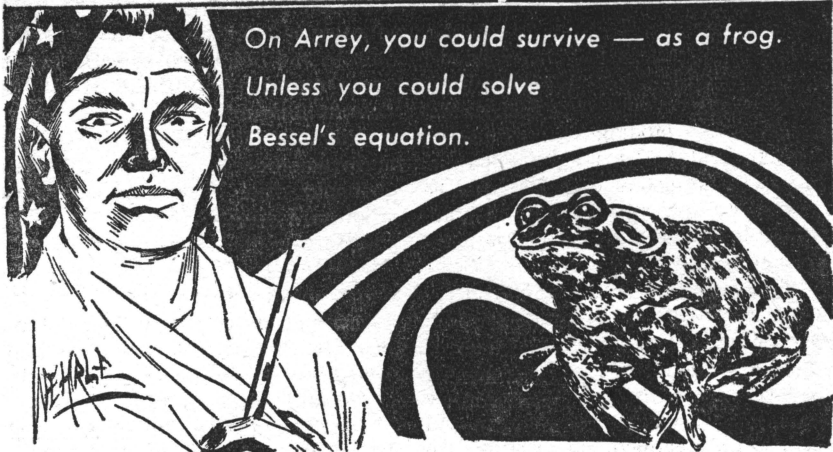


*On Arrey, you could survive — as a frog.
Unless you could solve
Bessel's equation.*



MERLIN PLANET

by E. G. VON WALD

It was just before noon in the little town of Arrey that Jerrold Aix beheld the logically impossible event.

He shut his eyes tightly, shook his head, and then looked again. The scene had not changed. There was the huddle of wary people on one side of the small village square. There was the tall, hooded man with the bushy beard and the piercing black eyes. And there was the oversized frog sitting on the pile of ragged garments.

Suddenly frightened, Jerrold took a backward step, but he had already been observed. The bearded one was now looking intently at him, the

slender stick in his hand raised as if to gesture.

Jerrold abruptly ducked around the edge of a squat stone building and ran. It was not easy to run on those slippery cobblestones, and the muddy water of the puddles splashed in the village square drove him on.

It had been a bad day right from his carefully-selected native costume, but the shock of what had happened the beginning. First there was that long chess game during the Zipstar trip. In a careless moment, he had pushed the wrong pawn, and that political scientist from Arcturus IV took immediate advantage of it. The

result was a desperate but futile defense in the inexorable logic of the end game. It had been a bitter thing for one who had been champ at Centaurus Multiversity.

Then the landing officer of the Zipstar boat had insisted on leaving him ten kilometers outside Arrey as a security measure, so that he had to spend the whole morning walking in a hot, muggy sun.

And now this — impossible, illogical and terrifying. He almost expected to find that they had dropped him on the wrong planet, but finally he saw the sign at the end of the narrow street, right where it was supposed to be. This calmed him a little. He slowed down, hiked his skirts to ford a particularly large puddle in front of the sign, and entered the rickety, wooden building.

“Well?” There was a gray-haired man seated behind the desk who seemed irritated at the interruption.

Jerrold tried to talk, but he was out of breath. Instead, he pulled his appointment card from a pocket and set it on the desk.

“Um,” said the man after a brief glance at it. “Sit down.”

Jerrold gratefully sank onto the crude wooden chair indicated. “Is this the right place?” he panted.

“This is Consolidated Enterprises, Endive Planet Division,” said the grizzled man. “I am Director Finn. And according to your appointment card, you are the new operative I’ve been trying to get out of Personnel for the past six months. What’s the matter with you?”

Jerrold shook his head. “I don’t know what happened,” he said uncertainly. “But I saw something that is absolutely impossible.” His voice faltered.

“Oh-oh,” said Finn. He got up quickly and drew a bottle and glass from a cupboard and poured Jerrold a stiff one.

“Here, drink this. I gather you saw one of the local hot-shots at work. What happened?”

“I don’t know. It was logically impossible. It just couldn’t have happened, but I saw it and —”

“Drink!” ordered Finn bruskiy.

Jerrold drank, sputtered and gasped for breath. After a moment, Finn said, “Feel better now?”

Without replying, Jerrold nodded.

“Then tell me what you saw.”

“Oh.” Jerrold drained the last few drops from the glass. Then he stated, “Like I said, it was impossible. I thought I saw a man changed into a frog.” He took a deep breath and wondered whether his new boss would laugh or call for the medics.

“Frog, eh?” Finn said thoughtfully. He nodded. “Sounds like one of Eilen’s spells. He’s a mean one, all right, but shrewd. A pity the sheriff can’t pin anything illegal on him.”

Jerrold stared at him with dismayed wonder. “You mean you believe it really happened?”

“Who knows what really happens in such events?” Finn asked impatiently. “That’s all beside the point, anyway. Universal Enterprises isn’t in the natural philosophy business. But if you are going to work on Endive, you had better get used to

such things. Didn't they brief you on the place?"

"Certainly. Planetary specs, commercial potentials, local languages —"

"But no magic?"

Jerrold shook his head incredulously.

"And no counter-magic, then, I take it?"

"Counter-magic!"

Finn scowled and returned to his chair. "Didn't they even tell you that Endive is a merlin planet?"

"Oh yes."

"But you didn't bother to look up the reference."

"Oh, but I did look it up," Jerrold protested. "The Catalog said that a merlin planet is a generic term for certain, very unusual planets which have technologically primitive cultures in which magic plays a strong role. They are closed to ordinary interstellar commerce, except for special franchises."

"Well," Finn admitted, "It's sketchy, but it's all there. You just didn't believe it, I guess. You read the word 'magic' and mentally interpreted it as 'belief in magic.' Right?"

Jerrold drew a breath and started to say something to the effect that such a conclusion was obvious, but then he remembered the over-sized frog hopping out of the pile of ragged clothing.

"It looks as if I'll have to brief you," Finn grumbled. "As if I didn't have enough to do already."

He frowned and pulled a cigar out of a desk drawer. After lighting up, he said, "Merlin planets are different. You can say that in spades.

They have a funny chemistry and a funny minerology. That's why we are in here. Endive produces one of the most remarkable natural essences ever discovered. There is a big demand for it, and so far nobody has come close to synthesizing it.

"The trouble with the place is that there is something about it that is — well, call it hallucinogenic if you like. If somebody spells you into being a frog, you think you are a frog and so does everybody else, including the animals."

"You mean it's an illusion. A hypnotic gas in the atmosphere or something like that."

"Scratch the hypnotic gas and anything like that. Consolidated spent a whole year with their regional research staff trying to isolate a physical cause, and they couldn't do it. They ended up with some mishmash about psionic feedback, which might satisfy them, but it didn't help us any. We still had to come in here pretty much helpless at first, or lose the franchise.

"Call it mass hypnosis, if it makes you any more comfortable. Only there's a strange side effect on Endive. Given the necessary environment for good frog survival, you can last indefinitely. As a frog, that is."

"But how —"

"That's the reason for the postulate of psionic feedback. The ecology is stable. An enchanted frog is just as good as a natural one here on Endive."

Finn quickly held up a hand to forestall any more discussion. "Just accept it as a local difficulty in doing business. Think you can do that?"

"I'll try," said Jerrold uncertainly. "Good. Now for your counter-magic." Finn dumped some ashes from his cigar and smiled. "With your background, you won't have a bit of trouble. The local wizards can't touch you."

Jerrold listened and found himself saying, "That's nice. Why?"

"All you have to do is go through some fairly elaborate mathematical pattern in your head. Like, for instance, solving Bessel's equation."

"Bessel's equation," murmured Jerrold.

"Well, it doesn't have to be Bessel's equation necessarily. That's just an example. It happens that my favorite counter-spell is LaPlace's equation in cylindrical coordinates. By the time I've separated the variables and got into the Bessel part of it, every wizard within spitting distance is completely terrified. Nobody knows why, but the local wizards can feel it when you just think this sort of thing at them."

"Who," asked Jerrold, "is Bessel?"

Finn looked at him with surprise. "You mean to tell me a math major never heard of Bessel's equation?"

"I am not a math major," Jerrold replied. He drew his new degree from his tunic and handed it over. "My major was interstellar business. That's mostly law, with a little non-technical engineering."

"Oh, no!" Now it was Finn's turn to be disconcerted. "I specifically asked them for a first class mathematician. They told me that they had hired some of them at Centaurus General Multiversity."

"That's my school, all right," Jerrold told him. "But I haven't had a math course in fourteen years. Would a little elementary trig help?"

"I doubt it," said Finn. "What a mixup!" He raised his voice and shouted, "Arline!" Then he turned back to Jerrold. "You are sure you don't know something just a little more advanced and complete? A little calculus, maybe?"

Jerrold shook his head.

"This is bad," said Finn. When his secretary entered, he said, "Where's the requisition on this new operative, Arline? I asked for math, and the idiots sent me law."

"Oh, dear," said Arline. She glanced sympathetically at Jerrold, then went to a file cabinet. She drew out of it a large, bulky folder and set it in front of Finn. "That is the complete correspondence."

For several minutes, the director went through the records in the file folder and finally slammed it shut. "As I read it, it says math grads are very expensive this year and that they are afraid my budget might not be able to handle the cost. So I guess we're stuck with him."

Jerrold remembered those job interviews. Law grads were as common this season as the math grads were scarce. If he hadn't spent so much time on his hobby, he would have been high enough on the honors list to compensate, and thus get one of the glamorous assignments. Unfortunately, although he could memorize an entire chess game, he discovered in the final exams that legal precedents were something else again.

He said, "Maybe I could memorize one of your math patterns. I've got a pretty good memory for some things."

"No good," grumbled Finn. "We tried that already. Unless you understand the significance of the pattern, it doesn't work."

"Surely there must be something else—"

"It's too new to tell. The research boys at Regional Headquarters say that the sophisticated evocation of a complete, self-consistent logical pattern like mathematics interferes with local patterns already resonant in the psionic feedback net. At least as far as magic is concerned. But until they find out precisely how and why, we're stuck with the way we do it now."

"Then I guess I better go back and try to get reassigned."

"Too late for that," said Finn. "Endive is too far off the main sequence of Zipstar routes. There won't be another boat in here for six months." He shrugged. "So, if you are going to stay, you might as well get to work."

"But is it safe, Boss?" Arline asked earnestly. "Remember how it was when we first came here."

"I remember. We nearly lost half a dozen operatives before we accidentally found out about the math bit. But that was a few years ago. Things are different now. Every wizard in the area knows that we are able to throw a counter-spell at them that will ruin their magic for weeks. And their whole business is magic, right?"

Arline agreed doubtfully.

"Well, then. Who around here knows that this fellow can't counter-spell with the best of us? All he needs is a wand."

"Why of course!" exclaimed Arline enthusiastically. "If they think he is a wizard like the rest of us, they will be afraid to challenge him."

"What's this about a wand?" asked Jerrold.

"You have to have a magic wand if you are going to be a magician, don't you?" Finn asked with a smile. Then he went on more seriously.

"We all know a little math, here, but there isn't a single one of us who is really good at it. So what we do is take a walking stick and carve the key steps on it. It is very much like an ancient Irish ogam stick. For those of us who know the code, it's a mnemonic device. For the Endese, it's a magic wand.

"It's a pity we couldn't get a really good mathematician in here. He might be able to neutralize the whole region for months, and it would be easier for us. What's more, somebody like that might be able to teach enough math to the serfs so that they might be able to protect themselves.

"Meanwhile," Finn concluded, "we have work to do. Fix this fellow up with some kind of wand, Arline. Then take him over to the sheriff with you and report that beggar. Anasa isn't going to be much interested in just a beggar, I guess, but it's the least we can do to help the poor guy."

The Director turned back to his cluttered desk, and Jerrold left with Arline.

Sheriff Anasa was short, squat and muscular, and he wore his wizard's hood carelessly thrown back, revealing curly, blond hair. He was, as Finn predicted, not very enthusiastic about the frog.

"All right," he grumbled. "So some silly beggar got himself changed into a frog. What am I supposed to do about it?"

"But this is a human being," insisted Arline.

"No, it isn't," replied Anasa crossly. "It is a frog. You said so yourself. Do you expect me to chase down every frog in the village and try to invert the spell? It would take me all afternoon."

Arline said, "Director Finn believes that Eilen is the magician who did it."

Immediately, Anasa sat up and looked at her intently. "Eilen? I was told that he might be in the neighborhood. You have a witness?"

Arline indicated Jerrold:

"Ah." The sheriff turned to Jerrold and said, "Can you positively identify Eilen?"

Jerrold shook his head. "I can describe him, but I never saw him before. There were others in the square, though, who might be more familiar with your man. Why don't you ask them?"

"You Farofflanders have odd customs," Anasa replied. "Here we do not take the testimony of serfs. Even," he added scornfully, "if they could say anything useful. And if it were Eilen, they will be afraid to incur his wrath by telling me about it. Let me hear your story, just as you remember it."

Jerrold related the event, omitting nothing.

Anasa nodded slowly. "It certainly does sound like Eilen. But you don't know whether there was a challenge, since you are not familiar with our customs. If Eilen offered the proper challenge and the man accepted, then it was all perfectly legal. There is nothing against the law if two wizards have a contest, provided no innocent bystander wizards are injured."

"Can't serfs be innocent bystanders?"

"Who cares about serfs? They are powerless and easily replaced."

"It would seem," said Jerrold, "that this one cannot. The beggar is the only one who can give you the information you seek, and he is now a frog. Perhaps, however, a great wizard like yourself, Sheriff, can cause a frog to speak."

The slur was not lost on Anasa. "You have a quick tongue," he snapped. "I noticed in your story that you were frightened. This is perfectly understandable for those who know no magic, but I see you bear a wand." He indicated the newly carved walking stick in Jerrold's hand.

"He was new here," Arline put in quickly. "We have, as you say, different customs."

The sheriff shrugged his heavy shoulders and let the point pass.

"I was just curious," he said. "As I am sure Eilen must have been. To me it is unimportant. What is important is that Eilen is a rogue and should be imprisoned in a large block of granite. Unfortunately, so far he

has managed to avoid any public violation of the law. Perhaps the beggar might have to be consulted, after all."

He stood up. "So. Now if you will forgive me, I must set about investigating that fool frog."

It took Jerrold several days to familiarize himself with the operation that Consolidated Enterprises was conducting on Endive. The barter deal itself was simple. Essence was distilled in the countryside, with the aid of certain insects. Eventually, it was shipped to Arrey by caravan, where Finn traded a low grade of bullion for it. About every six months, a Zipstar boat dropped down under camouflage radiation to pick it up.

The background was more complicated. For many years, Central Authority had the policy of permitting the assimilation of any planet that could maintain its cultural identity within a galactic civilization. This meant that any technological changes must be initiated by the populace of the planet in question. Endive, mired in the confusion of an effective magic, was technologically helpless. Physical law seemed to change almost with the wind, or at least upon the whim of some overlord wizard. The common serf, from whom progress ultimately must come, could do nothing to help himself.

Such a planet must be monitored. Survey teams were costly to field, however, so certain carefully restricted commercial activity was permitted as the most economical way of keeping tabs on the place. Unmentioned was the fact that this was

also the way, long sanctioned by tradition and practice, for the dissemination of civilization.

Finn showed Jerrold a sketchily-drawn map on the wall of his office. "You can see the territory where we operate," he explained. "It may not seem large to you, but by the time you have made the rounds, you will realize how slow travel is in a primitive place like this."

"I understand," said Jerrold. "The principal means of transport is a *jagon*, which looks like a horse but travels like a donkey."

"Right. Another problem we have is information. For instance." He tapped a location in the distant mountains. "Here is the Satrapy of Bengal. This usually is a rich source of essence, but something has happened up there. I don't know what the trouble is, but the caravan Bengal sends to Arrey at this time of the year hasn't arrived. Your first assignment is to go up there and find out what happened to it."

Jerrold studied the map with care. "That looks like a week's trip, providing I don't get lost."

"About that, but you shouldn't have much trouble. I can provide you with a guide who knows the way. As a rule, the intervening region is infested by bandit wizards, but according to Sheriff Anasa the bandits seem to have moved elsewhere this summer. He is worried about it. They sometimes hire out as mercenaries, and that makes it more difficult for him to control them."

"Maybe they waylaid the caravan," Jerrold suggested.

"Possibly. Not very likely, though,

because Bengal usually sends a couple of squads of his soldiers with the caravan. He has a good-sized army of wizards to maintain his authority there in the mountains."

The trip proved uneventful for the first two days. Like most Endese, the guide was no wizard, but he was stoic about the powers that be in the universe. Also, like most Endese, he had no name other than that of his job.

On the third night, they bedded down by a delightful fresh brook, teeming with fish. Guide caught some and cooked them, while Jerrold sat on the grass and studied his map.

"Ordinarily," said Guide, "such a pleasant place as this would be used only by a large convoy. It is too obvious a stopping place for the night. And the bandits like to strike at night."

"We haven't seen any so far," Jerrold pointed out.

"True," agreed Guide. "But there is always the first time. I am grateful to be in the company of a Farofflander wizard in such a place."

Jerrold looked around the pleasant countryside in some alarm. It seemed peaceful enough, except for a large, dense forest in the distance. He asked about that.

"In the forest there are lions," said Guide. "Who knows? Some of them may be enchanted people, but their appetites are those of lions."

As Jerrold considered what sort of animal might be considered a lion on Endive, Guide added, "It is fortunate that they do not stray far from the forest."

Nevertheless, shortly after the sun set, their pack animals appeared restless. Guide went to quiet them, and when he returned he said quietly, "I think we are not alone in this valley. Might I suggest a small protective spell?"

Jerrold's mouth was dry. He said, "Better stir up the fire."

"Of course," Guide murmured. "I forget that you Farofflanders use light when you make your magic."

He quickly stirred up the fire and threw on more fuel, but its light did not do much to dispel the gloomy shadows surrounding them. Soon there came a low snarl from not far away, and the pack animals immediately commenced a tumult. Reluctantly, the two men picked up torches and went to investigate.

The tumult continued, and in the dim light cast by the torches, Jerrold could just make out the cause, its eyes glowing.

"Wizard Aix," cried the Guide. "Cast your spell quickly."

Lacking a spell to cast, Jerrold threw his torch, but the big cat merely snarled and stepped nimbly aside. That left him with his wand as his only weapon. It was heavy enough, so he prepared to wield it as a club. About this time, the lion vanished. In its place stood the bandit, Eilen.

"I wish no conflict with a Farofflander," said Eilen, his voice deep and mournful.

Jerrold decided that the best defense under the circumstances was arrogance. "Then leave us," he ordered.

"In due time," murmured the wizard in his bass voice. "For a moment, I thought you intended to club me to death with that wand, instead of casting a proper spell."

"Would you like me to cast one now?" demanded Jerrold, brandishing the wand threateningly.

For the space of perhaps ten seconds, Eilen considered the question. Then he said, "You feared me in the village. True, you held no wand at the time. Now you have a wand, yet you hold it like a club, rather than the mystic device that it should be. I find this interesting, and I shall think further on it."

His manner changed. "I have claimed this wilderness as my domain. Therefore it is suitable that you pay me a tribute."

"I pay you nothing," snapped Jerrold.

"Perhaps," said Eilen. "Perhaps. You have given me much to think upon. At the moment, however, I am in a hurry to reach my destination, so I must leave you. But do not forget that you owe me a tribute. I shall exact it when the time is ripe."

With that he moved back into the shadows and disappeared.

The two men returned to the fire, and Jerrold asked Guide his opinion of the affair.

"Eilen means you no good," said Guide thoughtfully. "If he was indeed in a hurry, then we probably will not see any more of him this trip. However, one day he will not be in a hurry."

He shrugged and settled down on his blanket. As an afterthought, he said, "Almost it seemed as if he were

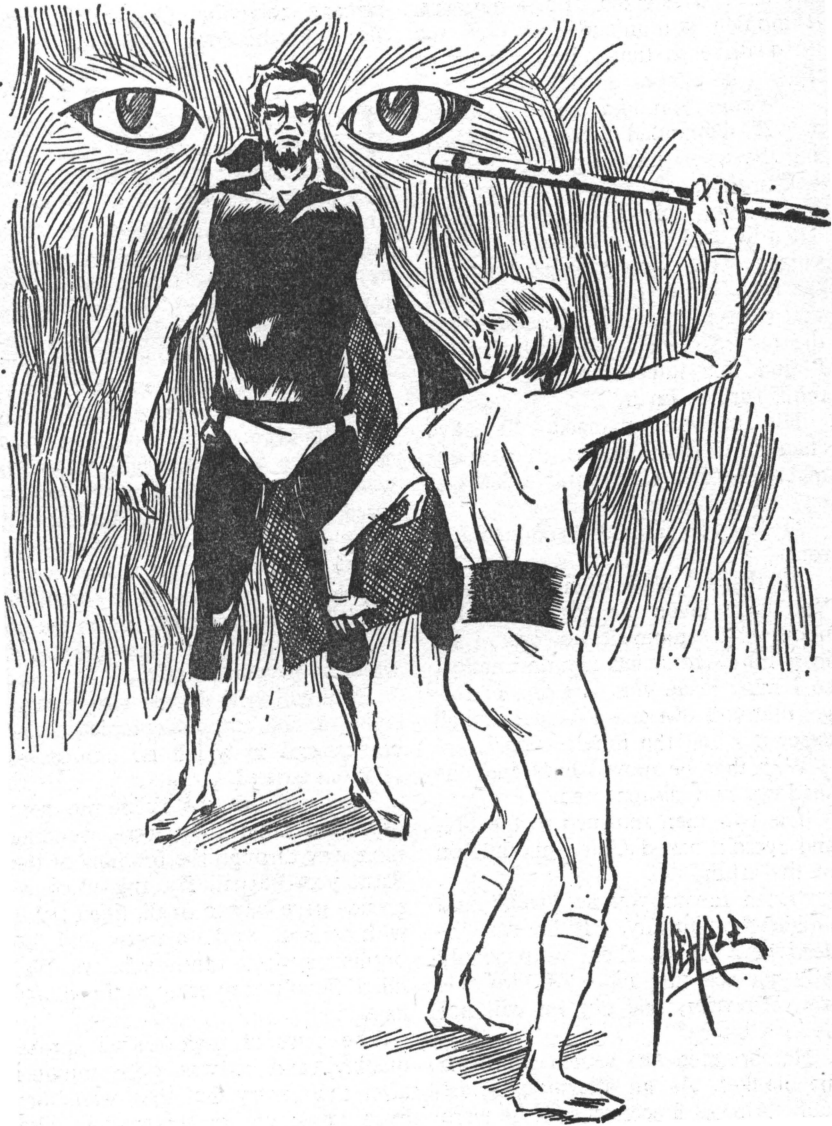
going to challenge you. This is very strange behavior. One might even think that he does not regard you as a wizard."

Jerrold got little sleep that night. He spent the time going over in his mind the whole illogical situation. The Endese had magic. Magic was illogical. There was a psionic feedback network operative on Endive, according to Finn. This might be logical, but why should it be that the thinking through of a complicated mathematical theorem interfered with the magic? Jerrold knew little math, but he was convinced that the most important thing about math was consistency of logic. Beginner's math was of no value, so Finn had indicated, because it did not represent a complete system. The conclusion, therefore, must be that it was necessary to have recourse to a complete, logical system in which there was no room for the non-causal relations which represented magic.

Eventually, he drifted into a doze, trying to think about complete, logical systems in which no non-causal relations existed.

They did not see Eilen the next day, and soon they were wending their way through the foothills of the Satrapy of Bengal. The rugged countryside gave way to small, tilled fields with serfs at work in them, and the outhouses where the essence was distilled. Finally they came to the village itself.

The news of their arrival spread quickly, and it was only minutes after their entry that they were met by a squad of hooded soldiers who



WHEELER

insisted that they follow. In a short time, they found themselves in a large encampment overlooking a valley. The satrap emerged from his tent to greet them.

"Welcome, Farofflander," said Bengal heartily. He came right to the point. "Accept my apologies that pressing business has delayed the usual caravan of essence."

Jerrold nodded and looked around at the grouping of disciplined soldiers, their capes thrown back in the cool mountain air.

"You have quite an army here," he said.

"Of course I have an army," replied Bengal. "I am at war with the Satrap of Bichardy." He pointed to an encampment on the opposing hill.

"Usually my forces are adequate to defend my realm, but Bichardy has enlisted mercenaries. He has made them many promises of wealth and glory for the taking. For two months, we have watched each other like jackals, so evenly matched that neither of us could make a decisive move."

Jerrold said, "Indeed. Your realm seemed quite peaceful as we approached."

"Of course it is peaceful," shouted Bengal. "Do you think my wizards have been idle? Many a sneak attack in the night has been met by sneak defense. It is a tiresome thing, not to be able to attack like a civilized person. Yet if I were to send a squad of lion conjures at him, he would counter with tiger conjures. Firebreathers are met by deluge-makers.

"No, we have been too evenly

matched to fight it out, but the change has come. Only this morning, Bichardy was joined by a group of stragglers from the wilderness. This will tempt him to attack. We should know soon."

"Perhaps," suggested Jerrold with care, "it might be better for me to watch the event from some more distant vantage point."

"By no means," Bengal insisted firmly. "As I say, the denouement is at hand. Bichardy has twenty more soldiers. But I have a Farofflander who wants the essence from my fields."

Jerrold shook his head. "There is nothing I can do to help you. My organization is committed to neutrality in such conflicts."

"Of course. And nobody is more desirous than I of seeing to it that your attitude remains unchanged. But remember that you are here to get essence. You will not get it from Bichardy. He is not a builder, like me. He is a raider, a destroyer."

The satrap became more earnest. "I do not ask that you cast a spell on Bichardy. Simply let him know that you are my ally. This will strike fear in the black hearts of his followers."

A messenger came pounding up the trail and panted, "Highness, the Satrap of Bichardy has signaled that he wishes to parley."

Bengal frowned. "Strange," he said. "I would rather expect an attack. But come with me, Farofflander. This provides me with my opportunity. Merely to show yourself at my side should suffice to ensure peace in this countryside."

It was a hard argument to resist. Jerrold took a firm grip on his wand, displaying it conspicuously, and marched down into the valley beside Bengal.

Bichardy also brought an aid. With a thrill of somehow alienated fear, Jerrold saw that it was Eilen.

They met, and Bengal shouted, "Enough of this, Bichardy. You see my ally. Leave my lands, and nothing further will be done to you. Attack, and you attack a Farofflander."

"We will have a contest," insisted Bichardy in his turn. "My man against yours."

"You dare challenge a Farofflander?" asked the astounded Bengal.

"My man says that he knows this Farofflander. He says that this Farofflander is afraid of him, ran in terror when first they met, and later failed to defend himself properly against the threat of my man's enchantment.

"I know nothing of this, myself," Bichardy added. "This I do know. If my man is wrong, I am already defeated, for the Farofflander can ruin my army with a single spell. But if my man is right, I think I can defeat you, Bengal. And our battle is now long overdue."

Bengal glanced sharply at Jerrold. "Can this be true?" he demanded angrily. But he did not wait for an answer. He turned back to Bichardy and said, "I accept."

With that, he strode from the field without a backward look.

A few minutes later, Jerrold and Eilen alone occupied the valley.

"I have considered your behavior in detail," Eilen said in his deep, mournful voice. "I have concluded that although you now bear a wand, you do not understand the use of it. You are like the first Farofflanders that came here, helpless as a serf.

"Also, you will recall that I told you I would exact a tribute from you when the time was ripe. Such a time is now at hand. You will be the tool of my aggrandizement, for I shall be famous for having beaten you. Many people will fear my name. In time, I shall replace Bichardy himself as lord of the mountains."

Jerrold found himself saying, "But suppose you are wrong about me?"

Eilen shook his head, his smile confident. "I am not wrong, Farofflander. That wand is useless to you."

Slowly, as a cat torments a mouse, he prepared for the final, terrible gesture.

"You are right about the wand," Jerrold told him. "But you are wrong about me. I need no wand."

He began his chant out loud. For a moment, Eilen stood transfixed. Then the full significance of the counter-spell bore down upon him; he clutched his head in agony and fled.

Finn was pleased, in spite of the fact that Jerrold returned without the essence. "That's great, Aix," he said. "I'll have to let the research boys know about this. When did you figure it out?"

"The night Eilen visited us. I decided that even if I didn't know any of your kind of systematic logic, I had my own. There is nothing so in-

exorable as the logic of chess, particularly in the end game. It is a complete system where everything is visible, nothing is mysterious, and every effect has a clearly discernible cause. There is no room for magic on the chess board. I simply recited the moves of a famous tournament game which I had memorized in college."

"All right. Now tell me this. Why did Bengal get so angry with you at the end? You won his war for him, didn't you?"

"Yes, but I tried an experiment. You said that you couldn't teach the Endese enough math to protect themselves against magic. Math is abstract and difficult to motivate with such people, but chess is a game and works just as well. Checkers is a similar game and much easier to learn than chess. So I taught some of his servants to play it. They got to be pretty good in just a few days.

"That's when Bengal blew his top.

He said that between my spells and my games I was reducing his domain to barbarism, that they wouldn't be able to practice magic there for years, and he had no idea how he was going to keep the serfs in line without it. As I left, he had started his soldiers drilling with spears and clubs."

Finn considered this information thoughtfully for several minutes. Finally he smiled.

"Bengal is right, of course. His farmers have been virtual slaves, because they could not practice magic. Now things will be different up there. A serf can fight back against spears and clubs."

The director's smile broadened as his enthusiasm grew.

"This will spread. The serfs have finally learned a tool against magic they can use. It will be slow at first, but the step has been taken. Endive is finally on the road to the stars."

END

Announcing — **THE GALAXY AWARDS**

Galaxy Publishing Corporation announces the establishment of annual awards for excellence in science-fiction writing. Every story appearing in the magazines *Galaxy* and *If* in issues dated 1968 will be eligible for the first series of awards, which will consist of:

1968 Galaxy Award
\$1,000.00

for the best story of the year. Honorable Mention will receive \$250; the next runner-up will receive \$100.

The procedure by which the winning stories will be selected is intended to reflect the judgment of the readers of *Galaxy* and *If*. Principal reliance will be placed on a mail survey of a randomly selected group of subscribers to the magazines in making the awards. Questionnaires asking for preferences will be circulated to these subscribers approximately one month after the December issues appear.