



The Vennies didn't make any sound—or do anything

The Unforgiven

By EDMOND HAMILTON

*They hailed him as a hero
for the one deed
which he hoped to forget. . . .*

HE WAS a big guy; he was famous and he'll always be famous, but I still say he was a little crazy. At least, that's what I think most of the time. Other times—well, I don't know what to think.

I remember that when he arrived from

Earth, I wasn't much interested when the bunch in the barracks told me about it. I'd just got back to base from a hard day, and I was tired.

"He only landed at Port yesterday," Spafford told me. "Came right up here today. It's him, all right. Farrell Blaine, himself."

So it was Farrel Blaine—so what? I knew the name, all right, everybody knew it, but I was getting ash-dust out of my shoes and I didn't care about VIP's from Earth.

"What's he look like, Louie?" asked one of the others.

"Not so old as you'd think," said Spafford. "And you know what—he's got a suntan. Yeah, a real Earth tan. The lucky son! Probably got it lazying around beaches with a lot of blondes."

"You've got blondes on the brain," I said.

Spafford jeered. "Listen to Wimer! He don't like 'em. He wouldn't like it if he found one in his bunk right now, a nice little blonde with—"

He went on to describe the blonde in detail.

"Sure I'd like it," I said. "I'd like it fine. I just don't like hearing you yak about it all the time."

That made him mad. "So me talking about dames gets you down? Okay, okay, we'll talk about something else. You see any more Vennies today?"

And there it was again, all of them grinning at me, and I wondered if they were ever going to quit ribbing me about that, and I wished to God for the hundredth time I'd never opened my mouth about Vennies.

Spafford kept turning the knife. "You ought to go and talk to Farrel Blaine about it, Wimer. You and he got a lot in common, you know. You both discovered something."

That got a laugh. I let it go by, and went on cleaning my shoes. There wasn't any use arguing it all over again.

Then an orderly from HQ popped his head in and said, "Colonel wants you, Wimer," and ducked out again.

Somebody said, "Jeez, what you do?"

"The colonel wants him to meet Farrel Blaine, probably," said Spafford. "Sure, just like I said, they're both famous guys—"

I brushed down fast and got started, glad to get out of the barracks right then, but puzzled and worried too.

The night was hot and black and acrid with smog. We were burning off the Glades northwest, and that made it hard to breathe. I coughed and spat and wished for a wind, a hard wind like you have on Earth, but that wouldn't ever blow here.

I went between the barracks to HQ, and the orderly passed me in, and there were the colonel and the major and the VIP sitting around a table with drinks on it.

The colonel said, "That's all right, Wimer, this is unofficial. Have a chair—but first, meet Mr. Farrel Blaine."

I shook hands. I saw now what Spafford meant. Blaine didn't look so old. Not that he was any kid, he must have been nearly fifty. I'd heard his name nearly all my life, I was just six when he did his big stunt. But that was over twenty years ago, and you figured he'd be a pretty ancient guy.

But he wasn't. His hair was still black, and he was still lean. His suntan stood out, here on Venus. He'd have looked even younger, if he hadn't seemed so tired. Even his eyes seemed tired.

I thought, So you're the big hero—you took just one chance twenty years ago and you've been famous ever since. Pretty soft!

But what I said was, "I'm sure proud to meet you, Mr. Blaine."

Blaine asked me, "Like it in the Corps?"

I knew better than to sound off with an honest answer. I put on my bright boy scout look and said, "It's tough sometimes, but it's a real job."

The colonel said, "Wimer is the man who saw the Vennies."

I felt kind of sick, then. So that was what it was all about. I'd been fetched in to tell my funny story to the VIP. I saw the major grinning as he boosted up

his drink.

Blaine looked at me and asked, "Did you see Vennies?"

I SQUIRMED a little and tried to hedge. "Well, I thought I did. You know, it's pretty tangled up there in the Glades, and you can't be sure sometimes just what you see."

Blaine didn't say anything for a moment, and then he asked, "How many?"

Both the colonel and the major were grinning now. I damned them inside for making a show out of me. I said, "Maybe two, I thought. I only saw their legs. Could have been lizard's legs, I guess—"

"Of course that's what it was," said the major. "There aren't any Vennies. Haven't been any, for a dozen years."

The colonel said, "When I first came to Venus, there were still hundreds of them. Especially in the southern Glades."

Blaine looked as though he were thinking. He said, "When I first came, there were tens of thousands."

"Well, they're all gone now," said the major, and grinned at me and added, "Except for the ones that Wimer saw."

Why the hell didn't they let it drop? It wasn't that funny. I'd been kidded enough already about seeing Vennies, and this would start it all up again stronger than ever. I could just hear Spafford going to town on this.

I suddenly woke up to the fact that Blaine was saying, "I'd like to go up there with Wimer and see. Would it be all right, Colonel?"

He took the colonel by surprise, as well as me. The colonel said, "Oh, why, of course—but really, Mr. Blaine, you know it's a wild-goose chase and it'd be a dull trip—over a hundred miles up in the Glades—"

"That's all right," Blaine said. "You know I came to look around at the new Venus. I'd be interested in seeing if any of the old Venus is left."

The colonel didn't like it. "But you can't use a copter, for the ceiling slams down tight every few days. And—"

Blaine said, "Wimer and I could make it in a trac-car. Couldn't we?"

That last, he asked me. I said, "Yes, we could."

"Then we'll start in the morning—if the colonel is agreeable."

The colonel bloody well had to be agreeable, and knew it. "All right. But I'll hold you responsible, Wimer. You can go now."

So that was that, and here I was walking back down to the barracks with the biggest VIP there was dumped into my lap. That was just fine. My big mouth had really got me into it, this time. Why the devil had I ever come yelling back to camp about seeing Vennies, that day? It'd been nothing but a headache ever since.

I didn't want to yak to the others about it, so I waited till well after lights-out before I went back in. I lay in my bunk and wondered about Farrel Blaine. I couldn't figure his angle. It couldn't be that he was just curious. He'd seen Vennies, more than anybody ever had. I didn't get it.

NEXT morning I reported at HQ and there was a trac-car waiting, and the colonel's orderly was piling Farrel Blaine's stuff into it. So this guy was a great explorer? He had a duffle-bag big enough for a year. It didn't make sense, for just a few days' trip. But it wasn't up to me to say anything. I just looked bright and respectful when Blaine came out with the colonel.

Blaine didn't say anything as I drove out of Base, and on up over the burned-over areas. He didn't seem to be much interested in the scenery. There wasn't much to see, except the black plains and the smoggy, leaden sky. It wasn't until afternoon that we wallowed over a swamp-lead, and got into the unburned Glades.

They were called the Glades because they looked a lot like the Everglades on Earth—the tall, sad-colored grass that went on forever, with only here and there a big hummock of trees like an island sticking up out of it. Then I suddenly remembered that it was the guy beside me, the first man ever to land on Venus,

that had given them that name.

"I guess this looks more like it did twenty years ago," I said to him.

Blaine nodded. "Yes. There were no burned-over areas then."

"More than two-thirds of Venus is burned off now," I said, "and most of it already under cultivation. Big business, now."

Blaine didn't say anything to that. The smog seemed to bother him, and he coughed every so often.

I couldn't make him out. What'd he want to come up here for? Why would a guy who had it as good as he had on Earth want to come back here?

I tried to remember about him. It was a long time ago, and I'd been just a kid, and those screaming headlines were dim in my memory now.

"It was down south you landed, wasn't it?" I asked.

He nodded, but he didn't say anything. I thought, All right, if you don't want to be friendly, the hell with you.

So Blaine was a Hero, with a capital H. He'd brought the first rocket down safe through the clouds, all those years ago. Others had tried and crashed, but he'd made it, and set up the first radar, and Venus was open at last. So Farrel Blaine was a big guy from then on—but was he so big he couldn't even talk to a guy like me?

The Glades went on and on, and the trac-car went on and on. My arms got tired, and Blaine spelled me a couple of times, but the wheel shook him around a lot. He might have been tough stuff once, but he was soft, now.

He looked pretty tired by the time we camped for the night on a big hummock. He brought a bottle out of his bags, and I had a couple of drinks, and he had more than a couple. He sat staring into the dark outside our circle of light, and had another drink, and said, "It's a haunted world."

I got what he meant, and I said, "Yeah, there were all those Vennies when you first came."

"Not at first," said Blaine. "They were frightened, at first. It was only aft-

er the first few days that they started to approach us. And they were still scared—muddy beggars like poor beginnings of men, staring and staring at us."

He had another drink. "We gave them sugar. And bright bits of metal. And death."

"But *you* didn't," I said. "It was all those Earth viruses, afterward, that did it."

"Sure," said Farrel Blaine. "But I was the first. I let the others in. And in a dozen years—no more Vennies."

He handed me the bottle. "How does it feel, Wimer, to drink with a murderer?"

He was half drunk. I knew that, but even so, that jolted me. It would jolt you, sitting out there with one guy, and all the dark of Venus around you. Then I caught on.

"Say, listen, Mr. Blaine, you surely don't blame yourself for what happened to the Vennies!"

"I let the Earth in here, Wimer. The Earth ships, and the Earth men, and the Earth death."

"But it wasn't anybody's fault!" I said. "How could people know our viruses would hit the Vennies like that? Didn't we get plenty of viruses from them?"

"The difference," said Blaine, "is that we had the science to fight theirs—but the Vennies didn't have any science to fight ours. Sure, our people tried to save them. But they didn't."

"It's still not *your* fault! If you hadn't opened up Venus, somebody else would—"

Blaine said, "It is impossible but that offences will come. But woe unto him through whom they come!"

IT SOUNDED like the Bible he was quoting, and it made me more uneasy yet, this big shot drunk and quoting the Bible to me. If he blew his top up here in the Glades, I'd be in a sweet spot.

I said, "Anyway, we ought to turn in. We got a long way to go tomorrow to reach the place I told you about."

Blaine didn't make any fuss. He said,

"All right, Wimer—it's up to you. After all, I came all the way here from Earth on your say-so."

That knocked me cold. That was something I hadn't even dreamed. "You mean—you saw that newspaper squib they ran about me seeing Vennies?"

He nodded. "That was it. I wanted to find out for sure if there could be any of them left."

He didn't say any more. Just rolled up in his dew-sheet and went to sleep, and left me lying there beside him, sweating.

I had plenty to sweat about. I was responsible for Farrel Blaine, one of the most famous men alive. And Blaine was off his rocker!

He wasn't ordinary crazy. But he'd been brooding, all these years, about the Vennies dying, and blaming himself. What the psychos call a guilt complex.

It didn't make sense. Of course it didn't make sense. The Vennies had died, and the Earthmen had done everything to save them and couldn't, and that was that. But because Blaine had, been first here, he'd blamed himself.

And if he blows his top completely up here, I'm for it, I thought.

Why the devil had I ever yapped about seeing Vennies? After all, I wasn't sure—not real sure. And it had brought me nothing but trouble. If anything happened to Blaine, it'd get me busted higher than a kite.

We wouldn't find any Vennies, it was pretty sure. What would Blaine do when we didn't? I worried, and I sweated.

Next morning, Blaine didn't say anything. Not until we'd got going again, and were bumping through the Glades.

Then he said, "Don't worry, Wimer. I'm not going to get you into trouble."

He wasn't dumb. He'd figured me pretty close. Maybe I'd had worry all over my face. I told him, "Look, Mr. Blaine, I'm only a Corps private, it's not for me to tell you anything, but—"

"But I ought to forget about the Vennies," he finished for me. "Yes, I know. I told myself that, for years. I was Farrel Blaine, the great space-pioneer. I got

rich; I got married; I had children. I was happy—until I thought of Venus, of the lonely grass, the emptiness, the silence, where they had once been but would never be again."

I didn't know what to say. Finally, I said, "But even if you found the ones I saw, there'd only be a few. Not like it used to be."

"Two would be enough, Wimer. Just two could start the race again. The race I thought I murdered."

There wasn't any answer to that. He had a complex, and he couldn't get over it, and I couldn't argue him out of it. There was nothing I could do but keep driving north.

Blaine didn't talk much, after that. He sat slumped, but there wasn't anything relaxed about him. His eyes seemed to speed out ahead of us, as though the car was too slow, as though he couldn't wait.

I'd brought out the survey-maps the colonel had given me. It was while we were running survey-lines up here that I'd seen them, or thought I'd seen them. I headed for that big hummock, one almost a mile across.

We left the car in the grass, and went in. I showed Blaine the place in the brush. "It was right about here. They were running that way. I only saw their legs."

"We'll search the whole hummock," he said.

We did. He was somehow cold calm now, as though he didn't care if we found anything. That made me more uneasy than if he'd been twitching.

WE DIDN'T find anything. Nothing but a few big lizards that crashed off into the brush. We didn't even find any tracks, though the rains could have washed those out.

I looked at him. "Now what?"

"We'll look through the nearby hummocks, Wimer."

I didn't like this. He acted as though we'd keep searching till we found something. And I was dead sure now we wouldn't—I was sure now it was only lizards I'd glimpsed.

But we had to bump over to the next hummock, and look around in it. It was late afternoon, Blaine dripping with sweat and me almost as bad. Back at Base, the guys would be lounging around the barracks by now, and—

Blaine said, "Look here, Wimer."

He said it so flatly I didn't realize what it was until I went over to him. Then I saw. It was a little shelter of dry fonds, a sort of wretched tumble-down hut, almost like an animal's den.

"It could be old," I said finally.

"Look at those frond-ends—not yet completely dried out. It's not old. You saw them, Wimer."

I stared at the miserable little heap. I still couldn't quite believe it, myself. The Vennies had been gone so long that it was like seeing a fresh dinosaur-track, back on Earth.

They weren't all gone. There were at least some—a few—alive. It was sort of staggering, to look around the bush and think they might be right near us.

Then I stopped looking around, and looked at one place. A place where there were two big gray blobs under the brush. The blobs had eyes that looked back at me.

I guess I laughed, without meaning to. I said, "All right, Spafford, you loud-mouth—so I'm a liar."

Queer, how you pop out things like that when you get a surprise. Blaine said, "What—?" I said, "Look. Vennies. You're famous again, all over. So am I. We're both famous."

The Vennies just looked at us. There were two of them, huddled there. They looked at us, afraid.

They were like Blaine had said—like muddy beginnings of men. Like big, scared, hunkering monkeys, only with that muddy coarse-grained skin instead of hair. Their eyes were big and didn't wink.

I hate to call them a man and a woman, for they certainly weren't that. But I don't know how else to say it. The man gripped a sharpened wood spear. The woman held something that looked like a big, slimy frog, but it was a Vennie baby.

Blaine didn't raise his voice. He said, "Keep back, Wimer."

He must have dreamed of this, a long time, finding these Vennies. But he didn't show any emotion, not now.

He went a little toward them. He stopped and said, in a soft voice, "Friend. Friend."

The Vennies didn't make any sound, or do anything.

Blaine sat down on the ground. He told me, over his shoulder, "Get the square brown plastic box out of my bag."

All the way to the trac-car and back, I got more excited. I kept thinking what they'd say at Base about this, what they'd say back on Earth. I kept seeing my own name in bigger and bigger letters, in the headlines of Earth newspapers. I pictured myself on the telecasts, and in big pompous halls, making speeches. Societies I couldn't remember the names of would give me medals. Maybe I'd write a book, "I Found the Last of the Vennies." I—

Blaine pulled me up short, cursing me quietly for making too much noise. He took the box and began to open it. I looked at the Vennies. They hadn't moved, except the woman had turned her body around so it was between us and the wretched little creature she had in her arms. She watched us over her shoulder, and the man watched us, and I whispered to Blaine, "Why don't they run away? They ran fast enough when I saw them that first time."

HE SHOOK his head, like he didn't want to be bothered. Or maybe he knew the answer already and didn't want to admit it. He was taking stuff out of the box. "Special food," he said, still in that soft crooning voice that was supposed to make the Vennies feel easier. "Drugs. I brought them all the way from Earth." He moved forward, real slow and careful, saying "Friend . . . friend." He didn't go too close. He put the stuff down on the ground and moved back again, and waited.

"They used to hunt the big lizards for meat," he told me, "like the Ituri pyg-

mies hunt elephants, in packs. Now there's only the two of them, and the baby. They must be living on roots and grass. They must be half starved."

They must have been, because after a while the man made a sudden rush out and grabbed up the nasty mess—it looked nasty to me and I didn't ask Blaine what it was supposed to simulate. He retreated with it and began to gobble, while the woman looked on. "Nice guy," I said, and Blaine whispered, "Wait."

It was pretty obvious that the man could have wrapped himself around the whole container-full and six more like it. But he didn't. He ate half and no more, and gave the other half to the woman. "All right," I said. "So I take it back."

Blaine leaned forward, and I could see the lines in his face getting deeper. For a minute I didn't catch on. The woman seemed to be trying to feed her baby, sticking her finger first into the container and then into the child's mouth, which I thought was normal enough. But the kid wasn't having any. It made a weak little croaking sound and turned its head away, and I heard Blaine groan. "It's sick."

"Maybe it's too young to eat that way. Maybe it just doesn't like the grub." I didn't care much one way or the other. Most baby things are appealing, but this one was too much like a toad for me to break my heart over. I just wanted to make Blaine feel better.

I don't think he even heard me. The woman kept pawing at the baby, trying to make it eat. Finally she gave up and gobbled a bit herself, but her heart wasn't in it. Blaine said heavily; "That's why they didn't run away."

"You mean, she's sick too?"

Blaine nodded. He looked sick himself. "It isn't fair," he whispered. "After all these years—they're the last ones, the very last, and I've found them, but too late—"

He turned on me, all of a sudden. "We won't let it be too late! If I can get enough food into them—there's antibiotics in it that can keep them going till we get them back to Base—"

"Back to Base?" I squawked. "You mean haul *them* in our trac-car?"

The Vennies were hunkering under their bush, staring at us. The woman hung tight to the baby. It croaked once in a while, and the woman had spells of shivering.

They stunk. Even here in the open air, they stunk to high heaven. The idea of having them in the car with us turned my stomach.

Blaine didn't even get what I meant. He said, "We can get them to the hospital at Base in time, if we can just win their confidence, get them to trust us—"

I knew right then I might as well keep my mouth shut. You can't argue with a fanatic, especially when he's a big shot.

"Okay," I said. "Go ahead."

He tried. He offered them more food, and then bright trinkets he'd brought. But each time he got too close the man would snarl and warn him off with that sharp stick, and the woman would curl protectively around the baby until you'd have thought she'd crush it.

Night came on, hot and dank with the heavy dew. I made camp a little way off where the stink of the Vennies wouldn't reach me. I heard Blaine's voice, mumbling away about how he was a friend. Finally, he came over and sat down beside me.

"Well?" I asked.

He shook his head. "I could make friends with them, in time. But there isn't much time left, if we're to save that baby."

He sat brooding. I told him, "It looks pretty far gone, to me."

OUR circle of light just touched the Vennies. The baby barely moved any more, and its croaking whispers were so faint you could hardly hear them. I rustled some grub, which Blaine hardly tasted, and then rolled up in my dew-sheet. I didn't get much sleep. Blaine kept waking me up talking to the Vennies, still in there pitching to them how he was their friend. It was wasted effort. By morning the baby was dead.

You'd have thought, to look at Blaine,

that it was his own kid. I just kept my mouth shut and waited. After a while the man took it from the woman's arms. She didn't make much fuss, and with her there was no telling where one misery ended and another began. Looking at their stinking wretchedness, I thought if Blaine ended their race he'd done them a favor, but I didn't dare say so.

The man took the dead child and went away with it into the brush. He kept snarling back at us, as he went. Blaine said, "Don't go near the woman he's afraid we'll harm her while he's gone."

He came back after a while, and didn't have the baby. The woman hadn't budged. He felt her all over to make sure she wasn't hurt, and then hunkered down beside her and glowered at us.

I was sick of the whole sordid business. I didn't want to be the guy who discovered Vennies, any more. I said, "So now what?"

Blaine wouldn't give up. "They can have more children," he said. "But the woman has to be got to Base hospital. It's now or never."

He told me to pack up, and wait in the car. He'd try to persuade them. I saw him sitting down with them, babbling his "Friend . . . friend," that they couldn't understand, and pointing and making gestures. I packed up and then sat and waited in the trac-car, hoping that Blaine would fail.

But he didn't. He got them to come, God knows how. They came with him, scared and slow, the man helping the shivering woman and ready to use his sharpened stick on us, Blaine talking soothingly to them at every step.

He got them into the back of the trac-car, and I just sat there at the wheel, and didn't turn around, like he ordered. The skin crawled on my back, and it wasn't just the stink of them that did it. It's all very well to talk about meeting up with aliens and being friendly. You go and try it.

Blaine told me to start easy and quiet. I did, but I could hear the man snarling when the motor started, and Blaine talking soothing. I think if the man hadn't

been so dazed by the baby's death and the woman's being sick, he'd never have come that far.

We rolled. We pushed south hour after hour through the grass. The ceiling held up, and that made it easier, but the heat and the smog and the smell we carried with us made it tough enough. I cursed myself that I'd ever seen those Vennies and talked about it.

Blaine told me twice to stop, and he gave the woman drugs. Then an hour before dark, he told me we'd have to camp at the next hummock. "She can't go any farther today," he said.

I looked at her. "She can't go any farther, period."

He flared out at me. "Damn you, Wimer, don't say that. I'll get some shots into her. You make camp."

I did, pretty sulkily, when we reached the hummock. I saw Blaine working over the muddy, shivering thing like it was his own wife. The man just sat and watched quiet, as though somehow he trusted Blaine more now.

WHEN Blaine finally came over to me, he didn't eat but fished another bottle out of his bag and we had a couple of big slugs.

"She'll be all right," he said. He didn't look as though he believed it.

He ate a little, but drank more. Time to time, he looked back at the shadows, at the man-thing hunkering beside the shivering one on the ground.

The way Blaine looked, I felt kind of sorry for him and got over my sulkiness. He was a fanatic, all right, but he was really sweating this out.

"Take it easy," I said. "There isn't anything more you can do."

"I'm not trying to do anything," he said. "I'm trying to undo something. And this is my last chance."

He kept drinking. Every once in a while he'd get up and go over to the Vennies, saying his "Friend . . . friend," and looking at the woman, and then he'd come back and have another drink. He got pretty drunk. He talked.

He said, "Why didn't we stay on

Earth, that was given to us for our own world? Why, Wimer?"

"You sound like one of those religious cranks who were all against space travel."

"Maybe. Maybe I do. But just suppose the cranks were right?"

I said, "Oh, hell. I don't love this place, and maybe it wasn't so bright our coming here, but why bring sin into it?"

"Because we may have sinned, Wimer: Whoever made things put us on Earth, and put the Vennies here, and put a wall around each world, around every world, to keep it to itself. And we wouldn't keep to ourselves; we struggled and scrambled and planned till we climbed the wall that had been put around us, and maybe that was sin, sin against the way things were intended."

I said, "You talk like it was all unnatural, coming here. But we were bound to get to these other worlds, sooner or later. Everybody always knew that."

"Yes, they knew it. I knew it. I knew we had to come, and I came first, and I didn't think, none of us thought, that we were changing things forever, doing something unforgivable."

I was tired, and his wild talk got on my nerves, and so did what was over in the shadows. I rolled up and said:

"We got a long way to go tomorrow."

I heard him drink, and throw the empty away, and go over to the Vennies and then come back again. I slept.

I woke, and it was all over, just like that. Blaine had wakened me with a queer hoarse sound, and he was running toward the Vennies. When I got there, he was stooping over them.

The woman was dead. And the man had run his wooden spear into his own heart and was dying too. We ought to have foreseen it. He was human enough for that. When the woman died, and he was the last, he didn't want to live.

Blaine just sagged there, all his hopes and all the crazy dream that had brought him back to Venus, dying there with them. The Vennie looked up at him—he looked sick and scared, like anyone who knows he's dying, but something else too. He said something that sound-

ed like "Vran," and made like to touch Blaine, and then he was dead too.

Well, I admit I felt a little relief, at first. I'd been sorry for them, but though they were pitiful they were also sort of disgusting, and anyway it had all been hopeless from the first. But Blaine still held that dead, stinking creature, and he had tears in his eyes. "He was trying to say 'Friend,'" he said.

I don't know, maybe he was. I guess he'd been smart enough to catch the word he'd heard so often from Blaine. And he had trusted Blaine.

Somehow, it made me feel a little different about the Vennies. I mean, seeing the last of them die like that.

Blaine helped me bury them. He didn't want to take their bodies down to Base.

He said, "I don't think we need tell anyone we found them."

We started on. We rolled south. Blaine didn't say anything, and I worried about that until finally I said:

"Look, Mr. Blaine, you made a good try, but it was no dice, and I wouldn't worry about Vennies any more."

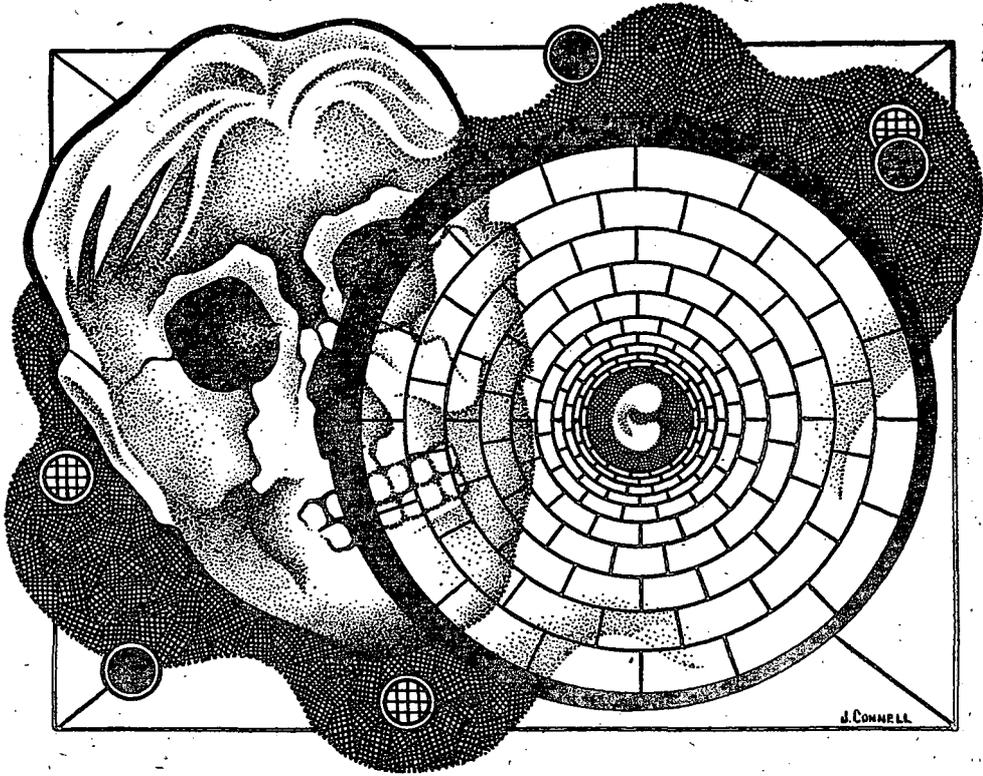
He didn't take it wrong, like I'd been afraid he would. He just said, "I won't worry any more. I did wrong, but I was forgiven."

Can you tie that? A big guy like Farrel Blaine, a rich guy, a famous guy, eating his heart out for years over a guilt-complex, and then getting over it just because that wretched thing tried to say a word? But he was a fanatic, for sure.

He went back to Earth. And I went back to my work with the Corps, like before. But somehow, it doesn't all seem quite the same here now.

I mean, it looks the same but it *feels* different, somehow. Out in the Glades in the daytime, and in the dark around the barracks at night, it all feels too quiet, too empty.

I guess Blaine's talk got on my nerves. I keep remembering what he said about our leaving Earth not being intended. You don't suppose there's anything in that, do you? Before, I'd have said it was only crank's talk. But now, I don't know. I just don't know.



Out of the Well

By TOM McMORROW, JR.

He had a will of iron, but it couldn't forge the future

JASON RANDALL was dying. Of course the papers were careful about it, as they have to be. "Near death" was the way some put it. You can be near it, you know, without getting there. "Ex-Senator sinking fast," said others. There's a handy difference between sinking and sunk.

But Jason Randall was sunk. He was going all the way. Braumeyer knew it, because it was his business to know. He was the top specialist in the line, which

was why they'd called him in. One look at the patient's cyanotic face had told him the story even before his examination, but this was no ordinary patient, and for publication he said simply, "Critical."

The reporters knew it, and they made bets among themselves as to how long he'd last, and the old-timers rolled out tales of other death-watches they'd sat out. It was a fairly pleasant assignment. You could relax—the subject wasn't go-