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What Goes Down Must Come Up

When the time comes to make science fiction awards for 1961, the judges will want to look beyond purely literary efforts. A great talent is beginning to make itself felt from another field of endeavor. For soaring fantasy unencumbered by regard for fact, it is going to be hard to beat India's Defense Minister V. K. Krishna Menon's implication, offered in comments last month to the Foreign Correspondents Association in New Delhi, that American underground testing of nuclear weapons is potentially more dangerous than Soviet atmospheric testing.

Krishna Menon implied that atmospheric tests would produce less fallout than underground tests. His explanation, to quote the Associated Press dispatch upon which this report is based, was that atmospheric tests "do not suck up earth and contaminate it," while underground tests are potentially more dangerous because "they involve the ground." Under questioning, Menon declined to concede that the Americans, in order to reduce hazards in testing, are going to more trouble and expense than the Russians. Each side, he said, conducts the kind of tests it finds most useful, and each side uses the arguments that suit its purposes.

But masterly as is the Indian Defense Minister's analysis, we do not propose to sit idly by and watch science fiction honors leave this country unchallenged. And so in a spirit of friendly international competition, we have also let our imagination rise unweighted by mere fact and have come up with the following tale.

Project Mohole is familiar to many people as the effort in which American scientists plan to drill a hole, at great trouble and expense, through the earth's outer layer down to the interior. Preliminary drillings beneath the ocean demonstrating the feasibility of the effort have been well publicized. Unfortunately, what is not so well known is that the uses of the project bear directly on the American nuclear weapons program.

The contention that underground testing is potentially more dangerous than atmospheric testing is, of course, quite correct. The American claim, as sometimes reported in the press, that underground testing is safe because the effects are contained within a subterranean chamber is also correct as far as it relates to the earth's outer crust, but there remains the danger of the *inner* crust.

The earth being hollow, the real danger is not that radioactive particles will be released into the atmosphere, but that the explosion will break through the inner crust, releasing the poison into the earth's interior. Then, as the pressure in the interior rises above atmospheric pressure, the poisoned gases will be sucked up through porous sections of the earth—generally farm areas, because of repeated plowing—contaminating the earth as they pass. What goes down must come up.

It is this hazard that Project Mohole is expressly designed to eliminate. The hole will provide a safety valve through which the radioactive particles can escape. Moreover, the particles will not simply be released into the air, as in atmospheric testing. But, because of the design of the hole, they will be expelled with such velocity as to shoot directly from inner to outer space, and so produce a geyser that should be a wonder and joy to behold for East, West, and neutral alike.—J.T.