and suggest he's one of our friends. In that case he could go on renewing his throat till

doomsday."

Silence clamped down. For twenty minutes they ate without a word. Then Connant jumped up with an

angry violence. "You sit as still as a bunch of graven images. You don't say a word, but oh, Lord,

what expressive eyes you've got. They roll around like a bunch of glass marbles spilling down a

table. They wind and blink and stare - and whisper things. Can you guys look somewhere else for a

change, please?

"Listen, Mac, you're in charge here. Let's run movies for the rest of the night. We've been saving

those reels to make 'em last. Last for what? Who is it's going to see those last reels, eh? Let's see

'em while we can, and look at something other than each other."

"Sound idea, Connant. I, for one, am quite willing to change this in any way I can."

"Turn the sound up loud, Dutton. Maybe you can drown out the hymns," Clark suggested.

"But don't," Norris said softly, "don't turn off the lights altogether."

"The lights will be out." McReady shook his head. "We'll show all the cartoon movies we have. You

won't mind seeing the old cartoons, will you?"

"Goody goody - I'm just in the mood." McReady turned to look at the speaker, a lean, lanky, New

Englander, by the name of Caldwell. Caldwell was stuffing his pipe slowly, a sour eye cocked up to

McReady.

The bronze giant was forced to laugh. "O.K., Bart, you win. Maybe we aren't quite in the mood for

Popeye and trick ducks, but it's something."

"Let's play Classifications," Caldwell suggested slowly. "Or maybe you call it Guggenheim. You

draw lines on a piece of paper, and put down classes of things - like animals, you know. One for 'H'

and one for 'U' and so on. Like 'Human' and 'Unknown' for instance. I think that would be a hell of a

lot more than movies. Maybe somebody's got a pencil that he can draw lines with, draw lines between

the 'U' animals and the 'H' animals for instance."

"McReady's trying to find that kind of a pencil," Van Wall answered quietly, "but we've got three

kinds of animals here, you know. One that begins with 'M.' We don't want any more."

"Mad ones, you mean. Uh-huh. Clark, I'll help you with those pans so we can get our little

peep-show going." Caldwell got up slowly.

Dutton and Barclay and Benning, in charge of the projector and sound mechanism arrangements,

went about their job silently, while the Ad Building was cleared and the dishes and pans disposed of.

McReady drifted over toward Van Wall slowly, and leaned back in the bunk beside him. "I've been

wondering, Van," he said with a wry grin, "whether or not to report my idea in advance. I forgot the

'U' animals', as Caldwell named it, could read minds. I've a vague idea of something that might

work. It's too vague to bother with though. Go ahead with your show, while I try to figure out the

logic of the thing. I'll take this bunk."

Van Wall glanced up, and nodded. The movie screen would be practically on a line with his bunk,

hence making the pictures least distracting here, because least intelligible. "Perhaps you should

tell us what you have in mind. As it is, only the unknowns know what you plan. You might be -

unknown before you got it into operation."

"Won't take long, if I get it figured out right. But I don't want any more

all-but-the-test-dog-monsters thing. We better move Copper into this bunk directly above me. He

won't be watching the screen either." McReady nodded toward Copper's gently snoring bulk. Garry

helped them lift and move the doctor.

McReady leaned back against the bunk, and sank into a trance, almost, of concentration, trying to

calculate chances, operations, methods. He was scarcely aware as the others distributed themselves

silently, and the screen lit up. Vaguely Kinner's hectic, shouted prayers and rasping hymn-singing

annoyed him till the sound accompaniment started. The lights were turned out, but the large,

light-colored areas of the screen reflected enough light for ready visibility. It made men's eyes

sparkle as they moved restlessly. Kinner was still praying, shouting, his voice a raucous

accompaniment to the mechanical sound. Dutton stepped up the amplification.

So long had the voice been going on, that only vaguely at first was McReady aware that something

seemed missing. Lying as he was, just across the narrow room from the corridor leading to Cosmos

House, Kinner's voice had reached him fairly clearly, despite the sound accompaniment of the

pictures. It struck him abruptly that it had stopped.

"Dutton, cut that sound," McReady called as he sat up abruptly. The pictures flickered a moment,

soundless and strangely futile in the sudden, deep silence. The rising wind on the surface above

bubbled melancholy tears of sound down the stove pipes. "Kinner's stopped," McReady said softly.

"For God's sake start that sound then, he may have stopped to listen," Norris snapped.

McReady rose and went down the corridor. Barclay and Van Wall left their places at the far end of

the room to follow him. The flickers bulged and twisted on the back of Barclay's gray underwear as

he crossed the still-functioning beam of the projector. Dutton snapped on the lights, and the

pictures vanished.

Norris stood at the door as McReady had asked. Garry sat down quietly in the bunk nearest the

door, forcing Clark to make room for him. Most of the others had stayed exactly where they were.

Only Connant walked slowly up and down the room, in steady, unvarying rhythm.

"If you're going to do that, Connant," Clark spat, "we can get along without you altogether, whether

you're human or not. Will you stop that damned rhythm?"

"Sorry." The physicist sat down in a bunk, and watched his toes thoughtfully. It was almost five

minutes, five ages while the wind made the only sound, before McReady appeared at the door.

"We," he announced, "haven't got enough grief here already. Somebody's tried to help us out.

Kinner has a knife in his throat, which was why he stopped singing, probably. We've got monsters,

madmen and murderers. Any more 'M's' you can think of, Caldwell? If there are, we'll probably

have 'em before long."

Chapter 11

"Is Blair loose?" someone asked.

"Blair is not loose. Or he flew in. If there's any doubt about where our gentle helper came from -

this may clear it up." Van Wall held a foot-long, thin-bladed knife in a cloth. The wooden handle was

half-burnt, charred with the peculiar pattern of the top of the galley stove.

Clark stared at it. "I did that this afternoon. I forgot the damn thing and left it on the stove."

Van Wall nodded. "I smelled it, if you remember. I knew the knife came from the galley."

"I wonder," said Benning, looking around the party warily, "how many more monsters have we? If

somebody could slip out of his place, go back of the screen to the galley and then down to the

Cosmos House and back - he did come back, didn't he? Yes - everybody's here. Well, if one of the

gang could do that -"

"Maybe a monster did it," Garry suggested quietly. "There's that possibility."

"The monster, as you pointed out today, has only men left to imitate. Would he decrease his - supply,

shall we say?" Van Wall pointed out. "No, we just have a plain, ordinary louse, a murderer to deal

with. Ordinarily we'd call him an 'inhuman murderer' I suppose, but we have to distinguish now.

We have inhuman murderers, and now we have human murderers. Or one at least."

"There's one less human," Norris said softly. "Maybe the monster have the balance of power now."

"Never mind that," McReady sighed and turned to Barclay. "Bar, will you get your electric gadget?

I'm going to make certain -"

Barclay turned down the corridor to get the pronged electrocuter, while McReady and Van Wall

went back toward Cosmos House. Barclay followed them in some thirty seconds.

The corridor to Cosmos House twisted, as did nearly all corridors in Big Magnet, and Norris stood

at the entrance again. But they heard, rather muffled, McReady's sudden shout. There was a savage

scurry of blows, dull "ch-thunk, shluff" sounds. "Bar - Bar -". And a curious, savage mewing

scream, silenced before even quick-moving Norris had reached the bend.

Kinner - or what had been Kinner - lay on the floor, cut half in two by the great knife McReady had

had. The meteorologist stood against the wall, the knife dripping red in his hand. Van Wall was

stirring vaguely on the floor, moaning, his hand half-consciously rubbing at his jaw. Barclay, an

unutterably savage gleam in his eyes, was methodically leaning on the pronged weapon in his hand,

jabbing, jabbing, jabbing.

Kinner's arms had developed a queer, scaly fur, and the flesh had twisted. The fingers had

shortened, the hand rounded, the fingernails become three-inch long things of dull red horn,

keened to steel-hard razor-sharp talons.

McReady raised his head, looked at the knife in his hand and dropped it. "Well, whoever did it can

speak up now. He was an inhuman murderer at that - in that he murdered an inhuman. I swear by all

that's holy, Kinner was a lifeless corpse on the floor here when we arrived. But when It found we

were going to jab it with the power - It changed."

Norris stared uneasily. "Oh, Lord, those things can act. Ye gods -sitting in here for hours,

mouthing prayers to a God it hated! Shouting hymns in a cracked voice - hymns about a Church it

never knew. Driving us mad with its ceaseless howling -"

"Well. Speak up, whoever did it. You didn't know it, but you did the camp a favor. And I want to know

how in blazes you got out of that room without anyone seeing you. It might help in guarding

ourselves."

"His screaming - his singing. Even the sound projector couldn't drown it." Clark shivered. "It was

a monster."

"Oh," said Van Wall in sudden comprehension. "You were sitting right next to the door, weren't

you! And almost behind the projection screen already."

Clark nodded dumbly. "He - it's quiet now. It's a dead - Mac, your test's no damn good. It was dead

anyway, monster or man, it was dead."

McReady chuckled softly. "Boys, meet Clark, the only one we know is human! Meet Clark, the one

who proves he's human by trying to commit murder - and failing. Will the rest of you please refrain

from trying to prove you're human for a while? I think we may have another test."

"A test!" Connant snapped joyfully, then his face sagged in disappointment. "I suppose it's another

either-way-you-want-it."

"No," said McReady steadily. "Look sharp and be careful. Come into the Ad Building. Barclay,

bring your electrocuter. And somebody - Dutton - stand with Barclay to make sure he does it.

Watch every neighbor, for by the Hell these monsters came from, I've got something, and they know

it. They're going to get dangerous!"

The group tensed abruptly. An air of crushing menace entered into every man's body, sharply they

looked at each other. More keenly than ever before - is that man next to me an inhuman monster?

"What is it?" Garry asked, as they stood again in the main room. "How long will it take?"

"I don't know, exactly," said McReady, his voice brittle with angry determination. "But I know it

will work, and no two ways about it. It depends on a basic quality of the monsters, not on us. 'Kinner'

just convinced me." He stood heavy and solid in bronzed immobility, completely sure of himself

again at last.

"This," said Barclay, hefting the wooden-handled weapon, tipped with its two sharp-pointed, charged

conductors, "is going to be rather necessary, I take it. Is the power plant assured?"

Dutton nodded sharply. "The automatic stoker bin is full. The gas power plant is on stand-by. Van

Wall and I set it for the movie operation and - we've checked it over rather carefully several times,

you know. Anything those wires touch, dies." he assured them grimly. "I know that."

Dr. Copper stirred vaguely in his bunk, rubbed his eyes with fumbling hand. He sat up slowly,

blinked his eyes blurred with sleep and drugs, widened unutterable horror of drug-ridden

nightmares. "Garry," he mumbled, "Garry - listen. Selfish - from hell they came, and hellish

shellfish - I mean self - Do I? What do I mean?" He sank back in his bunk, and snored softly.

McReady looked at him thoughtfully. "We'll know presently," he nodded slowly. But selfish is what

you mean all right. Selfish is the word. They must be, you see." He turned to the men in the cabin,

tense, silent men staring with wolfish eyes each at his neighbor. "Selfish, and as Dr. Copper said,

every part is a whole. Every piece is a self-sufficient, an animal in itself.

"That, and one other thing, tell the story. There's nothing mysterious about blood; it's just as

normal a body tissue as a piece of muscle, or a piece of liver. But it hasn't so much connective

tissue, though it has millions, billions of life-cells."

McReady's great bronze beard ruffled in a grim smile. "This is satisfying in a way. I'm pretty sure

we humans still outnumber you - others. Others standing here. And we have what you, your

other-world race, evidently doesn't. Not an imitated, but a bred-in-the-bone instinct, a driving,

unquenchable fire that's genuine. We'll fight, fight with a ferocity you may attempt to imitate, but

you'll never equal! We're human. We're real. You're imitations, false to the core of your every cell.

"All right. It's a showdown now. You know. You, with your mind reading. You've lifted the idea from

my brain. You can't do a thing about it.

"Blood is tissue. They have to bleed, if they don't bleed when cut, then, by Heaven, they're phony!

Phony from hell! If they bleed - then that blood, separated from them, is an individual - a newly

formed individual in its own right, just as they, split, all of them, from one original, are individuals!

"Get it, Van? See the answer, Bar?"

Van Wall laughed very softly. "The blood - the blood will not obey. It's a new individual, with all the

desire to protect its own life that the original - the main mass from which it split - has. The blood

will live - and try to crawl away from a hot needle, say!"

McReady picked up the scalpel from the middle of the table. From the cabinet, he took a rack of

test-tubes, a tiny alcohol lamp, and a length of platinum wire set in a little glass rod. A smile of grim

satisfaction rode his lips. For a moment he glanced up at those around him. Barclay and Dutton

moved toward him slowly, the wooden-handled electric instrument alert.

"Dutton," said McReady, "suppose you stand over by the splice there where you've connected that

in. Just to make sure no - thing - pulls it loose."

Dutton moved away. "Now, Van, suppose you be first on this."

White-faced, Van Wall stepped forward. With a delicate precision, McReady cut a vein in the base of

his thumb. Van Wall winced slightly, then held steady as a half inch of bright blood collected in the

tube. McReady put the tube in the rack, gave Van Wall a bit of alum and indicated the iodine bottle.

Van Wall stood motionlessly watching. McReady heated the platinum wire in the alcohol lamp

flame, then dipped it into the tube. It hissed softly. Five time he repeated the test. "Human, I'd say."

McReady sighed, and straightened. "As yet, my theory hasn't been actually proven - but I have

hopes. I have hopes.

"Don't, by the way, get too interested in this. We have with us some unwelcome ones, no doubt. Van,

will you relieve Barclay at the switch? Thanks. O.K. Barclay, and may I say I hope you stay with us?

You're a damned good guy."

Barclay grinned uncertainly; winced under the keen edge of the scalpel. Presently, smiling widely,

he retrieved his long-handled weapon.

"Mr. Samuel Dutt - Bar!"

The tensity was released in that second. Whatever of hell the monsters may have had within them,

the men in that instant matched it. Barclay had no chance to move his weapon as a score of men

poured down on that thing that had seemed Dutton. It mewed, and spat, and tried to grow fangs - and

was a hundred broken, torn pieces. Without knives, or any weapon save the brute-given strength of

a staff of picked men, the thing was crushed, rent.

Slowly they picked themselves up, their eyes smouldering, very quiet in their emotions. A curious

wrinkling of ther lips betrayed a species of nervousness.

Barclay went over with the electric weapon. Things smouldered and stank. The caustic acid Van

Wall dropped on each spilled drop of blood gave off tickling, cough-provoking fumes.

McReady grinned, his deep-set eyes alight and dancing. "Maybe," he said softly, "I underrated

man's abilities when I said nothing human could have the ferocity in the eyes of that thing we found.

I wish we could have the opportunity to treat in a more befitting manner these things. Something

with boiling oil, or melted lead in it, or maybe slow roasting in the power boiler. When I think what

a man Dutton was -

"Never mind. My theory is confirmed by - by one who knew? Well, Van Wall and Barclay are

proven. I think, then, that I'll try to show you what I already know. That I too am human." McReady

swished the scalpel in absolute alcohol, burned it off the metal blade, and cut the base of his thumb

expertly.

Twenty seconds later he looked up from the desk at the waiting men. There were more grins out

there now, friendly grins, yet with all, something else in the eyes.

"Connant," McReady laughed softly, "was right. The huskies watching that thing in the corridor

bend had nothing on you. Wonder why we think only the wolf blood has the right to ferocity? Maybe

on spontaneous viciousness a wolf takes tops, but after these seven days - abandon all hope, ye

wolves who enter here!

"Maybe we can save time. Connant, would you step forward-"

Again Barclay was too slow. There were more grins, less tensity still, when Barclay and Van Wall

finished their work.

Garry spoke in a low, bitter voice. "Connant was one of the finest men we had here - and five

minutes ago I'd have sworn he was a man. Those damnable things are more than imitation." Garry

shuddered and sat back in his bunk.

And thirty seconds later, Garry's blood shrank from the hot platinum wire, and struggled to escape

the tube, struggled as frantically as a suddenly feral, red-eyed, dissolving imitation of Garry

struggled to dodge the snake-tongue weapon Barclay advanced at him, white-faced and sweating.

The Thing in the test-tube screamed with a tiny voice as McReady dropped it into the glowing coal of

the galley stove.

Chapter 12

"The last of it?" Dr. Copper looked down from his bunk with bloodshot, saddened eyes. "Fourteen of

them -"

McReady nodded shortly. "In some ways - if only we could have permanently prevented their

spreading - I'd like to have the imitations back. Commander Garry - Connant - Dutton - Clark -"

"Where are they taking those things?" Copper nodded to the stretcher Barclay and Norris were

carrying out.

"Outside. Outside on the ice, where they've got fifteen smashed crates, half a ton of coal, and

presently will add ten gallons of kerosene. We've dumped acid on every spilled drop, every torn

fragment. We're going to incinerate those."

"Sounds like a good play." Copper nodded wearily. "I wonder, you haven't said whether Blair -"

McReady started. "We forgot him! We had so much else! I wonder - do you suppose we can cure him

now?"

"If -" began Dr. Copper, and stopped meaningly.

McReady started a second time. "Even a madman. It imitated Kinner and his praying hysteria -"

McReady turned toward Van Wall at the long table. "Van, we've got to make an expedition to Blair's

shack."

Van looked up sharply, the frown of worry faded for an instant in surprised remembrance. Then he

rose, nodded. "Barclay better go along. He applied those lashings, and may figure how to get in

without frightening Blair too much."

Three quarters of an hour, through -37 degree cold, they hiked while the aurora curtain bellied

overhead. The twilight was nearly twelve hours long, flaming in the north on snow like white,

crystalline sand under their skis. A 5-mile wind piled it in drift lines pointing off to the northwest.

Three quarters of an hour to reach the snow-buried shack. No smoke came from the little shack,

and the men hastened.

"Blair!" Barclay roared into the wind when he was still a hundred yards away. "Blair!"

"Shut up," said McReady softly. "And hurry. He may be trying a long hike. If we have to go after

him - no planes, the tractors disabled -"

"Would a monster have the stamina a man has?"

"A broken leg wouldn't stop it for more than a minute," McReady pointed out.

Barclay gasped suddenly and pointed aloft. Dim in the twilit sky, a winged thing circled in curves of

indescribably grace and ease. Great white wings tipped gently, and the bird swept over them in

silent curiosity. "Albatross-" Barclay said softly. "First of the season, and wandering way inland

for some reason. If a monsters's loose-"

Norris bent down on the ice, and tore hurriedly at his heavy, windproof clothing. He straightened,

his coat flapping open, a grim blue-metalled weapon in his hand. It roared a challenge to the white

silence of Antarctica.

The thing in the air screamed hoarsely. Its great wings worked frantically as a dozen feathers

floated down from its tail. Norris fired again. The bird was moving swiftly now, but in an almost

straight line of retreat. It screamed again, more feathers dropped and with beating wings it soared

behind a ridge of pressure ice, to vanish.

Norris hurried after the other. "It won't come back," he panted.

Barclay cautioned him to silence, pointing. A curiously, fiercely blue light beat out form the cracks

fo the shack's door. A very low, soft humming sounded inside, a low, soft humming and a clink and

clank of tools, the very sounds somehow bearing a message of frantic haste.

McReady's face paled. "Lord help us if that thing has-". He grabbed Barclay's shoulder, and made

snipping motions with his fingers, pointing toward the lacing of control-cables that held the door.

Barclay drew the wire-cutters from his pocket, and kneeled soundlessly at the door. The snap and

twang of cut wires made an unbearable racket in the utter quiet of the Antarctic hush. There was

only that strange, sweetly soft hum from within the shack, and the queerly, hecticly clipped clicking

and rattling of tools to drown their noises.

McReady peered through a crack in the door. His breath sucked in huskily and his great fingers

clamped cruelly on Barclay's shoulder. The meteorologist backed down. "It isn't," he explained

very softly, "Blair. It's kneeling on something on the bunk - something that keeps lifting.

Whatever it's working on is a thing like a knapsack - and it lifts."

"All at once," Barclay said grimly. "No. Norris, hang back, and get that iron of yours out. It may

have - weapons."

Together, Barclays powerful body and McReady's giant strength struck the door. Inside, the bunk

jammed against the door, screeched madly and crackled into kindling. The door flung down from

broken hinges, the patched lumber of the doorpost dropping inward.

Like a blue-rubber ball, a Thing bounced up. One of its four tentacle-like arms looped out like a

striking snake. In a seven-tentacled hand, a six-inch pencil of winking, shining metal glinted and

swung upward to face them. Its line-thin lips twitched back from snake-fangs in a grin of hate, red

eyes blazing.

Norris' revolver thundered in the confined space. The hate-washed face twitched in agony, the

looping tentacle snatched back. The silvery thing in its hand a smashed ruin of metal, the

seven-tentacled hand became a mass of mangled flesh oozing greenish-yellow ichor. The revolver

thundered three times more. Dark holes drilled each of the three eyes before Norris hurled the

empty weapon against its face.

The Thing screamed in feral hate, a lashing tentacle wiping at blinded eyes. For a moment it

crawled on the floor, savage tentacles lashing out, the body twitching. Then it staggered up again,

blinded eyes working, boiling hideously, the crushed flesh sloughing away in sodden gobbets.

Barclay lurched to his feet and dove forward with an ice-axe. The flat of the weighty thing crushed

against the side of the head. Again the unkillable monster went down. The tentacles lashed out, and

suddenly Barclay fell to his feet in the grip of a living, livid rope. The Thing dissolved as he held it, a

white-hot band that ate into the flesh of his hands like living fire. Frantically he tore the stuff from

him, held his hands where they could not be reached. The blind Thing felt and ripped at the tough,

heavy, windproof cloth, seeking flesh - flesh it could convert -

The huge blow-torch McReady had brought coughed solemnly. Abruptly it rumbled disapproval

thoatily. Then it laughed gurglingly, and thrust out a blue-white, three-foot tongue. The Thing on

the floor shrieked, flailed out blindly with tentacles that writhed and withered in the bubbling wrath

of the blow-torch. It crawled and turned on the floor, it shrieked and hobbled madly, but always

McReady held the blow-torch on the face, the dead eyes burning and bubbling uselessly. Frantically

the Thing crawled and howled.

A tentacle sprouted a savage talon - and cripsed in the flame. Steadily McReady moved with a

planned, gim campaign. Helpless, maddened, the Thing retreated from the grunting torch, the

caressing, licking tongue. For a moment it rebelled, squalling in inhuman hatred at the touch of icy

snow. Then it fell back before the charring breath of the torch, the stench of its flesh bathing it.

Hopelessly it retreated - on and on across the Antarctic snow. The bitter wind swept over it twisting

the torch-tongue; vainly it flopped, a trail of oily, stinking smoke bubbling away from it -

McReady walked back toward the shack silently. Barclay met him at the door. "No more?" the

giant meteorologist asked grimly.

Barclay shook his head. "No more. It didn't split?"

"It had other things to think about," McReady assured him. "When I left it, it was a glowing coal.

What was it doing?"

Norris laughed shortly. "Wise boys, we are. Smash magnetos, so planes won't work. Rip the boiler

tubing out of the tractors. And leave that Thing alone for a week in this shack. Alone and

undisturbed."

McReady looked in at the shack more carefully. The air, despite the ripped door, was hot and humid.

On a table at the far end of the room rested a thing of coiled wires and small magnets, glass tubing

and radio tubes. At the center, a block of rough stone rested. From the center of the block came the

light that flooded the place, the fiercely blue light bluer than the glare of an electric arc, and from it

came the sweetly soft hum. Off to one side was another mechanism of crystal glass, blown with an

incredible neatness and delicacy, metal plates and a queer, shimmery sphere of insubstantiality.

"What is that?" McReady moved nearer.

Norris grunted. "Leave it for investigation. But I can guess pretty well. That's atomic power. That

stuff to the left - that's a neat little thing for doing what men have been trying to do with 100-ton

cyclotrons and so forth. It separates neutrons from heavy water, which he was getting from the

surrounding ice."

"Where did he get all - Oh. Of course. A monster couldn't be locked in - or out. He's been through

the apparatus caches." McReady stared at the apparatus. "Lord, what minds that race must have -"

"The shimmery sphere - I think it's a sphere of pure force. Neutrons can pass through any matter,

and he wanted a supply reservoir of neutrons. Just project neutrons against silica, calcium,

beryllium, almost anything, and the atomic energy is released. That thing is the atomic generator."

McReady plucked a thermometer from his coat. "It's 120 degrees in here, despite the open door.

Our clothes have kept the heat out to an extent, but I'm sweating now."

Norris nodded. "The light's cold. I found that. But it gives off heat to warm the place through that

coil. He had all the power in the world. He could keep it warm and pleasant, as his race thought of

warmth and pleasantness. Did you notice the light, the color of it?"

McReady nodded. "Beyond the stars is the answer. From beyond the stars. From a hotter planet that

circled a brighter, bluer sun they came."

McReady glanced out the door toward the blasted, smoke-stained trail that flopped and wandered

blindly off across the drift. "There won't be any more coming, I guess. Sheer accident it landed

here, and that was twenty million years ago. What did it do all that for?" He nodded toward the

apparatus.

Barclay laughed softly. "Did you notice what it was working on when we came? Look." He pointed

toward the ceiling of the shack.

Like a knapsack made of flattened coffee-tins, with dangling cloth straps and leather belts, the

mechanism clung to the ceiling. A tiny, glaring heart of supernatural flame burned in it, yet burned

through the ceiling's wood without scorching it. Barclay walked over to it, grasped two of the

dangling straps in his hands, and pulled it down with an effort. He strapped it about his body. A

slight jump carried him in a wierdly slow arc across the room.

"Anti-gravity," said McReady softly.

"Anti-gravity," Norris nodded. "Yes, we had 'em stopped, with no planes, and no birds. The birds

hadn't come - but they had coffee-tins and radio parts, and glass and the machine shop at night. And

a week - a whole week - all to itself. America in a single jump - with anti-gravity powered by the

atomic energy of matter."

"We had 'em stopped. Another half hour - it was just tightening these straps on the device so it

could wear it - and we'd have stayed in Antarctica, and shot down any moving thing that came from

the rest of the world."

"The albatross - " McReady said softly. "Do you suppose - "

"With this thing almost finished? With that death weapon it held in its hand?

"No, by the grace of God, who evidently does hear very well, even down here, and the margin of half

an hour, we keep our world, and the planets of the system too. Anti-gravity, you know, and atomic

power. Because They came from another sun, a star beyond the stars. They came from a world with

a bluer sun."

THE END