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QUARTERLY

**THE SUN CAME
UP LAST NIGHT**

FEATURE NOVEL

By Edwin James

**SECOND
DAWN**

By Arthur C. Clarke

DANGER MOON

FEATURE NOVEL

By James McCreigh



**ALL STORIES NEW
No Reprints**

Volume
1
Number
2

Science Fiction QUARTERLY

August
1951

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SEEDS OF INSECURITY

By Larry Shaw

Hidden behind a maze of bureaus with bewildering titles lay the little known, but all-powerful Department of Insecurity, which did strange and wonderful things. Like taking a little, rabbit-like man—such as Heywood Civin was—and thrusting him into a job where he'd have to fight. And for a bigger reason than Civin, or the weird flower he guarded.

THE PHONE rang. Heywood Civin, lost in contemplation of one of the most beautiful Rigellian corona-blossoms he had ever owned, ignored it. It rang again. Civin tra-la-la-ed in a voice that threatened to become a soprano without notice and pruned a few more of the plant's sharp, poisonous spikes with a loosely-held incineclipper.

When the phone rang the third time, the willowy florist was waving his hand vaguely in the direction of the switch-bank hidden in the wall; he was not succeeding very well in his attempt to improve the lighting effect upon the flower, because his attention was all on the plant itself and not on the more general matter of what he was trying to do. Anyway, the noise finally penetrated, and Civin did a double-take.

It shouldn't be happening; Civin had set the instrument to receive no incoming calls unless they were replies to calls he had tried to make and hadn't completed. There had been none of the latter, and the cut-out could only be bypassed by someone with almost unlimited authority, using peak emergency powers. Nobody could want Civin that badly...

The caller wanted him worse than that. With a popping protest from the set that was probably heard in the phone company's polar offices—and Civin's greenhouse was in Peru—the screen and speaker suddenly

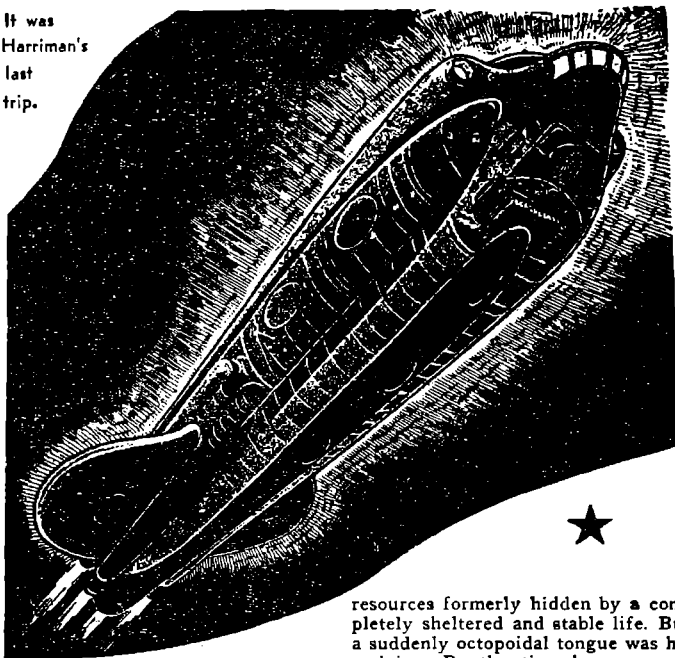
came to life, without Civin's having pressed the On stud at all.

Startled, Civin did a loose-jointed backwards prance which ended when his rump met the workbench, narrowly missing the still-hot point of the incineclipper he had dropped there. The hatchet-faced man on the screen smiled and said "Novschmozl!"

Apparently, however, he realized immediately that the internationally accepted demand-for-courtesy would not be enough to bring Civin back to earth. "Look, Civin," he continued rapidly, "I'm sorry to break in like this, but I've got lots to do and no time to flap around. I'm Julian Brinkly, Government priority BZ-4992qgl134, Flowers and Plants Sub-Section, Natural Beauties Section, Office of New Discoveries, Division of Intangible Assets, Bureau of Experimental Knowledge, Department of Intragalactic Culture. Got a job for you, be there in ten minutes."

The screen went blank, leaving Civin to his receding astonishment and growing indignation. There in ten minutes, indeed! Civin believed in leading a calm and orderly life, and he exercised the privileges of his high position in the Federated World Florists by making appointments rarely, and at least a week in advance. By Jove! He'd keep the uncouth fellow cooling his heels in the anteroom until he was good and ready to...

It was
Harriman's
last
trip.



• **P**RECISELY TEN minutes later, the inner door flickered open and a short, wiry man wearing the face Civin had seen on the outraged phone strode briskly in.

"Pleasure!" he said, shaking hands with himself almost too briefly for politeness. He kept up a steady stream of patter as he deftly unzipped an obviously custom-tailored knapsack from his custom-tailored back and placed it on the workbench, but Civin didn't really hear it. Frustration and despair were joining his other emotions; he never had learned to say no to a peddler who got this far.

Give him credit; Civin at least made an attempt. He drew himself up to his large, if attenuated height, and said: "Mister Bribbry—Brigg—Big—Gink..." For him, this was bravery; with such a beginning, he might have called up any number of

resources formerly hidden by a completely sheltered and stable life. But a suddenly octopoidal tongue was his undoing. By the time he was even slightly done again, Brinkly had remove the fantastic flower from the knapsack and placed it on the table.

And then Civin could do nothing but stare in fascination. It was too downright unusual to qualify as the most beautiful flower he'd seen, at least without due consideration. But it was undeniably beautiful, and eye-gluing in its uniqueness.

The main feature, the big attraction, was the almost perfectly transparent sphere which topped the sinuous, silvery stem; and which was partially concealed—different sections appearing and disappearing with enticing unpredictability—by the waving and weaving of broad leaves of various delicate hues. If the leaves seemed to have a strange life of their own, that sphere had an even stranger one. For it contained a blaze of color—it was impossible

to make out exactly what it consisted of—that reminded Civin of nothing so much as a child's kaleidoscope, a constantly changing rainbow of sharp shapes in awesome symmetry. It was inexplicable; it was weird; it was lovely.

Civin's bewildered gaze went back to Brinkly for a brief instant. It was the signal for the alert government man to backtrack just to the right place in his spiel. "As I was saying," he bounced along, "we'll not only pay you a good salary—a bonus for one excuse or another if you succeed at all—and ten per cent on all blossoms sold by the government after our labs, gardens and so on have all they want; but we'll also give you all the plants you can use to play with or sell, as you please. Now if you'll just sign these forms, making you an agent of the Department for the duration of the field trip..."

Civin succeeded in saying a complete word, which was "What?"

Brinkly, to be blunt about this, was a self-important little pipsqueak who would never acquire much more than the small amount he was now flinging about so wildly—but Civin was not to realize that for quite some time. Brinkly made a big business of studying his ringwatch and consulting a mental time-table.

"Look," he said with exaggerated care. "We—the Department—want you to do a little job for us. This flower was sent in by an operative on one of the two habitable planets of a recently posted sun that's just been named Smith. He didn't have time to learn much about the flower but his message said it has some extremely peculiar features—especially in the seed stage. Trouble is, there's apparently something about Earth's atmosphere that stunts its growth, or something.

"That is, it stays alive, okay, but nothing happens to it. It don't produce no seeds, even though our agent said it was—uh, ahem—self-pollinating. And as long as we've only got the one plant, we're afraid to experiment with it too much. So you're going to Smith II, find the source of

the plants, learn as much about 'em as you can, arrange for a supply of 'em to be shipped to earth, make any recommendations you want to about their possible use, et cet. We'll take care of your place here while you're gone..."

"Why," croaked Civin finally, running his flexible fingers frantically through his long, unmanageable hair, "why can't you just send some member of your department, and leave me alone? I've never even been off earth, I don't want to. Why"—his voice almost broke—"can't you go?"

Brinkly saiffed disdainfully. "Really, Mr. Civin, the job isn't that important. Our men, myself included—not bragging, of course—have much bigger matters to attend to. This is small-apples. At the same time," he smiled again, "we need a man who *really* knows his flowers, especially extra-terry types. A man with a good, solid rep, so his name will be useful in any publicity releases..."

He ran on, alternately sneering at the job and offering crude praise of Civin. The kaleidoscope flower—Civin learned eventually that the government thought of it that way, too—made its ever-different patterns of flashing gems and crystals. Civin fluttered distractedly, and thought of various ways to say no. He had his own unhurried life to live; he was happy with it. The venture this uncultured interloper proposed was utterly impossible. If only Civin's grandmother were here; she'd tell the fellow so. No. No, no, no...

● **THE SPACE-LINER *Harriman*** was thoroughly up-to-date, and had facilities for practically every recreation and entertainment humans had invented, or borrowed from other cultures, that did not require a full sized arena. None of them appealed to Civin. He had never taken part in any strenuous physical activity or wasted valuable time learning to play games; few of the entertainments were intellectually dignified enough to suit him, and he was too worried to pay atten-

tion to those that were. Naturally, he didn't worry about dangers the crew and captain might have considered seriously, but about such foolish items as meteors (which weren't dangerous), space-sickness (which didn't exist as such), cosmic rays (which bounced), and ether storms (which had been forgotten by all but the most unimaginative and deadline-harried stereloid writers).

And: *Why* had he allowed himself to be talked into this? *What* would his grandmother, who'd raised him and died in his arms, have thought of such goings-around? *Where* could it possibly end? And *how*...



He spent most of his waking hours in one of the quieter lounges, a place panelled in artificially-aged artificial wood and dimly lit by artificially-antique lanterns, drinking Ksallian-herb tea. His one attempt to sooth his nerves alcoholically, in which he made the serious error of choosing potent Rigellian *Bhull-yordz*, had ended in a disaster of explosive proportions.

"Thought I might find you here. Pleasure." Civin looked up from his snifter to see the owner of an efficient smoothness and an air of massaged well-being standing beside his booth, hand-shaking. "Mind if I sit down?" this gentleman asked, sitting down.

His pleasantly compelling voice continued as he punched out a recipe on the special-drink console beside the booth and waited for the result to pop into the receiver. "Have a little something on me? No? Well, I guess you can spend freely without worrying about the old sin account, eh? Heh-heh! The Department of Insecurity still pays its errand-boys as well as ever, I

guess, Mr. Civin? Nice trip?"

"Nice—errand—who—what's the Department of Insecurity?" the uprooted florist managed.

"Heh-heh! Your little joke, Mr. Civin? Or," the efficient voice became a fraction more so, "do you really think we don't know about the Department? Let's come to business. I am Mr. Friend; my friends call me Friend for short. Heh-heh! Now, of late you fellows have been interfering with my enterprises annoyingly often. I would like to arrange for this to stop happening, and I would like further information about..."

The soft flow of background music tinkled to a pause, and an announcer's well-modulated tones came from the speaker. "Listen, please. A group of passengers has requested a special guided tour of the ship. Such tours are usually conducted only on first and second days of trips, and this will be a rare opportunity to see and learn about the inner workings of the *Harriman*. Anyone wishing to join this tour, please report in the observation dome immediately..."

Civin saw a chance to escape a situation he didn't like or understand. "Tour!" he said. "I'm going to—I didn't—first trip—some other time, perhaps!" He rose hastily, almost upsetting what remained of his tea, and left the lounge in a hurry.

Friend moved along placidly at his elbow. "Been a long time since I've taken one of these tours myself," he said. "I'll go along, and we can continue our chat afterwards."

• **WHEN** THEY reached the dome, Civin was panting and his sensitive, bony face was even whiter than usual. He held back an urge to cling to the first person he saw and beg for help, and contented himself with pressing as deep into the middle of the tour group as he could get. Naturally, he didn't notice that the group consisted of six young men who were remarkable for their emotionless deadpans and their incredibly neat but otherwise undistinguished attire. He cowered in their midst as the tour got under way, not

hearing what the guide was saying, much less seeing that these young men seemed determined never to look at him directly. That didn't go for Friend, of course; he was right at Civin's side, smiling benevolently.

The tour swung into a room marked *Danger! Keep Out!* Inside, they clustered behind a railing and watched the big MacReady-Davidson machine cluck away, renewing the gravitic surface on huge, flat metal plates, which then shot along heavily-braced tracks through an opening in the deck. To Civin, whose interest in things of the past was second only to that in flowers, the machine looked like nothing so much as an old-fashioned flatbed printing press.

The guide was saying: "Without this machine and the artificial gravity it produces, space trips could not be made in anything like the comfort you-all have come to take for granted. It is incredibly complex, and in untrained hands might even be dangerous. If a plate broke free of those tracks, it would become a virtually irresistible force, shooting out of the machine on a straight line, and could easily tear a hole in the side of the ship. It's nothing to worry about, though; the track itself is so strong, and its mounting so carefully engineered, that nothing less than an atomic cannon could put the slightest dent in it. As you-all know, the machine was invented largely as the result of a lucky accident..."

The men in the tour group did a strange thing. They joined hands in a roughly straight line, with Friend at one end. Simultaneously with the appearance of a tiny, gun-like object in Friend's free hand, the man on the other end of the line approached an electric wall-socket and inserted a plug which dangled from a wire leading up his sleeve. Friend aimed the instrument at the tracks, which suddenly warped, buckled, and collapsed into powder.

The gravitic plate emerging from the machine shot forward on a straight line, tearing a gaping hole in the hull.

The MacReady-Davidson screeched to a stop. Hull-plates shrieked and

groaned; alarms clanged furiously; the guide yelped; escaping air whistled. Civin covered his ears and cowered against a bulkhead.

Then men in Friend's group—he had obviously taken over the leadership now—hit Civin and the guide over their heads. They did this to the guide first, and Civin had time to see them shove him into the thinning stream of outgoing air which carried the guide into empty space before he was struck himself.

They either hit Civin carelessly or they didn't want him to remain out long. He didn't go out at all at first, but was dimly conscious of their carrying him through the door, before it clanged shut on the airless room, and hustling him into a lifeboat. Friend's voice came to him through a fog as that deadly gentleman snapped orders to seal the boat and release it from its capsule immediately, before any of the panicked passengers or only slightly less excited crew could board it with them. Then Civin blanked out temporarily.

● **H**E CAME to with a headache, and clung to the ache as the only familiar thing in an upside-down universe. He couldn't help reacting to it normally, however. Civin twisted and groaned, then groaned again as dimly he perceived someone approach; then he heard Friend's voice say solicitously, "Feeling all right, Mr. Civin?"

Something pricked Civin's arm painfully, then all pain disappeared. The florist was almost sorry to feel the headache go. He sat up on the bunk and blinked; Friend's smile swam into focus.

"Now!" the hated one said smartly. "In just a moment, we can get back to the conversation we were having just before we were interrupted. First, I'd like to point out to you that everything that has happened since I introduced myself was the result of a careful plan. We leave nothing to chance, you see, and our resources are tremendous. We're particularly advanced in the field of weapons, as witness the little gadget we used to wreck the *Harriman*—"

in a way that investigators will never be able to trace.

"Even our timing was perfect, Mr. Civin. The *Harriman* was near enough to its next stop, Smith I, so that all of its lifeboats—the ship itself, if it somehow hangs together—will be able to make the colony port there with ease. We were not so far from Smith II, however, that this boat can't reach our own destination there—with oxygen to spare, since we have so few passengers. It will be marked down as lost in space, of course. And even the life insurance on the 'dead' passengers will be collected by us, or our associates, under other identities. Heh-heh—about the only thing we didn't figure out was a way to collect *your* insurance, Mr. Civin."

Civin shrank against the wall, unable to answer. "Come, come," Friend went on cheerfully. "We haven't decided what we're going to do with you, after all. And we're not always as destructive as we were just now; this little incident was partly a test of one of our newest weapons. Worked well, didn't it? If you'll cooperate, though, we may be able to give you a good deal."

He moved away. Civin swung his legs over the edge of the bunk and leaned forward; he felt sticky and sick with fear, but he was beginning to look for a path of escape.

Friend approached a table in the middle of the narrow room—which Civin noticed was the control room, with autolocked panel at one end—and picked up something which he chuckled at paternally. Civin recognized it as the instrument that had destroyed the *Harriman*. Friend replaced this on a corner of the table, along with several lengths of wire—Civin was able to think clearly enough now to decide that all of the men had had wires up their sleeves and had connected them when they joined hands—and said, "Boys!"

●THE SIX men from the tour group appeared from elsewhere in the boat. One of them came forward with a large black case, which he handed to Friend. Civin rec-

ognized this even more easily; it was the specially insulated and air-conditioned box in which he himself had been carrying the kaleidoscope flower. Friend swung it to the table.

"Oh yes, we rescued your baggage," he smiled. "A minor detail, heh-heh. The only unusual article we found in it was this—and we'd like an explanation of it now!"

Civin stood up on shaky legs. No matter how ugly were the circumstances surrounding it, he had come to love that flower; he couldn't let these ruffians harm it! He approached the table, saying, "Now, look here!"

Friend looked straight through him. "We just succeeded in opening this before you woke up," he said. "But even in that short time, we have managed to become quite, quite curious about it. I rather imagine it's valuable," his voice had become almost a purr, "and if it's valuable enough, perhaps some facts concerning it would be enough to purchase your life. Eh?"

He had flipped the case open as he spoke. Civin stared, and the perspiration on his brow turned cold. The flower was gone! All that remained was the pot of Smith II soil in which it had stood. No, there was something more—lying in the soil, blending with it, were several small, brownish balls... Seeds!

Seeds. Then they must have entered an atmosphere indigenous to the plant, the atmosphere of Smith II. Only—in that case it couldn't be the atmosphere itself, but some other property of the planet that was favorable... Radiation? Civin reached out to pick up the seeds—and Friend's hand chopped down hard on his delicate fingers.

Civin *ouched* and retreated, involuntary tears springing to his eyes, as Friend picked up the seeds and looked at them coyly. Finally, as Civin succeeded in gulping down an undignified sob, Friend said, "Here, boys, take a look," and passed a seed to each of his attentive subordinates. Then, holding the one he retained under Civin's nose in a wary hand, he said, "Well? The explanation?"

If Civin had stopped to think it all out, he might have done just what he did; anyway he might have realized that Friend was a man who planned his campaigns in devious detail, and that direct, impulsive action was foreign to him. He might have decided that the situation screamed for a surprise attack, and that confusion would reign if he removed the group's leader from play. None of this occurred to him, though.

He just got little-boy mad.

The flower case was the handiest thing, so that was what Civin hit Friend with. It was a feeble blow, but completely unexpected—and the case was heavy. Friend fell like a dead boulder.

His men drew back in alarm that was ludicrous under the circumstances. Apparently this penetrated their skulls, too, because only three of them had gotten out the door before they all turned and started to advance again. They came looking for blood. And they came almost in time, because Civin stooped to pick up the seed Friend had been holding before he got behind the table, plucked the fierce-looking little disintegrator from it, and plugged the short wire attached to it into a wall socket that conveniently presented itself. Shakily he levelled the thing in the general direction of the gang and said, "D-d-d-don't move!"

They halted briefly. Then one of them said, "That thing don't work on people." He drew a gun and shot Civin through the shoulder.

● **I**T WAS a gun that shot tiny steel needles, which could be poisoned or doped, and which hurt badly enough all by themselves. This one hadn't been treated, but it caused Civin to drop—rather, fling—the disintegrator just as he was pulling the trigger.

He learned then that the thing's output had apparently been increased by the multiplied wire and the bodies between it and the power source back on the *Harriman*; its effect now was comparatively feeble. All it did was make a charred mess of the control panel. The boat lurched and danced.

Somebody yelled, "We're going to crash!"

Somebody else yelled, "Get the parasuits!"

A third somebody yelled, "Bring the boss!"

They scrambled through the door again, dragging Friend, ignoring Civin. He followed, clutching his burning shoulder, into a passageway lined with lockers. Fear drove him fiercely, now; logical thinking had been completely short-circuited. He never knew afterwards how he managed to struggle into a suit—one not designed to accommodate his more than six feet, at that—using only one arm; but under the circumstances he probably would have accomplished it even without the benefit of the compulsory spacesuit drill he'd fumbled through on the *Harriman*. Somehow or other, at any rate, he left the boat's lock with the others.

They knew he was there, but they were too busy with their own troubles to do anything about it at first. They'd shoved Friend unceremoniously into a suit, too, and a pair of them carried him out. Once outside, and spaceborne themselves, they locked the arms of Friend's suit into power-flight position and switched on the miniature rocket-motors mounted on them. From there on, it was a one-man job to fly along above him and keep him in control. The remaining five turned their attention to Civin again.

And Civin was diving towards the surface of Smith II at a frightening clip. His action was again the best one—this time because it was the only one. He had not yet learned to handle the tricky powered parasuit, and the arm-rockets were only adding speed to what would otherwise have been a free fall.

The suit began to get hot, and he realized the atmosphere was becoming dense. The heat made him double his frenzied efforts to straighten out. Gradually, he succeeded; he was still whistling along at a great rate, but now it was on a sweeping curve towards the surface.

The question of what to do next forced its way into his already spin-



Civin never knew that this girl existed in the deeps of his mind.

ning brain, along with his fright and the throbbing messages from his damaged shoulder. His stomach heaved, and he thought for a horrified second of what it would be like to get sick inside the plastic bubble of his helmet. He bit his lips, and the trickle of warm, salty blood down his throat only made things worse.

He nearly farked out, then. He was crying real tears, and he wanted only to crawl into a safe, warm bed and pull the covers over his head...

Yes, he nearly farked out, and that would have been the end of him. But his brief retreat into childhood was the beginning of the thing that saved him...

• **D**ON'T ASK what made him look backwards over his

shoulders towards his pursuers; machoism would be as good an answer as any. Even if the act hadn't made his peril more apparent, it was damned uncomfortable. But aside from all that—overriding it completely, in fact—was the shock Civin got, which was bigger than all the earlier ones put together.

Sitting on his back, in a miniature saddle with a safety belt made of anachronistic chain, was a girl whose blonde hair streamed behind her. Her costume was equally anachronistic; had Civin been more up-to-date, he probably wouldn't have recognized it as—of all things—a suit-for-bathing. And as Civin gawked, she unlimbered a highly-chromed and inefficient looking rifle, brought it into firing position. *Materialized* it might be a better description, in fact, since she obvi-

ously had no means of concealing it upon her person.

She began to fire, and Civin thought at first that she meant to finish him. But the muzzle-blast—which looked like that from a Roman candle—went harmlessly past his head, and he began to think that she was only attempting to steer him in the direction she wanted to go.

The weirdness of it somehow forced Civin's brain into high gear. There were two twos that had to fit together some way—exactly how he couldn't yet tell. He strained his neck some more, and his gaze went beyond the girl. The fact that his gaining pursuers appeared to have armed and lightly-clad Amazons on their spacesuited backs, too, didn't fit in with his first deductions, and still... There they were.

He returned his attention to the ground, where a minor surprise yet awaited him. He was plunging headlong for a group of tents, surrounded by a small army of men, running about excitedly and looking in his direction. He knew without thinking that this was the main body of the enemy. Even as he watched, they completed setting up a number of objects he recognized as tractor beam projectors, fired a few experimental bursts, and swung the sputtering beams in his direction.

He was too late to check his dive. The fingers of force flicked across him, danced back, and held him in a tight crossfire. His arm-rockets were no match for the steady pull. He was brought up short with a suddenness that rammed his nose into the plastic of his helmet; then he was blinking back tears as he was hauled ignominiously groundwards.

His theory had to be correct now; it was the only possible weapon left. And there was a way to check it. With a mighty effort of will, he made his mind as completely blank as he could.

When he twisted his neck muscles again, the girl on his back had vanished!

He was right! Now, if he could just... The ground came up to meet him as the tractor beams swung

him in a wide arc. The beams snapped off just before he touched, leaving him to skid to a nose-first landing which plowed a long furrow in the sandy ground, raised a tremendous cloud of dust, and nearly knocked him out again. The enemy added a bloody nose to their score.

Painfully, Civin stood up and shook his head to clear it. Blood spattered the inside of his helmet. Seconds, he knew, remained, but there was no help for it—he had to get out of the parasuit or he couldn't see. It seemed to take hours, but he accomplished it somehow. Swaying, battered and bloody, thoughts whirling, he looked through the settling dust towards the mob that came charging from the enemy camp.

He clamped down on his thoughts, constructed a mental funnel through which only essentials could pass...

• **AND FROM** behind him came a herd of raging *grocko-jumps*, bigger and fiercer than any he had seen in the zoos of extra-terry creatures back on earth. In eerie silence they thundered past him and bore down on the packed enemy, fire blazing from myriad eyes, steam pouring from myriad hairy nostrils, every wicked claw, fang, hoof, barb and tentacle flashing in the sullen light of the sun called Smith.

As one man, the enemy turned and fled.

As one man, they stopped. Where their camp had been was a forest of Algonian man-eating trees, which quivered and swayed as if to a snake-charmer's piping, and stretched gaping, slimy mouths hungrily for their prey.

The mob shuddered, stupefied—and Civin wondered what to do next. The bigger enemy group, on the ground, was inactive now, but they'd come to life again—Civin couldn't project these mental pictures forever. And the parasuited men above him, apparently unaffected by the apparitions, were swooping in for the kill.

Help finally came.

From behind the forest of man-

eating trees—or rather, from behind where they had appeared to be, for Civin's surprise at the new development forced them from his mind—the tractor beams lanced out again. They caught the mob in their powerful crisscross, and dragged the squealing mass of humanity back across the sand until they were jammed tightly against the big projectors. When they were safely pinned, another beam stabbed the sky, neatly hooking the oncoming fliers.

Running, Civin arrived in the camp just as the beam dropped the men, heavy suits and all, on top of their feebly-struggling fellows. He approached the tiny, dark girl at the central control board. "You're real, aren't you?" he demanded bluntly.

"I'm real," she said. "You're real—and Insecurity? Glad to see you; these lads were ripening to do some real damage somewhere. You did a lovely job of bringing them into the open, pard."

Civin was a new man. He hardly

gawked at all before they settled down to work again.

● **THEY HASHED** and rehashed it on the way back, in the special government rocket which had been sent out to bring them in and take the prisoners into custody. (Civin had supervised the loading himself, being satisfactorily rough, thank you, with boss Friend.)

He wanted to know all about this Insecurity thing, of course. "It'll take a long time to tell you even the small part that I know," Sara Keyes, his vivacious new girl friend, told him. "Officially, there's no such thing—as a complete, autonomous unit; at least—yet, it does exist under guises of a helluva lot of government agencies with fancy phoney names. Rounding up outright criminals, like these illegal arms and munitions makers and potential warlords, is only one of the things it does.

"The outfit's been growing for years until nobody below the top knows everything it includes. It's

devoted to the principle that security breeds complacency, ignorance, and all sorts of worse things. Insecurity—the Department destroys institutions that have become malignantly old, dangerously entrenched in the past (as warlords are, after all). It sets up new institutions whenever and wherever they become needed. It tries to keep people generally shaken up a bit, constantly on their toes."

"It used me." Civin mused on his new knowledge with some awe. "I was a pawn to force Friend and Co. into an overt move, when they were getting to the danger point and it was discovered the boss and his chief stooges would be taking the *Harriman*... Neat, if not entirely flattering."

"You were more than that, Hey," Sara told him, making nice eyes. "They wanted you to contact me, and possibly rescue me, in case the bums discovered that I was not just an adventurous ray-moll. That almost happened; I think you *did* save my neck. The Department's latest report to me says they also wanted to use your greenhouse temporarily, as stage-setting for another operation. And I'm sure they figured you for a guy who was worth a little Insecurity treatment, who'd do a lot better knocked out of his rut. You can see how complex it gets."

Civin mused some more. "You know, I think I'm going to see if your Insecurity brass can't use me again—I like it. Guess I had gotten into the habit of living with those silly flowers and in the past too much," he admitted. "Good thing in a way, though. Otherwise I might not have caught on to the amazing protective coloration gimmick the kaleidoscope flower had developed to save its seeds."

"Mental pictures, projected on nothing, by a means I still haven't figured out! Gosh, they must have had some tough predators on Smith II not many years back: things that would think only of themselves, no doubt, and project their twins—but that would be scared silly if they looked in a mirror!"

"And the rugged blonde that appeared on your back was actually *Futuregal*, a character you read about in magazines when you were a kid," Sara chuckled, but it was a nice chuckle. "And your mind projected her, through the seed you were carrying. Shows a strong mind, though, Hey—you blanketed out any thoughts your boat-buddies might have been sending, and all the other seeds picked up ripples from you. A mental superman, by gum!"

The old Civin would have blushed; this one didn't. "Anyhow, I recognized her, and realized my briefly childish mind had been hoping for her to rescue me," he said. "And she showed me how to rescue myself, at least—just project a few monstrosities!"

"And one other thing the Department—which I'm sure can use you—wanted was at least a partial success," Sara went on. "They really did want more dope on the kaleidoscope plant. I hoped they would when I smuggled it out, since I couldn't make direct contact with our boys."

"And now it may be useful to them in making people less certain of the rules their world follows. Too bad, though, that it remains in stasis when removed from Smith II. I wonder if a seed would just continue throwing whatever mental picture it happened to be caught with, if you removed it from its home world..."

This time Civin showed some embarrassment. "You mean you haven't noticed?" he asked. "The seeds do just that, and there seems to be no way of getting rid of the image once they're stuck in such a groove. Like the seed I brought aboard with me... See?"

He pointed over the girl's shoulder, and she swivelled on the couch where they were sitting in pleasant proximity. Standing in the doorway to the room, surrounded by a roscate aura, was a figure that appeared to be an exact duplicate of Sara Keyes herself.

That gave rise to some discussion of a different nature.