



## THE COMMAND

Jom~wy BLACK took Volume ~ of the Britannica off the library shelf and opened it to "Chemistry." He adjusted the elastic that held his spectacles and found the place where he had left off last time. He worried his way through a few sentences, and then thought sadly that it was no use; he'd have to get Professor Methuen to explain some more before he could go on. And he did badly want to know all about chemistry, which had made him what he was-had made it possible for him to read an encyclopedia at all. For Johnny Black was not human.

He was, instead, a fine specimen of black bear, *Euarctos amencanus*, into whose brain Methuen had injected, a chemical that lowered the resistance of the synapses between his brain cells, making that complicated electrical process called "thought" about as easy for Johnny's little brain as for a man's big one. And Johnny, whose ruling passion was curiosity, was determined to find out all about the process.

He turned the pages carefully with his paw-he'd tried using his tongue once, but had cut it on the paper, and then Methuen had come in and given him hell for wetting the pages-the more so, since Johnny was at that moment indulging in his secret vice, and the Professor had visions of Johnny's drooling tobacco juice over his expensive books.

Johnny read the articles on "Chess" and "Chicago." His thirst for knowledge satisfied for the nonce, he put the book away, stowed his spectacles in the case attached to his collar, and ambled out.

Outside, the island of St. Croix sweltered under a Caribbean sun. The blueness of the sky and the greenness of the hills were lost on Johnny, who, like all bears, was colorblind. But he wished that his bear's eyesight were keen enough to make out the boats in Frederiksted harbor. Professor Methuen could see them easily from the Biological Station, even without his glasses. His eyesight, together with his lack of fingers to manipulate, and articulatable vocal organs to speak, were Johnny's chief grievances against things in general. He sometimes wished that, if he had to be an animal with a hominoid brain, he were at least an ape-like McGinty, the chimpanzee, over there in the cages.

Johnny wondered about McGinty-he hadn't heard a peep out of him all morning, whereas it was usually the old ape's habit to shriek



and throw things at everybody who went by. Curious, the bear shuffled across to the cages. The monkeys chattered at him, as usual, but no sound came from McGinty's cage. Standing up, Johnny saw that the chimp was sitting with his back to the wall and staring blankly. Johnny wondered whether he was dead, until he noticed that McGinty was breathing. Johnny tried growling a little; the ape's eyes swung at the sound, and his limbs stirred, but he did not get up. He must be pretty sick, thought Johnny, who wondered whether he should try to drag one of the scientists over. But then his rather self-centered little soul comforted itself with the thought that Pablo would be around shortly with the ape's dinner, and would report McGinty's behavior.

Thinking of dinner reminded Johnny that it was high time he heard Honoria's bell to summon the biologists of the Station to lunch. But no bell came. The place seemed unnaturally quiet. The only sounds were those from the bird and monkey cages, and the put-put-put of a stationary engine from Bemis' place, over on the edge of the Station grounds. Johnny wondered what the eccentric botanist was up to. He knew that the other biologists didn't like Bemis; he'd heard Methuen make remarks about men-especially little plump men-who swaggered around in riding boots when there wasn't a horse near the Station. Bemis really didn't belong to the Station, but his financial inducements had led the treasurer to let him put up his house and laboratory there. With Johnny, to wonder was to investigate and he almost started for the place, but remembered the fuss Bemis had made last time.

Well, he could still investigate the reason for Honoria's delinquency. He trotted over to the kitchen and put his yellowish muzzle in the door. He didn't go farther, remembering the cook's unreasonable attitude toward bears in her kitchen. There was a smell of burning food, and on a chair by the window sat Honoria, black and mountainous as ever, looking at nothing. A slight "woof!" from Johnny brought no more reaction than he had gotten from McGinty.

This was definitely alarming. Johnny set out to find Methuen. The Professor wasn't in the social room, but others were. Dr. Breuker, world-famous authority on the psychology of speech, sat in one easy chair, a newspaper across his lap. He didn't move when Johnny sniffed at his leg, and when the bear nipped his ankle he merely pulled the leg back a little. He had dropped a lighted cigarette on the



rug, where it had burned a large hole before going out. Doctors Markush and Ryerson, and Ryerson's wife, were there too-all sitting like so many statues. Mrs. Ryerson held a phonograph record-probably one of those dance tunes she liked.

Johnny hunted some more for his lord, and eventually found the lanky Methuen, clad in underwear, lying on his bed and staring at the ceiling. He didn't look sick-his breathing was regular-but he didn't move unless prodded or nipped. Johnny's efforts to arouse him finally caused him to get off the bed and wander dreamily across the room, where he sat down and gazed into space.

An hour later Johnny gave up trying to get sensible action out of the assorted scientists of the Biological Station, and went outside to think. He ordinarily enjoyed thinking, but this time there didn't seem to be enough facts to go on. 'What ought he to do? He could take the telephone off its stand, but he couldn't talk into it to call a physician. If he went down to Frederiksted to drag one up by main force, he'd probably get shot for his pains.

Happening to glance toward Bemis', he was surprised to see something round rise into the sky, slowly dwindle, and vanish in the sky. From his reading he guessed that this was a small balloon; he'd heard that Bemis was doing some sort of botanical experiment that involved the use of balloons. Another sphere followed the first, and then another, until they made a continuous procession dwindling into nothingness.

That was too much for Johnny; he had to find out why anyone should want to fill the heavens with balloons a yard in diameter. Besides, he might be able to get Bemis to come over to the Station and see about the entranced staff.

To one side of the Bemis house he found a truck, a lot of machinery, and two strange men. There was a huge pile of unfilled balloons, and the men were taking them one at a time, inflating them from a nozzle projecting from the machinery, and releasing them. To the bottom of each balloon a small box was attached.

One man saw Johnny, said "Cheez!" and felt for his pistol holster. Johnny stood up and gravely extended his right paw. He'd found that this was a good gesture to reassure people who were alarmed by his sudden appearance-not because Johnny cared whether they were alarmed, but because they sometimes carried guns and were dangerous if cornered or surprised.



The man shouted, "Get otta deh, youse!"

Johnny, puzzled, opened his mouth and said, "Wok?" His friends knew that this meant "What did you say?" or "What's going on here?" But the man, instead of sensibly explaining things, jerked out his pistol and fired.

Johnny felt a stunning blow and saw sparks as the .38 slug glanced off his thick skull. The next instant, the gravel of the driveway flew as he streaked for the gate. He could make ~ ~ m.p.h. in a sprint and 30 for miles at a time, and now he was going all out

Back at the station, he found a bathroom mirror and inspected the two-inch gash in his forehead. It wasn't a serious wound, though the impact had given him a slight headache. He couldn't bandage it. But he could and did turn on the faucet and hold his head under it, mop the wound with a towel, take down the iodine bottle, extract the stopper with his teeth, and, holding the bottle between his paws, pour a few drops on the wound. The sting made him wince and spill some of the solution on the floor, where, he reflected, Methuen would find it and give him hell.

Then he went out, keeping a watchful eye for the tough individuals at Bemis', and thought some more. Somehow, he suspected, these men, the balloons, and the trancelike state of the people at the Station were all connected. Had Bemis gone into a trance too? Or was he the real author of these developments? Johnny would have liked to investigate some more, but he had the strongest aversion to being shot at.

It occurred to him that if he wanted to take advantage of the scientists' malady he'd better do so while the doing was good, and he made for the kitchen. There he had a glorious time, for he had five effective natural can openers on each foot. He was pouring the contents of a can of peaches down his throat, when a noise outside brought him to the window. He saw the truck that had been at Bemis' back up and the two tough individuals get out. Johnny slipped noiselessly into the dining room and listened through the door, tensing himself to bolt if the intruders came his way.

He heard the outside kitchen door slam and the voice of the man who had shot him: "What's ya name, huh?"

The inert Honoria, still sitting in her chair, answered tonelessly, "Honoria Velez."

"Okay, Honoria, you help us carry some of dis food out to the truck, see? Cheez, Smoke, lookit de mess. Dat beh's been around here.



If you see him, plug him. Beh steaks is good eating, I hoid."

The other man mumbled something and Johnny could hear the slapping of Honoria's slippers as she moved about and presently the opening of the outside kitchen door. Still shuddering at the idea of becoming a steak, he pushed his door open a crack. Through the screen of the outside door he could see Honoria, arms full of provisions, docilely obeying commands and piling the cans and bags in the truck. The men sat on their running board and smoked while Honoria, like one hypnotized, made several trips back to the kitchen. When they said "Dat's all," she sat down on the kitchen steps and relapsed into her former state. The truck drove off.

Johnny hurried out and made for the clump of frees on the end of the Station's property opposite Bemis' house. The clump crowned a little hill, making it both a good hiding place and a vantage point. He thought, evidently the Station wasn't big enough for him and the strange men both, if they were going to corner the food supply and kill him on sight. Then he considered Honoria's actions. The negress, normally a strong-minded person of granite stubbornness, had carried out every order without a peep. Evidently the disease or whatever it was didn't affect a person mentally or physically, except that it deprived the victim of all initiative and will power. Honoria had remembered her own name and understood orders well enough. Johnny wondered why he hadn't been affected also; then, remembering the chimpanzee, concluded that it was probably specific to the higher anthropoids.

He watched more balloons rise and saw two men come out of the bungalow and talk to the inflators. One stocky figure Johnny was sure was Bemis. If that was so, the botanist must be the mastermind of the gang, and Johnny had at least four enemies to deal with. How? He didn't know. Well, he could at least dispose of the remaining food in the Station kitchen before the plug-uglies got it.

He went down and made a quart of coffee, which he could do easily enough because the pilot light of the gas stove had been left on. He poured it into a frying pan to cool, and lapped it up, simultaneously polishing off a whole loaf of bread.

Back in his hideaway he had difficulty sleeping; the coffee stimulated his mind, and plans for attacking the bungalow swarmed into it in clouds, until he almost felt like raiding it right then. But he didn't, knowing that his eyesight was especially poor at night, and suspecting that all four of the enemy would be in.



He awoke at sunrise and watched the house until he saw the two tough ones come out and go to work on the balloons, and heard the little engine start its put-put-put. Making a long detour, he sneaked up from the opposite side and crawled under the house, which, like most Virgin Island bungalows, had no cellar. He crept around until the scrape of feet on the thin floor overhead told him he was under the men within. He heard Bemis' voice: ". . . Al and Shorty, and now those fools are caught in Havana with no way of getting down here, because transportation will be tied up all over the Caribbean by now."

Another voice, British, answered: "I suppose that in time it'll occur to them to go up to the owner of a boat or plane, and simply tell the chap to bring them here. That's the only thing for them to do, with everybody in Cuba under the influence of the molds by now, what? How many more balloons should we send up?"

"All we have," replied Bemis.

"But I say, don't you think we ought to keep some in reserve? It wouldn't do to have to spend the rest of our lives sending spores up into the stratosphere, in the hope that the cosmos will give us another mutation like this one-

"I said all the balloons, not all the spores, Forney. I have plenty of those in reserve, and I'm growing more from my molds all the time. Anyway, suppose we did run out before the whole world was affected -which it will be in a few weeks? There wasn't a chance in a million of that first mutation-yet it happened. That's how I know it was a sign from above, that I was chosen to lead the world out of its errors and confusions, which I shall do! God gave me this power over the world, and He will not fail me!"

So, thought Johnny, his mind working furiously, that was it! He knew that Bemis was an expert on molds. The botanist must have sent a load up into the stratosphere where the cosmic rays could work on them, and one of the mutations thereby produced had the property of attacking the human brain, when the spores were inhaled and got at the olfactory nerve endings, in such a way as to destroy all will power. And now Bemis was broadcasting these spores all over the world, after which he would take charge of the Earth, ordering the inhabitants thereof to do whatever he wished. Since he and his assistants had not been affected, there must be an antidote or preventative of some sort. Probably Bemis kept a supply handy. If there were some way of forcing Bemis to tell where it was-if, for



instance, he could tie him up and write out a message demanding the information. . . - But that wouldn't be practical. He'd have to settle with the gang first, and trust to luck to find the antidote.

One of the men working on the balloons spoke: "Ten o'clock, Bert. Time to go for the mail."

"Won't be no mail, you dope. Everybody in Frederiksted's sitting around like he was hopped."

"Yeah, that's so. But we ought to start organizing 'em, before they all croak of starvation. We gotta have somebody to work for us."

"All right, smart guy, you go ahead and arganize; I'll take a minute off for a smoke. S'pose you try to get the phone soivce woiking again."

Johnny watched one pair of booted legs disappear into the truck, which presently rolled out of the driveway. The other pair of legs came over to the front steps and sat down. Johnny remembered a tree on the other side of the house, whose trunk passed dose to the eaves.

Four minutes later he paddled silently across the roof and looked down on the smoker. Bert threw away his cigarette butt and stood up. Instantly Johnny's ~oo steel-muscled pounds landed on his back and flung him prone. Before he could fill his lungs to shout, the bear's paw landed with a pop on the side of his head. Bert quivered and subsided, his skull having acquired a peculiarly lopsided appearance.

Johnny listened. The house was quiet. But the man called Smoke would be coming back in the truck. . . . Johnny quickly dragged the corpse under the house. Then he cautiously opened the front screen door with his paws and stole in, holding his claws up so they wouldn't click against the floor. He located the room from which Bemis' voice had come. He could hear that voice, with its exaggerated oratorical resonance, wafting through the door now.

He pushed the door open slowly. The room was the botanist's laboratory and was full of flowerpots, glass cases of plants, and chemical apparatus. Bemis and a young man, evidently the Englishman, were sitting at the far end talking animatedly.

Johnny was halfway across the room before they saw him. They jumped up; Forney cried, "Good Gad!" Bemis gave one awful shriek as Johnny's right paw, with a swift scooping motion, operated on his abdomen in much the way that a patent ice-cream scoop works in its normal medium. Bemis, now quite a horrible sight, tried to walk, then



to crawl, then slowly sank into a pool of his own blood.

Forney, staring at Bemis' trailing guts, snatched up a chair to fend off Johnny, as he had seen circus chappies do with lions. Johnny, however, was not a lion. Johnny rose on his hind legs and batted the chair across the room, where it came to rest with a crash of glass. Forney broke for the door, but Johnny was on his back before he had gone three steps. -

Johnny wondered how to dispose of Smoke when he returned. Perhaps if he hid behind the door and pounced on him as he came in, he could finish him before the man could get his gun out. Johnny had a healthy dread of stopping another bullet. Then he noticed four automatic rifles in the umbrella stand in the hall. Johnny was a good shot with a rifle-or at least as good as his eyesight permitted. He partly opened the breech of one gun to assure himself that it was loaded, and found a window that commanded the driveway. When Smoke returned and got out of the truck, he never knew what hit him.

Johnny set out to find the antidote. Bemis should have kept some around, perhaps in his desk. The desk was locked, but, although made of sheet steel, it wasn't designed to keep out a determined and resourceful bear. Johnny hooked his claws under the lowest drawer, braced himself and heaved. The steel bent, and the drawer came out with a rending sound. The others responded in turn. In the last one he found a biggish squat bottle whose label he made out, with his spectacles, to read "Potassium iodide." There were also two hypodermic syringes.

Probably this was the antidote, and worked by injection. But how was he to work it? He carefully extracted the bottle-cork with his teeth, and tried to fill one of the hypodermics. By holding the barrel of the device between his paws and working the plunger with his mouth, he at last succeeded.

Taking the syringe in his mouth, he trotted back to the Station. He found the underwear-clad Methuen in the kitchen, dreamily eating such scraps as had been left by his and the plug-uglies' raids. Breuker, the psychologist, and Dr. Bouvet, the Haitian negro bacteriologist, were engaged likewise. Evidently the pangs of hunger caused them to wander around until they found something edible, and their feeble instincts enabled them to eat it without having to be told to do so. Beyond that they were utterly helpless without orders and would sit like vegetables until they starved.





Johnny tried to inject the solution into Methuen's calf, holding the syringe crosswise in his teeth and pushing the plunger with one paw. But at the prick of the needle the man instinctively jerked away. Johnny tried again and again. He finally grabbed Methuen and held him down while he applied the needle, but the man squirmed so that the syringe broke.

A discouraged black bear cleaned up the broken glass. Except possibly for the missing Al and Shorty, he would soon be the only thinking being left on Earth with any initiative at all. He fervently hoped that Al and Shorty were still in Cuba-preferably six feet underground. He didn't care so much what happened to the human race, which contained so many vicious specimens. But he did have a certain affection for his cadaverous and whimsical boss, Methuen. And, more important from his point of view, he didn't like the idea of spending the rest of his life rustling his own food like a wild bear. Such an existence would be much too stupid for a bear of his intelligence. He would, of course, have access to the Station library, but there wouldn't be anybody to explain the hard parts of chemistry and the other sciences to him when he got stuck.

He returned to Bemis' and brought back both the bottle and the remaining hypodermic, which he filled as he had the previous one. He tried inserting the needle very gently into Professor Methuen, but the biologist still jerked away. Johnny didn't dare try any rough stuff for fear of breaking his only remaining syringe. He tried the same tactics with Breuker and Bouvet, with no better results. He tried it on Honoria, dozing on the kitchen steps. But she awoke instantly and pulled away, rubbing the spot where she had been pricked.

Johnny wondered what to try next. He considered knocking one of the men unconscious and injecting him; but, no, he didn't know how hard to hit to stun without killing. He knew that if he really swung on one of them he could crack his skull like an eggshell.

He waddled out to the garage and got a coil of rope, with which he attempted to tie up the again-sleeping Honoria. Having only paws and teeth to work with, he got himself more tangled in the rope than the cook, who awoke and rid herself of the coils without difficulty.

He sat down to think. There didn't seem to be any way that he could inject the solution. But in their present state the human beings would do anything they were told. If somebody ordered one to pick up the hypodermic and inject himself, he'd do it.



Johnny laid the syringe in front of Methuen, and tried to tell him what to do. But he couldn't talk-his attempts to say "Pick up the syringe" came out as "Fee-feek opp feef-feef." The Professor stared blankly and looked away. Sign language was no more successful.

Johnny gave up and put the bottle and syringe on a high shelf where the men couldn't get at them. He wandered around, hoping that something would give him an idea. In Ryerson's room he saw a typewriter, and thought he had it. He couldn't handle a pencil, but he could operate one of these machines after a fashion. The chair creaked alarmingly under his weight, but held together. He took a piece of typewriter paper between his lips, dangled it over the machine, and turned the platen with both paws until he caught the paper in it. The paper was in crooked, but that couldn't be helped. He'd have preferred to write in Spanish because it was easy to spell, but Spanish wasn't the native tongue of any of the men at the Station, and he didn't want to strain their faculties, so English it would have to be. Using one claw at a time, he slowly tapped out: "PICK UP SIRINGE AND INJECT SOLUTION INTO YOUR UPPER ARM." The spelling of "siringe" didn't look right, but he couldn't be bothered with that now.

Taking the paper in his mouth he shuffled back to the kitchen. This time he put the syringe in front of Methuen, squalled to attract his attention, and dangled the paper in front of his eyes. But the biologist glanced only briefly at it and looked away. Growling with vexation, Johnny pushed the syringe out of harm's way and tried to force Methuen to read. But the scientist merely squirmed in his grasp and paid no attention to the paper. The longer he was held the harder he tried to escape. When the bear released him, he walked across the room and settled into his trance again.

Giving up for the time being, Johnny put away the syringe and made himself another quart of coffee. It was weak stuff, as there wasn't much of the raw material left. But maybe it would give him an idea. Then he went out and walked around in the twilight, thinking furiously. It seemed absurd-even his little bear's sense of humor realized that-that the spell could be broken by a simple command, that he alone in the whole world knew the command, and that he had no way of giving it. He wondered what would happen if he never did find a way out. Would the whole human race simply die off, leaving him the only intelligent creature on Earth? Of course such an event would have its advantages, but he feared that it would be a dull life.



He could take a boat from the harbor and head for the mainland, and then hike north to Mexico where he would find others of his species. But he wasn't sure that they'd be congenial company; they might, resenting his strangeness, even kill him. No, that idea wouldn't do, yet.

The Station's animals, unfed for two days, were noisy in their cages. Johnny slept badly and awoke well before dawn. He thought he'd had an idea, but couldn't remember. .

Wait. It had something to do with Breuker. He was a specialist on the psychology of speech, wasn't he? He did things with a portable phonograph recording apparatus; Johnny had seen him catching McGinty's yells. He went up to Breuker's room. Sure enough, there was the machine. Johnny opened it up and spent the next two hours figuring out how it worked. He could crank the motor easily enough, and with some patience learned to operate the switches. He finally adjusted the thing for recording, started the motor, and bawled ~'Wa-a-a-a-a-ah!" into it. He stopped the machine, threw the playback switch, set the needle in the outer groove of the aluminum disk, and started it. For a few seconds it scraped quietly, then yelled "Waa-a-a-a-a-ah!" at him. Johnny squealed with pleasure.

He was on the track of something, but he didn't quite know what. A phonograph record of his cry would be no more effective in commanding the men than the original of that cry. Well, Breuker must have a collection of records. After some hunting, Johnny found them in a set of cases that looked like letter files. He leafed through them and read the labels. "Bird Cries: Red-and-Green Macaw, Cockatoo, Mayana." That was no help. "Infant Babble: 6-9 Months." Also out. "Lancashire Dialect." He tried this disk and listened to a monologue about a little boy who was swallowed by a lion. From his experience with little boys Johnny thought that a good idea, but there was nothing in the record that would be of use.

The next was labeled "American Speech Series, No. 7z-B, Lincoln County, Missouri." It started off: "Once there was a young rat who couldn't make up his mind. Whenever the other rats asked him if he'd like to come out with them, he'd answer, 'I don't know.' And when they said, 'Wouldn't you like to stop at home?' he wouldn't say yes or no either; he'd always shirk making a choice. One day his aunt said to him, 'Now look here! No one will ever care for you if you carry on like this. . .



The record ground on, but Johnny's mind was made up. If he could get it to say "Now look here!" to Methuen, his problem ought to be solved. It wouldn't do any good to play the whole record, as those three words didn't stand out from the rest of the discourse. If he could make a separate record of just those words. .

But how could he, when there was only one machine? He needed two-one to play the record and one to record the desired words. He squalled with exasperation. To be licked after he'd gotten this far! He felt like heaving the machine out the window. At least it would make a beautiful crash.

Like a flash the solution came to him. He closed the recorder and carried it down to the social room, where there was a small phonograph used by the scientists for their amusement. He put the American Speech disk on this machine, put a blank disk on the recorder, and started the phonograph, with a claw on the switch of the recorder to start it at the right instant.

Two hours and several ruined disks later, he had what he wanted. He took the recorder to the kitchen, set it up, laid the syringe in front of Methuen, and started the machine. It purred and scraped for ten seconds, and then said sharply, "Now look here! Now look here! Now look here!" and resumed its scraping. Methuen's eyes snapped back into focus and he looked intently in front of him-at the sheet of paper with a single line of typing across it that Johnny dangled before his eyes. He read the words, and without a flicker of emotion picked up the syringe and jabbed the needle into his biceps.

Johnny shut off the machine. He'd have to wait now to see whether the solution took effect. As the minutes passed, he had an awful feeling that maybe it wasn't the antidote after all. A half-hour later, Methuen passed a hand across his forehead. His first words were barely audible, but grew louder like a radio set warming up: "What in Heaven's name happened to us, Johnny? I remember everything that's taken place in the last three days, but during that time I didn't seem to have any desires-not enough will of my own to speak, even."

Johnny beckoned, and headed for Ryerson's room and the typewriter. Methuen, who knew his Johnny, inserted a sheet of paper for him. Time passed, and Methuen said, "I see now. What a sweet setup for a would-be dictator! The whole world obeys his orders implicitly; all he has to do is select subordinates and tell them what to order the others to do. Of course the antidote was potassium iodide;



that's the standard fungicide, and it cleared the mold out of my head in a hurry. Come on, old-timer, we've got work to do. The first thing is to get the other men around here to inject themselves. Think of it, Johnny, a bear saving the world! After this you can chew all the tobacco you want. I'll even try to get a female bear for you and infect her brain the way I did yours, so that you can have some company worthy of you."

A week later everyone on St. Croix had been treated, and men had been sent off to the mainland and the other Caribbean islands to carry on the work.

Johnny Black, finding little to arouse his curiosity around the nearly deserted Biological Station, shuffled into the library. He took Volume ~ of the Britannica, opened it to "Chemistry," and set to work again. He hoped that Methuen would get back in a month or so and would find time to explain the hard parts to him, but meanwhile he'd have to wade through it as best he could.